

SUPPORT OFFERED BY SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TEAMS ON CURRICULUM ADAPTATION: EXPERIENCES OF FULL SERVICE SCHOOLS TEACHERS IN A SPECIFIC DISTRICT IN GAUTENG

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to investigate the experiences of teachers at Full-Service Schools (FSS) with regard to the support offered by a School-Based Support Team (SBST) for curriculum adaptation when addressing barriers to learning. When adapting the curriculum in inclusive schools, the SBST should play an advisory role, as stipulated by the White Paper 6 on inclusive education. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and employed a case study design. Twelve teachers and twenty SBST members from four selected FSSs were interviewed. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Data was collected using document analysis and focus group interviews, after which it was analysed thematically. The main findings of the study revealed that the SBSTs clearly understand their role in supporting FSS teachers during curriculum adaptation, but still lack knowledge the knowledge to fulfil this role effectively. It was evident that, in these schools, there is little to no collaboration between the teachers and the SBSTs in terms of sharing ideas for strategies to adapt the curriculum. This article recommends that in order to enable teachers to accommodate learners who experience barriers to learning, the SBST should be adequately trained to develop various strategies to support all teachers in curriculum adaptation, and challenges to support must addressed.

Keywords: curriculum adaptation, full-service school, school-based support team, inclusive education

INTRODUCTION

After the dawn of democracy, the education support services in South Africa have undergone a paradigm shift in order to support teachers in all schools, rather than those who only teach learners who experience barriers to learning in centres of education support. At school level, this support must be provided by SBSTs through the provision of properly coordinated learner and teacher support services, as mandated by White Paper 6 for inclusive education (DoE, 2001). As a result, this strategy aims to enhance teachers' knowledge in order to improve their teaching and learning, and ultimately to adapt teaching methods, learning environments and assessment procedures to accommodate all learners (DoE, 2005a:6). However, the said support structure has been less successful in producing reflective and permanent teaching transformation for supporting teachers to effectively adapt the. For instance, despite the evidence that inclusive education is present in all schools, the public and the media have attributed the challenges encountered by learners experiencing barriers to learning in accessing basic education to the fact that teachers use the same criteria for teaching and assessing all learners in the class, despite their diverse needs (Ainscow, 2012; Adewumi et al., 2017). Bridgre (2014) mentioned that the reality is that many teachers do

not have the time nor the skills for effecting curriculum adaptations on an ongoing basis. Of particular interest is that though many teachers are positive to support learners experiencing barriers to learning, their main area of concern is the impediment to inclusion because of ineffective assistance by support structures with regard to appropriate curriculum adjustment for all learners. (Makhalemele, 2011; Nel et al., 2016). At the same time, education support policies and guidelines are emphatic that one of the roles of the SBST is to collectively develop strategies to address identified needs and barriers to learning, including curriculums with a major focus on teacher development and support (DoE, 2001; 2005a; 2007; DBE, 2014).

Even though much research has been published on the roles and responsibilities of the support structures at school level, studies of the support that SBST offer teachers in order to identify and address barriers to learning, tends to pay less attention to the role of these teams with regard to support for curriculum adaptation, especially in an inclusive classroom context. Influential research such as Mashau et al. (2008) examined the support services necessary for teachers to have learner relationships. The findings showed the need to establish and improve these relationships, and that support services are not present or available. Motitswe (2014) investigated the functionality of these teams when addressing barriers to learning and providing support in schools; here, the main finding was that the SBSTs need intensive and critical training to provide support services. With regard to the improvement of support services at schools over the years, Nel et al. (2016) focus on the functionality of these support structures in the implementation of inclusive education, and found that it is not as effective as proposed by policy and educational authorities. Therefore, this study begins to fill the gap by investigating the FFS teachers' experience of the support for curriculum adaptation when addressing barriers to learning offered by SBSTs.

