AOSIS

Teachers' experiences of using the screening, identification, assessment and support strategy to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia

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Authors:
Faith Karimupfumbi[1]
Veronica M. Dwarika[1]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Veronica Dwarika, veronicam@uj.ac.za

Background: Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) and screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS) promote inclusive education for all learners, including those who present with learning difficulties and are vulnerable to exclusion. The article reports on the experiences of teachers using the SIAS strategy to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia at a primary school in Gauteng.

Aim: The study sought to explore the experiences of teachers using the SIAS tool to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia at a primary school in Gauteng, South Africa.

Setting: Three foundation, four intermediate, and two learning support educators participated in the study. The full service primary school has learners with mild learning difficulties.

Method: Three foundation, four intermediate, and two learning support educators participated in the study. The full service primary school has learners with mild learning difficulties.

Results: Teachers experienced limited success in the implementation of the SIAS tool requiring further professional development.

Conclusion: The need for teacher training in the use of effective support strategies to assist learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia, is advocated for Teacher development for the effective implementation of the SIAS tool is recommended.

Keywords: inclusion; Education White Paper 6; SIAS strategy; dyslexia; primary school, specific learning disorder.

Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill for school achievement because learners access information primarily through reading (Bernsetin 2000; Hoadley 2017; Spaull & Hoadley 2018). The ability to read is used as a yardstick to measure school performance, as reading proficiency influences the academic performance of learners (Spaull 2017). Learning to read also has a 'strong social justice imperative: the value of literacy extends beyond the classroom and should ideally equip children with the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate actively in society' (Spaull 2017:77). For learners to reach their full potential later in life, they must first learn to read fluently and with comprehension in the early years. Children who cannot read are marginalised from engaging with most aspects of the formal curriculum because the curriculum is predominantly presented and taught through reading (Bernstein 2000; Pretorius & Spaull 2016). Addressing reading challenges requires a systematic approach that combines total screening, progress monitoring, teacher professional development and classroom-based prevention, intervention and reading support programmes (Berman & Stetson 2018; Hoadley 2018).

Within South Africa, at a national level, surveys evidence that approximately 58% of children in the country have not learned to read fluently and with comprehension in any language by the end of grade 4 (Spaull 2016). There have been numerous national policies, strategies, campaigns and interventions since the early 2000s, which have been set up to address the crisis of the enduring reading illiteracy rates in South Africa. The most prominent include the Numeracy and Literacy Strategy in the Western Cape (2006), the Foundations for Learning campaign (2008), the Systematic Method for Reading Success (2008), the National Reading Strategy (2008) and the Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (2010) (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2014; Spaull 2017). In 2011, the DBE began to focus on the primary grades by designing the Annual

National Assessments (ANAs) (Spaull 2013). In 2012 and 2013, the British Council and the DBE collaborated to present a training course for a Certificate in Primary English Language Training to teachers in the Foundation Phase (FP) and Intermediate phases (IP) (Spaull 2013). Other meaningful initiatives include the supply of DBE workbooks and graded readers to schools in order to ensure the use of texts in classrooms. Together with the curriculum assessment and promotion policy (CAPS) curriculum that supports teaching with specific reading pedagogies, more children have the opportunity to handle books than before (Hoadely 2017). The notable reading campaigns, such as Read to Lead, Drop All and Read, the Early Grade Reading Study in the North West province and the Progress in International Literacy Studies (PIRLS), aimed at gauging South African children's literacy attainment, all point to the prioritisation of reading by the South African government (DBE 2011; Taylor, Fleisch & Shindler 2019).

Despite several initiatives to support the teaching and learning of reading, the related challenges remain significantly high. Whilst many factors that may contribute to reading challenges include inadequate initial language acquisition, insufficient teaching, inadequate practise in reading and lack of prior knowledge (Rajchert, Zultak & Smulczyk 2014; Spaull 2016), in some children, the causal factor is a specific learning difficulty referred to as dyslexia (Gabriel 2018; International Dyslexia Association [IDA] 2017).

