

Equipping teachers to educate learners with disabilities

POLICY BRIEF 1

Are policies regulating initial teacher education (ITE) programmes enabling the realisation of an effective inclusive-education system?

Executive summary

This policy brief:

- Outlines the policy frameworks guiding inclusive-education practices and initial teacher education (ITE) programmes at higher education institutions (HEI)
- Highlights specific areas for development in current ITE regarding inclusive education and the accommodation of learners with disabilities
- Makes recommendations on possible policy responses to best contribute to the realisation of a functioning inclusive-education system.

Reports on the South African government's 20-year progress in implementing Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) strategies – aimed at realising the immediate, constitutional right to basic education of learners with disabilities by building an inclusive education system – indicate that there are many serious problems inhibiting the realisation of this policy's goals.ⁱ Despite South Africa ratifying multiple international human-rights treaties to fulfil obligations to provide education for these learners, including the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD),ⁱⁱⁱ there is substantial evidence to suggest significant breaches of such treaties and that over half a million children with disabilities are still not in school.^{ii,iv} Furthermore, those children who are in school do not enjoy quality learning opportunities and are not gaining the skills needed to live independent and fulfilling adult lives.

Research has identified a lack of adequate teacher training in various types of schools serving learners with diverse disabilities as a significant problem.^v While the DBE and DHET have undertaken to strengthen teacher education through various legislation and policies, there is the acknowledgement that an education system is only as effective as the teachers it is made up of.^{vi,vii} It is clear that an inclusive education system will not materialise in South Africa without the proper formal preparation and training of teachers working with learners with sensory or intellectual impairments and developmental disabilities. This means that learners with such impairments will not have access to a proper basic education and will not reach their potential or be able to meaningfully contribute to South African society.

About TEDI

The Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI) project aims to empower teachers to provide quality education for learners with severe to profound sensory and intellectual impairments through training that is focused on inclusivity, diversity, and addressing learners' impairment-specific needs.

TEDI is a partnership between the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Christoffel-Blindenmissie (CBM). We therefore acknowledge the valuable expertise contributed by the Division of Disability Studies at UCT and the funding of the European Union and CBM, which enable and support our work.

The current problematic

Many research reports and literature advocating for the right to education of learners with disabilities reveal:

- the lack of skilled teachers in the South African education system to meet the needs of approximately 600 000 learners with specific sensory or intellectual impairments and developmental disabilities;ⁱ
- the lack of formal, specialist teacher-training opportunities and programmes preparing teachers to teach such learners;^{viii} and
- the expressed requests of teachers within the system for such expertise.^{ix}

The imperative to address these points has been highlighted in Article 24 of the UNCRPD, which states that all teachers at all educational levels must be equipped with the necessary core competencies and values to work in inclusive educational environments.ⁱⁱⁱ Pre- and in-service teacher training must, therefore, develop teachers' skill levels appropriately to urgently address learner needs, and give teachers opportunities to engage in practical experiential learning. The Convention also prohibits legislative or regulatory provisions limiting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all regular learning environments on the basis of their impairment or the degree thereof. Therefore, without equipping teachers with the necessary skills and training on inclusive practices, a truly inclusive education system will not be achieved.

It is important that the DHET ensures that HEIs make provision in their programmes to meet the demand for teaching expertise for specific impairment types (e.g. education for learners with visual or hearing impairments). This necessitates a review of and change in policies regulating ITE, and setting imperatives for HEIs to optimally prepare pre-service teachers to meet these learners' educational requirements.

Implications of inclusive-education policy on the roles of schools and teachers

At the end of apartheid, children with disabilities had access to 380 special schools which separated them from mainstream schooling.^{iv} By adopting a social model of disability, the South African inclusive-education policy framework set out to effect systemic change to ensure children with disabilities were catered for by all schools in the education system. To achieve this, four school categories were identified: mainstream/ordinary, full-service, special, and special schools as resource centres.^{iv}

| School categories established under EWP6 | |
|--|--|
| Mainstream/ordinary | Schools that all children attend. They are required to reasonably accommodate children with disabilities and all learners with low support needs. |
| Full-service | Specially designated and converted mainstream schools that are resourced and equipped by government to accommodate learners with a range of disabilities and learning needs (low to moderate-intensive). These schools are not provided for in the South African School's Act and are transitional entities. |
| Special | Equipped to deliver a specialised education programme to learners requiring access to highly intensive educational support (learners with high support needs). |
| Special schools as resource centres | Special schools in each province that are defined as resource centres and equipped to provide a range of significant support services to other schools in their area. |



