

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS IN IDENTIFYING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING BARRIERS AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Leetwane Anna Ntlhare¹, & Kananga Robert Mukuna²

¹*Department of Education and Professional Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Central University of
Technology, Free State Bloemfontein-9300 (South Africa)*

²*School of Education Studies, Faculty of Education, University of the Free State, QwaQwa Campus
(South Africa)*

Abstract

South African Department of Education like other countries adopted an inclusive education and Training System Policy in 2001 to improve access to quality education for vulnerable learners and those who experience learning barriers. Training and Professional Development programmes were offered to teachers. Policies and guidelines were reformed to determine how support could be appropriately implemented in schools. The training programmes were perceived as the opportunity for teachers to improve their teaching skills, knowledge, and competences in identifying learners with learning barriers in an inclusive classroom. Although policies were reformed and teachers' received training, teachers still lack experience challenges in identifying learners with learning barriers in an inclusive classroom. Research shows that many professional development programs have failed to improve teaching practice (Birman, Desimone, Porter and Garet, 2000; Newmann, King, and Youngs, 2001; Armour and Yelling, 2004; Hofman and Dijkstra, 2010). The aim of the study is to explore how teacher training and Professional development can be improved in identifying learners with learning barriers in South African primary schools. Twenty-eight participants (N=28) were purposefully selected from four South African rural primary schools. A qualitative interpretive approach was adopted, and data were gathered through four focus group interviews with twenty Foundation Phase teachers (five from each school) and eight individual face-to face interviews with four support teachers and four subject advisors. Data were thematically analysed as suggested by (Babbie and Mouton, Leedy and Ormrod, 2015). Result demonstrated that training and professional development programmes were not effective due to the following aspects: the training focused mostly on reading not the identification of learners and teachers experience challenges in identifying learners with learning barriers in an inclusive classroom. Reports also indicate that teachers lack proper skills and knowledge to implement evidence-based inclusive teaching strategies and practices for facilitating the success and participation of all learners within the inclusive classroom. (Awad, 2016; Ghoneim 2014; Alkhateeb et. al., 2016). Due to ineffective of the training, the current study suggests rethinking of a new strategy for improving teachers training to meet the needs of the teachers and improve learners' performance.

Keywords: *Professional development, teacher training, barriers to learning, foundation phase teachers, foundation phase learners.*

1. Introduction and background

One of the greatest challenges faces the South African education sector is to produce competent Foundation Phase teachers who can identify learners with learning barriers. South African Department of Education has adopted inclusive education and Training System policy in 2001 to improve access to quality education for vulnerable learners (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker and Engelbrecht, 2014). Policies were reformed and teachers received training to improve their teaching skills, knowledge, and competences in identifying learners with learning barriers in the inclusive classrooms (Forlin, Dinh, 2013). Professional Development were highlighted as a need for promoting teachers' professional learning to improve their teaching skills (Zhang, M., Xu, J., and Sun, C, 2014). But the issue of how to prepare teachers during professional learning experience, seems to have receive little attention. Although the reform of policies and expose teachers to training, teachers still lack skills and knowledge in identifying learners with learning barriers in an inclusive classroom (Chataika, Mckenzie, Swart, Lyner-Cleophas 2012). For curriculum developers to promote teachers' training and professional

development for teachers, there is a pressing need to make them aware of the prevailing situation in our education system. The aim of this study is to explore how teachers training and Professional Development could be improved in identify learners with learning barriers in South African primary schools. Against this background, it was necessary for the researcher to discuss the strategies that could enhance teacher's professional development that could lead to positive changes in teaching and learning and propose a model which might be an effective to overcome the problem.

2. Objectives

To explore how teachers training and Professional Development could be improved in identify learners with learning barriers in South African primary schools.

- To investigate the challenges that teacher training encountered in identifying learners with barriers to learning in the primary schools, in the Free State, South Africa.
- To develop intervention strategies that can improve teachers' training in identifying learners with barriers to learning in primary schools, in the Free State, South Africa.
- To explore the success on improving teachers' training in identifying learners with barriers to learning in the primary schools, Free State, South Africa.

