

A collaborative approach to enhance quality education in Foundation Phase inclusive classes in South Africa**

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Abstract

Teachers in South African schools have the mandate to work together with parents to implement the inclusive education policy. However, schools and families continue to work as separate entities, and this negatively affects the support provided to learners experiencing barriers to learning. Insufficient collaboration between teachers and parents has hampered the ability to support learners who experience barriers to learning. Barriers to learning must be identified, and learners must receive collective support as early as in the Foundation Phase so that barriers do not continue to affect learners' learning. Notably, there is minimal support for such learners in disadvantaged schools due to limited collaboration among support stakeholders. This study investigated how a collaborative approach can be useful to enhance effectiveness in teaching Foundation Phase inclusive classes. The study was underpinned by Ubuntu theory. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, and qualitative research methodology based on an interpretive paradigm was used. Focus group interviews, involving the recording of the discussion, were used to generate data. The findings of the thematic analysis revealed the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to achieve and enhance effective inclusive teaching in the Foundation Phase. We conclude that locally available assets that reside in parents within the school environment should be used to promote inclusive teaching and learning.

Keywords: collaboration; Foundation Phase; inclusive class; quality education

Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, where a new vision for education was established that should be followed for the next 15 years (UNESCO,

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2017). This vision is clearly explained in the Global Sustainable Development Goal 4 (GSDG4) which emphasises ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. It has been observed that learners in the Foundation Phase in South Africa have different learning barriers that are a hindrance to achieving quality education. The South Africa Council for Educators (SACE, 1999) and the South African constitution (1996) emphasise that parents are partners in the education of their children and are legally bound to be involved in their children's learning. However, research reveals a lack of collaboration among teachers and other stakeholders, including parents, which affects not only the support provided to learners, but also their acquisition of quality education (Sibanda & Netshitangani, 2021; Davids, 2020). According to Ndwandwe (2023), and SIAS (2014), parental support involves engaging children in cognitively stimulating activities at home, enhancing their schooling experiences and playing a meaningful role for successful implementation of the support outlined in the individualised support plan. Parental involvement in their children's schooling has a motivating factor for learners (Hugo and Mobarra 2024) and can be especially beneficial to those identified to be experiencing barriers to learning in the Foundation Phase.

Ndwandwe (2023) is of the view that poor collaboration between teachers and parents is a significant contributing factor to the high failure rate in schools. Although the purpose of collaboration is to provide support to children, it is said to improve child performance, alleviate school dropout, and lead to an enhanced positive behaviour and self-esteem (Chemagosi, Odongo & Aloka, 2016; Mehta, Chauhan, & Kaur, 2022). Good teacher-parent relationships make children feel supported and guided (Gil-Galvan & Martin-Espinosa, 2023).

Barriers to parental involvement include a poor financial background, which increases the burden placed on teachers as parents tend to be concerned with income-generating activities while neglecting their roles in their children's education (Mampane, 2023; Bozhkova et al., 2020). On the other hand, illiteracy makes parents underestimate the contribution they can make to their children's learning, and in some cases, they are not aware that being involved is their constitutional obligation (Ntekane, 2018; Otermans, Sharma & Aditya, 2022). This is blamed on teachers who do not educate parents on the value of their contributions to their children's learning (Adigun & Ndwandwe, 2022).

The Foundation Phase is the focus of this study as it is where the groundwork and fundamentals of the development and education of learners are laid (Skae et al., 2020). In this understanding, it is two decades since South Africa was committed to the Universal Declaration on Inclusive Education (IE), hence [she] published the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6).

Inclusive education involves teachers teaching an “inclusive mix” of learners experiencing barriers to learning (LEBL) and ordinary learners (OLs) in the same class at the same time (Engelbrecht, et al., 2015a). This imposes new responsibilities on teachers, many of who struggle to cope with inclusive classes (ICs). A possible reason is that the initial teacher training was tailored to train teachers to teach in ordinary schools or special schools, which affects the self-confidence of ordinary teachers as they believe that only experts can teach inclusive classes (Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018).

