

Chapter 9

Investigating School–Based Support Teams’ Roles in Supporting Children With Cerebral Palsy During the National Lockdown

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ABSTRACT

The demand for mainstream South African schools to adopt inclusive education research recommendations is rising exponentially. The COVID-19 pandemic effects compound curriculum access difficulties for children with cerebral palsy. In addition, the COVID-19 virus emergence exposed longstanding home-schooling endangerments. As part of a larger study, this chapter is a sequel to a qualitative, descriptive multiple case study interviewing 15 teachers from three schools, three coordinators of the school-based support teams, and the district-based support team coordinators in Limpopo Province. The study drew from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems, Piaget’s cognitive development, and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theories to investigate stakeholders’ understanding of inclusive education. During the lockdown period, follow-up online interviews with the school-based support team (SBST) identified a continuous fragmentation of IE stakeholders’ responsibilities. They recommended a community of practice (CoP) approach that advocated expediting the implementation of recommendations.

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INTRODUCTION

Goal 4 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encourages the transformation and creation of an education system in which children with special needs will participate, benefit, and develop in mainstream schools. Inclusion is a global but highly misunderstood concept (Al-Manabri, Al-Sharhan, Elbeheri, Jasem & Everatt, 2013; Nazar, Chaudhry, Ali & Faheem, 2018; United Nations, 2015). However, governments internationally and in South Africa regard it as a strategy to eradicate learning barriers and bring about social change for communities through mainstream teaching (Department of Education, 2001). Mainstream schools are those in communities with the imperative to 'leave no child behind' despite embedded cognitive, socioeconomic, physical, and emotional barriers. The inclusive strategy mandates admission and quality support to enhance curriculum access for children with varied educational needs (Mukherjee, 2017). The outlook assumes that life's outcomes do not hold by scrutinising only one distinct feature (Curan & Petersen, 2017).

Al-Manabri et al. (2013) and Thuketana (2018) endorse stakeholder collaboration for quality teaching enhancement in schools. Stakeholder collaboration warrants effective policy formulation and novelty for quality inclusive education (IE). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, inclusion further commanded home schooling as a teaching and learning strategy (Rose & Shevlin, 2017). The home-schooling phenomenon received attention in developed countries (Cahapay, 2020; Rose & Shevlin, 2017) but remained largely unscrutinised in Africa, including South Africa. In certain parts, parents choose home-schooling to enforce racial segregation ideologies and cultural value systems on their children (Bartholet, 2020).

On the other hand, some parents' socioeconomic status and literacy levels become barriers to making home-schooling choice educational strategy. The home-schooling viewpoint supports an urgent call for the 2030 SDGs in the pandemic context. Goal 4, on quality education, aims to empower communities, particularly those in developing countries, to improve their livelihoods and eradicate poverty (UNESCO, 2009). The global trend is rooted in the philosophy that all children, including those with cerebral palsy (CP), can learn and are entitled to quality and equal education as per the international rights protocols (UNESCO, 2009).

South Africa evidenced slow but consistent progress in revolutionary rights empowerment movements for children with disabilities until the Covid-19 pandemic emerged (Dube, 2020). The pandemic presented challenges and opportunities in the education sector: the government locked down schools, and children with CP stayed home, delaying developmental opportunities through play opportunities with typical peers. The government simultaneously seized the chance to investigate varied communication and visual support technologies to enhance perception and offer stimulation activities for children with CP, among other learning challenges. The aim was to improve authentic learning through technology in rural areas. However, Ramnarain and Hlatswayo (2017) reiterate rural teachers' lack of technology skills, dilapidated infrastructure, and resource shortage as factors stalling children's educational needs. The outcomes are not predictable, but the disruption that the pandemic caused in teaching and learning in rural schools is pervasive. It is opportune for South Africa to create new knowledge and respond to specific social, political, and economic challenges in a progressive quest.

In the context of globalisation, Kang'ethe and Duma (2014) state that merging Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism brings out a common identity and promotes interconnectedness. I support this viewpoint; however, I argue the importance of creating context-specific knowledge systems in the process. Eurocentrism displaced African knowledge systems, stifling innovation and creating African definitions of disabilities and the accompanying support systems. For example, in the interviews, it emerged that the

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