OVERCOMING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS: A LESOTHO CASE-STUDY

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Abstract

Teachers in Lesotho are confronted by a myriad of challenges, such as ensuring the meaningful inclusion of learners with impairments as well as adequately meeting their educational needs. This paper therefore, explores this challenge and how it impacts on teachers' abilities to deal it, and further recommend some teaching strategies to overcome it. An Attitudes Toward Inclusive Educational Scale (ATIES) questionnaire was adapted in this paper for the collection of data from 211 randomly-selected teachers from the Maseru and Berea districts of Lesotho. Findings as reported by teachers indicate, amongst many factors contributing to the challenges brought about by inclusive education, inadequate teacher training, inadequate resources, and a lack of support from authorities and parents. The revamp of classroom infrastructure and the review of teacher training approaches in Lesotho are vital policy imperatives to eradicate these educational challenges.

Keywords: Teachers; Inclusive Education; Lesotho - Ministry of Education and Training (MOET); teaching challenges; teaching strategies

1.   INTRODUCTION

The intention of this paper is to address the challenges and complexities of meaningfully inclusion of learners with impairments in mainstream primary schools in Lesotho. Inclusive Education is a global agenda (Pijl, Meijer, & Hegarty, 1997; Agbenyega, 2007). Although teachers as change agents are key to every attempt to a meaningful inclusive education, teachers' needs and concerns are paramount to the accomplishment of this goal. Savolainen (2009) notes that teachers play an essential role in quality education and quotes McKinsey and Company who say: 'the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers'. (p. 16) Studies suggest (e.g. Sanders and Horn, 1998; Bailleul, Bataille, Langlois, Lanoe & Mazereau, 2008) that the quality of the teacher contributes more to learner achievement than any other factor, including class size, class composition, or background. Notably, Subban (2005) states that while some studies point out that teachers' attitudes to inclusive education are typically positive, (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Kuester, 2000; Schmelkin, 1981), other studies reveal that teachers' attitudes may be influenced by the disquiet they experience regarding the impact such a process will have on their time and skills (Avramidis *et al.*, 2000) is so profound.

Additionally, Davis and Florian (2004) posit that general teacher-oriented training should enable all teachers to recognise children's special needs, to practise preventive teaching, and to collaborate with specialists in carrying out remedial and corrective instruction. In the past, learners with physical disabilities were excluded and rejected by their communities, but a host of documentary evidence (Chitereka, 2010; Hammel, 2012; Kearney, 2009; Mariga and Phachaka 1993; White Paper 6 2001) reinforces the concept of inclusion, where all learners should be supported, so that they can enjoy the full range of learning. Lesotho is one of the developing countries in which learners with impairments are not given special attention. According to the Special Education Report (2007:2), there are only 19 mainstream schools in the Maseru district and 10 schools in the Berea district, which have been identified as having learners with impairments. These schools are located only in the central regions of these two districts, with most of these learners having not yet been identified in the outskirts of these districts. Regrettably, the Special Educational Report (2007:2) indicates that there are constraints with regard to the visitation of schools with impaired learners by educational professionals, e.g. occupational therapists, physiotherapists and educational nurses.

Preliminary investigations reveal that there are many learners with impairments in the primary schools of the Berea district in Lesotho (Ntaote, 2003:01) especially those in the central region. These impairments include neurological and general health conditions. Ntaote (2003) further decries the fact that there is no evidence of even a minimal systematic investigation into what the educational implications of such disabilities are in these schools. This paper takes this debate further, specifically investigating some of the challenges confronting teachers in the inclusive classroom, and recommending some possible teaching strategies that could assist with the inclusion of learners with impairments. The anchor to this research is based on the work done by Davis and Florian (2004).

2.   PRINCIPAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Numerous theoretical perspectives underpins research in each of the strand areas, however there is evidently a notably overlap with behavioural, cognitive behavioural, social constructivist and systemic (eco-systemic) approaches dominating the intervention literature. Additionally, there is an increasing understanding of psychological and educational connections between different theoretical approaches to teaching and learning, and between social, emotional and cognitive aspects of educational experience including for impaired learners. According to Davis and Florian (2004:9), behavioural models of learning focus on observable outcomes of learning as influenced predominately by the key principles of reinforcement theory in different learning contexts. This theory considers that all behaviour is learned according to rules which shape, change or sustain it.