An inclusive class means that all learners, including LEBL, are provided with appropriate support in a safe space that understands and caters to different abilities at a young age (Skae et al., 2020).

Several studies reveal a lack of knowledge of inclusive teaching among teachers that imposes negative effects on the way they respond to complex situations they encounter (Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden, 2017; Dreyer, 2017; Engelbrecht et al., 2015b; Mahlo, 2017). This is demoralising for teachers who otherwise understand themselves as experts in education and who deserve more power compared to parents. Albrecht (2021) and Paju et al. (2021) are of the view that teacher-parent collaboration depends on teachers’ willingness to share their skills and professional knowledge while at the same time acknowledging that parents can help them better understand their children. Teachers avoid collaboration efforts for fear that their incompetence will be exposed to parents. As long as teachers work in isolation, marginalisation of LEBL who are physically present in schools will continue to be a challenge and quality education will not be achieved.

Families are experts in knowing the needs of their children and the kind of support that can work best for them (Avalos-Bevan and Bascope 2017), so they should be actively involved. Schools and communities working as separate entities deprives learners who experience barriers to learning of collective support in teaching and learning. Teachers recognise frustrations related to inclusive practices and have admitted that they cannot succeed when working alone (Dreyer, 2017). This means that they now recognise that everyone belongs to a communal interdependent relationship, which calls for collaborative efforts (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019). Therefore, we suggest casting inclusive teaching through collaborative partnerships between schools, support stakeholders, and parents, where each stakeholder’s role is clearly stated. This will promote mutual interdependence and collaboration as core ingredients in the support of LEBL in the Foundation Phase. This study sought to answer the question, how can

a collaborative approach be used to enhance quality education in Foundation Phase inclusive classes in South Africa?

Theoretical framework

The focus of this article is on the collaboration between stakeholders to include all learners regardless of learning abilities when teaching in the Foundation Phase to enhance quality education. For this reason, we considered the *Ubuntu* philosophy to be the suitable theoretical framework to inform this study. The word *ubuntu* comes from Bantu languages in Southern Africa and refers to the quality of being human (Jenjekwa, 2016; Lefa, 2015). Asante (2007) notes that *ubuntu* is a term from the Xhosa and Zulu languages that signifies a union of loyalties and relationships. In a rural setting, *ubuntu* has been known to be an influential moral system that underpins how people relate to each other (Cilliers, 2008). We see this as a useful platform to invite parents to support collaborative efforts for inclusive classes, as *Ubuntu* seeks interdependence where one's humanity is inextricably intertwined with that of others. A person who is guided by Ubuntu has transparency and is always available to others, supports others, and has no feelings of being threatened when others are capable and good. We understand *ubuntu* as assuring every individual that he/she is part of a greater community that does not oppress other people. This suggests that when *ubuntu* is foundational in collaboration, feelings of superiority and inferiority have no place, and everyone focusses on offering whatever skill for the benefit of the community.

Viriri and Mungwini (2010); Jolley (2011); Letseka (2014); Metz & Gaie (2010); and Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru & Shiza (2012) explain that *ubuntu* is an African notion of personhood that connotes that people are interconnected and interdependent. This suggests that humanity is expressed in relationships with others. *Ubuntu* promotes harmonious and humble co-existence, enabling people to relate well to one another and enhancing solidarity (Lefa, 2015). This does not mean that problems should be overlooked, but that the solution should be a community effort intending to bring improvement. Applying *ubuntu* can unlock an African culture in which individuals are motivated to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality to build and sustain communities (Lefa, 2015; Wichtner-Zoia, 2012). Through *ubuntu*, the people's interest is to see others treated well to perform better. Collaboration guided by *Ubuntu* principles allows all members to put the interest of the community before personal interest, which can be more useful for inclusive teaching and learning.

