

BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN DIVERSE CLASSROOMS: TEACHERS' VOICES

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on barriers identified by teachers and how such barriers inhibit learning support processes. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was used. The paper reports on qualitative study conducted with eighteen senior phase teachers in South Africa to explore and describe how they provide learning support for learners identified with specific learning difficulties in their classrooms. Data were collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews, document analysis and field notes were reflected in a journal. Data was analysed through thematic data analysis. The findings revealed that learners encountered barriers such as significant language difficulties; reading and writing difficulties, multiple barriers experienced by individual learners; contextual barriers and behavioural-barriers. Participants indicated that such barriers inhibited learning support processes and mentioned that they lacked specific competencies in addressing them. It is recommended that teachers to should be in the forefront of mediating the learning support processes in addressing barriers; collaborate with parents, the learners, the community and the district office; and collaboration between the Department of Education and Institutions of Higher Education.

Keywords: Barriers to learning, Specific learning difficulties, learning support, mainstream schools, inclusive education.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) is a reality affecting many learners globally. There are different views, from different scholars, on what constitutes SpLDs. Hence, Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2010) assert that the area of SpLDs is complex. These scholars also contend that SpLDs are less readily identifiable, do not always have a clear physical basis and are subject to different social contexts. On the other hand, Tipper and Sutherland view the concept SpLDs as an umbrella term that refers to difficulties relating to the processes of learning and literacy. They contend that the difficulty might be in one area of learning such as working memory, an area which may affect more than one process of learning such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, which vary from one individual to another. In contrast, Woolfson and Brady (2009) use the state that term, "learning difficulties" instead of SpLDs to describe students with intellectual or learning difficulties and all learners who are considered to have special educational needs, including physical, sensory and emotional-behavioural.

Learners with SpLDs have diverse learning needs that often present as barriers to learning. For this reason, schools are compelled to provide learning support by applying inclusive education

principles and processes to ensure that they learn optimally. In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) embraces inclusion and recognises that different degree of support can be accommodated in special schools, full service schools and mainstream schools (DoE 2001, Volsoo 2009, DBE 2014). In this paper, the author contends that majority of learners with SpLDs, are also found in the mainstream schools.

This paper reports on barriers identified by teachers in the classrooms and discusses how these barriers influenced learning support processes. The assumption for embarking on such a study was that its findings could be used to develop a learning support framework that could be used by teachers in mainstream schools. The need for such a framework was deemed necessary, because the researcher viewed the learning support process as complex and challenging for many teachers. Furthermore, she argues that not all teachers have the necessary formal training, interest and competencies in addressing issues pertaining to learning difficulties. Understanding the teachers' experiences could therefore provide rich data on what is it like to deal with the phenomenon of SpLDs as they are people who interact with learners daily. Therefore, the research question for this papers is: What barriers do teachers observe in their classrooms in supporting learners with specific learning difficulties?

CONTEXTUALIZING BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA

The concepts barriers to learning was developed as a shift from a medical model that focused on the learner excluding other areas in the education system, the family and the society to a more inclusive education paradigm (DoE 2001). It can be described to include those aspects that inhibit learning and development due to different reasons (DoE 2001). Categories of barriers to leaning include extrinsic barriers occurring outside the learner such as home circumstances, socio economic factors; intrinsic barriers such as medical conditions and disabilities. and systemic barriers such as language of teaching and learning, lack of leaning material (DoE 2001, DBE 2014. Donald et al, 2010, Nel, Nel & Hugo 2012).

To ensure that such barriers are addressed, a range of education policies such as Education White Paper 6 (DoE 2001), "Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning" (DBE,2010b), the Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support" [SIAS] (DBE, 2014), have been formulated, introduced and supposedly implemented in schools (Mavuso 2015). In addition, school-based support structure such as the School-Based support teams (SBST) have been tasked with the responsibilities of facilitating learning support processes in collaboration with the referring teachers, learning support educators, the District-Based Support Teams (DBST) and other external stakeholders (DoE, 2005). Although such education policies, systems and structures are in place, the author argues that a gap still exist as there is high incidence of overaged learners in the senior phase presenting with SpLDs without adequate identification, support and referrals. She observed that the only time such learners were referred for support was at the exit grade 9 -an exit grade of compulsory schooling in South African. This observation also suggested that training learners were progressed from other intermediate phase (grades 4-6) to the senior phase (grades 7-9) meeting the required outcomes, they were not supported adequately, and workshops conducted by officials from the district did not yield positive outcomes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The education system in South Africa takes a systems approach as its frame for addressing barriers to learning. Thus, it embraces inclusive education principles that recognises that every learner can learn when supported appropriately. The author therefore sought to use Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory can be described as a multidimensional model of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The model is characterised by the simultaneous and multifaceted influence of the environment with structures such as the macrosystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the microsystem and the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Härkönen, 2007; Paquette & Ryan, 2001; Lewthwarte, 2011; Parke & Clarke-Steward, 2011).

As Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana writes, the microsystem includes direct interactions the learner has with the family, other learners including peers, teachers, physical learning spaces, classroom cultures and routines, resources and the playground. At the meso system, the learner actively and directly interacts with two or more settings. Such settings could be the home and the school; interaction between the home and the community or family and peer group. The exosystem represents those aspects that have indirect influence on the learners' development. Such aspects could have positive or negative influence to the child' development. The next level is called the macrosystem and it represents the broader community, the economy, value systems, politics surrounding the learner. These aspects have a bearing on the developing learner in that. The last layer is referred to as chronosystems and it represents changes that happens over a period of time.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was considered pertinent for the study in which this paper is based, because it considered all systems that could influence the process of learning support within the systemic context involving the interactions of teachers within each school. In the context of research of this paper, teachers facilitate learning support as individuals in their classrooms and collectively, as members of the SBSTs. Therefore, it was important to explore their experiences because, if these experiences were not known, it would not be easy to propose recommendation on how teachers could address barriers experienced by learners. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory also helped in spelling out the complexities of interactions between multiple systems that impacts on different factors that influence learning support processes.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on the qualitative research that explored the experiences of senior phase teachers in providing learning support for learners experiencing SpLDs and how the teachers' experiences influenced learning support processes. Four schools in the Tshwane South District, South Africa participated in the study. The schools were ideal to provide qualitative meaning on the essence teachers attach to providing learning support for learners with SpLDs

Data was collected through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, document analysis and field notes. As Merriam (2009) writes, interviewing is necessary when behaviour cannot be observed or when it is difficult to observe how people interpret the world.

Additionally, document analysis was used to corroborate what was said in the interviews (Henning, Gravett, & Smith 2004).

Eighteen participants were selected through purposeful sampling (Henning, 2004) and included senior phase teachers, selected from four mainstream schools. The selected teachers comprised teachers who were referring teachers, SBST coordinators and learning support educators who supported teachers and learners. Participants had encountered the phenomenon of providing learning support for learners with SpLDs. The participants had different work experiences and qualifications. They were recruited by the researcher who also explained the purpose of the research.

Data were analysed through thematic content analysis, which involved breaking down the data into manageable sections and then analysing it (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2009). Differences, similarities, relations and interactions within themes were identified.

Trustworthiness was applied through credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability measures. Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with the study, until data was saturated, searching for deeper meaning and triangulation (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2006). To address transferability, the researcher provided a thick description of the study, highlighting the demographics of the participants and used purposeful sampling that included participants who could describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible. Dependability of this study was achieved by using different methods of data collection; following procedures in line with the stated research methods; implementing feedback from the promoter; and submitting the research to a peer review process with formal feedback (Babbie & Mouton, 2006)

Ethical consideration included permission to conduct the study which was sought from the Gauteng Department of Education; ethical clearance was obtained from the institution where the study was supervised; informed consent was requested from participants; assurance was given regarding confidentiality and anonymity; participation was voluntary; safety in participation was confirmed; and participants were informed of the choice to withdraw at any time, without any consequences; and the benefits of participating in the research were highlighted to the participants. Feedback was presented to the participants.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

From the data analysed, five sub-themes emerged about participants' experiences regarding barriers they observed in their classrooms and how such barriers inhibited learning support processes, namely: significant language difficulties; reading and writing difficulties, contextual-related barriers, behavioural-related barriers and that some individual learners experienced multiple barriers

The sub-themes are discussed in the next section, each as a subheading.