Cognitive-behavioural approaches take account of the capacity of individuals to understand and reflect on their behaviour. The advantages of this model lie primarily in the positive, practical outlook, the clear signs of success, and the ways in which the setting of specific targets allows all those involved in teaching and learning to understand the goals and expectations for individuals and groups of pupils. However, these approaches have been criticised for an overly narrow focus on measurable learning outcomes, when it is a known fact that many aspects of knowledge and understanding are not directly observable and measurable in the required form. There is also an acknowledged danger of pupils' coming to rely on extrinsic rewards for achieving success.

Constructivist models of learning are those in which children are seen as active participants in the processes of seeking out knowledge, making sense of their experiences and gaining intrinsic satisfaction from learning and solving problems. Constructivist learning is seen to be a transformative experience which opens up opportunities for further learning, as children gain a greater depth of understanding and increasingly flexible ways of representing their knowledge and dealing with new information. Related to this approach is social constructivism or sociocultural theory. Here children's active role in learning is set in the context of their membership of social groups and communities (such as classrooms and schools) which jointly create knowledge through their engagement in purposeful and valued activities (Davis & Florian, 2004:10).

The current study is underpinned by the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This model provides a commonly accepted theoretical framework for considering the inclusion of students in educational settings. Ecological models of learning focus less on the individual learner and more on the interaction or 'goodness-of-fit' between the learner and his or her environment. Ecological models operate within a concept of 'nested systems' or 'levels' often referred to as bio, micro, meso, macro, exo, chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In such a model the learner is situated in the centre of the system interacting at various levels, each of which is part of a larger system; for example, the level of the classroom (micro level), the level of the school not involving the child directly (macro level) and society (macro level). Teaching strategies and approaches often focus on the micro level, but acknowledge or incorporate activity on broader levels. The meso-system refers to the relationships between two or more settings in which the child participates. Such an approach allows for the consideration of the role of such things as school or community culture in learning (Davis & Florian, 2004).

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Teachers are regarded as an integral part to the implementation of inclusive education (Haskell, 2000; Subban, 2005).

This is confirmed by Cant (1994) when he states that vast research conducted communicates the view that teachers are the key to the success of inclusionary programs, as they are viewed as linchpins in the process of including students with disabilities into regular classes (Stewart, 1983; Whiting & Young, 1995). Beliefs about disability, ethnicity, attitude and concerns of teachers can influence the practice of inclusive education as well as the quality of educational materials and instruction students receive (Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001; Nieto, 1997; Sharma & Desai, 2002; Wilczenski, 1992). It is therefore not surprising to notice that many regular education teachers who feel unprepared and fearful to work with learners with disabilities in regular classes tends to display frustration, anger and negative attitude toward inclusive education because they believe it could lead to lower academic standards (Gary, 1997; Tiegerman-Farber & Radziewicz, 1998). Additionally, access to resources and specialist support affects teacher confidence and attitudes toward inclusive education (Bennett, DeLuca, & Bruns, 1997; Wolery, Anthony, Snyder, Werts, & Katzenmeyer, 1997). Other studies acknowledge that inclusive education can only be successful if teachers are part of the team driving this process (Horne, 1983; Malone, Gallagher, & Long, 2001).

The rationale of this paper is premised on the fact that teachers as change agents are flexible, open-minded and willing to make a difference in all their learners' educational goals and experiences, irrespective of their conditions. This fact makes it paramount therefore, to examine the attitudes of mainstream educators toward the inclusion of learners with impairments in their mainstream classroom settings as their perceptions may influence their behavior toward and acceptance of such students (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Sideridis & Chandler, 1996; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2001). The success of an inclusionary program may be at risk if regular classroom teachers hold negative perceptions about the inclusion of students with disabilities (Horne, 1983; Van Reusen et al., 2001). Negative perceptions of inclusive education may become obstacles, as general education teachers attempt to include students with disabilities (Cawley, Hayden, Cade, & Baker-Kroczynski, 2002). Thus, we chose to explore the challenges and concerns of teachers regarding Inclusive Education as it impacts on their attitudes.