Guided by the *Ubuntu* philosophy, we rejected the notion that an individual is defined by his/her physical and psychological characteristics and promoted unity of purpose to empower teachers, learners, parents, and other stakeholders to support each other to promote effective teaching in Foundation Phase inclusive classes in rural schools in the Eastern Cape Province. Lefa (2015) and Mugumbate & Chereni (2019) assert that an African is not a rugged individual, but a member of the community where solidarity defeats hunger, isolation, deprivation, poverty, and any emerging challenges through brotherly and sisterly concern, cooperation, care, and sharing. The *Ubuntu* philosophy recognises both individual voices and group suggestions in discussion rather than isolation. Therefore, the researchers engaged the participants in valuing the experience and skills of everyone, regardless of age and educational and social background, to improve inclusivity in Foundation Phase classes. Working collaboratively on issues that affect many people helps uncover and speak about the buried histories of those who have been denied their essential humanity through oppression (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019; Mangena, 2014). Therefore, as researchers, our objective was to create a strong functional community-school collaboration where all support stakeholders, including teachers, learners, school management, parents and community members, co-participate in shaping and implementing IE programmes for the benefit of LEBL. Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru and Shiza (2012) note that the *Ubuntu* philosophy stresses that '*sonke singabantu*' (we are all human beings). The use of this philosophy encouraged stakeholders to prioritise the needs of all learners, including those with learning barriers.

Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) and Zagona, et al. (2017) highlight the importance of collaboration in preparing teachers for inclusive schools and teaching although the apartheid legacy fosters unhealthy relationships between schools and parents. Crispel and Kasperski (2021) assert that some newly trained teachers have the capability to teach inclusive classes, while those trained prior to 1994 have experience in regular school teaching. To promote IE practices, collective will and solidarity among teachers where they share both experiential skills and learnt expertise are important. An inclusive culture is about moving away from individualism towards principles of shared learning and development to reach a common goal (Ketikidou & Saiti, 2022). Collaboration between teachers and parents is also considered a key to implementing inclusive practices within schools. Furthermore, the broader community needs to be made aware of the need to support LEBL (Paju, et al., 2021). This approach resonates with the principle of *Ubuntu* philosophy, which emphasises collaboration and interdependence among community members.

Many teachers were not trained to teach an inclusive population of learners and thus find this new responsibility to be a burden. According to Mahlo (2017), inclusive teaching is a complex and multifaceted endeavour that goes beyond the traditional dichotomy of teaching either in an ordinary school or in a special school, as was the case before 1994. Instead, teachers are now tasked with instructing both ordinary learners and those facing learning barriers in the same classroom and simultaneously, albeit with the added responsibility of providing extra support to the latter group (Engelbrecht, et al., 2015b). Therefore, the inclusion of parents who have been supporting these children from birth until they went to school cannot be overlooked. This implies that teachers, parents, and other stakeholders must work collectively to provide the unique support and services these learners require (Nel et al., 2016). Urgent interventions are required to avoid the inequality of the past, where many LEBL dropped out of school because their families could not afford special schools.

Although inclusive education workshops for teachers were organised by the district-based support team (DBST), however, they do not seem to have had the desired effect (Engelbrecht, et al., 2015a). In this article, we assume that if teachers, parents, and other stakeholders can work together, the desired goals can be achieved. Collaboration is vital as it will improve the self-efficacy of all stakeholders in moving from an individualistic approach to shared responsibility where ‘your child is my child’. Therefore, as researchers, we focused on ensuring that all parties involved understand how inclusion works to the benefit of LEBL. Barriers then become a shared problem that calls for collaboration to identify solutions that should be implemented in the Foundation Phase so that the problem does not persist (Martinez-Alvarez, et al., 2021).

Teacher-parent collaboration

Studies indicate that the role of home and school is crucial in schooling and in improving the learning interests and endeavours of children (Edwards & Alldred, 2000; Paju et al., 2021; Addi-Racah & Jones, 2016). Parents are referred to as key role players in support provision and therefore are expected to assist in their children’s learning (SIAS, 2014; Sibanda & Netshitangani, 2021; Jama et al., 2024). Ebrahim, Bipath, and Theron (2023) are of the view that parents are knowledge holders with agency, and thus their voice in supporting their children is pivotal. Parents are aware of who their children are and how best to leverage resources to educate them (Mbhiza & Nkabinde, 2022). Sibanda and Netshitangani (2021) similarly assert that parental participation in educational efforts can resolve challenges in the delivery of quality education.