CURRICULUM ADAPTATION AS A MEANS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS

Chataika et al. (2012) and Burkhauser and Lesaux (2017) viewed curriculum adaptation as an dynamic, ongoing process that modifies and adapts the prescribed programme of studies to meet the learning requirements of learners who experience barriers to learning. It is a key strategy for responding to the needs of learners with diverse learning styles and needs, and further involves processes of modifying, extending, and varying teaching methodologies, teaching strategies, assessment strategies and the content of the curriculum (DoE, 2005a; DBE, 2017). Through modification of instruction or content of a curriculum, teachers are able to welcome learners of all abilities and ensures that every learner is challenged to learn.

Many studies have associated curriculum adaptations with a range of positive classroom characteristics such as higher learner engagement, fewer learner competing behaviours, and less teacher time dedicated to classroom management (Lee et al., 2010; Reis et al., 2011; Wium & Louw, 2015). Dessemontet et al. (2012) and Kurth and Mastergeorge (2010) maintain that when teachers adapt curriculums effectively in an inclusive setting, the academic outcomes for learners who experience barriers to learning will likely improve. Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that in order to achieve such improved outcomes, it is necessary for teachers to possess knowledge and skills to adapt curriculums, and that continuous training on this aspect is necessary. In-service training is an essential component in the delivery of quality education, and teachers must receive

continued training in teaching methodology to improve their skills and knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Internationally, the literature on inclusive education considers curriculum adaptation founded on strategies that ensure individual access and participation in teaching and learning. This access is frequently obtained through creating accommodations and adaptations to teaching, learning, and assessment (Alquraini & Gut 2012; Odom et al., 2011). Accordingly, it is imperative that teachers change their practices from programme-based teaching to learner-based teaching (Meidl & Meidl, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014). Teachers should therefore adapt teaching strategies to the needs of each learner by acknowledging that each learner is different in terms of their interests and level of functioning. Nationally, the rationale for curriculum adaptation is based largely on the inclusion of learners with disabilities. In this case, the emphasis is placed on the development of good teaching strategies that will benefit all learners, and on the adaptation of the support systems available in the classroom (DoE, 2001:19). The risks associated with non-inclusion are exacerbated by the fact that academic failure often results in low self-esteem, social maladjustment, and ultimately the inability to sustain themselves financially (Wium & Louw, 2015; DBE, 2017). Therefore, the curriculum policy requires the adaptation of teaching and assessment methods and the learning environment (Wium & Louw, 2015). Teachers are now expected to present content at varying degrees of complexity, and to adapt learning materials to meet the needs of all learners. Such differentiation is required to provide access to learning and to ensure that all learners experience success (Granados & Kruse, 2011; Dalton et al., 2012; Nel et al., 2013).

To fulfil these expectations, the inclusive learning programme was developed to provide guidance to teachers, administrators and other personnel to address diversity in the classrooms and schools. The programme gives a detailed procedure to instructions (including learning programmes, work schedules, and lesson plans) to accommodate all learners in an inclusive education system and the inclusive strategies for learning, teaching, and assessment (DoE, 2015). Consequently, all role players are provided with practical perspectives on how to become more inclusive in the classroom through curriculum adaptation and serve as a support structure specifically for teachers, to assist them to make teaching more fulfilling for learners (DBE, 2017). The Department of Education aims to mandate SBSTs to support teachers in terms of curriculum adaptation. This support function for curriculum adaptation is one of the primary roles of SBSTs. These teams are provided with guidelines to assist them with differentiation, modification, adaptation, planning, and management of the curriculum to address diversity (DoE, 2017:19).

INVOLVEMENT OF THE SBST IN CURRICULUM ADAPTATION

According to the Department of Education (2005b:35), one of the key functions of the SBST is to coordinate teacher and curriculum support in the institutions to support teaching and learning. This corresponds with White Paper 6, which states that support structures at institutions should ensure access to learning through properly coordinated support services that can be realised by means of collaboration. The SBST can only be successful to perform this role through networking and integrating the activities to other teams within the school. Networking has been recognised as a skill that heightens the competency of all teachers and it leads to successful inclusion efforts (Nel et al., 2013). Effective networking would enable the SBST to coordinate tasks and ensure that the process of teaching and learning is flexible enough to accommodate different learning needs and

styles. In this role, the SBST assists teachers with creating greater flexibility in their teaching methods and in the assessment of learning by ensuring the availability of illustrative learning programmes, learning support materials, and assessment instruments (DoE, 2011). The strategy is in accordance with the rights-based approach, which argues that the curriculum should be adapted to meet the needs of all learners and that education must be flexible and adaptable, as there are constant changes in the challenges and needs of societies (Adewumi et al., 2017).