4.   EVOLUTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

According to Mariga and Phachaka (1996:3), before the 1980s, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), churches and individuals were responsible for the special provision of education for learners with impairments in Lesotho. It was between 1983 and 1992, when parents, impaired learners and their organisations began to seek national education provision for impaired learners. Concepts such as individual dignity were spreading, and gaining support and influence worldwide, with Lesotho also joining this trend.

It became an area of focus that vulnerable and marginalised learners needed to participate in a new educational dispensation, as well as needing to be emancipated to promote their own development. Thelejane (1990) reports that a study of structures and guidelines on special education was undertaken in 1987 by Professor Mary from Canada. She initiated the development of a special education programme. Between 1987 and 1988 a special education policy was developed, which included various ministries' priorities, deliberations and programmes. This policy began to be an operational plan in 1990. According to the Ministry of Education and Training (1990), Lesotho established a Special Education Unit to implement inclusive education, from 1989-1990. The establishment of the Unit was intended to support the attainment of education for all. To fully support all learners, the Ministry of Education and Training, from 1990 began to promote the integration or inclusion of all learners in the regular school system, to enable them to acquire appropriate skills and education (Mariga & Phachaka, 1996:3). In order to support special education learners in the mainstream, the Special Education Unit, with other NGOs, sensitised the public to the educability of learners with special education needs. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Training embarked on a project of community-based rehabilitation. The purpose of this was to equalise opportunities, and to ensure the social inclusion of all learners with impairments. This is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Learner (1989), which states that no learner should be discriminated against and reinforces the right of all learners to education, irrespective of their impairments (Mariga & Phachaka, 1996).

5.   POSSIBLE TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

The contention by David and Florian (2004) support our view that there is indeed a growing understanding of the need to move away from the belief that one model of learning informs and justifies one model of teaching. Further, structured behavioural techniques, for example, are just one set of skills available for selection by teachers according to the assessment of children's overall needs (Farrell, 2000). Pace (2003) found that the more effective interventions for teaching reading are those which have a more comprehensive model of reading and therefore a more complete instructional approach.

According to Davis and Florian (2004:28), Mitchell (2008:105) and Cheminais (2004:53-55), in broad terms, there are some promising teaching strategies and approaches emerging from the literature. In terms of impaired learners, it our view that there is no single best strategy but rather a multi-method teaching approach is likely to yield desired results. Research on the efficacy of multiple approach strategies tends to report that a combination of strategies produces more powerful effects than a single strategy solution (Speece & Keogh, 1996; Nelson & Cammarata, 1996).

As a result, we concur with Davis & Florian (2004) that the strategies identified during the course of this review of possible effective strategies for impaired learners, might be usefully organised according to Kershner's (2003) typology as those which are concerned with:

• **Directly raising attainment** (e.g. using task analysis and target setting, with associated guidance, prompts and other supports to reach specified objectives and demonstrate success); and access strategies directly relating to attainment (e.g. teaching relevant ICT skills to overcome literacy difficulties and allow entry into learning across the curriculum)

• **Promoting 'active learning'** (e.g. modelling appropriate learning strategies, developing thinking skills, metacognition (i.e. awareness and control of learning strategies), reflection and creativity; employing investigative and experiential approaches, etc.); and access strategies relating to active learning (e.g. promoting language development and observational skills, self-assessment and response partner systems; facilitating choice and risk taking in learning, play, drama and simulations; making explicit links between out-of-school knowledge and school learning, etc.)

• **Promoting participation and engagement** (e.g. facilitating collaborative learning and peer tutoring; engaging in 'real-life' problem solving, emphasising the use or application of knowledge for 'real life' purposes and citizenship; apprenticeship models for learning in sports, creative arts and literacy; using mentoring schemes, artists/writers in residence and visiting speakers with work-related expertise; etc.); and access strategies for participation and engagement (e.g. authentic assessment, enhancing self-esteem, emotional growth and motivation; attribution retraining (i.e. locating causes of success and failure as within pupils' control); developing social skills, teamwork and friendships; establishing supportive whole-school ethos (e.g. seeking out and valuing pupils' opinions and contributions); forging community links etc.)

