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## Factors Hindering the Admission of Learners with Learning Barriers in Special Schools in Dr. Kenneth Kaunda District, South Africa

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### **Abstract:**

*The study aimed to examine the factors hindering the admission of learners with learning barriers in selected inclusive special schools in Dr. Kenneth Kaunda district. The researcher adopted a descriptive case study approach with a qualitative perspective. The study found that the views of most school stakeholders were predominantly positive, reflecting an acceptance of the inclusive status of the schools. The absence of significant negative attitudinal barriers, improvements in school accessibility, progress in teacher training and the production of locally made Inclusive Education (IE) modules are noticeable areas of achievement. The study concludes that despite the presence of various exclusionary factors, the two schools have made some observable headway towards the improvement of inclusive learning for children with disabilities.*

**Keywords:** Challenges, disabilities, inclusion, exclusion, learners with learning barriers

### **1. Introduction**

In 2007, 408 special schools across the country provided education to 91,280 learners identified with special needs. Typically, the best-resourced special schools tend to be in urban areas (Rensburg, Thobane, Kader, Aphane, Mpuru, Mokotong, Ngoveni, Tinyiku, Ratiba, & Tredoux, 2024). They also attract the best-qualified specialists and possess the most material resources and assistive devices. Historically, inequity in terms of providing for learner needs was most pronounced in the Special Needs sector.

The 2004 Human Rights Commission report revealed that rural learners suffer the worst forms of exclusion. Not only are there very few special schools in rural areas, but they do not exist in many deep rural areas, and where they do exist, they are in the most deplorable conditions. Chitsamatanga and Rembe (2020) lack qualified staff and specialists. It has become apparent that many special schools offer very little in terms of appropriate, quality education, and many learners never progress beyond Grade 1.

#### *1.1. Statement of the Problem*

There are several impediments that hinder the admission of learners, such as learning barriers and the inflexible nature of the curriculum, and this prevents admission as learners are unable to access the curriculum (DoE, 1997). According to the DoE (1997; 2001; 2005), the key barriers to learning found in the education system include: attitudes of the teachers, learners and other relevant stakeholders, socio-economic conditions, language skills and communication, inappropriate and inadequate provision of support services, disability and the lack of human resource development strategies.

#### *1.2. Objectives*

The objectives of the study were set as follows:

- To uncover the challenges in the admission of learners with learning barriers in two selected special schools in Dr. Kenneth Kaunda
- To profile the type of support that the District Based Support Team (SBST) may provide in enhancing the admission of learners with learning barriers.

### 1.3. Significance of the Study and the Benefit to Education Department

This study might provide additional light on the challenges in the admission of learners with learning barriers in special schools. It is further hoped that the information obtained from this study might be useful to policy-makers and other key stakeholders in formulating policies and interventions that would ensure the full implementation of inclusive education, particularly in primary schools (Zemba & Chipindi, 2020). The study findings might enhance the awareness of regular teachers and school managers to rigorously address implementation challenges at the school level. The role of the district-based support team in enhancing the successful admission of learners with learning barriers is essential; therefore, it needs thorough training and continuous engagement of a school-based support team (SBST) in this regard.

As a former teacher and the principal, I have experienced first-hand that there are many similarities and differences in the functioning of the SBST in a previously disadvantaged farm school. In my personal experience with all colleagues and other teachers, I have come to realise that teachers and parents were not equipped, trained or supported to include all learners, regardless of their learning barriers. Failure to have teachers and parents trained resulted in parents not willing to have their children enrolled in special schools.

### 1.4. Aim of the Study

The study aims to outline the factors hindering the admission of learners with learning barriers to special schools in Dr. Kenneth Kaunda.

### 1.5. Research Question

The research question in this study stated thus:

- What are the factors hindering the admission of learners with learning barriers in special schools in Dr. Kenneth Kaunda?

## 2. Literature Review

Implementing an inclusive education system is part of the significant educational reforms that occurred after the 1994 democratic election. In 1994, the World Conference on Special Needs Education was held in Salamanca, Spain, and the outcome of this conference informed a worldwide movement towards inclusive education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). The study intends to explore factors hindering the admission of learners with learning barriers to special schools.

