

**UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND**

**THE ROLE OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN EMPOWERING SPECIAL  
NEEDS LEARNERS WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL SKILLS IN NKANDLA  
CIRCUIT**

**By**

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**2016**

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NEEDS LEARNERS WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL SKILLS IN NKANDLA  
CIRCUIT**

**By**

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**A dissertation submitted in the Faculty of Education in partial fulfilment  
of the  
requirements for a Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the  
University of Zululand  
KwaDlangezwa**

**SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR D.R. NZIMA**

**JANUARY 2016**

## DECLARATION

I, Sibekezelo Sipiwe Nene declare that this dissertation represents my own work, both in conception and in execution. All sources that have been used or cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Sibekezelo S. Nene

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Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to convey my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all people who contributed to this study for their unending support and encouragement. Great appreciation is extended to:

- My supervisor Prof D.R. Nzima for his patience, in-depth interest and competence at all times. Your critical but constructive comments are highly appreciated.
- Mr J.S. Mkhize, Writing Centre Coordinator: Faculty of Education for his assistance and valuable contributions in research as a whole. Your patience is appreciated.
- The Department of Education and the Principal of the special school who granted me the permission to conduct the study in their school. The teachers and parents for the cooperation I received when I requested to conduct interviews. I am very grateful for the full support you accorded me.
- Mrs N.N Mbatha from the Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education for proof-reading and editing my work.
- All my friends and colleagues Sinenhlanhla Nyawo, Tholinhlanhla Mkhwanazi, Sibongiseni Mthembu for your academic and social support, in particular, I wish to thank Zinandi Nyasulu for her endless assistance at all times. Thank you guys for being there for each other at all times.
- My beloved mother (Bongiwe, uMaXulu Dlamini) and every single member of the family for the love, prayers, support, patience and encouragement that helped me to bring this study to a finality.

- I would like to express my gratitude for the trust vested in me by my beloved husband, Senzo. Your unconditional love, patience and support Sithenjwa,

Madlokovu, Ntusiyeinkomo is appreciated. A special appreciation goes to my sons and daughters: Malondi, Thembelani, Nqobile, Mncedisi, Smanga, Popiza, Nokuthokoza and Samkelo for their endless love and patience when missing their mother while studying. May this piece of work be an inspiration to you.

- My in-laws: sis'Busi Shezi and family; sis'Dudu Msimang and family; sis'Fezile; sis'Zandile; bhuti uZweli; bhuti uThabani and bhuti uSipho for your direct and indirect contributions. Your support was a driving force to the completion of this study.
- My final and most important thank you, goes to ALMIGHTY GOD for giving me wisdom and energy to bring this study to finality.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved mother Bongiwe (uMaXulu) Dlamini, my beloved husband Senzo and in-laws, my sons and daughters for their prayers, love, support, patience and encouragement. May this work be a reminder to them that perseverance is the mother of success.

## ABSTRACT

The current study examines the role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in a special school. The objective of the study was:

- To determine the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills.

Data was collected using qualitative methodology. The purposive sampling was used in selecting nine teachers and eight parents for the study. To collect data, semi-structured interview questions were formulated. Interview questions consisted of open-ended questions were conducted to teachers and parents in determining the role they play in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills. Observation was done in different phases during lessons/learning. Qualitative data analysis was used in order to draw conclusion about the role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in a special school. Research findings led to the following conclusions: teachers empower special needs learners in various ways compared to the role played by parents. They believe in teaching special needs learner's skills to be independent, sociable, and presentable and be recognised by the society. Others teach skills by focusing on the learner's strengths to overcome their weaknesses. Some teachers empower learners through sports in order for them to participate and compete with other children outside school while others believe in teaching discipline so that learners should be able to obey the rules outside school. The results reveal that the empowerment of learners depends on the child's condition/disability. The findings revealed that hundred percent of parents believe in giving their special needs children love and support in whatever skill that has been identified by teachers as their role of empowering them. They also make their children feel important to the family and to the community.

Parents believe that once the child feels loved, she or he is able to love themselves and others.

The results show that there is a gap between the role played by teachers and that played by parents which needs to be filled.

The findings revealed that partnership between teachers and parents in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education is good although there are challenges mentioned. The programmes available in the school and in the community also empower special needs children even they exit school. On the basis of the findings, recommendations for teacher training in special education were put forward in order for the empowerment of special needs learners with psychosocial skills in special schools to be effective.