EWP6 states that low-intensive educational support will be provided by ordinary schools, moderate-intensive support by full-service schools, and high-intensive needs by special schools. However, this does not imply that all children with disabilities have high support needs and should receive education in special schools. Rather the placement of any child should, according to policy and the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996), be determined by the extent to which the school is able to reasonably accommodate the learner. This places responsibility on teachers in mainstream schools to adapt their teaching and learning methods to meet the needs of learners with impairments. Specialised training is needed on how to differentiate the school curriculum for specific needs, assessment and teaching adaptation, and the use of suitable assistive devices.

With an increase in the number of full-service and special schools – approximately 700 and 450 schools respectively – comes an increase in demand for more teachers qualified in special needs education.^{vi} However, measures to meet these changing demands have not been put in place. For example, in KwaZulu-Natal's uMkhanyakude district, full-service schools regularly do not receive their mandatory additional funding to provide necessary learner support; class sizes are often at 50 learners to one teacher; and teachers are unable, without specialised or impairment-specific training, to adapt the curriculum appropriately.^{ix,iv}

Current policy influences on teachers' abilities to cater for learners with impairments

DHET policies

Developed out of the National Qualifications Framework, MRTEQ is the DHET's main policy to which HEIs must adhere.^x It provides guiding principles for the development of ITE programmes and continued professional academic development (CPAD) for teachers.

This policy acknowledges that inclusive education is an important aspect of teachers' specialised knowledge. However, the only requirements it makes of ITE programmes is that all BEd and PGCE graduates (the two formal ITE pathways), Advanced Certificate in Teaching graduates, and Grade R teachers, 'must be knowledgeable about inclusive education and skilled in identifying and addressing barriers to learners, as well as in curriculum differentiation to address the needs of individual learners within a grade'.^x There is no stipulation about how inclusive or special needs education is constituted in HEIs' ITE programmes, and no time is prescribed for the WIL component at full-service or special schools. This means that HEIs can construct their curricula in any manner, provided graduates can demonstrate competence in overcoming barriers to learning on completion of their qualification.

However, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has reported that qualified teachers lack specialised knowledge in many key areas of disability, such as education for learners with visual, auditory and intellectual impairments, and developmental disabilities.¹ Recent TEDI research confirms this, with key role-players in ITE, including university deans and NGO representatives involved in continued professional teacher development (CPTD), expressing their concern about qualified teachers' abilities to provide intervention strategies for learners with impairments.^y

With the exception of centres of excellence set up at the universities of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and Pretoria, which offer formal qualifications for teachers in impairment-specific education specialisations, there are minimal formal learning opportunities for pre-service and qualified teachers in this field. This educational space has

largely been serviced by special interest NGOs (e.g. Cape Mental Health, South African National Council for the Blind) through short courses or workshop-based training for CPTD. Provincial departmental regional or district offices have also offered opportunities to teachers, but these can often only be taken up by specific school representatives and tend to be theoretical in nature, rather than providing practical upskilling.^{ix}

Improvement plans for ITE

Over the last ten years, policymakers have made a concerted effort to improve teacher education. The overarching plan to do this – the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development 2011–2025 (ISPFTED) – clearly acknowledges (among many other complex problematic areas) the shortage of special needs teachers, the need for upskilling teachers in impairment-specific methodologies such as competence in Sign Language and Braille, and identifies the 'need both for the upgrading of the qualifications of special needs teachers and the development of entry-level specialist qualifications (such as an Advanced Diploma in Education) to prepare such teachers better for the contexts in which they teach'.^{vi}

Arising from the ISPFTED, the South African Council for Educators' (SACE) draft professional standards for all teachers confirms teachers' professional identities as promoters of social justice and agents of social inclusion by stating that teachers should be 'committed to affording every learner equitable and high quality learning opportunities' and 'have a moral responsibility to identify, confront and resist the marginalisation and exclusion of learners from accessing quality learning opportunities'.^{xi} Consequently, a noticeable onus has been created on HEIs to provide access for pre-service teachers to high-quality, formal learning opportunities in specialised education to accommodate learners with disabilities – including training on impairment-specific methodologies – so that they are able to fulfil their professional obligations.