Dyslexia is less understood but rather more prevalent than many acknowledge. Its slow detection may be a key challenge to enhancing reading performance (Berman & Stetson 2018). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association 2013) classifies dyslexia as a neurodevelopmental disorder and uses the term 'Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in reading' to describe it. Dyslexia may also be described as a 'difficulty in learning to decode (read aloud) and to spell' (Snowling, Hulme & Nation 2020:501).

Whilst there is a lack of consensus regarding a single universally agreed-upon definition of dyslexia, the internationally recognised definition that is widely adopted by the IDA in 2002 is that Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a difficulty in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (IDA 2017).

Characteristics of dyslexia include difficulties in phonological awareness: a skill needed to interpret print. Some children are unable to recognise these differences in speech sounds or to make these sound-symbol connections, thus encountering difficulties in pronunciation and recall of words, which hinders fluency, spelling and writing (Powell 2017). Difficulties in verbal memory and verbal processing speed are the other characteristics of dyslexia (Fallen & Katz 2020; IDA 2017). Although dyslexia has traditionally been viewed as a phonologically based difficulty, further research disputes this theory and states that the nature of difficulties underlying dyslexia extends beyond phonological difficulties to procedural learning and visuospatial difficulties (Alt et al. 2017; IDA 2017). Visuospatial difficulties are characterised by difficulty forming visually based representations that manifest in writing challenges (Alsobhi, Khan & Rahanu 2014; Fallon & Katz 2020; IDA 2017). Dyslexia can also present with difficulties with reading comprehension that can manifest itself in various ways, such as failure to recall the main points of a story, failure to answer literal or inferential questions and failure to complete the actual reading of the text (IDA 2017). Regardless of varying definitions and types of dyslexia, there is a consensus that dyslexia is biologically based and is caused by a disruption in the brain's neural circuits. Four theories address the underlying neurobiological aetiology of dyslexia, namely phonological difficulties, magnocellular difficulties, attentional causes and orthographical processing difficulties (Powell 2017). In the school context, a child can present with the following characteristics of dyslexia: 'poor reading of common words for a learner's age, which should be recognised without sounding out letters' and 'poor response to effective instruction and unexpected impairment in sight word reading' (Erbeli, Rice & Paracchini 2022:2). The presentation of these characteristics of dyslexia and other reading challenges within educational settings are also supported by Shaywitz and Shaywitz (2020), Miciak and Fletcher (2020) and Wagner et al. (2020). It must be observed (understandably so) that these characteristics do not fundamentally differentiate dyslexia from other specific learning disabilities in reading given the combination of criteria used for dyslexia (Erbeli et al. 2022).

Inclusive education in South Africa

South Africa has attempted to address and redress inequalities in the education system after the apartheid regime was replaced by a new dispensation (Nel & Grosser 2016). One of the major steps taken was the establishment of an inclusive education system informed by the Salamanca Statement (1994). The emergence of Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) reflected the government's aims towards the advancement of a universal education framework that empowers learners to fulfil their potential (Nel & Grosser 2016). Inclusive education is concerned with the development of an inclusive society. Education White Paper 6 defines such a progressive system of education as one that makes determined efforts to develop learners' strengths and to provide opportunities for them to actively engage in learning within their school environments.

Supporting learners with reading challenges, including characteristics of dyslexia, is encompassed by the principles of inclusive education. Learning support is a process that

addresses and reduces barriers, which is administered through evaluation system the schools practice and protocols to establish relevance for learners, educators and caregivers. Whilst dyslexia and related learning disorders cannot be cured, the necessary support may assist to promote reading success (IDA 2017). Classroom accommodations include the use of instructional materials (e.g. use of a voice recorder, blocking out extraneous visual stimuli, developing paragraph-by-paragraph, page-by-page or section-by-section reading guides) and successful instructional activities (e.g. repeating directions, maintaining structured daily routines, simultaneously combining verbal and visual instruction, using mnemonic instruction). In addition, multisensory structured language teaching and explicit direct phonological and phonemic instruction are teaching strategies that can be implemented to support learners with dyslexia (Fourie 2016:8; IDA 2017).