Challenges to functional teacher-parent collaboration include inferiorities associated with low education or lack of skills and incorrect perceptions that parents cannot add value to their children's education due to illiteracy, poverty, and inferiority distance them from their children's schooling (Haisraeli & Fogiel-Bijaoui (2023); Magwa, 2017). According to Sibanda and Netshitangani (2021), sometimes parents find it difficult to effectively communicate with the school, including being unable to read and respond to school letters, and this negatively impacts relationships in which teacher-parent collaboration can be forged (Munje & Mncube 2018). Parents tend to have conservative ideas about the education of their children, especially LEBL, due to the fear that their social honour becomes compromised (Phasha & Condy, 2016). The lack of teacher-parent collaboration in teaching LEBL has resulted in some of these learners being 'dumped' in mainstream classrooms with no guarantee that they will be accommodated in effective teaching and learning (Wium & Louw, 2016; Dreyer, 2017). On the contrary, Diana (2016) and Bornman (2021) assert that learners perform better at school when their parents are on board. According to Albrecht (2021), parents and teachers are important players in supporting LEBL therefore, it is important to foster collaboration between the school and communities so that appropriate support can be provided to foster children's academic growth (Venter & Venter, 2019; Landsberg et al. (2019).

Furthermore, it is important to understand and acknowledge that barriers to learning not only hinder the acquisition of quality education but also tend to negatively affect self-esteem (Bruwer, 2021; Van Roekel et al., 2019). Research shows that when parents work together with teachers to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but also throughout life (Meir & Lemmer, 2015). Hugo and Mobarra (2024) also assert that parental involvement is a motivating factor for learners that leads to high academic performance and enhanced self-esteem. Davids, (2020) notes that in functional parent-teacher partnerships, teachers can form close ties with families and become more aware of the culture, needs, and concerns of the community that can help to use relevant examples that learners can relate with (see also, Landsberg, et al., 2019). This implies that since parents have the advantage of continuous contact with their children, they are better positioned to share information that can help teachers come up with strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase. On the contrary, when parents are not involved in their children's learning, they disown the responsibility for their children's failure and point fingers at teachers (Segoe & Bischoff, 2019).

Challenges Teachers Face When Teaching Foundation Phase Inclusive Classes

Classrooms in the Foundation Phase are particularly important because they are where the groundwork of learners' education is crafted (Skae, et al., 2020). Ineffective teaching at this stage leads to feelings of rejection, exclusion, and marginalisation of LEBL, while parental involvement leads to improved attendance and performance by learners (Albrecht, 2021). Among the constraints to effective teaching in the inclusive Foundation Phase is that teachers see it as a daunting task due to the large numbers in these classes, as well as inadequate training that has prepared them for such classes (Skae, et al., 2020).

Research indicates that teachers' prior knowledge of IE from pre-service and in-service training leads to more positive attitudes and results (Mpu & Adu, 2020; Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018). Continuous and responsive support is still considered a necessity for teachers, even for those who were trained in IE (Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018). Some teachers on the other hand see IE as a top-down burden where training is in the form of continuing professional development and once-off workshops, and these do not equip them to teach confidently in these classrooms (Schuelka, 2018). Therefore, teachers who were trained before 1994 struggle to meet LEBL's educational needs (Engelbrecht, et al., 2015a). This difficulty can be associated with the fact that teacher training prior to 1994 only prepared teachers for ordinary or special schools, not inclusive classes (SIAS, 2014).

Research Methodology

In this study, an interpretive qualitative approach was used due to its characteristic of allowing understanding of the complexity of social phenomena of people who are directly involved or affected by it (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative approach was suitable for this study, as it allowed researchers and participants to address research questions focusing on a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants in the context of the study. The phenomenon explored was the perspectives of teachers and parents of learners experiencing barriers in the Foundation Phase on how the collaborative approach can be used in support provision. A case study design was used, as participants came from two categories of support stakeholders, teachers, and parents of the learners identified as experiencing barriers to learning. This design allows for investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, while at the same time, it enables researchers to closely examine the data within a specific context, which was the Foundation Phase where learners identified as experiencing barriers are learning (Yin, 2012).

