

Learning Together Disability inclusion in education

Empowering teachers with knowledge and practical skills to differentiate instruction for learners with specific barriers to learning

Are initial teacher education (ITE) providers equipping student teachers to effectively teach learners with disabilities?



POLICY BRIEF 2

Executive summary

This policy brief:

- Outlines the imperatives that the South African inclusive-education policy framework has placed on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to deliver formal initial teacher education (ITE) programmes that equip student teachers with the knowledge and skills required to work with learners with specific impairments.
- Makes recommendations to HEIs on how to improve upon the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) specifications, thereby optimising their ITE curricula and accredited short-course offerings to meet pre-service and in-service teachers' needs for specialised and impairment-specific training on how to differentiate learning for learners with a diverse range of barriers to learning.
- Identifies specific content topics and skills that HEIs should include in their ITE curricula, and in other accredited short courses for continued professional teacher development (CPTD).

One of the aims of Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) was to remedy the historical educational injustices experienced by learners with disabilities and to help them realise their immediate, constitutional right to basic education. As a result, teachers at all levels and in all types of schools had a greater responsibility to adapt their teaching practices to overcome a diverse range of barriers to learning.

Subsequent to the unveiling of the new vision for a quality inclusive-education system, recommendations to improve teacher education were

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.

made by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in their Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development 2011–2025 (ISPFTED).ⁱ These included upgrading the qualifications of special needs teachers; upskilling teachers in impairment-specific methodologies, such as competence in SASL and Braille; and the development of entry-level specialist qualifications.

These recommendations and other international ratifications aimed to equip all teachers at all levels in the shortest time with core competencies and values to work in inclusive educational environments, and to gain the necessary practical and functional experiential learning to manage specific impairments.ⁱⁱ However, the MRTEQ,ⁱⁱⁱ which regulates ITE in South Africa, does not specify curriculum content for inclusive-education or impairment-specific training for formal teaching qualifications offered by HEIs. In addition, there is no stipulation for student teachers to complete practical learning in full-service or special needs schools, where they would gain skills in differentiating learning for learners with specific impairments.

TEDI research suggests that inclusive-education modules within ITE remain largely theoretical and all-encompassing, taking more of a generalised approach to impairments, rather than empowering student teachers with impairment-specific teaching methodologies and facilitation skills.^{iv}

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.^v

It is clear that an inclusive education system will not materialise in South Africa without ITE programmes providing the content and skills development required by teachers to differentiate learning. Without this, learners with sensory or intellectual 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.

HEIs should review their initial teacher education (ITE) qualifications' curricula for Bachelor of Education (BEd) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes across all school phases to determine the scope, content and efficacy of inclusive-education modules.

The problematic with teacher education on inclusivity

While the current MRTEQ policy acknowledges inclusive education as an important aspect of teachers' specialised knowledge, it does not prescribe how inclusive or special needs education should be constituted in formal teacher qualifications (BEd or PGCE), and does not require students to complete their WIL in full-service or special schools. The only ITE programme requirement is that graduates '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.'^{vi} 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.

The imperative for HEIs to ensure that they equip pre-service and in-service teachers with core competencies and values to work in inclusive educational environments was highlighted internationally in Article 24 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).ⁱⁱ It states that teacher education programmes 'must address a basic understanding of human diversity, growth and development, the human rights model of disability, and inclusive pedagogy including how to identify students' functional abilities – strengths, abilities and learning styles – to ensure their participation in inclusive educational environments'. It further specifies that teacher education 'should include learning about the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, such as Braille, large print, accessible multimedia, Easyread, plain language, sign language and deaf culture, education techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities'.

The UNCRPD also explains that teachers require practical guidance to:

- Provide individualised instruction adapted to the learning styles and unique abilities of each learner;
- Develop individual educational plans to support specific learning requirements;
- Introduce a pedagogy that is centred around learners' educational objectives;
- Foster an inclusive culture among staff, parents and learners that provides an accessible and supportive environment promoting collaboration, interaction and problem-solving; and
- Apply the principles of UDL, which provide a structure to create adaptable learning environments and differentiated instruction.

The Three Principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

1. Representation: Giving learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge.
2. Expression: Differentiating the ways in which learners can express what they know.
3. Engagement: Stimulating interest and motivation for learning using content that is suitable for the varied levels of abilities and preferences/interests of learners by facilitating options and choices of activities and resources.

However, evidence suggests that teachers in South Africa, having completed their ITE, are unable to fully display the envisioned competences prescribed in MRTEQ. The DBE has also reported that qualified teachers lack specialised knowledge in many key areas of disability, such as education for learners with visual, auditory or intellectual impairments.^{vi}

TEDI research has confirmed this, with key role-players in ITE, including university deans and NGO representatives involved in CPTD, expressing their concern about qualified

teachers' abilities to provide intervention strategies for learners with impairments, and teachers stating their own need for upskilling and more training to provide support to learners with disabilities.^{iv,vii} Study participants also voiced concerns about:

- a general lack of inclusive and special needs education programmes, and the depth of them at HEIs;
- apparent contestation among HEI programme convenors over how impairment-specific specialised methodologies can be facilitated effectively in busy curricula; and
- the adoption of a generalised approach to curriculum differentiation without sufficient attention to impairment-specific specialisation and instruction.