TEDI research on the provision of inclusive and special needs training in ITE

To further investigate and understand possible reasons for the lack of provision of quality education for learners with severe to profound sensory and developmental disabilities (SPSDD) in South Africa, TEDI conducted research to find out what teacher education exists to equip teachers to teach such learners.^v The study considered the provision of formal, accredited ITE programmes and CPAD at universities, and informal short courses run by

NGOs and disabled people's organisations (DPOs). A review of universities' ITE programme literature, surveys and interviews with deans and key role-players at universities and professional development providers, enabled data to be collected on the availability of special needs education and impairment-specific education learning opportunities for teachers.

An indication of the focus areas of 23 universities' offerings of full ITE and other qualifications^v

| Type of training | Inclusive-education focus | Impairment-specific focus |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| ITE full qualification | 0 | 2 |
| CPAD | 9 | 11 |
| Module | 27 | 4 |
| Short learning programme | 4 | 1 |
| Theme | 3 | 1 |
| Short courses | 3 | 5 |

TEDI's research supports the proposals of the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development 2011–2025 by concluding that there is minimal provision of teacher education to equip teachers to offer specialised support within the domains of vision, hearing, learning, and cognition. This provision, seemingly, has been reduced with the adoption of Education White Paper 6, possibly on the understanding that barriers to learning can be fully addressed through a generic approach to diverse disabilities.

It was found that 70% of HEIs facilitating teacher education include inclusive-education or impairment-specific components in their offerings. These components lie within the CPAD offering of 91% of these HEIs and not within their formal ITE programmes (BEd or PGCE). This means that the majority of pre-service teachers completing a formal ITE qualification will not be properly equipped with the skills to teach learners with disabilities. Teachers' empowerment with the necessary skills therefore relies fully on the individual teacher's pursuit of CPAD while teaching.

Additionally, 87% of the modules offered have an inclusive-education focus (covering broad topics such as learner diversity, inclusive classrooms, learner support, etc.) rather than an impairment-specific focus. The latter is concentrated at the CPAD level and not in formal, full qualifications, with only one HEI developing a full qualification in visual impairment studies and one in D/deaf education, and none in severe to profound intellectual disabilities.

Information collected through interviews and surveys also indicates concerns about the provision of inclusive and special needs education programmes at HEIs. These include

A landmark court judgement on the right to basic education of children with disabilities

In 2011, the Western Cape High Court found that the government was infringing upon the constitutional right to basic education of children with severe to profound intellectual disability (SPID). At the time, the government's policy indicated that children with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities were to be accommodated in special schools, and children with severe to profound intellectual disabilities were excluded from special schools. The Western Cape Forum for Intellectual Disability challenged the government's notion that learners with SPID were uneducable, and that there was a breach of these children's rights to basic education, protection from neglect, equality and basic human dignity. The court found in favour of the Forum and instructed the government to take reasonable measures to give effect to the rights of children with SPID.

a general lack of such training and the depth of it, apparent contestation over how impairment-specific specialised methodologies can be facilitated effectively in busy curricula, and the adoption of a generalised approach to curriculum differentiation with no impairment-specific specialisation and instruction.^v

Supplementary qualitative TEDI research, which involved interviewing educational role-players (provincial and district officials, school management teams, teachers, learners, and parents) in full-service and special schools in a range of socio-economic contexts in three provinces, also revealed a correspondence between the learning needs of learners with SPID and teachers' requests for specific training.^{viii} This was expressed through learners' requests for teachers to better understand their instructional requirements (e.g. realistic pacing of teaching and learning activities, and the adaptation of resources), while teachers expressed their struggle with managing these factors due to a lack of knowledge and inadequate infrastructure.



Recommendations

Considering South Africa's educational and related ITE context, the influencing factors outlined in this policy brief, and TEDI's recent research findings, TEDI recommends that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and other stakeholders regulating teacher education:

1.

Revise the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) policy to clarify formal ITE requirements in terms of inclusive education and impairment-specific education.