The aim was to obtain in-depth and multidimensional qualitative data from parents of learners who are experiencing barriers to learning, as well as from Foundation Phase teachers who trained pre-1994 and post-1994. In this study, all participants were made aware that each has an equal opportunity to express their thoughts on how best to maximise collaborative support for LEBL to benefit from learning in inclusive classes. The school districts that participated were the Oliver Reginald (OR) Tambo Inland and the OR Tambo Coastal in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. These districts are located in a province where 60% of the population lives in poverty, which is widely recognised as the primary factor contributing to learning barriers (Ngumbela, 2014). The study was carried out in five primary schools in the Eastern Cape province, OR Tambo Inland and OR Tambo Coastal Districts. We purposively selected 15 participants. Parents and teachers were chosen to be participants because they are the first providers of support to those learners who have been identified to be experiencing barriers to learning and are expected to work together to discuss the strengths of the child (Messiou & Ainscow, 2015). As an indication that participants agreed to participate in the study, they signed a consent form after the purpose of the study was communicated to them. To make the reader understand the study, we provided the demographic information of the purposively selected participants as presented in the table below.

Table 1. Biographical information of the participants.

Pseudonym	Age Group	Level of Education	Designation	Gender	Teaching experience
SP1	45-50	Bed Honours	Principal	Female	20 years of teaching experience and 5 years as a principal
SP2	35-40	Bed Honours	Principal	Female	10 years of teaching experience and 3 years as a principal
SP3	50+	ACE	Principal	Female	30 years of teaching experience and 5 years as a principal
SP1	45-50	ACE	Principal	Male	15 years of teaching experience and 8 years as a principal

SP2	55+	ACE	Principal	Male	35 years of teaching experience and 12 years as a principal
P1	55+	Standard five	Parent	Female	Not applicable
P2	35-40	BEd Honours	Parent	Female	Not applicable
P3	45-50	Matric	Parent	Male	Not applicable
P4	40-45	Standard eight	Parent	Female	Not applicable
P5	15-20	Matric	Parent	Female	Not applicable
T1	20-25	BEd Honours	Teacher (SBST coordinator)	Female	2 years of teaching experience
T2	40-45	An Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	Teacher	Female	10 years of teaching experience
T3	20-25	BEd Honours	Teacher	Female	1 year of teaching experience
T4	45-50	ACE	Teacher	Female	15 years of teaching experience
T5	55-60	ACE	Teacher	Female	35 years of teaching experience

We anticipated that these participants would provide in-depth information as they were interested in IE and its implementation in inclusive classes. The criteria used to purposively select newly appointed teachers and experienced teachers as participants helped to get their views on collaborative approach with parents to enhance quality education for LEBL in the Foundation Phase. Newly appointed teachers have theoretical knowledge about inclusive education but lack practical experience in inclusive classrooms while many experienced teachers have not received adequate training in inclusive education, with some having only attended a single workshop that introduced Education White Paper 6 (Mahlo, 2017). This selection helped to get to their different perspectives as these were informed by their respective

years of experience in supporting LEBL and noting a need for teacher-parent collaboration in the Foundation Phase.

Data were generated at five sites using focus group discussions in which parents and teachers were represented. . As researchers, we employed the principles of thematic analysis to analyse data. These principles were appropriate and powerful to this study because they sought to make us understand a set of experiences, thoughts or behaviours across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The following six steps, provided by Braun and Clarke (2014), were used to thematically analyse the data: familiarising ourselves with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the manuscript. Thematic analysis brought a systematic element to data analysis and allowed us as researchers to associate the analysis of the frequency of a theme with the whole content. The researchers listened to the recordings of the discussions repeatedly to capture everything without missing any important information and together with field notes, were transcribed and categorized into meaningful units. During the data coding process, we labelled and organised the data into different themes that emerged. Codes were generated through the identification of patterns that answered the research questions and were used to establish categories that led to themes that were selected based on their relevance to the research question.