• **Responding to personalised learning styles and preferences** (e.g. visual / auditory / kinaesthetic modes of learning; orientation to study (such as deep / surface approaches); concrete / abstract / active / reflective thinking; multiple intelligence, etc.) Such a personalised approach allows for children to obtain individualised support as required. It is also consistent with the new understandings of teaching diverse groups of learners.

It stands to reason that the theoretical roots for each of these approaches to enhancing achievement, active learning, participation and responding to individual differences can be found in the various models of learning and development.

6.   METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling Size

A quantitative research approach in the form of a survey method which is descriptive and exploratory in nature was adopted. A probability sampling technique was used; namely, random sampling, because it involves dividing the population into homogeneous groups, an suitable sampling technique because it affords each teacher from the random number tables from all the selected primary schools equal chance of being selected (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002:167). The adopted semi-structured questionnaire, i.e. Attitudes Toward Inclusive Educational Scale (ATIES), consisting of multiple Likert-rating scales was distributed to 211 randomly-sampled teachers, teaching in inclusive primary schools. Babbie and Mouton (2001) view random sampling technique this technique as one of the best ways to enhance reliability. Surveys measure what people express about their thoughts, feelings and behaviour (Sullivan, 2001:255).

Participants and setting

The respondents in this study were primary school teachers working in the mainstream inclusive schools in Maseru and Berea districts of Lesotho. There are only 19 mainstream schools in the Maseru district and 10 schools in the Berea district, which have been identified as having learners with impairments. These schools are located only in the central regions of these two districts.

Data Collection and Analysis

Of the 211 questionnaires distributed, 149 were returned fully completed, giving a response rate of 70%, which is viewed as an excellent (de Vos, Strydom, Delport & Fouchè, 2002:172). The results were statistically interpreted and analysed using the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 6.0, so that a proper theoretical meaning of the results (Isaac, 2006:60) could be derived. All raw data was transformed by calculating the natural logarithm of the scores. This routine procedure was carried out in order that the data conform to the assumptions of the parametric statistical tests used for objective analysis of the results, including analysis of variance.

Instrumentation

The self-constructed questionnaire items are borrowed and adapted from the original work by Wilczenski (1992) namely, Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES), which consists of a 16-item scale that measures participants' attitudes toward numerous aspects of Inclusive Education. The questionnaire comprised two sections: namely, Section A which related to demographic information (for example age, gender, work experience, qualifications, and level taught), while Section B focused on factual and attitudinal factors related to the challenges encountered by teachers regarding impaired learners in mainstream schools. A mixture of Likert-rating scales; a two- and three-point rating scale with the following categories: 'Yes= 1', 'No=2', and the three-point Likert scale comprising 'Always=1', 'Sometimes=2', and 'Not at all=3', was used to test the research questions in the paper. The responses are displayed in tabular and graphical forms. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis was used to test the internal consistency of the measuring instrument. The pilot study results for all the constructs yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value of 0.8193, which is above the acceptable standard of 0.7.

Ethical issues

Ethical clearance sought covered the following issues: (i) requested permission from the Department of Education in the Maseru and Berea districts of Lesotho prior to data being collected, followed by a written letter requesting permission from each school principal to collect data from his/fer respective schools. The letter explained the purpose of the study, and promised confidentiality to the respondents, and that the questionnaire would not include the name of the school or the participants (i.e. anonymity guaranteed). Immediately after obtaining permission, the researchers proceeded with the pilot study.

7.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports on the findings of the collected data, both inferential and descriptive statistics. The demographic profile of the respondents included gender, age, ethnicity, educational level/qualifications, qualifications in Special Education and teaching experience of the respondents. The demographic profile of the sample population (n=211) is shown as frequencies and percentages in Table 1.