Many challenges that learners face in schools can be mitigated or eliminated when barriers to learning and participation are identified (Oliva, 2016). Wium and Louw (2015) take the same stance and state that the key to managing effective support is ensuring that obstructive practices in the system are identified by all the relevant support structures within the school community. Adewumi et al. (2017) and Meidl and Meidl (2011) added that the proper identification of barriers to learning for learners, teachers, and curriculums has been recognised as a powerful tool to improve outcomes for all learners. The responsibilities of the SBST encompass identifying barriers to learning at learner, teacher, curriculum and institutional levels (DoE, 2005b). Thus, the SBSTs' main aim is to support teachers and learners. However, teachers themselves often struggle to identify barriers to learning, while also experiencing inadequate support from the relevant support structures (Makhalemele & Payne-Van Staden, 2018).

The Department of Education (2005b:32) states that the SBST have to develop strategies to address the identified needs and barriers to learning by focusing on teacher development as a support. The significance of this role is emphasised in Whiter Paper 6, which stipulates that barriers to learning may not cause learning to be ineffective and may not contribute to the exclusion of learners from the curriculum (DoE, 2001:18). It is clear that these teams have to develop strategies to address the identified need from teachers and curriculums, so that teachers themselves can cope with a diversity of learning and teaching needs. To perform such a mammoth task, the SBST is entrusted with offering training on curriculum adaptation to teachers. Alsubaie (2016) argues that in order to be able to contribute to curriculum development, teachers need training and workshops that are geared toward professional development. Adewumi et al. (2017) reiterate that it is necessary to use workshops to train teachers to develop the necessary skills for identifying, assessing, and adapting to the needs of learners, and to differentiate the curriculum and manage diversity in the classroom. Handler (2010) expresses the benefit that teacher development holds for curriculum adaptation succinctly: "teachers can contribute by collaboratively and effectively working with curriculum development teams to arrange and compose material, textbooks, and content". Finally, Molapo and Pillay (2018) assert that a teacher trained in curriculum adaptation will always have the confidence to develop creative solutions to the contextual and individual challenges for implementing the curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in its broad approach, and adopted an interpretivist paradigm that pays particular attention to people's subjective experiences, with a focus on the social construction of peoples' ideas, views, or understandings of reality (Strydom & Venter, 2002:193). The research takes the form of a case study of the participants' descriptions of their everyday experiences with regard to support for curriculum adaptation offered by SBSTs. The case study design is appropriate

for the aims of this research, it is an in-depth study of particular situation without intervening with the events, and asking questions like how and why (Akar, 2016). Strydom and Venter (2002:194) and Creswell (2012) state that this design gives in-depth details and narrative accounts from participants. Focus group interviews were used to record the views of the participants. The aim was to gain in-depth and multi-dimensional qualitative data from the participants about their feelings, thoughts, experiences, attitudes, and perceptions about a particular topic (Merriam, 1998; Strydom & Venter, 2002; Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, the use of documents was another data collection strategy that was used in this study. Nieuwenhuis (2010:82–83) explains that document analysis helps the researcher to focus on all types of written communication that may be valuable to the phenomenon being studied. This study considered policies, lesson plans, support intervention plans for teachers, and minutes of meetings.

Twelve teachers and twenty SBST members from four selected full-service schools were purposefully selected to take part in the focus group interviews. The data collected was analysed thematically to identify patterns in the data that are important or significant, in order to address the research or say something about an issue (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017:3357).