This study applied methodological triangulation which involves utilising recorded and transcribed discussions and written reflections. These were discussed with participants as a follow-up to check the consistency of the findings, and we also conducted member-checking to verify data, where interpretations and conclusions were shared with the participants to enable them to clarify their meanings, correct errors, and provide additional information which they felt necessary. The Eastern Cape Department of Education granted permission to conduct research in the identified school districts. Consent was sought from all participants, including teachers and parents. Additionally, the study received approval from the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) ethics committee. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality, anonymity, and non-maleficence principles were observed. The findings will be discussed in the following section.

Findings

The findings are presented under the themes that emerged from the data analysis. They suggest that a lack of effective collaboration in inclusive teaching derails the development of the learner. This implies that there is a need for collaboration between parents and teachers to

support LEBL in the Foundation Phase. Lastly, they point to the need for teachers and parents to collaborate for effective teaching and learning in inclusive classes.

Solidarity Can Enhance Quality Education in Inclusive Classes

The findings suggest that parents, teachers, and other stakeholders do not work together to support learners in inclusive classes. It emerged that teachers require parents' approval to complete the support needs assessment (SNA) 1 and 2 forms. However, it was alleged that most parents were not willing to give their consent, which delayed the provision of support to LEBL.

The following responses to the question on challenges in delivering IE highlight this issue.

... Some parents do not accept that their children experience barriers... they are in denial and could not agree that their children should receive help (SP1).

Denial from parents... they do not accept that their children experience barriers to learning... takes time to accept and delays progress because if parents do not agree that their children experience barriers to learning, nothing can be done (T2).

The above responses suggest that there are disagreements between parents and teachers when their children are identified to be experiencing barriers to learning and that ruins chances of working together to ensure the child receives additional support.

P4 responded with a frowning face and made a threatening statement:

Nisibizele lonto apha?... ukuba uke wagcwalisa eza forms usenzela umntwana wam asizukubona nge liso elinye (Is that the reason why you have called us here...should you fill those forms for my child, we will not see eye to eye, as my child will be sent to another school where her grant will not be enough for payment as special schools are expensive).

It is evident that, for some parents, identification of learning barriers is associated with special schools that they think they cannot afford, hence they become defensive and say their child does not experience any barrier to learning. Their lack of knowledge of IE practices led them to think that their children would be taken away from them, which is not always the case. This could be construed as a denial of the children's democratic right to receive the necessary support in their learning.

Some of the teacher's responses also pointed to similar misconceptions. For example, T4 commented:

During my teaching experience, I have realised that parents of children with barriers always fight against any person who tells them that their children are differently abled, which makes it difficult to consult them when we experience any challenges in teaching their children.

From T4's response, it is clear that there are no good relationships between teachers and parents, especially when it comes to what is happening in the classroom. Furthermore, T5 was of the view that inclusive classes are a burden for teachers:

Having an inclusive class is tiresome. It requires effort from both sides, school and home, so that there can be a collective idea on how to assist these learners.

Such comments suggest that teachers are willing to involve parents in the teaching and learning processes.

The responses of both teachers and parents point to the need to improve the nature of the relationships they have so that they can easily share their feelings and facilitate joint or united effort on behalf of the children. This is in line with Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden (2017) and Engelbrecht et al. (2015a) who associate some of the challenges confronting IE with the legacy of the previous discriminatory education system. In South Africa, inclusive education emerged as a human rights initiative that aimed to rectify the inequalities created by the education system during the apartheid era. This system not only segregated learners based on racial differences, but also excluded learners facing barriers from mainstream schooling (Engelbrecht, et al., 2015b). It was customary to refer learners identified with learning barriers to special schools which were often far from their families. These special schools were scarce and generally lacked sufficient resources, particularly in black communities (SIAS, 2014; Dreyer, 2017). Excluding some learners from mainstream schools due to disabilities they experienced negatively impacted parent-teacher relationships and contradicts *Ubuntu*, which emphasizes the importance of unity as illustrated by an African idiom, *ubunye nga mandla*, which means that “divided we fall and united we stand” (Shaw, 2013). It was clear from the responses that the participants mistrusted each other, but after narrating what IE entails and how many learners benefit from these support services, parents started to recognise their failure to work with teachers.