Structured literacy (SL) approaches are supported and recommended as evidence-based practices for learners with characteristics of dyslexia (Brady 2011; IDA 2017; Fletcher et al. 2007; Foorman et al. 2016; National Reading Panel 2000; Spear-Swerling 2019). Structured literacy approaches include the Orton-Gillingham approach, (Gillingham & Stillman 2014; Smith 2013), direct instruction (Carnine et al. 2009) and the Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing Program (Lindamood & Lindamood 1998). It is a specially guided educational approach for dyslexia and other associated learning disabilities, which is obtained from multisensory structured teaching. It includes establishing clear connections between the senses of sight, sound and touch (Smith 2013). Spear-Swerling (2019:2) highlighted the main features of these SL approaches as follows:

- Involves explicit, systematic and sequential teaching of literacy at multiple levels, phonemes, letter–sound relationships, syllable patterns, morphemes, vocabulary, sentence structure, paragraph and text structure. These are taught clearly and directly and logically by the teacher, ensuring that the essential pre-requisite skills are taught first, practised by learners to achieve success before moving forward to next-level skills.
- Builds in cumulative practices and includes an ongoing review to support learners to retain the skills and building-in automaticity
- Uses carefully chosen examples, decodable text and prompt, corrective feedback.
- Includes a high level of learner–teacher interaction, which is direct instruction by the teacher, learner engagement with the materials and relevant feedback timeously provided by the teacher.

The use of the screening, identification, assessment and support strategy to support learners with reading challenges

The screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS) policy (DBE 2014), is founded on the philosophy of inclusion and emanates from EWP6 (Department of Education [DoE] 2001). The SIAS process aims to develop standardised processes to identify learning barriers and support for such learners. The goal is to bridge learning gaps and effectively support learners to receive equitable access to education. The EWP6 and SIAS process are intended to support learners who are most vulnerable and who are excluded because of a variety of challenges, including neuro-developmental challenges (DBE 2014). The SIAS policy is underpinned by the necessity of early intervention, professional development, school management and monitoring, including public participation (DBE 2014). This policy is targeted towards providing relevant support within Grades R–12 to manage and support learning for learners with learning difficulties (DBE 2014). Addressing reading challenges requires a systematic approach that combines screening, progress monitoring, professional development and classroom-based prevention, and intervention and reading support programmes (Berman & Stetson 2018). The implementation of the SIAS policy is a progressive step within education in South Africa, as it is aimed at redressing the imbalances in education for vulnerable learners who were previously excluded from participating fully in the education system and to provide quality education for learners who encounter learning challenges, including learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia.

The SIAS process is deliberately intended to assist teachers to assess the level and extent of support learners need in order to strengthen and improve their participation in the classroom (DBE 2014). By offering guidelines and procedures that are to be followed when supporting learners' needs, the strategy includes the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders (teachers, education administration, district office personnel, caregivers and learners).The SIAS strategy ranks the level of the identified support that is required as either a low, moderate or high level of provision, based on the frequency, scope, availability and cost of the additional support required (DBE 2014).

The SIAS pack incorporates a learner profile to be utilised by teachers, the school-based support team (SBST) and the district-based support team (DBST). The learner profile requires the inclusion of references to the specific challenges of the learner and other support needs. In addition, it contains the following forms: the diagnostic profile, Support Needs Assessment (SNA) (SNA form section 1 and SNA form section 2), Individual Learner Support Plan (ILSP) (SNA form section 3a), Assessment for Support Demand (SNA form section 3b), School Request Form for Extra Support and Action Set Up for Extra Support Provision and Observance (SNA form section 4) (DBE 2014).

Role functions and responsibilities within the screening, identification, assessment and support process

The DBE (2014) outlines the educator, parent or caregiver, SBST and DBST's roles and responsibilities within the SIAS process. The class teacher is responsible for monitoring all learners during teaching, learning and assessment processes

for vulnerability to learning and or their developmental challenges (DBE 2016). Learners who present with risk factors (e.g. whose exposure to social and academic milestone development were limited are then flagged for support and intervention within the classroom). The class teacher collects the learners' basic information (full profile) so that learners' strengths, challenges and learning gap goals are identified. The teacher also identifies the learning barriers that the learner might experience, by reflecting on techniques and teaching approaches, including the arrangements for classroom practices. The teacher responds to the needs of the learner by employing curriculum differentiation by determining and responding to barriers in the context of the child's school and home life. The teacher also determines the impact of the aid provided through different assessment tasks and refers the learner to the DBST if there is minimal or no impact on learner achievement and participation (DBE 2014). The risk and support information is recorded by the teacher who, guided by the profile, develops a SNA and an ILSP to aid the learner's academic or behavioural performance (DBE 2011, 2014). These documents serve as a record and inventory of the learner's strengths and barriers to learning. The SNA and ILSP are developed by teachers in consultation with the learners, caregivers and the SBST (DBE 2011, 2014).