The admission of learners in South African schools has been a challenge for a long period of time (Morelle & Tabane, 2019). At the beginning of every year, thousands of learners report for Grade R and Grade 1 across schools in South Africa. Unfortunately, many learners are refused admission to these grades when parents apply. The national policy that guides and governs the admission of learners to public schools is the South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996.

### 2.1. Factors Impeding the Admission of Learners with Learning Barriers in Special School

#### 2.1.1. The Role of Vision and Mission of Selected Special Schools in the Admission of Learners Identified with Learning Barriers

A global call for inclusion of learners with SEN means that the majority of learners with SEN are accommodated in regular classrooms (Adewumi, T. M., Mosito, C., & Agosto, V., 2019). Therefore, the admission of learners identified with learning needs must be accommodated in special schools, and thus, a feasible and workable vision and mission must be developed.

The vision and mission of the school play a pivotal role in the admission of learners to special schools. Vision and mission statements are important because they help people focus and bond together to reach common goals, which are factors hindering the admission of learners in special schools. The vision and mission of the school encapsulated the procedures on how to admit learners identified with learning barriers in special schools. All the steps are to be followed, and the requirements and documentation are to be included in the applications for learners with learning barriers in schools. Finally, all the procedures, steps and requirements must be incorporated and clearly stated in the admission policy.

#### 2.1.2. Lack of Boarding and Lodging

Without boarding facilities, students who live far from special schools may face difficulties attending regularly, which can disrupt their learning and progress. Some families may struggle to afford alternative accommodation options or transportation costs, especially if the special school is located far from their home. Boarding facilities provide a conducive environment for additional educational support, extracurricular activities and peer interaction, which may be lacking for learners without access to such facilities. Addressing this issue requires collaboration between educational authorities, government agencies and community stakeholders to ensure that all students, including those with barriers, have access to appropriate accommodation options that support their learning and overall well-being. This may involve advocating for additional funding, developing partnerships with local organisations or exporting innovative solutions such as community-based housing options or transportation subsidies.

#### 2.1.3. Parental Lack of Knowledge of Children's Barriers

The guidelines for teaching and learning have identified parents as a major contributor to the implementation of inclusive education. Children model the attitudes and behaviours of their parents (Paseka & Schwab, 2019). Furthermore,

understanding parental attitudes towards barriers will help provide information on how parents view barriers and what their needs are in the educational system. In some cases, parents of children with barriers to learning do not believe that an inclusive education environment is conducive to their child's academics.

#### 2.1.4. Shortage of Learners' Transport

Learners with learning needs are often left behind without access to education due to either non-existent or inadequate transport. Learner transport problems are not the fault of the school but of an uncaring and unsympathetic administration that is seemingly indifferent to the plight of learners with special needs (Abongdia & Jane-Francis, 2015). Learners who are on the autism spectrum may have severe sensory sensitivities and difficulties in processing the sensation of being in close proximity to another person, as some transports are dangerously overcrowded.

#### 2.1.5. Marginalised Families

The provision of special education services to special needs students is largely upheld by federal and state policies and regulations such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, which ensures that children have the opportunity to access free, appropriate public education. However, marginalised families of low-income and linguistically diverse backgrounds continue to face barriers and challenges to actively participate in their child's education and secure the necessary and appropriate services for their needs in special schools (Yell, Mitchell, Shriner & Antonis, 2017).

#### 2.1.6. Minimal Resources

The message here could be that teachers find it challenging to deal with learners with special needs due to a lack of enough resources in schools. Additionally, it could be that resources are not available; therefore, the needs of learners are not catered for (Rensburg, Thobane, Kader, Aphane, Mpuru, Mokotong, Ngoveni, Ratiba & Liezel, 2024). Limited access to support services and the availability of resources can influence teacher's ability to implement inclusive education effectively. Significantly limited access to support services, the availability of resources and outcome pressures, and limited professional learning about diversity influence teachers' understanding of the implementation of inclusive education. The deduction that could be made is that teachers realise they have limited resources to support services and resources; therefore, they find it challenging to implement inclusive education effectively and admit learners with special needs in special schools.