To gain access to the research site as well as the participants, the principals of the participating schools were consulted. The ethical aspects of qualitative research were observed throughout the interview process. Participants' informed consent was obtained and their right to privacy and anonymity was respected by replacing any identifying information in the report with codes. Because this study did not intend to conduct a comparative analysis of schools, no reference is made to the schools to which participants are attached.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

When analysing the data in this study, the following themes emerged: understanding the role of SBST for curriculum adaptation, lack of knowledge on adapting the curriculum, ineffective collaboration between the teacher and the SBST, and the challenges for support. These themes are each discussed in the following sections. It must be noted that during the interviews, several participants mentioned some of the positive aspects of the SBSTs' provision of support for teachers regarding curriculum adaptation.

Understanding the role of SBST for curriculum adaptation

All the participants indicated that they understood the role of SBST, namely to advise teachers on the adaptation of and support systems available in the classroom. Twenty-five participants illustrated that the role of the SBST is to support teachers when adapting or modifying the curriculum to suit the needs of all learners in the classroom. Only seven participants conceptualised the role of the SBST as ensuring that teachers are able to simplify the curriculum to meet the outcomes, without changing what needs to be learnt. This is illustrated by the following two extracts from two interviews:

“Amongst its role and responsibilities, this team is mandated to play a role of supporting teachers to be able to adapt or modify the curriculum to suit the specific learners depending on the needs of the learner” (A1).

“Despite the challenges it might experience, it is our expectation that the SBST should advice and support teachers to simplify curriculum so that learners who experience barriers to learning may also achieve as expected” (B5).

The key words that indicated “adaptation” were words such as “adapt”, “modify”, “extending” and “simplify”. These words indicate the ultimate aim of responding to the needs of learners with diverse learning styles and needs. This is in line with the document “Responding to Diversity in Grade R to 9: Practical approaches to English and Mathematics curriculum differentiation–participants manual” (DBE, 2017), which states that adaptation involves processes of modifying, changing, adapting, extending, and varying teaching methodologies, teaching strategies, assessment strategies, and the content of the curriculum.

Furthermore, it emerged from the focus group interviews that it is necessary for the SBSTs to empower teachers with regard to curriculum adaptation so that they can gain the knowledge and skills to differentiate in order to meet the needs of the different learners in the classroom.

A key reason that shows the necessity of support for teachers in this regard, is that teachers often do not fully understand the curriculum, or what the adaptation thereof entails. They therefore have difficulty with adapting their teaching methods in such a way that learners will understand the content, and achieving the objectives of the lesson. This is supported by Chataika et al. (2012) and Adewumi (2017), who found that learners understand the content and feel included when teaching methods are improved and applied appropriately. The following are responses from teachers specifying their desperation for support from SBSTs:

“I’m always frustrated in that class. I do not know which method or resources must I use to ensure that that specific child master the outcomes like others. I really need help from our support team although I have not yet approach the team” (B10).

“There is a need really to us be supported. Many of us struggle to plan and present the lesson that will accommodate all learners. That is very serious because some leaners feel excluded in the classroom” (B11).

“Although I’m trying my best to accommodate all learners, but I also feel that I need support to be able to adapt curriculum to meet the needs of all my learners” (A4).

Many studies highlighted that motivated teachers are able to perform their tasks effectively and become willing to support learners who experience barriers to learning (Wood & Olivier, 2010; Künsting, Neuber, & Lipowsky, 2016; Makhalemele & Payne-Van Staden, 2018). Teachers need to be highly skilled and motivated to be successful, as inclusion demands such high levels of teaching competence and organisational changes (Loreman et al., 2010). Nel et al. (2016) also suggest that if the SBST is properly organised and it provides appropriate support, teachers will be better motivated as they will have knowledge, confidence, and a change of attitude. In this study however, the majority of participants indicated that most teachers are not motivated to teach in a diverse classroom, since they are not fully supported by the SBSTs, particularly with regard to curriculum adaptation. Some members of the SBSTs stated that:

“You can see that our teachers are very demotivated. They hardly apply any type of curriculum adaptations on their classes to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning” (A9).