The learner's role is to be cooperative during the SIAS process. In order to encourage such cooperation, the learners need to be included in the support processes available and offered and informed about the learning area where they will get extra support before any recommendations are made. Furthermore, the caregiver's role is considered to be crucial during the SIAS process (DBE 2014). Observations and comments from caregivers may guide the educator to find out more about the specific type of barrier experienced by the learner. Insights gained from the caregiver's contributions further assist to evaluate the relevance and value of the support offered to the child. Caregivers should be notified and consulted before support provision (DBE 2014).

The SBST reviews the intervention strategies by the educator regarding the barriers to learning that have been detected. The review assists in quality assurance of the educator's support. The SBST also evaluates the assistance required to support the learners and assists in creating a programme to enable educators and caregivers to effectively support the learner. Depending on the needs of the learners, they may either receive low or moderate support and are accommodated within the mainstream classroom. Learners requiring high or intensified levels of specialised support are referred to the relevant education DBST by the referring schools' SBST, for further assistance with intervention and support (DBE 2014). The DBST verifies the evaluation of the SBST and does a thorough assessment of the additional support required to support the learner effectively. The DBST's role includes providing teachers with professional development and offering guidance to educators and caregivers (DBE 2014). The DBST support may include support to the SBST to strengthen the schools' ILSP for the identified learner, remedial classroom support, educational psychological assessments, assistive devices, social, speech and occupational therapy interventions, and/or special school placements.

The study gap

Most South African learners have not reached satisfactory literacy milestones. Learners still perform below average in reading on standardised measures of achievement compared with other countries, according to the results of the 2016 PIRLS assessment in reading literacy (Howie et al. 2017). The SIAS tool provides guidelines on early identification and support and the role of teachers in implementing inclusive education to address the literacy challenges in South Africa (DBE 2014).

Previous research by other scholars has addressed the issues of SIAS and dyslexia in isolation. Research by Roberts (2011) concentrated on the impact of the SIAS training received by educators in the North West province, whilst research on dyslexia by Olivier (2017) focussed on how teachers are supporting learners with dyslexia. This study seeks to combine its investigation to focus on teachers' experiences of using the SIAS strategy to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia.

Research methods and design

The study aimed to explore and describe the experiences of teachers using the SIAS strategy to support learners who present with dyslexia. Informing this study were the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of teachers in the use of the SIAS tool to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia?
2. What support would teachers require to implement the SIAS tool effectively to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia?

Method

This minor study employed a generic qualitative approach within an interpretive research paradigm. The school (at which the first author (F.K.) was a staff member) was selected to elicit in-depth insights into teachers' experiences in the implementation of SIAS strategy in supporting learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia. The school is a quintile two school with English as the language of teaching and learning. Participants were purposively selected based on their reported prior knowledge of dyslexia and the SIAS tool and who were teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) in the FP and IPs. When completing the biographical information, all participants had indicated as agreed or strongly agreed that they had knowledge about dyslexia, received professional development related to the use of SIAS and confident about using the SIAS tool to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia. The sample was obtained from primary school teachers at a Full Service School (FSS). The EWP6 (DoE [2001]) described an FSS as a mainstream

school that is specially designed to support learners with learning challenges within an ordinary school setting. The school is situated in Johannesburg Central District. It has over 1000 learners and both staff and learners are predominantly black. Semi-structured individual interviews were undertaken with nine educators (three from the FP, four educators from the IP and two learning support educators [LSE]) who had qualifications in remedial support. A focus group (FG) interview was undertaken with the SBST members (who consisted of the two LSE educators, FP and IP heads of department and the deputy principal). Tables 1 and 2, provide an overview of the participant demographic profiles.