A Collaborative Approach to Supporting Inclusive Education

As noted previously, many teachers were not trained to teach children with disabilities or, generally, how to teach in a child-friendly, active way (Makhalemele & Nel, 2016). Therefore,

additional in-service training for teachers on inclusive practices is necessary to improve their self-confidence prior to their involvement with other stakeholders in providing support (Engelbrecht, et al., 2015b; Wapling, 2016). Teachers who were trained before IE was introduced do not have the skills to work in inclusive classes and incorporate parents and other stakeholders (who are not trained as teachers) into the teaching and learning processes. Galkiene and Monkeviciene (2021) note that many teachers in low- and middle-income countries, including South Africa, have not been trained or sufficiently exposed to working closely with parents in what they are doing in the classrooms. We are therefore of the view that no matter how well-articulated inclusive policies are and how well-resourced schools can be, effective inclusive teaching and learning will remain a problem if parents are sidelined from it. Principals and teachers who participated in our study stated that they do not feel capable of teaching effectively in ICs.

SP1: The greatest problem is that most teachers, especially the old ones, are not used to having to discuss school matters with parents, especially those related to teaching and learning in the classroom. For them, a parent can only be informed of the progress of the child without going into detail as to what support they should also provide as partners in education.

This response highlights a barrier to collaboration between teachers and parents and the need for a reorientation on how parents are perceived, since they now have a role to play as stakeholders in support provision.

SP2: There is no parental support to teachers for LEBL... so teachers find it difficult to provide additional support to learners they identify to be experiencing barriers... they end up ignoring such learners though they are in their classes.

This participant is calling for parental support for teachers so that they can provide the necessary support to learners in need.

T5: What I think can be helpful for all of us to be able to work together is to have some regular parent-teacher workshops in our circuits on inclusive education, because really if we all know how to assist these children, it becomes easy for us to work towards achieving one goal.

T5 acknowledged the need for additional workshops in which both parents and teachers will be trained in inclusive teaching and support expected from each stakeholder. This indicates that

teachers recognise their limited understanding of inclusive practices and are willing to receive training, along with parents, to facilitate inclusive classrooms.

P1: I am of a generation where school was separated from home, but now I see the importance of playing a role in the learning of my child. If only I could reverse time, I would go back to school to understand how I can help these teachers assist my child.

P1 seems to realise the gap between generations in terms of participating in the support provided to learners experiencing barriers to learning, rather than just sending their children to teachers without being involved in what is happening at school to enhance their learning.

P4: You know when you started, I could not understand why you wanted us to discuss this topic, but what I am seeing now is that our children who experience barriers are also human beings who deserve to be respected and cared for in education. If only it were possible [for] such discussions [to be held] in community meetings in the presence of our leaders so that everyone understands the importance of education [for] all children.

These responses from parents show the importance of collaborating with the school and, thus, making sure that they must acknowledge their role as stakeholders in providing support for their children to benefit in the schooling system,. P4 also noted the need for the whole community to know about IE, as many people still believe that a child who is differently abled should be sent to special schools, leading to children dropping out due to long waiting lists and financial constraints. Inclusive education acknowledges the reality of diversity by providing multiple ways for learners to access content and demonstrate their learning. The use of traditional teaching strategies where parents are excluded from what is happening in the school affects LEBL; therefore, it is important that teachers, as well as parents, embrace inclusive strategies.

SP 1: I think working in a cooperative way where learners venture into different activities, such as play-way methods, will help them to assist their peers with some barriers to effective learning of certain concepts.

This response suggests that learners can help their peers who experience barriers to learning if teaching strategies are adjusted to allow for playful methods. This demonstrates the principal's understanding that learners also have a responsibility in providing support, thus highlighting the significance of collaboration among various stakeholders.

T2: The challenge we have is that we do not know our learners individually as their parents, which makes it difficult for us to teach them in a way that accommodates their different educational needs.