Table 1: Reflections on teachers' concerns according to their demographic variables

Demographic variables	N = 211	Total sample = %	F	Sig.
Gender			5.379	.022
Male	58	27.59		
Female	153	72.41		
Age (years)			1.457	.234
Younger than 30	30	14.09		
31–40	96	45.72		
41–50	59	27.87		
Above 51	26	12.32		
Educational level/qualifications			2.276	.104
College Teacher's Certificate/Diploma	142	67.36		
University Certificate/Diploma/Degree	47	22.22		
Other qualifications	22	10.42		
Qualifications in Special Education			8.001	.006
Yes	36	17.06		
No	175	82.94		
Teaching experience			.899	.442
< 12 months	15	6.99		
1–5 years	50	23.78		
6–10 years	78	37.06		
11–20 years	38	18.18		
Over 21 years	30	13.99		

The female teachers were in the majority (72.41%), this finding is consistent with previous reports, such as Morolong (2007:72); Shah, Das, Desai and Tiwari (2013:6). Evidently, most respondents (i.e. 45.72%), were 30 to 40 years of age, followed by those aged 41 to 50 years, at 27.87%. Most teachers possess either a Teacher's Certificate or Diploma (67.36%), while 22.22% went to a university to obtain their qualifications. Over 50% of the teachers had experience ranging from 6 to 20 years, with a sizeable proportion (23.78%) having 1 to 5 years' teaching experience.

To further determine whether any of these observed differences between teachers' mean scores significantly related to the demographic variables, analyses of variance (anovas) were computed. A presentation of a summary of the anovas with teachers' demographic factors is presented as the independent variables and teachers' mean scores as the dependent variable. The most prominent profound findings reveal the follow:

- The findings reveals significant differences between male and female teachers regarding their challenges about including learners with impairments in their mainstream classes (F=5.49; p<.05). Evidently, female teachers had a significantly higher level of challenges than male teachers.

- The results show a significant difference in the level of challenges between those teachers who had qualifications in special education and those who did not (F = 8.00; p < .05). Teachers without a special education qualification had significantly higher levels of reservations about including impaired learners in their classes than teachers with a qualification in special education.

- There were significant differences in challenges about inclusive education between teachers who had varying lengths of teaching experience (F = .773; p < .05). However, the post hoc analysis using Scheffe's test did not yield significant differences between the mean rating scores for any of the five groups of teachers (teachers with less than 12 months, teachers with 1–5 years, teachers with 6–10 years, those with 11-20 years, and those with over 21 years teaching experience).

Inferential statistics

In Figure 1 (below), it can be seen that 41.04% of the respondents have impaired learners in their classes, but 60.32% claim to have worked or taught such learners, even though they currently did not have any such learners in their classes. An insignificant number of respondents, i.e. 0.77% and 0.38% respectively, indicated either not ever having had contact with these learners, or being unsure of whether or not they have encountered such learners.
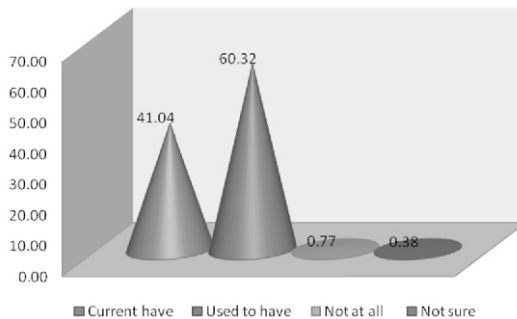
Figure 1: Prevalence of impaired learners

Frequency Distribution

Table 2 shows the first ten opinions expressed which featured prominently among the thirty-two concerns raised by most of the respondents, are listed in no specific order.