“Although I’m serving in this team but really the spirit of teachers is down because I believe they will not get anything from the SBST. Even us we also struggle with this in our classes” (A15).

Lack of knowledge about adapting the curriculum

Participants agreed that although the SBST members understand their roles, they lack the knowledge and skills to support teachers in classroom activities, including the adaptation of the curriculum. It emerged that members of the SBST often do not have the necessary knowledge for adapting the curriculum, and are therefore unable to provide adequate support to teachers. It was further exacerbated by their feeling that they have little knowledge that might not contribute to teachers. Some of the SBST responses on this topic were as follows:

“It’s true, if I have a knowledge about curriculum adaptation I could have been able to support teachers” (A14).

“I do adapt curriculum in my lesson but the thing is I as the SBST member I have no idea on how to go about to support teacher to do curriculum adaptation. It never been introduced to us” A7).

“I don’t trust that my little knowledge I have will be of any help to my fellow colleagues. I’m totally blink on how to do that” (A12).

Teacher participants revealed that due to the SBST’s lack of knowledge to implement support strategies for them, they manage by consulting one another and by inviting others to implement anticipative strategies in their classes, as illustrated by the following extract:

“Truly we do succeed on adapting the curriculum in our classes. We are fortunate because we are able to consult to each other for a help. Some are able to demonstrate their strategies in my classes” (B9).

Another teacher participant was emphatic about the fact that the lack of the necessary knowledge and skills for supporting them with regard to curriculum adaptation consequently leads to the inability to find practical solutions to practical problems in their classrooms:

“I’m simply struggle to come up with solutions to practical problems in my class because of lack of support and inadequate resources” (B12).

Another teacher participant indicated that considering the SBST’s lack of knowledge, the responsibility falls to the principals to promote the capacity of the SBSTs to provide appropriate knowledge and skills that will help teachers to effectively contribute to the curriculum development operation. In this regard, principals as the managers of the schools are in position to exercise their authority to promote the SBSTs to address all issues pertaining to curriculum adaptation, as illustrated by the following sentiment:

“Principals should be vocal to encourage the SBSTs on this role. I believe these teams should be involved in all matters dealing with the modification of the curriculum and in turn advices teachers on how to go about” (B4).

Ineffective collaboration between the teacher and the SBST

The lack of collaboration among SBST members themselves, teachers, and members from other teams was evident during the focus group interviews. All the participants insisted that ineffective collaboration in the support services provided by their schools, hampers teaching and learning. The expectation that SBST members should act as professional leaders to lead the process of support through collaboration when the teacher is in need of their help was reiterated. Participants indicated that the key functions of the SBST are to coordinate support services within the school by identifying and addressing learner and teacher needs and to encourage collegial collaborative support.

“I know it is difficult to us as the support team to coordinate support for teachers. But the least we can do is to encourage collaborative support so that we can be able to help each other to address the barriers, including capacitation of teachers on curriculum modification” (A8).

“We do trust their expertise to identify and address different barriers in our school. However, it will be more meaningful if they promote the working togetherness in the team and also involve us as teachers. In doing so, we can simply succeed to address all issues related to curriculum” (B2).

“In most of the time the SBST members are not there to address curriculum issues. It is better if they can collaborate with colleagues to support each other” (A14).

Participants were vocal about the fact that they do not have a problem with collaborating with SBST members to plan their lessons in an effort to accommodate individual learner needs. This type of collaboration may be extended to the involvement of members from other teams within the school in order to develop, implement, and evaluate personalised learning plans. This seems a guiding principle for effective support for collaborative planning and delivery of interventions by all stakeholders involved with the learner. This was affirmed by the following participants:

“I would say to realise the success of addressing curriculum issues in our classes, it is better to be together when planning our lessons. That will help as I will be able to indicate where I need help and the SBST members will be able to advice and support me” (A20).

“It will be easier for us only if the SBST are involved in lesson planning and delivery of the content. I believe none of us have a problem to collaborate with SBST members” (A3).

“I’m willing to do planning together with teachers. I know from that I will gain a lot, I will comprehend on different strategies to develop in order to support them since I have little knowledge on how to support them” (A5).

Collaboration within the SBST is important for providing direct services to teachers to prevent academic failure. Moreover, Wium and Louw (2015) and Makhalemele and Payne-Van Staden (2018) strongly believe that communicating clear expectations about collaboration among team members and their respective roles within their service delivery model is of utmost importance. In this regard, prominent concern for the participants was the lack of collaboration among the coordinators and other SBST members, where coordinators are unwilling to share

information from workshops for fear of losing power. This concern is indicated by the following participants:

“Team members need to collaborate, they also need to understand their individual roles in the team. There is this tendency of not giving feedback to other members after attending the workshop. That really destabilise the effectiveness of this team” (B6).

“We might not be aware that SBSTs were trained on curriculum adaptation because our coordinator doesn’t give us feedback. It seems he is the only one in power” (A14).

The creation of culture of collaboration within a school is important for effective provision of support services. It was highlighted that the members of the school management team who serve in the SBST should facilitate scheduled opportunities for collaboration among stakeholders involved in the support process. This is evident from the following extracts:

“School managers serving in the SBST should play their role to create opportunities for this team to collaborate with teachers and other stakeholders” (A17).

“Principals should use their authority to enhance the chances of collaborating this team with those involved in support process. This is applicable also to issue of curriculum adaptation in the sense that resources will be brought from community to schools” (A15).

“Perhaps if principals can use their presence in this teams, collaboration with others might be at ease” (B3).

Challenges to support

Numerous challenges that hinder the SBSTs in fulfilling their supportive role with regard to curriculum adaptation for teachers were mentioned. Teachers who face these challenges felt frustrated when implementing curriculum adaptations for learners who experience barriers to learning. The first challenge relates to the lack of training to support teachers to adapt the curriculum. Zhang et al. (2014) pointed out that extended professional development for teachers is an important condition for the successful implementation of curriculum adaptation. Molapo and Pillay (2018) also believe that adequate training for teachers for lesson planning is imperative to equip them with the planning skills for successful implementation. The abovementioned arguments make a strong case for the urgent training of SBST on how to enable teachers to adapt the curriculum to meet the different needs of learners who experience barriers to learning. In this respect, all participants agreed that teachers remain the key players in the adaptation of the curriculum, which means that their knowledge and skills need to be continually refreshed and developed. The implication here is that the SBSTs, in consultation with the District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs), should make an effort to train teachers. Participants related the following experiences:

“There is nothing wrong for the SBST to ask training from the DBST on how to support us on simplifying the curriculum” (B4).

“We need continuous training to be able to master curriculum adaptation and I believe that should be the role of the SBST. I’m wondering what might be the problem for them to be trained on this aspect” (B9).

“I agree that as the SBST member we need urgent training so that we can be able to intervene in this aspect. We are really desperate for such kind of training” (A3). “Yes, we have been trained for curriculum adaptation in one of the workshops but they never train us or give us strategies on how to support a teacher with curriculum adaptation. So, there is a necessity for such kind of training” (A11).

The second challenge relates to waiting for teachers to seek support from the SBSTs. For instance, some members from these teams felt they were restricted by not being able to approach or openly talk to teachers about their role in adapting the curriculum. They felt that to assist teachers in this regard, it would be more effective to allow them to discuss issues related to both teachers and learners. They further expressed the desire to be in a position to publicise their willingness to support teachers in this regard:

“Due to the procedure, I would say that I take an advantage of that and relaxed, waiting for the teacher to come to us for a help. The worse thing is that we really not to publicly tell teachers to come to us for support” (A14).

“The best thing is to openly discuss issues around curriculum adaptation with them and be in a position to show them how willingly we are to support them” (A18).