Language-related barriers

Participants perceived language as one of the major barriers encountered by learners in the senior phase and stated that it hampered learning in its totality. They indicated that most learners used English as a second or third language adding that some learners had migrated from different

provinces within South Africa as well as those who emigrated from different African countries. Selected extracts in relation to the language barriers experienced by the participants include the following:

P5: One [learner] was coming from Congo, up in Africa, where his first language is French and, so, he has a gap in English ... He is very terrible in other languages and it is difficult because of the medium of teaching is English.

P6: The problem is caused by home language ... If a child comes from Venda [Limpopo Province] and moves to Gauteng [province] and the school that the child is enrolled in offers Zulu, as the home language, the child struggles, because the vocabulary is different. In Venda, a B is spelled as VH. You know, there are many things that are not similar, and the child will end up struggling.

This theme points out that learning in a different language creates barriers and aggravates a specific learning difficulty a learner might already be experiencing. The theme also highlights language barriers in context – the growing number of learners from foreign countries and migrants from other provinces. This context adds to the already well-substantiated claim that learners in South Africa perform poorly in English compared to their counterparts in other countries (Motshega, 2009).

Language-related barriers are also noted in the “Education White Paper 6 - Building Inclusive Education Training Systems” (EWP6), which states that learning in a different language can create barriers to learning and development, and hamper learning (DoE, 2001). Nel and Hugo (2012) assert that language is used for communication and contains cumulative social constructs of the community. Thus, through language, people gain knowledge that helps them to understand, to experience and value information as well as to form worldviews. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2010) mention that language plays a central role in cognitive development; that language is a powerful carrier of values, information and worldviews; that it is a key factor in cognitive development; and that language is a powerful tool, used by communities to communicate with each other. It is an important factor in cognitive development and it is communicative, abstract, governed by rules, social and versatile (Dednam, cited in Landsberg, 2011).

The researcher is therefore of the view that learning cannot take place adequately when learners have a limited understanding of the language of teaching and learning. In addition, it would be extremely difficult for the participants to teach and provide adequate learning support, if they themselves do not understand the third or fourth language used by learners. The researcher concludes that teaching, in complex language contexts, inhibits the learning support processes.

Reading and writing difficulties

Reading and writing is an important aspect of learning, but most participants reported that a significant number of learners in the senior phase could not read. They mentioned that learners had not received a proper reading foundation in the lower grades and pointed out that this prevented them focusing on other aspects of the subject content or limited them from giving other learners the attention they deserve. Participants stressed that they also spent more time trying to teach basic reading and writing skills, instead of delivering on the curriculum content.

Some of the extracts depicting participants’ views in this regard include the following:

P10F1: The biggest barrier is reading and writing. These learners are unable to read their mother tongue.

P3: Most of our learners struggle to read. They find it difficult to engage in formal learning most of the time. Reading is a problem, because they are given instructions in writing. They find it difficult to interpret what is expected of them in a non-verbal form.

P1: It is amazing, because I had some learners who were brought to me and these learners are unable to read, even their mother tongue. I took out a book, because I wanted to prove to myself that they can't read. I gave them a paragraph to read. The learner was not even able to read the letter A. He was calling it N, even other alphabetical letters.

P6: They don't know how to write, because I don't think they had a proper foundation at the primary level, we give them ten minutes to help them to read and write.

This theme reveals that reading and writing difficulties affect understanding and influence learning. Evidently, some of the causes of barriers to reading and writing, emanating from the research, are poor foundational teaching of reading and writing; reading disorders such as dyslexia; inadequate identification skills in the lower grades; and inadequate implementation of learning support processes. Thus, learners are promoted without getting any support.

Dednam (cited in Landsberg, 2011) states that most learners, who experience difficulties in spoken language and reading, also do so in written language. The author regards writing as the highest level of language use and considers it more complex than speaking or reading. The elements of written language and their components include cognitive, linguistic, systemic, spelling and handwriting difficulties. In order to address reading and writing difficulties, the author proposes a systemic holistic approach to supporting learners with language difficulties in writing.