As part of this process, the following actions are recommended:

- a. Consultation with HEIs on:
 - how ITE programme curricula for the Bachelor of Education (BEd) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) can be best specified in policy across all school phases;
 - how HEIs are addressing the practical upskilling of teachers in impairment-specific teaching and learning methodologies; and
 - how students are being trained to screen, identify, assess and support learners who experience barriers to learning.
- b. In conjunction with (a) above, Work Integrated Learning (WIL) for ITE programmes should include mandatory time spent at full-service and/or special schools, in addition to mainstream schools, for *all* teachers.
- c. Formal qualifications for teachers wishing to enter special schools should be specified and differentiated according to impairment-specific training requirements and related learner needs. Professional teaching standards for inclusive-education specialists should also be included in ITE programmes.
- d. In the implementation of (c) above, the specification and creation of a formal, accredited qualification for teachers of learners with severe to profound intellectual disabilities.
- e. Clarification of the need for ITE programmes to not only include Information and Communications Technology (ICT) integration, but also instruction on how to use assistive devices to overcome specific learning barriers.

2.

Make provision for and encourage the design process of impairment-specific formal teacher education qualifications across HEIs providing ITE.

This should form part of the broader guideline development process informing specific strategies for teacher education pathways to meet the needs of learners with disabilities in an inclusive education system. This should not be done in isolation, but integrated into general and inclusive teacher education, recognising that the majority of barriers to learning can be addressed through quality inclusive teaching and that this is a prerequisite for teaching.

3.

Seek funding for incentives to encourage pre-service teachers to complete formal teacher qualifications in inclusive and impairment-specific specialised education.

Notes

- i DBE (2015). *Report on the Implementation of Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education – An Overview for the Period: 2013–2015*. Pretoria: DBE.
- ii Human Rights Watch (2015). *Complicit in Exclusion: South Africa's failure to guarantee an inclusive education for children with disabilities*. Human Rights Watch.
- iii UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2016). General comment No. 4 (2016), Article 24: Right to inclusive education, 2 September 2016, CRPD/C/GC/4. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57c977e34.html> [Accessed 12 March 2020].
- iv Khumalo, S. and Fish Hodgson, T. (2017). 'Chapter 5: The right to education for children with disabilities', in *The Basic Education Rights Handbook*. Johannesburg: Section 27.
- v Kelly, J. and McKenzie, J. (2018). *Teacher education: An analysis of the availability of teacher education addressing the educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments*. Cape Town: TEDI, UCT.
- vi DBE and DHET (2011). *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011-2025*. Pretoria: DBE and DHET.
- vii Centre for Development and Enterprise (2017). *Teacher professional standards for South Africa*. CDE: Johannesburg.
- viii TEDI (2018). McKenzie, J., Kelly, J. and Shanda, N. (eds) *Starting where we are: Situational analysis of the educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments in SA*. Cape Town: Disability Innovations Africa, Disability Studies Programme, School of Health and Rehabilitation Science, UCT.
- ix McKenzie, J., Kelly, J., Vergunst, R. and Watermeyer, B. (forthcoming). *Empowering teachers for disability inclusion: An evaluation of four short courses*. Cape Town: TEDI, UCT.
- x DHET (2015). *National Qualifications Framework Act (67/2008): Revised policy on the minimum requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications*. *Government Gazette*, vol 596, no 38487, Pretoria, 19 February 2015. pp. 23, 29, 33, 37, 51. (Note: This policy was under review at the time of writing. Requests for submissions of public commentary were made in late 2019. A publication date for the revised version is pending.)
- xi SACE (2018). Draft Professional Teaching Standards. Available from: [https://www.sace.org.za/assets/documents/uploads/sace_36738-2019-03-06-SACE%20Draft%20PTS%20for%20Gazette%2028082018%20\(00000003\).pdf](https://www.sace.org.za/assets/documents/uploads/sace_36738-2019-03-06-SACE%20Draft%20PTS%20for%20Gazette%2028082018%20(00000003).pdf) [Accessed 19 March 2020].

Further information

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Note: Severe to profound sensory and developmental disabilities (SPSDD) is an umbrella term whereunder the TEDI project focussed only on severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments.