The Role of District Learning Support Officials in the Application of Concessions to Learners with Learning Disabilities

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Abstract:- The dawn of democratic South Africa witnessed transformation in the education system where policy were developed to ensure education that cater all learners irrespective of their diverse abilities. Through the constitution post-1994 education policies ensures equitable access to education for all learners irrespective of their differences. The study intends to explore the role played by district based support team (DBST) in the application of learners identified with learning barriers in inclusive schools. The study was conducted in Matlosana local education office (MLEO), where qualitative study approach was employed. Participants were selected as personnel in the district office, teachers as people responsible for the implementation of inclusive education in inclusive schools, school based support team, departmental heads as people managing the implementation of inclusive education in schools. All participants were selected from four inclusive schools in Matlosana local education office. In this study data was collected through the use of semi structured interviews and video recorded.

Keywords:- Concessions, District Based Support Team, Learning Disabilities, Learners with Learning Barriers.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

South African education system come from historically background where learners with learning disabilities marginalised where they were overlooked in traditional educational spaces. However, democratic South Africa witnessed significant transformation in the Constitution calling for equal education (Engelbrecht, 2006). As a results there has been a paradigm shift towards ensure inclusive educational practices and providing many forms of support which include accommodations and concessions to support learners experiencing learning disabilities (Purcell, Davis, & Gioia, 2018). As a results Department of Basic Education (DoE) introduced White Paper 6 policy aiming to support equal education for all learners within the setting (DoE, 2001), ensuring that all leaners are accommodated. Furthermore the policy on screening and support management structure known as Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) (DBE, 2014) was introduces. SIAS provides procedures on how learners should be supported which includes the procedure on process for accommodations and concessions applications in assisting to reaching out to the needs of all learners (Msane, Hlongwane & Kent, 2023).

Therefore, educational landscape post-1994 experienced significant transformation redressing the injustices of the past (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). After democratic system education policies embraced the principles of inclusion, accommodating diversity in the schooling spaces, where diversity and recognition of unique needs of all learners is embraced (Francis, 2023). Therefore the establishment of inclusive education required more support personal to ensure support and monitoring for the implementation of policies to ensure access to education for all leaners. Morelle (2023) states that inclusive education has progressively been implemented in conjunction with several that include White Paper 5, White paper 6 and SIAS policy South African Schools Act (SASA). Subsequently, the instruction of inclusive education required require specialised support to engage with educational content that cater for all learners irrespective of their disabilities (Engelbrecht, 2020). As a results more learning support official were introduced to support a range of learning disabilities within the educational context (Dreyer, 2013).

Some forms of support encompass variety of concessions and accommodations playing a critical role for support and inclusion of learners with learning disabilities. The concessions and accommodations bring about Varies forms of alternative assessments which may include assistive devices to meet the diverse needs of learners. These concessions and accommodations aimed at minimising barriers and facilitate meaningful participation and academic success for all learners.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Democratic South Africa aim to ensure equal education to all learners, including those with learning disabilities to achieve their academic success. One critical aspect of inclusive education is through the provision of concessions support learning needs for all learners including those with learning disabilities to support their learning needs. District learning support officials play a critical role in facilitating

the implementation inclusive education through the implementation of concessions. However, previous Studies show that learning support officials play critical role to ensure the implementation of inclusive education and ensuring that learner who need alternative form of assessment are provided through concessions (Engelbrecht, 2020). Literature reveals that, district officials should be in the forefront in enhancing and capacitating teachers to effectively serve the diverse needs of all learners, thereby fostering inclusive through the use of concessions (Aiello & Sharma, 2018).

However, Msane, Hlongwane and Kent (2023) indicate that most of the District officials in education who should be at the forefront in ensuring the implementation of inclusive education are often lack knowledge on inclusive education. As a results the policy of Screaming Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) is often not implemented, as a results educators are unable to apply for concessions (Msane et al., 2023). Engelbrecht (2020) is of the view that teachers are not prepared enough in terms of skills and confidence in working with learners with learning problems, hence the difficult for concession applications. Mpu and Adu (2021) argues that most educators were previously not adequately trained and supported for the implementation inclusive education as a results, it is challenging for the District officials to support and guide teachers for implementation of concession in schools.

A. Methodological Approach

Qualitative research approach is employed in this study. Utilisation of quantitative research approach allows the researcher to obtain rich data with detailed insights based on the complexities of human experiences and social contexts to understand the phenomenon under investigation (Ningi, 2022). Therefore, qualitative research is suitable for this study due to the purpose of the study exploring the roles of learners support District official in ensuring implementation of concessions. In this study qualitative research approach enables researchers to explore deeper into unexpected areas of interest and diverse viewpoints of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, qualitative research approach enable the researcher to explore complex social phenomena while capturing diverse perspectives, and generating rich knowledge that has a potential to inform theory, practice, and policy (Ningi, 2022).