T2 was concerned about not knowing the needs of individual learners and recognises that parental participation can help as they are more knowledgeable about their children's needs. This makes it difficult to know all the strengths of children who experience barriers, and these are necessary to build on when providing the necessary support (Messiou & Ainscow, 2015).

P4: Njengabazali asazi ukuba singenza njani ukuncedisana noo titshala abasebenza nabantwana bethu, kodwa ke kuyabonakala ukuba xa singasebenzisana nabo basinike ulwazi singakwazi ukwenza ngcono (As parents, I think we can do better if we can collaborate with teachers, where they will share their expertise with us as parents, I believe that we can find a solution on how best we can be of assistance in our children's learning).

After focus group interviews and discussions about what the study was all about, the attitudes of all participants seemed to change, and they expressed a willingness to partner to ensure that children learn effectively in inclusive classes.

P2: The most painful thing is that we see some problems in our children, but we do not bring that to the attention of teachers to assist us because we are not sure what the outcome will be, as many children were taken out of school because they were told they needed a specialised setting... and some never attended any school, which is a sad thing.

This also suggests a change in how parents perceived their relationship with teachers, as previously they did not want to disclose anything about their children to the teachers. The data presented here suggest that, despite the official commitment to IE in South Africa, there is a need for collaboration to improve the support of learners from teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. There is also a clear indication that a collaborative initiative was needed to emancipate and transform parents' and teachers' perceptions of IE, particularly in Foundation Phase classes. Collaboration is congruent with the principles of *Ubuntu*, which focus on working together to reach a specific goal. Through participation in the study, parents changed from being negative and became keen to collaborate to support LEBL teaching and learning processes. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that both teachers and parents have the skills to support LEBL.

Discussion of the Findings

Collaboration between teachers and parents in the teaching and learning of LEBL is of vital importance. Diana (2016) and Bornman (2021) note that the success of learners depends on the involvement of parents in their schooling. *Ubuntu* also highlights the importance of members of the community working together, while Mugumbate & Chereni (2019) draw our attention to the adage that it takes a village to raise a child. Based on the concept of a collaborative approach to inclusive teaching and learning processes, working together as education stakeholders enables alleviation of the challenges faced by LEBL (Kamga, 2020; Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden, 2017; Viriri & Viriri, 2018). For example, when children are supported at home or at school, there is no contradiction in what they are expected to do. Harnessing collaboration to support inclusive classes can thus benefit LEBL as parents work with teachers to monitor how these children learn. Bornman (2021) and Venter & Venter (2019) assert that this collaboration creates a positive learning environment both at school and at home. Understanding the intentions of IE led the participants to conclude that its effective implementation requires a partnership between parents and teachers at all levels.

People within the community depend on each other in whatever they do, not for personal benefits, but rather for the benefit of the entire community. This implies that there must be strong relationships among different stakeholders, as Mugumbate & Chereni (2019) and Viriri & Mungwini (2010) emphasise the interdependence and solidarity of people within a particular community. This suggests that it is not the responsibility of either a teacher or a parent to ensure that LEBL learns in these inclusive classes but that of every stakeholder in the community.

Conclusion

Achieving quality education for all learners, particularly in the Foundation Phase, requires joint effort among all the role players in education. This points to the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents, and other stakeholders for inclusive classes to become spaces where LEBL access the same learning as their peers without barriers. Secondly, we found that parents and teachers in South African rural schools have limited knowledge of how learners with learning barriers should be supported to achieve their potential. Therefore, it is important to capacitate teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in their different roles as key stakeholders in supporting IE. Lastly, we also concluded that parents do not consider themselves to be important stakeholders in the teaching and learning of learners, particularly LEBL. Therefore, the use of *Ubuntu* in this study was useful in encouraging partnerships between parents and teachers. Full participation of parents and teachers in the study allowed

them to change their attitudes towards learners living with barriers and how they can be supported in their learning.

Ethical Statement: This study was carried out in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. The approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Walter Sisulu University (ethical approval number: REC/3/2015).

Conflict of interest: As authors, we declare that there are no competing interests.

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