3. Methods

3.1. Design

A qualitative interpretative approach was used to collect data using semi-structured focus group and face-to-face interviews. Twenty-four Foundation Phase teachers with four subject advisors were purposively selected from (rural) three primary schools in the Free State, in South Africa.

3.2. Sample

Twenty-four Foundation Phase teachers with four subject advisors were purposively selected from (rural) three primary schools in the Free State, South Africa.

4. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to collect data. Interviews responses were transcribed, coded, and categorized. Themes were constructed, grouped them finding commonalities and differences essential to the study.

5. Results

Table 1. Biographic Results teachers.

School	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Grade teaching	Highest qualification	Teaching experiences	Teaching subjects	Race	Residential areas
School A	T1	Female	35 years	2	JPTD	14 years	Numeracy	Black	Botshabelo
	T2	Female	35 years	1	Hons	13 years	Sesotho	Black	Botshabelo
	T3	Female	45 years	3	JPTD	20 years	Life Skills	Black	Thaba-Nchu
	T4	Female	50 years	3	ACE	35 years	English	Black	Thaba-Nchu
	H1	Female						Black	
School B	T1	Female	49 years	1	Hons	21 years	Numeracy	White	Bloemfontein
	T2	Female	42 years	3	JPTD	15 years	Sesotho	White	Botshabelo
	T3	Female	45 years	2	JPTD	10 years	Life Skills	Black	Thaba-Nchu
	T4	Female	42 years	3	JPTD	20 years	English	White	Botshabelo
	H2	Female	25 years	3	Hons	8 years		Black	Botshabelo
School C	H3	Female	58 years	1	ACE	31 years	Numeracy	Black	Botshabelo
	T	Female	55 years	2	JPTD	25 years	Sesotho	Black	Botshabelo
	T2	Female	42 years	1	JPTD	11 years	Life Skills	Black	Thaba-Nchu
	T3	Female	57 years	3	PTC	35 years	English	Black	Thaba-Nchu
School D	T4	Female	25 years	1	JPTD	10 years			Botshabelo
	T1	Female	45 years	3	JPTD	15 years	Numeracy	Black	Bloemfontein
	T2	Female	33 years	2	JPTD	5 years	Sesotho	Black	Botshabelo
	T3	Female	40 years	1	Hons	10 years	Life Skills	Black	Botshabelo
	T4	Female	27 years	2	Hons	15 years	English	Black	Bloemfontein
	H4	Female	28 years	1	Hons			Black	Thaba-Nchu
School A	ST1	Female	35 years	3	JPTD	5 years	Numeracy	Black	Bloemfontein
School B	ST2	Female	35 years	4	Hons	8 years	Sesotho	Black	Botshabelo
School C	ST3	Female	45 years	1	JPTD	20 years		Black	Thaba-Nchu
School D	ST4	Female	42 years	3	ACE	35 years		Black	Botshabelo

Table 2. Biographic Results of Subject Advisors.

School	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Highest qualification	Teaching experiences	Race	Residential areas
School A	SA1	Female	43 years	ACE	ST 8yrs, Gr2 4yrs. Gr5, (6month)	African	Thaba-Nchu
School B	SA2	Female	59 years	BA Hons (Psychology)	(3yrs teaching) (21yrs) SA	African	Botshabelo
School C	SA3	Female	50 years	BA Hons (Psychology)	Gr 1,5 yrs 11years SA	White	Botshabelo
School D	SA4	Female	46 years	BA Hons (Psychology)	19-year teaching. SA 3 yrs	African	Bloemfontein

Data analysis in table 1, 2 and 3 shows that twenty teachers, four Support Teachers and four Subject Advisors participated during the interviews, all were female residing in different areas. Their ages varied from 33 to 58 and their teaching experience ranged from five to thirty-five. Out of twenty-four, six had Honours Degree, two had ACE while the rest had Junior Primary Teachers Diploma and all of them were teaching Grade 1 to 3. Whereas Subject Advisors were between 43 to 59 years, and all were representing Foundation Phase and had qualifications for primary schools. Three of them had Bachelor of Art and one had Advanced Certificate in Education. Two Support Teachers had Junior Primary Diploma, one Hons and one ACE. The Ages of the support teachers ranged from 35 to 45 years, vary according to teaching experiences.