B. Sample and Sampling

Creswell (2014) describes purpose of sampling as the way of gathering data for the proposed study from a portion of the population to be used to make generalisations about the entire population. Sampling is one of critical aspect of a study to be conducted, it allows the researchers to gather efficiently data and draw conclusions about phenomenon to be studied within a particular populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, this study was conducted in the North and one District was sampled to explore the implementation of SIAS looking at the role of District officials in applications for concessions. Official six officials from the inclusive education unit in the District were

sampled. District officials were sampled because they are mandated to monitor and support schools for the implementation of concession for learners in need.

C. Data Collection

Semi structured interviews; observation and document analysis were used for data collection. The selected data collection technique is significant because participants use the interviews in telling the stories in a microcosm of their consciousness (Mwita, Kelvin. (2022), interview is also necessary when we cannot observe behaviour or feelings, or how people interpret the world around them (Merriam, 1998). The semi-structured interviews were conducted for the duration of thirty minutes per participant. By making use of the semi-structured interviews, participants provide the researcher with rich qualitative data with regard to their life experiences (Smit, & Onwuegbuzie, (2018). Permission to use the audio-recording was sought from the participants for data transcripts.

Semi-structured interviews employed in this study are regarded as face to face interviews and are characterised by synchronous communication in time and place. Due to this, interviews can take advantage of social cues, such as voice, the tone and body language of the interviewee. The interviewer can get much information from the value added by the interviewee's verbal answer. The observation method will be used to enhance the information collected during interviews. Observation is a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place. Observation implies seeing as well as observing with other senses, Smit, & Onwuegbuzie, (2018).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework is based on the existing theories serving as a roadmap and the structure that provides a foundation for understanding and analysing phenomena within a particular field of study (Creswell, 2014). The identified theoretical framework for a study enables the researchers organise their thoughts and make sense of the existing knowledge (Kivunja, 2018). Therefore, for the purpose of this study the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is utilised. The model suggests that attitudes toward behaviour may be influenced by past experiences, previous knowledge and newly acquired knowledge.

A. Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) seeks to understand and human behaviour based on a particular context (Ajzen, 1985). The TPB is often utilised for the purpose of determining behaviour/s arising from ones' attitude towards those with disabilities (Mncube & Lebopa, 2019). This theory aims at understanding the behaviour behind ones' attitude by focusing on the relationships between attitudes, subjective norms and behavioural intentions (Mncube & Lebopa, 2019). Individual's attitude may often influenced by many factors such as past experiences, previous knowledge and newly acquired knowledge based on a particular context (Azjen, 1991).

Therefore, the attitude of educators or district official has the potential to affect the implementation of inclusive education in particular the implementation of concession for learners who re in need of alternative forms of assessments. This study aimed at investigating the roles of District official towards provision of support through accommodations and concessions for learners experiencing learning barriers. Therefore, it was critical to employ TPB to investigate the impact of District officials towards supporting learners experiencing learning disabilities during the process of applications for concessions. The intentions of TPB are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behaviour as the indication of how hard people are willing to try or how much of an effort they are planning to exert for support (Opoku, Pedersen, & Rayner. 2021).

The TPB theory is grounded within three factors, namely: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. These aspects influences how individuals intends to respond in a given space such as education system, which often results into a certain behaviour (Savolainen. Malinen & Schwab, 2022). Subsequently, personal beliefs or knowledge influence one's attitude in a particular context (Mncube & Lebopa, 2019). Therefore, utilisation of TPB enable the researchers to investigate how personal belief impact on the behaviour of learners with learning disabilities within the schooling space (Freitag & Dunsmuir, 2015). The objective of this theory is to understand the role of human being when interacting with other over a period of time and how their interactions influence the behaviours of other during the process (Msane et al., 2023).

IV. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical considerations are critical aspects of a study to ensure the integrity, validity, and trustworthiness of a conducted study that involves human participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As a results ethical consideration enables the researchers to maintain protection of the participants, ensuring that individual's identity are treated with confidentiality. Ethical clearance was obtained from the North West Department of Education. The nature of the study was explained to participants by the researchers and they have signed the consent form to participate during the study process.

V. CONCLUSION

The study intends to outline the role played by the district based support team in assisting teacher to enhance successful applications for concessions and accommodations for learners with learning barriers. The study was conducted in MLEO where learners, teachers, parents, subject advisors were selected as participants. The researcher adopted qualitative study method encapsulating semi-structured interviews as means of data collection. The study outlined challenges experienced by teachers in the identification of learners with learning barriers in various schools.

The study concluded by articulating lack of teacher training as the main challenge hampering the application for concession and accommodation to learners with learning barriers. The district based support team as the cornerstone in the applications for concession and accommodation there must be continuous interaction with school based support team, thus enhance successful identification of learners with learning barriers.

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