Table 2: General perceptions and views of teachers regarding their inclusive classroom experiences

Statement (N=211)	Yes (%)	No (%)
I am comfortable and confident about teaching in an inclusive classroom.	45.11	54.89
I am aware of available and appropriate teaching approaches for the inclusive classroom.	31.29	68.71
I received training geared towards working with impaired learners.	34.78	65.22
I use additional/supplementary teaching methods that accommodate learners with impairments.	45.18	54.82
There is adequate infrastructure to support teaching and learning for impaired learners.	11.17	88.83
I feel we receive assistance and support to deal with impaired learners from educational authorities.	34.75	65.25
Parental involvement is the norm at my school.	10.91	89.09
There is skills development training opportunities for teachers willing to learn more about impaired learners.	39.95	60.05
We receive regular workshops on the latest inclusive teaching approaches.	41.00	59.00
There is a gradual increase of impaired learners at my school.	29.91	70.09

From Table 2, just over 50% of the teachers do not feel confident and comfortable teaching in an inclusive classroom, as opposed to 45.11% who do. A significant 68.71% are not aware of any available and appropriate teaching approaches for inclusive classrooms. A 65.22% of none training received is a logical an appropriate explanation for the respondents' feeling. A lack of support (65.25%), lack of parental involvement (89.09%), as well as inadequate infrastructure (88.83%), and the non-existence of skills development training opportunities compound the problem faced by these teachers. Given this situation, there is no way the respondents could apply appropriate additional methodology (extra teaching methods) in their inclusive classrooms.

Table 3: Teachers' mean rank order scores on the factors

Variables	No.	Mean	Sig.
Lack of IE training/knowledge	102	54.187	.005
Inadequate teaching/learning resources	98	58.000	.059
Lack of parental involvement	88	57.243	.322
Lack of support from educational authorities	53	52.096	.033
Fear of disciplining impaired learners	44	51.700	.001
Others, i.e. big numbers, sloppiness, time-consuming, etc.	31	48.003	.012

Sig. level (p= .05)

The data in Table 3 above indicates that a (i) lack of Inclusive Education (IE) training and knowledge (p=.005), (ii) inadequate teaching and learning resources (p=.059), and (iii) fear of disciplining impaired learners (p=.001) were significantly correlated with the teachers' challenges at .05 level of significance. Interestingly, the paper further indicates a significantly negative correlation between lack of parental involvement (p=0.322); lack of support from educational authorities (p=0.033), and other (0.012) and teachers' challenges. Higher mean factor scores are indicative of a greater level of challenges.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Undoubtedly, in inclusive education, every learner, regardless of his or her gender, social class and ability, has the right to basic education (Westwood, 2008:3; White Paper 6, 2001:3). Overcoming the challenges of inclusive classrooms requires a collective, systemic approach, where all stakeholders should assume their rightful roles. Gibson and Blandford (2005:25) maintain that partnership with parents is pivotal to promoting a culture of cooperation between the school, parents and educators, who should also provide effective support for one another. It is proposed that firstly, an overhaul of teacher training approaches and the curriculum should be implemented to also focus on teaching approaches and techniques for impaired learners; secondly, emphasis should be placed on continuing in-service teacher training; and finally, a systemic approach should be the norm if any meaningfully impact is to be realised in any endeavours to address the challenges of the inclusive classroom.

9. CONCLUSION

This paper endeavoured to investigate the challenges and complexities of inclusion of impaired learners for teachers in their mainstream classrooms. The results suggest that while primary school teachers view inclusive education as a challenge, they emerge as accepting of learners with impairments in their mainstream classrooms. Clearly, inclusive settings appear to provide a forum for teachers to experiment with different techniques and strategies to ensure that all students within this setting are achieving. Importantly, pre-service teacher education is vital to the continued development and success of inclusive educational practices (Dev, 2002; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005; Loreman, Forlin & Sharma, 2007). Florian (2009) asks whether teacher education can respond to the challenge of diversity without relying on different kinds of programmes and services for different types of pupils, and whether it is possible to develop more equitable ways of working in schools through the reform of teacher education. The purpose of this paper was to investigate some challenges with which teachers in Lesotho are confronted, when dealing with impaired learners in their mainstream classrooms.

Our contention is that individuals without impairments benefit from the same teaching strategies used to teach individuals with learning impairments (Reynods & Domberk, 2006). The educational authorities need to implement variables which will strengthen the education support service, thereby reducing possible barriers in the quest for education and training (White Paper 6, 2001:28). A short-term solution would be to provide schools with special teachers and/or teaching assistants, who could provide one-on-one support to learners with special needs so that they too, may benefit from the curriculum until it is modified (Ayers, 2006:43).

10.   REFERENCES

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