Data sets from the interviews and focus groups were thematically analysed. The interviews were manually transcribed, following which codes relevant to the research questions were generated. Repetitive patterns in the data set led to the emerging themes. The themes were discussed, interpreted and linked with literature. All ethical protocols were followed in the undertaking of the research and ethical clearance number 2019-086 was issued. Informed and voluntary consent was obtained from all participants.

Findings and discussion
Teachers' experiences of using the screening, identification, assessment and support strategy to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia

In their positive experiences, participants expressed satisfaction in the support they received from the SBST, which included facilitating mini workshops and providing ongoing individual support, thus enabling teachers to develop effective support strategies. The SBST actively assisted teachers by mobilising support resources that teachers could use to support learners. The following statement from participant 1 (P1), supports this claim:

> 'There is this case conference that we have, where we discuss the child and the interventions that I've carried out. After that discussion, the SBST comes up with a recommendation and we do conferences on learners who have been referred on how to handle them.'

The SBST was also viewed as proactive and supportive as they interacted with educators throughout the SIAS process. These comments confirmed participants' views: 'The SBST is very functional. They try to intervene and support us to design lessons for the learner'. Participants also acknowledged the reciprocal communication that existed between teachers and the SBST during the SIAS process, which revealed that the SBST was a reliable community of enquiry. This is supported by the following statement: 'SBST brings back the report and tells us the next step we can do to support the learner' (P6). The SBST also capacitated teachers through developmental workshops. The following quotes support this claim: 'They also help us with workshops so that we can manage these learners' (P6) and 'they also organise workshop for teachers with strategies and resources that we can use to help learners' (P9).

TABLE 1: Biographical details of participants in the semi-structured individual interviews.

Participant	Gender	Highest qualification	Years of teaching experience (years)	Teaching English (FAL) in Grade
P1	Female	BED Inclusive education	32	Grade 5
P2	Female	Diploma in Education	14	Grades 4–6
P3	Female	BED Inclusive education	26	Grades 4–6
P4	Male	BED Inclusive education	22	Grades 4–6
P5	Female	BED	27	Grades 4–6
P6	Female	ACE	10	Grade 3
P7	Female	PGCE	7	Grade 5
P8	Female	BED Inclusive education	4	Grade 4
P9	Female	BED	20	Grades 5, 6

FAL, First Additional Language; BED, Bachelor of Educations Degree; ACE, Advanced Certificate in Education; PGCE, Post Graduate Certificate in Education.

TABLE 2: Biographical details of school-based support team participants in focus group interview.

Participant	Gender	Designation	Highest qualification	Years of teaching experience (years)	Teaching grade	Subjects
FGP1	Female	HoD (F.P)	C.E	35	Grade 2	Language, Maths and life skills
FGP2	Male	DP	C.E	30	Grade 6	Mathematics
FGP3	Male	LSE	PGCE inclusive education	20	Grade 2–3	Remedial
FGP4	Female	HoD (I.P)	BED inclusive education	15	Grade 4	English
FGP5	F	Educator	PGCE inclusive education	9	Grade 5	Life skills
FGP6	F	LSE	BED Hon. inclusive education	15	Grade 4–6	Remedial

PGCE, Post Graduate Certificate in Education; FGP, Focus Group articipant; HoD, Head of Department; BED, Bachelor of Educations Degree; CE, Certificate in Education; LSE, learning support educators; I.P, Intermediate phases.

The given claims revealed that the SBST constantly engaged with teachers, thereby increasing their competency in using the SIAS tool. These findings correlate with the principles of the SIAS policy (DBE 2014), which prescribes that the role of the SBST is to provide support that can be implemented in the classroom by developing strategies to address learning needs. It also reveals that support is a collective effort between teachers and the SBST.

Collaboration amongst the school staff to support learners

Participants in the study confirmed that '[w]e meet twice in a term in the phase as teachers and the LSEs tell us what other strategies we can apply' (P7) and 'we share ideas with other educators in the phase on how we can help learners' (P8). One participant reflected that '[w]e have educators who specialise with learners with special needs like myself' (P3). Another participant indicated that '[t]eachers who are trained are taking these learners from class and temporarily place them in a special class to support us' (P4). Collaboration helps to improve the learning outcomes for a diverse learner population.