The third challenge relates to prioritising learner support over teacher support. All the participants expressed that support for teachers was clearly a significant challenge. Participants stated that they experienced problems with teachers not cooperating, not discussing certain personal issues, undermining their supportive roles and not having an interest in the promotion of support in schools. One comment from a participant serving in one of these teams seems to encapsulate the problem:

“Supporting teachers is a challenge hence much of our services are directed to learners. Teachers are adults and much sensitive to their welfare. They do not trust that we can be able to address issues related to them. They actually undermine our capabilities” (A17).

A teacher participant was outspoken when expressing an opinion that supported the view above:

“At times I do not trust these SBST members. I think it is fine for them to support learners more because once they support us, there are likelihood that they will talk behind our back about our weaknesses” (B3).

DISCUSSION

Based on these findings, it is notable that the SBSTs from these selected full-service schools do not support teacher effectively with regard to curriculum adaptation for the accommodation of learners with barriers to learning. This lack of support may cause teachers to be frustrated and demotivated. From the literature review, it became evident the weak support of teachers resulted in a lack of performance and a lack of confidence. Thus, supporting teachers through high-quality educational opportunities, will increase their professional knowledge, which in turn enables them to carry out their assignments and help their learners perform excellently in their academic work (Durowoju & Onuka, 2015; Lauermann & König, 2016).

However, the study found that in reality, teachers do not receive adequate support (DoE, 2015; Nel et al., 2014). In South Africa, White Paper 6 presents the establishment of SBSTs as an intervention to provide successful support for teachers to adapt the curriculum, since they feel more equipped and competent to address barriers to learning (DoE, 2001). Even though such structures are in place, and perform their specific roles as set out in inclusive education policies, research has indicated that in South African schools, the provision of effective formal support services from the SBSTs remains a challenge (Makhalemele & Nel, 2016). It is apparent from this study that within teaching and learning, this challenge will exacerbate teachers' poor resolve to deal with challenging problems and the poor performance of learners. Inclusive education policies such as White Paper 6 and the Curriculum Adaptation Guidelines for School-Based Support Teams provide guidelines to support teachers with regard to the implementation of inclusive education (DoE, 2005b). The policies further outline that one of the key strategies to minimise barriers to learning would be through the ongoing assessment of teachers' needs, followed by structured programmes to meet those needs. It is important that these needs should be carefully monitored and evaluated by the SBST. However, this role seems to be unfulfilled. The majority of the participants indicated that there were motivational programmes developed by schools, but only a few of DBSTs were involved. Accordingly, and keeping in mind that a lack of cooperation between the SBST and teachers was a significant finding of this study, the researchers suggest that it may be more useful for members of these teams to take a lead when supporting teachers. That way, it will be easier for teachers to learn about decision making, to address challenges and to continue with the support process. Collaboration within an inclusive learning-support framework comprises open communication, collective decision making and problem solving, shared responsibility for decisions taken, a supportive environment, cooperation towards shared outcomes, and accountability for outcomes (Nel et al., 2014; Scorgie, 2010).

It appears that the SBSTs are hindered by a lack of cooperation and absence of alternative communication strategies to enable teachers to engage in the personal support process. In the study conducted by Makhalemele and Nel (2016) the participants were of the opinion that an efficient collaborative relationship between teachers and members of DBSTs could alleviate some of their concerns and make the task of DBSTs less challenging. Adopting the practice of collaboration in educational settings will enable teachers to provide more effective strategies to support learners and cope with their work demands (Nel et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the support that SBSTs offer teachers with regard to curriculum adaptation by considering the experiences of FSS teachers in a Sedibeng West district in Gauteng. In conclusion, this study strongly suggests that the SBSTs must be trained with regard to methods to support teachers during curriculum adaptation to assist teachers to teach learners with barriers to learning. The SBSTs should be aware that supporting teachers will enable them to execute their duties successfully in an inclusive school setting. The data clearly indicates that not only is there a lack of knowledge and training, but also that poor leadership and a lack of collaboration are the main factors that diminish the competencies of SBST members in executing one of their key roles

for supporting teachers, namely to equip teachers with curriculum adaptation strategies to support learners who experience barriers to learning successfully.

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