Renee (2007) also adds that early identification can assist in developing interventions to address reading difficulties and asserts that failure to identify learners at an early stage or in prioritising the implementation of interventions might affect reading progress in higher grades. Renee (2007) further states that addressing the reading problem when learners are already in a higher grade is difficult, as learners, who have experienced repeated reading failure, are likely to lack motivation and display low self-concepts and anxiety about reading. Therefore, it becomes a serious problem if reading difficulties are not identified early, but rather left unattended until learners are in the senior phase. Landsberg et al. (2006) also highlight the importance of reading, arguing that, in the initial school phase, learners learn to read, but it is in the higher grades when they read for the purpose of learning. The authors suggest that teachers in the senior phase should teach reading fully to promote comprehension of the text. According to the National Curriculum Statement (DoE, 2005) and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (DBE, 2009), learners in the early stage of the senior phase (Grade 7) should, in general, be able to read.

With reference to English as a second language, Nel, et al. (2012) assert that learners experience difficulties in listening to the phonetic rules and tone melodies, such as high, low, rising and falling tones of English, which differ from those in the mother tongue. These scholars cite examples of discrepancies among English Second Language learners regarding phonological systems of language and pronunciation, skipping significant words and the use of contextual clues to guess other words where graphophonic, syntactic and semantic cues have to apply. For Nel et al. (2012), English Second Language learners also use a different coding system, characterised by the breaking up of syllables, recognising sounds in a word and combining words. They note that poor vocabulary also contributes to difficulties in English and that all of these examples affect

spelling, composition and comprehension. Nel et al. (2012) therefore suggest that reading classes should encourage learners to read aloud and, in this way, expand their vocabulary. They regard shared reading as a joint activity that learners can practice in small groups, thus assuming greater responsibility. This discussion points to the complexity of teaching learners whose home language or mother tongue differs from the language of learning and teaching.

The researcher in this article supports the views expressed above and would like to add that reading and writing forms the basis of all learning. These skills should be given a priority in the foundation phase, through to the intermediate phase, to enhance learning support processes. That the learners experience such significant difficulties in the senior phase is alarming and should be taken seriously.

Multiple barriers experienced by individual learners

Participants observed that some learners experienced multiple barriers but indicated that they were not sure of what the nature of the specific barriers were. The study also revealed that one learner could, for example, experience more than one learning difficulty. As a result, teachers found it difficult to provide learning support. Selected extracts on this aspect were expressed as follows:

P6: I encounter several learners who are unable to read properly, who cannot spell properly, and some are unable to concentrate for some time.

P7F1: We find that the child has a reading problem and has short-term memory. They forget most of the sounds [letter sounds]; they forget the words, even if it is familiar words or spoken words. Written words become different for them sometimes. Sometimes, they have study problems as well. Now, if they have study problems, you find the child [learner] has knowledge, but doesn't know how to retain the knowledge, they become very anxious.

P5: I could not explain what kind of learning difficulty, but the child [learner] couldn't literally write what they are saying. The learner could give the answer, but writing was something else.

The EWP6 (DoE, 2001) also states that the broad spectrum of needs, experienced by learners, includes physical, sensory, neurological and developmental impairments and psychosocial differences in intellectual ability. This is also highlighted by Lerner and Kline (2006: 13), who contend that learning differences apply to a broad group of children who are struggling to learn and are failing in school, but they argue against the use of labels such as “learning disabilities”.

This theme illustrates the different barriers that could be encountered by a specific learner that a teacher, as an individual where the teacher has to provide learning support. The responses presented also highlight the fact that, in some instances, teachers are able to articulate what they observe, without necessarily knowing how to provide learning support. Although this is the case, the researcher views the ability to identify the barrier in a positive light, in that it may assist teachers in the referral process, which the researcher sees as part of learning support.

The researcher also found it interesting to note that, in other instances, participants are unaware of processes and procedures that they are expected to follow as part of the learning support process, such as recommending a scribe in the case of a learner who can give the answers, but who doesn't know how to write. The researcher views this as having a bearing on the professional

development of teachers already in the system. This will therefore be taken into consideration when a learning support framework is proposed.

Contextual barriers teachers

This sub-theme highlights contextual barriers observed by teachers in their classrooms, which they had to address. These include examples such as complex family situations; child-headed families; families whose parents had little or no basic formal education and learners who were unlawfully staying with boyfriends and their families, without necessarily being officially, either legally or traditionally, married.