Collaboration was also evidenced in using SIAS processes (SNA 2, section 3 of the SNA 2 form) where the SBST

collaborated with teachers to establish an ILSP for learners who had been referred for further support. An ILSP is a plan designed for learners who require extra support or expanded opportunities (DBE 2014). The SBST and class teacher collaborations are considered important to the successful development of children with characteristics of dyslexia because of the additional resources and expertise that is required to support them (Friend & Cook 2013). During the FG interview, the LSE educators confirmed how they helped educators to deal with the SIAS process of developing the ILSP. One participant said: 'We are doing the ILSPs with the educator and teach them how to teach certain skills such as comprehension and spelling' (FGP2) the other (P9) said:

> '[S]o after teachers identify a learner with a barrier and try to support, but the child does not improve, they will involve me so that I can assess and support.'

Strategies used to plan interventions for individual learner support plan

These findings present the perceptions that teachers had on the usefulness and efficacy of applying various strategies to help learners acquire effective reading skills. With the support and collaboration of the SBST in the development of ILSPs, teachers mentioned their use of different sensory approaches (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile) to support learners who presented with characteristics of dyslexia. Participants explained the use of combining two different senses (visual and tactile) when teaching reading and spelling:

> 'We use the block letters to put them in front of these learners and give them a word so that they can try to build a word using block letters. Besides block letters we use pictures.' (P3)

As explained by another participant:

> 'I use the look-and-say methods, or the breaking down of words, or playing games of building words or memory games. I have a box with letters of the alphabet and I give them group by group to build words and read them.' (P5)

It emerged that teachers implemented the Orton-Gillingham multisensory approach for teaching reading as explicit direct phonological and phonemic instruction to enable learners to acquire basic reading skills. Proponents of the multisensory approach argue that it is one of the most proven interventions for teachers working with learners with dyslexia because it ensures learning through multiple senses. Multisensory activities are based on whole-brain learning ensuring long-lasting learning (Boardman 2019; IDA 2017; Sutton & Shields 2016).

One participant indicated that she taught children to use the auditory pathway to enable learners to process the information they hear to develop their phonic skills: 'I use syllabification, central auditory processing, where children are taught to process the information they hear through rhyming and phonics' (P9). Audiovisuals: This strategy was also acknowledged by another participant who combined the

audio and visual senses to teach reading: 'We take learners through teaching words using audiovisual [aids]' (P3).

Phonics instruction was the other method used by participants to teach reading. Phonics instruction enables children to recognise letter–sound correspondences and it is effective in preventing reading difficulties amongst at-risk learners (Smith 2013). Participants described how and when they used phonics and how it helped learners to acquire reading and spelling skills, which is explained as follows by a participant: 'I'm using relevant charts such as alphabet chart so that the child can see the difference between, for example, the most confusing one, like "b" [and] "d"' (P1).

Other participants also emphasised the effectiveness of phonics instruction: 'Our focus is mainly on pronouncing the alphabet in a sound-like way' (P3). They further elaborated how phonics was used in combination with audiovisual strategies: 'I use phonic charts, flashcards for sounds and pictures to teach learners to read' (P9).

Challenges experienced with the use of the screening, identification, assessment and support

Teachers encountered challenging experiences caused by factors such as overcrowding and dealing with large numbers of learners during screening and identification and time management during support. Teachers argued that they could not provide individual support to these learners within the restricted time frame indicated in the CAPS curriculum because the SIAS screening tool was lengthy: 'We don't have enough time so end up giving these learners a blind eye' (P1).

Findings also indicated a lack of parental involvement during the SIAS process. Teachers indicated that caregivers sometimes withheld certain information about their children, leaving a gap in recording-required information as per the SIAS policy (DBE 2014), such as the SNA forms relating to the child's needs. Findings of the study established that caregivers failed to turn up for discussion sessions with the teachers on the support package of their children. This had negative implications for the implementation of the SIAS tool. However, the findings of the study revealed that the absence of some caregivers could be attributed to work obligations.