#### 2.1.7. Lack of Training in Utilisation of Assistive Devices

Limited access to resources: Without proper training, educators may not be equipped to effectively integrate assistive devices into the learning environment, limiting students' access to necessary resources for their education (Ndlovu, 2021). Students may not receive the full benefits of assistive devices if educators are not trained to effectively incorporate them into instruction and support their use. Inadequate training can hinder efforts to create an inclusive learning environment where students with barriers can fully participate and engage with their peers. Without access to assistive devices or proper training in their use, students may struggle to overcome barriers to learning, leading to academic underachievement and reduced educational outcomes. Assistive devices are designed to support students in developing skills and independence. Without proper training, they may miss out on opportunities to build these essential abilities.

#### 2.1.8. Teachers Failing to Identify Learners for Placement

Delayed intervention, without timely identification, may cause students with special needs not to receive the support and accommodations they need to succeed in school. This can lead to delays in accessing appropriate interventions and services, which can impact their academic, social and emotional development (Deysolong, J, 2023). Special schools are equipped to provide tailored instruction, accommodations and therapies to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. Failing to identify these students means they miss out on the targeted support that could help them thrive academically and socially. Failing to identify learners who require placement in special schools may violate legal requirements for providing free and appropriate public education. It also raises ethical concerns about equity and access to education for all learners.

#### 2.1.9. Teachers' Lack of Knowledge to Identify Learners with Learning Barriers

According to White Paper 6, the inclusive training system was to be changed so that learners who experience barriers to learning should be identified earlier and given adequate support. Teachers are expected to have the skills and knowledge to identify learners with barriers in full-service schools. However, most teachers, if not all in full-service schools, are not being trained to teach in mainstream schools, not inclusive ones. The only form of training that they received from the Department of Education was in the form of workshops for the skills needed to identify learners so that they could provide support. The identification of such learners is essential because it is the first step in the process of providing support to learners.

### **3. Discussions and Findings**

From the schools that were selected, it was made clear that learners with learning barriers are denied admission for one or more reasons. The observation was conducted in two schools, and it was made clear that many special schools do not have boarding, thus making admission a challenging issue. Principals from both schools concurred that lack of enough accommodation resulted in minimal admission. It was also alluded that many parents do not have more

knowledge on how their children can be assisted when placed in special schools. Hence, they are reluctant to have their children placed in special schools.

Another factor hindering the admission of learners with learning barriers was found to be the result of learners settling far away from special schools, as they will need to travel to and from schools. Such learners will have to travel far to access education in skills such as plumbing, motor mechanics, graphic design, etc. The shortage of transport was found to be aggravated by marginalised families that cannot transport their learners to schools.

Teachers also made it clear that the lack of enough resources obscures and hinders the admission of learners identified with learning barriers. Teachers are left with the burden of how to inculcate necessary skills in learners with learning barriers due to a lack of resources. In both special schools, it was found that there are few assistive devices, and if there are, the use and utilisation of such devices remain a significant challenge. It was divulged that without access to assistive devices or proper training in their use, students might struggle to overcome barriers to learning, leading to academic underachievement and reduced educational outcomes. This results in hindering the admission of learners with learning barriers to access proper training to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve maximally as abled learners.

Teachers' perception and negligence in identifying learners with learning barriers were found to be the major factors hindering admission. Teachers lamented that they receive limited training and procedures in identifying learners with learning barriers, especially novice teachers who are not trained in inclusive education at university and college levels.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study intends to examine factors hindering the admission of learners with learning barriers in special schools. The researcher adopted a descriptive case study approach with a qualitative perspective. The study was conducted in Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, where two special schools were selected. Two special schools were selected because the admission of learners with learning barriers was found to be rife. The observation was conducted in those two selected schools, and it was found that the aforementioned factors indeed hinder the admission of learners identified with learning barriers.

In the study, it was recommended that continuous teacher training is essential to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify learners with learning barriers. The utilisation of assistive device will in future enhance the admission of learners with learning barriers.

The study concluded by emphasising that early identification of learners with learning barriers will indeed result in more learners being admitted to special schools and such schools being provided with assistive devices to ensure successful inclusion. The provision of transport will also exacerbate the admission of learners with learning barriers. A series of colloquiums and advocacy to parents and teachers will enhance learners' admission.

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