Most participants felt that such contextual barriers had a negative effect on teaching and learning and that it compromised the learning support processes. They also indicated that, as teachers, they lacked some of the competences to manage such contextual barriers; some, which they believed, should be addressed by professional psychologists or social workers.

To highlight these contextual barriers, Participant 5 relates the following:

You find out that these learners have a poor social background, their social environment is non-favourable. Other learners are child headed, there is no supervision at home and poverty is interfering with their learning and development. Some learners don't have both parents, some are emotionally withdrawn due to death, divorce and hunger at home, and parents are fighting. So, you find that when you come with the curriculum support, it does not work.

Another participant elaborated:

P14F2: The child comes to school on her own. You find that the child does not have anybody at home or the child is taking care of other siblings.

Participant P17F2 added:

I have a child in my class without any parents, but she stays with her mother-in-law and her husband. It is a serious problem, because she cannot be a wife and at the same time a learner ... You need someone for counselling before you can start with curriculum issues.

Participant 10F1 stated:

Most of the learners I have noticed, they don't have academic barriers. They have social barriers which, when not taken notice of, they impact on the academic barrier.

This theme is also highlighted in the EWP6 (DoE, 2001), which acknowledges that contextual barriers do exist and do affect learners. Donald et al. (2010) assert that vulnerable children experience multiple difficulties such as inadequate housing, health-related problems, HIV/AIDS, violence and inadequate access to social health and appropriate education services. On the other hand, Prinsloo (in Landsberg, 2011) identifies, among others, several aspects that affect modern family life such as single parenthood; families affected by violence and orphaned children without any family support. This scholar asserts that there are very few support structures available for such affected learners and, therefore, teachers potentially play a vital role in filling this gap.

Behavioural-related difficulties

Participants revealed that learners, who are experiencing learning difficulties, also display behaviour-related problems such as absenteeism and attention-seeking behaviour. In highlighting this aspect, participants cited the following examples:

P1: Normally they [learners] do not want to portray themselves as having learning barriers. What they will do is divert your focus. In which sense? [Rhetorical question] There will be those learners with behavioural problems, because they will start misbehaving in class so that you give them attention. When the attention they really need is the academic attention. As a human being, you get angry with them.

P5: They stay away from school, they are not doing their homework and their relationship is not good with teachers.

P14F2: Most of the learners are absent most of the time, sixty to seventy percent (of the time).

The behaviour of the learners is a call for help and of frustration as well as an indication that they are not getting appropriate support from teachers. The subtheme may also indicate teachers' competencies or lack of competencies in managing learning support processes within the classroom context. In addition, this subtheme may also indicate the type of support required by teachers to capacitate them to provide learning support.

My view, as the researcher, is that learner behaviour in any classroom can either harness or disturb learning. Additionally, it is important to take participants' experiences seriously in order to curb further indiscipline within classrooms.

In highlighting behavioural-related difficulties, Engelbrecht (2003) states that often learners face personal and contextual stressors that put them at risk of emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. This scholar advises that education support consultants should use a school as a base for service delivery, and that education consultants should possess unique knowledge and skills, because of their training experiences (Engelbrecht, 2003). This means that schools could use other sources to address barriers experienced by learners presenting with SpLD.

This view is embedded in various education policies of the Department of Basic Education, thus emphasising the importance of the involvement of other stakeholders in providing learning support. The EWP6 (2001) makes provision for maximising the support of teachers by means of encouraging District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs). Thus, at the district level, the staff complement of the Inclusion and Special Schools (ISS) unit includes educational psychologists (EPs) as well as inclusive education specialists. In the EWP6 (DoE, 2001), the scope of practice for EPs, within an inclusive education context, in particular the ISS unit, has been broadened and shifted from a child-centred approach to an ecological systems approach (DoE, 2001). Pertinent to the current subtheme, is that the EP can advise teachers on behaviour management strategies to assist learners and address individual or groups of learners regarding the difficulties they are encountering as well as linking schools with other relevant stakeholders to address such issues. EPs can also act as mediators of behaviour-related aspects through conducting workshops for teachers, parents and other community members. Engelbrecht (2004:25) advises that the EPs should share their expertise and give feedback, as well implement problem-solving strategies, that would empower teachers to manage behaviour-related difficulties. On the other hand, Swart and

Pettipher (2011) take this one step further, arguing that a whole school development approach is pertinent to ensure that inclusive education takes place.