**Key concepts:** Empowerment, special needs learners, psychosocial skills.



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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Learners with special needs are placed at a special school because of their inability to cope at a mainstream school with other children and learning expectations. Children do not come to school as empty vessels. Irrespective of their background, they are all influenced by their social environment, and while for most of them this has a positive impact on their learning within the school environment, for some it can sadly be a barrier.

Making a difference is what self-empowerment is all about. Learners need to know that they can perform adequately even with their special needs. Boje and Rosile (2001) maintain that a conducive school environment that fosters empowerment is one mode of living and doing that "teaches us how to grow a social consciousness" (Boje & Rosile, 2001, p.90). Empowered teachers who empower learners may help to ensure the future democracy.

It is acknowledged, recognized and respected that all learners with special educational needs can learn and are unique in terms of their needs. Due to those differences in learning, they need appropriate support in order for them to be empowered with psycho-social skills. There should be close co-operation between teachers and parents with regard to learners' education. Their co-operation is not only necessary for the effective teaching of the child but as co-teachers, parents form a valuable formal education-partnership at home. In this study the researcher is interested in investigating the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in a special school.

## **1.2 Literature review**

Learners should have the confidence and skills to empower themselves. Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), empowerment is a process by which people gain control over their lives. By the very definition of empowerment, one may be able to take control of his or her learning. For learners, this is a process of feeling confident about decision-making and feeling recognized as capable by the education system. Only by feeling safe, accepted, valued, and challenged can learners begin to make progress towards empowering themselves (Cowdery, 2012).

Cowdery (2012) notes that psychosocial skills are the skills that allow learners to interact with, perceive, influence and relate to others. They include their ability to appropriately experience, display and perceive emotional states and relate these to the events and environments where they occur. These skills should also work together with the learners' communication skills to enable them to interact appropriately with other individuals and function within a socially meaningful context. Learners who feel empowered are more confident and exhibit more self-esteem. Confidence can increase a person's ability to think and cope with basic challenges. Self-esteem can increase a feeling of worth and the ability to assert one's needs and wants.

Empowering teachers can foster learner empowerment in several ways, firstly, by allowing learners to follow through on their original ideas and solve complex problems. Secondly, it can make learners to be more committed to their own learning. Encouraging and equipping learners with essential skills lead to empowerment (Cowdery, 2012).

School is the place where children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and others with special educational needs (SEN) can be helped to encounter and learn to cope with new challenges or situations in a supportive environment. This can be extremely valuable, as it can then better prepare the learners for later life in the ever-changing and unpredictable world outside school (McAllister & Hadjri, 2013).



American Association on Mental Retardation (2000) affirms that learners with severe to profound mental retardation (intellectual disability) need an extensive and pervasive array of support to fully participate in everyday learning situations, community events, adaptive skills, self-determination, and social relationships.

Kincaid and Jackson (2006) in their study on how teachers learn to use problem based learning (PBL) units as a tool to empower learners with special needs to become more confident, independent and successful learners; they found out that learners benefit from adding real life learning situations to their traditional classroom learning. The goal of PBL unit was to enable the learners to solve real-life problems outside of the classroom, a skill that will enable learners to be successful in their careers and personal lives. They also found out that learners who always had a passive role in their education prior to the study, later, became leaders. Learners who had histories of problem behaviours and hostile personalities became caring and compassionate classmates. Learners who normally had poor academic performances were given a chance to shine under the admiration of classmates whose challenges were more severe than theirs.

There should be a feeling of respect, trust, and partnership between learners, parents, and teachers. In such an environment, learners will be given the opportunity to express themselves, and their self-determination will rise, knowing that they can make a difference (Cushing, 1994). By empowering learners to make choices, teachers can help lessen learner feelings of powerlessness. Teachers, parents and learners together can create a list of choices, but the learner, whenever possible, makes the final selection.

McCoy (2009) states that children with disabilities should no longer be thought of as children with anomalies or a broken people who need to be fixed but rather as individuals with strengths and value. Their educational experiences need to prepare them to live in and contribute to a democratic society and to realize their own individual potential.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

The researcher's experience working in a special school is what motivated her to embark on this study. The manner in which learners with special needs engaged with each other in a classroom demonstrated the ability to communicate properly. When given task, they worked well in groups, worked as a team and supported each other. In the society, children with learning disability or special needs are regarded as social outcast, as not having the ability to learn or to do things but from the researcher's observation, they are more of social beings.