A major indication that qualified teachers are not being empowered to realise MRTEQ goals is the entrenched attitude among teachers that children with disabilities are unable to learn to the same standard as children without disabilities.^{vii} Substantial research shows that South African teachers have concerns about learners with disabilities in mainstream schools and the consequences thereof, including doubts about their abilities to participate academically and socially in the classroom.^{ix}

While mounting evidence from civil society advocates points to the urgent need to improve in-service teachers' knowledge and practices of inclusive and impairment-specific education, there have also been concerted efforts from many stakeholders to strengthen teacher professionalism.^x The South African Council of Educators (SACE) drafted professional standards for teachers that reaffirm their responsibility to afford all learners – irrespective of learning barriers – equitable opportunities to high-quality learning, and actively resist the marginalisation and exclusion of learners.^{xi} It also requires teachers to 'understand the different challenges that confront learners and their families, and consider how these issues may affect their learning'. This means that teachers, through their ITE and CPTD training, must have access to high-quality, formal learning opportunities in specialised, inclusive teaching practices and impairment-specific methodologies to fulfil the professional obligations set by SACE.

Policy attempts to assist teachers

Implications of EWP6

EWP6 identified different types of schools to ensure that children with disabilities were catered for by all schools in the education system. It states that learners who require low-intensive educational support will receive this in ordinary schools, moderate-intensive support in full-service schools (a transitional entity not recognised by the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996) and learners with 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 Act, be determined by the extent to which the school is able to reasonably accommodate the learner.

EWP6 (which enacts the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) requirement for admission of all learners irrespective of educational needs into public schools without discrimination) conferred on teachers in mainstream/ordinary schools the responsibility to accommodate learners with special educational needs where 'reasonably practicable'. While only special schools are required to accommodate learners with high-support needs, it is incumbent upon full-service and regular schools to expand the range of what is reasonably practicable by providing increasing levels of support. This means that teachers who have not been trained in impairment-specific specialisations must:

- differentiate the mainstream curriculum (CAPS) for impairment-specific learning needs;
- adapt existing assessment strategies and potentially use more suitable ones;
- adapt existing LTSM and design or create new resources; and
- use specialised and suitable assistive devices appropriate for specific impairments.

To assist teachers, the DBE created Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom (DBE, 2011) and the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS).^{xiii}

Despite the implementation of and training on SIAS, research suggests that teachers still need practical solutions and strategies to support learners who experience barriers to learning, and that they find the administrative demands of SIAS burdensome, leading to misinterpretation of its use.^{xiv} ITE programmes need to be restructured and include instruction on professional collaborative behaviour, and it is critical that qualified teachers participate in high-quality CPTD opportunities.

HEI provision of specialised qualifications and high-quality CPTD

Along with the problematic of insufficient ITE programme content, there is minimal access to ITE programmes specialising in inclusive or impairment-specific education. In 2012, 65% of qualified mainstream teachers did not have a formal ITE qualification that included training in how to respond to diverse learning needs within mainstream classrooms.^{xv} TEDI's 2018 review of teacher education offerings at 23 South African universities confirmed that there are only two full ITE programmes with an impairment-focus (D/deaf education) facilitated by one university, and no full ITE programmes with an inclusive-education focus.^{iv} The only offerings in inclusive education at the other universities were modules within ITE programmes or short learning opportunities within the CPAD space.

Only seven universities collectively offered 20 full CPAD courses in inclusive or specialised, impairment-specific education, reflecting the dire shortage of formalised accreditation opportunities. CPTD/CPAD has largely been serviced by special-interest NGOs through short courses or workshop-based training. 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 are often theoretical in nature, rather than providing practical upskilling.^{vii}

Overview of training offered by 23 South African universities specialising in inclusive or impairment-specific education^{iv}

Type of training	ITE/CPAD	No. of training programmes	No. of universities
Full qualification	ITE	2	1
	CPAD	20	7
Module	ITE	17	8
	CPAD	14	8
Short learning programme	ITE	4	0
	CPAD	0	0
Theme	ITE	4	2
	CPAD	0	0

TEDI research on HEI provision of inclusive and special needs training

TEDI conducted research to investigate and understand the extent of teacher education offered to equip teachers to teach learners with SPSDD in South Africa.^{iv} The study considered the provision of full, formal ITE programmes and CPAD training by universities, and informal short courses run by NGOs and 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 inclusive and impairment-specific education learning opportunities for teachers.

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 largely on the individual teacher's pursuit of CPAD while teaching.

Furthermore, 87% of all modules offered within all full qualifications (ITE and CPAD) 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 evident at the CPAD level, but not in ITE.