My view is that collaborative efforts with other stakeholders, both within and outside the school, could enhance the processes of dealing with behavioural difficulties, as explained by teachers in the study. School-based teachers could identify assets among themselves and pull in external assets either from the community or the district office or the DBE.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

From the support needs assessment form 1 (SNA1) where teachers document their observations about learners, it could be concluded that teachers recorded barriers such as reading and writing, without necessarily describing them in detail, unlike the findings from the interviews in which teachers were able to elaborate.

The SNA1 form also required parents' signatures, which would act as proof that they have been made aware of the need for their children to be referred for further support and to give them opportunity to explain their observations and clarify barriers experienced by about their children. In the context of this article, the parents' signature often determines if the learner should be placed in a special school, referred for medical or related support, or remain in the mainstream school and be supported inclusively. However, the researcher noticed that most forms did not have parents' signatures, which support the statements recorded by participants that "the parent did not come" to meetings and confirm the lack of parental involvement. Other aspects relating to specific barriers observed by teachers were not captured in the support needs assessment forms.

Additionally, the researcher noted that dates on the support needs assessment forms were staggered and represented a period when the learner was supported. For example, dates indicated a month such as April and thereafter no other support interventions were recorded in the months that followed. It appears participant teachers did not provide learning support throughout the year, but prepared the forms when they were due, as shown by teachers who have been providing learning support, especially when it is time for teachers to complete possible retention schedules and to motivate why the learners needed to be retained. This also highlighted the issues related to a lack of sufficient time and work overload as barriers to providing learning support. From these observations, the researcher gathered that completing the forms was difficult and time consuming for participants and that teachers lacked adequate competencies to record their observations as part of providing learning support.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study on which this article is based revealed that the senior phase teachers experienced various complex barriers in their classrooms. These impede on learning support processes, as some barriers require collaborative efforts to deal with them. Their experiences have a bearing to the Department of Basic Education at national provincial, district and school levels. Since teachers are the people dealing the phenomenon of supporting learners with SpLDs daily, it would be beneficial for them to be at the forefront of mediating the process.

For these reasons, if it is recommended that they collaborate with parents, the learners, the community and the district office. To address the language related barrier, they could design a school-based profiling test to identify learners at the beginning of each. The test could be used as a baseline assessment that promotes access to learning and not labelling or preventing registration of learners in their schools.

Schools can also create school governing posts for teachers who could speak and teach languages such as French. Such posts could be on a temporal level. Schools can also encourage staff members to register on short learning programmes in various languages that could benefit their specific need.

In order to improve the competencies of senior phase teachers on learning support processes and practices, the national office could introduce a one-year in-service training programme targeting senior phase teachers to enhance proper implementation of learning support processes. The programme could focus on SpLDs, identification of learners, development of Individualised Learning Support Programmes (ILSP) and implementation of the interventions developed by teachers. Such a programme could be implemented in collaboration with institutions of higher learning. Substitute teachers could be temporarily employed while senior phase teachers attend the training.

Collaboration with the community such as social workers and community-based organisations could alleviate social and psychological issues encountered by learners as well as enhance teachers' competencies in terms of practical skills to support learners with SpLDs.

The findings also present an opportunity for DBE to review its processes. For instance, the national office could introduce a one-year in-service training programme targeting senior phase teachers. Such training could equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to support learners with SpLDs. Additionally, both the DBE national office and schools could also collaborate with the higher education institutions to encourage integration of SpLDs in all course material for teacher trainees. Collaboration could ensure that teachers, who enter the teaching profession, become well versed in teaching learners with SpLDs.

Officials from the Inclusion and Special Schools unit could consider collaborating with schools to develop an induction programme for teachers entering the teaching profession in the senior phase, ensuring that they are exposed to inclusive education and learning support processes. On-site collaborative support from the ISS and Curriculum Development and Support officials could be encouraged and properly planned. Year plans could be compiled collaboratively, eliminating the possibility of competing activities. This could help senior phase teachers to clarify challenges they experience on matters related to learning support and reduce the possibility of work overload. Schools could also consider temporary posts or contract employment of teachers, who can teach languages like French, to support learners from neighbouring African countries.

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