Another aspect that emerged from the study was learned helplessness, where learners give up on themselves after being faced with the situation of not being able to read for such a long time. This decreased level of commitment is explained by a participant as follows: 'Others tend to be irritated very easily because some children, you can tell that they have just given up because they know that they are slow learners in class' (P7). Participants also cited the co-occurrence of dyslexia with other barriers to learning as a hindrance to the successful implementation of the SIAS tool regarding support provision (P5, P3, P7). In that regard, providing

support would be a complicated process considering the short attention span manifested by these learners and some learners did not respond positively to some of the strategies, suggesting that the strategies used were perhaps an inappropriate fit for the learners needs.

Professional development needs of teachers to effectively implement the screening, identification, assessment and support strategy to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia

The second theme was related to the support requirements of teachers. Participants indicated the need for continuous professional development to enhance the implementation of the SIAS tool. The South African National Policy framework for teacher education and development promotes teacher expertise through ongoing professional development to address the changing needs of the curriculum. Therefore, the DBST and SBST should continuously facilitate various professional development programmes to empower teachers.

The findings of the study revealed that teachers required further professional development workshops on the implementation of the SIAS tool. It is widely accepted that developing the expertise, knowledge and requirements of teachers is one of the most fundamental measures needed to increase learner achievement (Steyn 2014). Therefore, the continued growth of professional knowledge and skills is significant as the success of education policy initiatives depends on the quality of teachers (Steyn 2014).

Prior studies have acknowledged the importance of support from the DBST. Education White Paper 6 (DoE [2001]) outlined a national strategy to achieve an inclusive education system. The EWP 6 mandated the setting-up of DBSTs in all education districts to assist teachers to cope with a diversity of learning and teaching needs.

School-based support team training needs

The SBST at the school revealed that they required more training from the DBST on how to manage a large number of learners and how to complete the SIAS documents. Participant 1 in the focus group attested the following:

> 'We need more training from the department, like how to deal with so many learners in class who have a reading challenge and how to fill this form, because even if it has been shortened, it is long.'

Participant 3 in the focus group was mainly concerned with the length of the SNA form and lamented:

> 'Yes, that's true as you can see that this SNA form is very long and sometimes it's difficult to use, so maybe the SBST should be capacitated to support teachers to complete this form.'

Participant 5 in the focus group observed that collaboration with other local SBSTs was empowering:

> 'You know this SIAS process is so complicated and systems are always changing, so we need external support even from [*other*] local SBSTs so that we can share good practices.'

Participants from the SBST also indicated that they needed training in using multimedia to teach learners with dyslexia (FGP1, FGP4, FGP5). In the implementation of inclusive education, learning can be integrated with strategies that support the heterogeneity of learner abilities (Bester & Brand 2013). Multimedia facilitates the bimodal presentation of information through multiple senses, namely the auditory, visual, kinaesthetic and tactile (Azmi, Nasien & Omar 2017). Children who present with characteristics of dyslexia also experience attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and therefore, using visuals in teaching enhances learning by enabling the learners to focus for longer periods (Bester & Brand 2013). Participant 4 in the semi-structured interviews said:

> 'I think the department should also train us in Information Communications and Technology (ICT) because we are in the technology era, so we need recent approaches to teaching reading that involve the use of technology such as computers.'

This was supported by Participant 3 from the focus group: 'The department should conduct workshop for us on how to use computers to teach these learners because these children enjoy technology as it keeps them practically engaged'. Participant 6 agreed with participants 3 and 4 on the relevance of workshops in computer technology:

> 'On the issue of using technology, I think it's very important because computers are stimulating, so learners won't get easily bored. The department should give us training and the relevant software with activities for these learners.'

One example of this would be the utilisation of voice recognition technology, which helps learners to transcribe their ideas through speech and text, avoiding spelling and handwriting difficulties (Sutton & Shields 2016).

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the experiences of teachers in using the SIAS tool to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia. The support of the SBST followed by professional development was identified as vital to teacher effectiveness. However, teachers cited challenging experiences that included dealing with large numbers of learners during screening and identification, insufficient time, lack of parental involvement, learned helplessness, inappropriate strategies, inadequate support resources and comorbidities with dyslexia.

Recommendations

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of the SIAS tool, schools should set up teacher support groups where teachers share ideas. Mini workshops should be facilitated to develop and conscientise caregivers on the value of teacher–caregiver partnerships. Teachers should also be

capacitated with ICT skills that will enable them to support learners who present with characteristics of dyslexia.

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