While there are full CPAD qualifications that allow students to specialise in disabilities, their focus is not impairment specific. Only one HEI has developed a full qualification in visual impairment studies and one in D/deaf education; none are available in SPID. NGOs and DPOs offer impairment-specific training to teachers, but without formal accreditation there is a lack of incentive to complete them.

Supplementary qualitative TEDI research 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. It confirmed previous studies' findings and offered additional valuable insights

on the training needs of teachers in managing learners with SPSDD:^{xvi}

- Training at full-service schools is not always specific to the educational needs of learners with SPSDD.
- There is a need for formal teacher education at HEIs focussed on SPSDD specialisations.
- Teachers felt insufficiently trained to make curriculum content adaptations to meet the diverse educational needs of learners with SPSDD and expressed frustration over a lack of parental involvement in the learning process.
- Teachers expressed the need for assistance with LTSM adaptation, learning Braille and SASL, and how to use specific methodologies in D/deaf education.
- Teachers requested increased access and support in the use of appropriate technology and assistive devices.
- Learners with SPSDD requested that teachers better understand their instructional needs (e.g. realistic pacing of work and environmental adaptation requirements), while teachers expressed their struggle with managing these factors due to a lack of knowledge and inadequate infrastructure.



Recommendations

Considering South Africa's inclusive-education policy framework, ITE context, and TEDI's recent research findings, TEDI recommends that HEIs:

1.

Review their ITE qualifications' curricula for Bachelor of Education (BEd) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes across all school phases to determine the scope, content and efficacy of inclusive-education modules.

This review should be completed with the intent of incorporating and/or improving the following content topics or approaches to content in the curricula:

- An impairment-specific approach to module content and skills development, in addition to a generic approach to inclusive education.
- Understanding disability as a social justice issue. Special attention should be given to the importance of adapting learning environments and collaborating with learners, their families and specialists to accommodate and understand specific impairments and their impact on teaching and learning.
- Special behaviour-management considerations of learners with severe to profound sensory and developmental disabilities (SPSDD) in a classroom.
- How to practically use and navigate the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy with learners who experience barriers to learning.

- The causes and effects of specific barriers to learning resulting from hearing, visual, physical, intellectual or other impairments.
- How to differentiate the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), design and implement specific teaching methodologies, and adapt learning and teaching support material (LTSM) to best overcome barriers to learning for learners with impairments. This should be presented and situated within the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which assumes that barriers to learning are in the design of the environment and not in the learner.
- How to use a range of low- to high-tech assistive devices, and online platforms, to overcome specific barriers to learning through practical demonstrations and practice opportunities.
- How to use South African Sign Language (SASL), Braille, and Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) with learners with specific sensory impairments, and how these mediums can contribute to literacy/language development.

2.

Prescribe that student teachers complete part of their compulsory Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in full-service and/or special schools, in addition to mainstream schools, so they can apply what is learnt in lectures to real-life teaching scenarios.

3.

Evaluate the practical expertise and experience of facilitators of inclusive-education modules.

This should focus specifically on their ability to offer specialised guidance and training to students on practical considerations and resources used in diverse teaching and learning contexts. This would include the adaptation of learning and teaching activities and support materials, and the use of assistive devices for learners with specific impairments/barriers. Drawing on the expertise of professionals and trainers from disability people's organisations (DPOs) and NGOs to facilitate parts of modules in ITE and continuing professional academic development (CPAD) programmes, should be considered part of this process.

4.

Design and offer more impairment-specific, accredited teacher-education qualifications, including ITE and shorter courses such as the Advanced Certificate in Education.

This should form part of the broader process of developing guidelines on specific strategies for teacher-education pathways to meet the needs of learners with disabilities in an inclusive education system. The course content should cover the suggested topics described in (1) above.

5.

Design and offer a new formal teacher-education qualification in teaching learners with SPSDD.

6.

Seek and/or create funding for incentives to encourage student teachers to complete full ITE or accredited shorter qualifications in inclusive or impairment-specific specialised education.

Notes

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- iv 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.
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- vii 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.
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- ix Bornman and Donohue (2013) and Savolainen, et al. (2012), cited in 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.
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- xii DBE (2011). Guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom though the CAPS. Available from: [https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/GUIDELINES%20FOR%20RESPONDING%20TO%20LEARNER%20DIVERSITY%20%20THROUGH%20CAPS%20\(FINAL\).pdf?ver=2016-02-24-110910-340](https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/GUIDELINES%20FOR%20RESPONDING%20TO%20LEARNER%20DIVERSITY%20%20THROUGH%20CAPS%20(FINAL).pdf?ver=2016-02-24-110910-340) [Accessed 26 Feb 2020].
- xiii DBE (2014). Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support 2014. Available from: <https://wcedonline.westerncape.gov.za/Specialised-ed/documents/SIAS-2014.pdf> [Accessed 26 Feb 2020].
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- xvi 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.

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.