5.1. Interviews results

The qualitative data analysis was obtained from the interviews held with a sample of teachers (T), HoDs, Support Teachers (SP) and Subject Advisor (SA). The researcher conducted the interviews with the participants to understand whether professional development activities they were involved in meet their needs and enable them to identify learners with barriers to learning. whether those activities improved in identifying learners with learning barriers or not, their challenges, successes and intervention strategies that might be used to overcome the problem.

Table 3. Categories used in this study.

Categories as sensitizing based on research questions	Example of quotes
Professional Development activities undertaken.	<p>"I have attended various workshops such as how to teach learners to read, HIV/AIDS, ANA etc arranged by support advisor" (T1, School B: T3, School C: T2, School C).</p> <p>I've attended curriculum coverage workshop (T2, School B: ST1, School B).</p> <p>"I have attended various workshops such as teaching reading, CAPS etc workshops but without taking part in any activities" (T3, School B: T4 School, HoD, school B: T3, School D: T2, School D). "I have attended various workshops such as how to teach learners to read, HIV/AIDS, ANA etc arranged by support advisor" (T1, School B: T3, School C: T2, School C).</p> <p>I've attended curriculum coverage workshop (T2, School B: ST1, School B).</p> <p>"I have attended various workshops such as teaching reading, CAPS etc workshops but without taking part in any activities" (T3, School B: H4, school B: T3, School D: T2, School D).</p>
Understanding how professional development activities were improved in identifying learners with barriers to learning in the primary schools in South Africa.	<p>"Well..., have never participated during the professional development".</p> <p>"Most of the trainings were focused on how to teach Foundation Phase learners to be able to read" (T1, School A: ST1, School B: H4, School B: T2, School D).</p> <p>"There is no improvement at all, what I can say is that subject advisors must adapt their teaching strategies during the workshops" (T3, School A: T2, School B: Teacher 2, School C: T3, School D: T1, School B:).</p>
Challenges encountered by teachers in identifying learners with learning barriers in an inclusive classroom.	<p>There are cultural challenges, the teacher will say the learner have to attend occupational therapy on the other hand the parent will say the child have to attend cultural ceremony" (T2, School A: T3, School A: T1, School B).</p> <p>The challenge is to teach diverse learners in one class and parents whose children are struggling, they don't want their children to repeat the grade" (T1, School A: T3, School C).</p> <p>"There is no time for intervention of learners, and the SBST do not meet regularly. Learners attending mainstream class are not able to balance work from remedial class and mainstream work and that create a serious challenge. Furthermore, parents do not assist the learners with the work done in the remedial class" (ST2, School C).</p>

<p>Successes on improving teachers' training in identifying learners with learning barriers in an inclusive classroom.</p>	<p><i>What can I say? Ehm..., my success is that last year I had a little girl (Grade 1) in my class she couldn't read even a single word. I tried to support that child but couldn't understand what I want her to do. I kept on supporting her and now she is in Grade 2 and is doing so well" (T2, School A),</i> <i>"...for me I did not achieve any success because I don't know how to identify learners with Learning barriers" (T1, School B: T2, School C: T3, School C).</i> <i>"My success is seen in what is happening in my schools I have pilot school whereby we succeeded in supporting learners. Some of the learners were identified and one of them is the candidate of special school. I took the learner and met with SBST member and work with the learner for the whole day. My objective was to see whether the learner will improve. I assessed the learner. To my surprise the learner I realised that the learner could read. I even got the support from the principal. I use this school as an example and encourage others to cope from it" (SA3: SA 4).</i> <i>I must say, no success because I am still facing challenge to teach diverse learners in the classroom" (T2, School B: T1, School D).</i></p>
<p>Intervention strategies that can improve teachers' training in identifying learners with barriers to learning in the primary schools in South Africa.</p>	<p><i>"Relevant workshops must be arranged by Subject Advisors for teachers to learn on how to identify learners in an inclusive classroom" (T1, School A: T4 HoD, School B).</i> <i>"I think all Foundation Phase teachers must be given the opportunity to attend courses related to the identification of learners with learning barriers other than that, pre-service training programmes should be provided to all student teachers in primary and secondary schools "(ST2, School C).</i> <i>"I believe that that if our Subject Advisors do class visits in our schools to see where problem lies, and they will be able to assist us and come up with intervention strategies" (ST1, school B: SA1: Teacher 2, School C: SA4).</i></p>

6. Discussion

In the interviews conducted, it was revealed that training programmes that teachers attended before were all based on reading not on identification of learners with barriers to learning. Previous reading workshops were of lecturing, teachers were not engaged in all the activities they were just listening because learners are still struggling to read or write. It can be noted of the present study that teachers prefer to attend workshops relevant to the identification of learners with barriers to learning. Thus, teachers training and Professional Development that do not focus only on reading are better preferred by South African primary teachers. The challenges faced by most of the teachers is the attitude of parents, they do not want their struggling children to repeat the grade. Sending struggling learner to the next grade frustrate teachers. The issue of progressed learners to the next grade was common in South Africa that often led to learners' unable read, write. Thus, affect learners' performance. Participants reported that they lack skills and knowledge to identify learners with barriers to learning. All expressed a need for relevant training workshops and follow-up support from subject advisors. Few had attended workshops but claimed that they are still struggling to identify learners.

7. Conclusion

Teaching learners with different learning styles in an inclusive classroom requires teachers who received special training to meet the needs of individual learners within the classroom. Because majority of teachers in the current study struggle to teach and identify learners with learning barriers in an inclusive classroom. Thus, rethinking of new model focusing on the improvement of teachers' training in identifying learners with learning barriers is needed.

8. Recommendations

The study recommends several actions for improving teachers training and professional development in identifying learners with barriers to learning in South African primary schools.

- Teachers' needs must be considered prior the training.
- The study proposed new model for improving teachers training to meet the needs of the teachers and improve learners' performance.

References

- Alkhateeb, J. M., Ghoneim, S., Hadidi, M. S., & Alkhateeb, A. J. (2016). *Inclusion of children with developmental disabilities in Arab countries: A review of the research literature from 1990 to 2014*. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 49-50, 60-75. doi: 10.1016/j.ridd.2015.11.005
- Babbie, E., & Mouton, J. (2015). *The practice of social research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Awad, N. E., & Ali, H. (2016). *Students with disability and the quest for inclusive education: A case study of private schools in greater Cairo (Unpublished master's thesis)*. The American University in Cairo.
- Chataika, T., Mckenzie, J., Swart, E. & Lyner-Cleophas, M., (2012). 'Access to Education in Africa: Responding to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', *Disability and Society* 27(3), 385–398.
- Department of Education (2001). *White Paper 6: Special Needs Education - Building an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Engelbrecht, P., Green, L., Naicker, S. and Engelbrecht, L. (2014). *Inclusive education in action in South Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Forlin, C. and Dinh, N. T., (2013). 'A national strategy for supporting teacher educators to prepare teachers for inclusion', in C. Forlin (ed.), *Teacher Education for Inclusion: Changing Paradigms and Innovative Approaches*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Leedy, P. & Ormrod, J. E. (2015). *Practical Research Planning and Design*. (10th ed). Edinburgh: Pearson Educational Inc
- Zhang, M., Xu, J., & Sun, C. (2014). *Effective Teachers for Successful Schools and High Performing Students: The Case of Shanghai* In S. K. Lee, W. O. Lee, & E. L. Low (Eds.), *Educational Policy Innovations* (pp. 143–161). Singapore: Springer Singapore. Retrieved from http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-981-4560-08-5_9