In a recent study conducted by Aller, Gifford, Otaiba, Miller and Cheathan (2013) on teaching learners with intellectual disability reading skills: effect of text-based lessons, they found out that their preliminary results provided promising evidence that even learners who initially do not respond to systematic instruction can learn to improve their ability to sound out and combine words. These results show that teachers have the ability to empower learners with psychosocial skills but there is nothing much said or contributed by the parents.

The researcher was interested in finding out the role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla Circuit.

#### **1.3.1 Research questions:**

1. What role do teachers and parents play in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills?
2. How do teachers and parents form partnerships in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education?
3. What programme is there, if any, which is aimed at empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in a special school?

## **1.4 Objective of the study**

1.4.1 To determine the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills.

1.4.2 To establish whether or not there is a partnership between teachers and parents in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education.

1.4.3 To establish whether or not there is a programme which is aimed at empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in a special school.

## **1.5 Definition of terms**

**1.5.1 Special needs child:** in this study it shall mean a child that requires assistance due to physical, mental, behavioural or medical disability or delay (Weeks & Erradu, 2013).

**1.5.2 Special school:** in this study it shall mean a school catering for learners who have special educational needs, due to severe learning difficulties or physical disabilities (Collins, 2014). According to the Department of Education “special schools are schools equipped to deliver education to learners requiring high-intensive educational and other support, either on a full-time or a part-time basis” (Department of Education, 2008, p.9)

**1.5.3 Psychosocial skills:** in this study it shall mean life skills for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life. They are loosely grouped into three broad categories of skills: cognitive skills for analysing and using information, personal skills for developing personal agency and managing oneself, and interpersonal skills for communicating and interacting effectively with others (UNICEF, 2003).

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

Studies conducted around the issue of empowering learners with psychosocial skills by Cowdery (2012) and Kincaid and Jackson (2006) reveal that more emphasis is put on teachers and learners, and little is said about the parent's input. For the parents, it is just to support what teachers have done. The study also seeks to assist parents and teachers in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills so that people in the society will not be ashamed of these learners and made to be respectable members of the society. It is hoped that the development and implementation of ongoing programmes, presentations, and publication of papers will assist in motivating parents to be more involved in empowering learners with the skills and also maintain them in a home environment.

## **1.7 Focus of the study**

The study focussed specifically on the role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in special schools. Three special schools in Nkandla Circuit had been identified as data collection sites. These were the only special schools available in this Circuit which cater for learners with various challenges.

## **1.8 Research methodology**

In this case study, the researcher used qualitative approach to get an in-depth understanding on the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special need learners with psychosocial skills. It also assisted in understanding the experiences of teachers in dealing with different disabilities of the learners who enrol in the school.

### **1.8.1 Sampling**

Sampling is the process of selecting units such as people or organizations from a population of interest so that by studying the sample we may fairly generalize our results to the population from which they were chosen (Maree, 2007). The sample was selected according to the needs of the case study. This type of sampling method is called purposive sampling. According to Maree (2007), sampling decisions are therefore made for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions. The participants were selected using the phenomenological approach. The phenomenology approach was aimed at understanding and interpreting the meaning that participants attach to everyday life (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2005). The phenomenology method is applied by means of engaging in the participant's life setting through a naturalistic manner, having interactions and discussions. For this purpose, the researcher decided to utilise interviews with multiple participants who are involved in the phenomenon as the data-gathering method (De Vos et al., 2005). Creswell (2013) notes that it is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied.

UThungulu District is one of rural districts in KwaZulu-Natal. Three Special Schools under Nkandla Circuit from UThungulu District which enrolls children with special needs were considered. These schools were identified by considering its geographical location. The study consisted of ten male and female teachers as well as ten parents.

### **1.8.2 Selection of participants**

#### **1.8.2.1 Teachers**

The main participants were teachers who were teaching the learners that were observed during teaching and learning. Structured interviews were conducted to teachers for the assistance in the answers required by the study. Teachers were interviewed because they are the ones who contribute a lot in empowering learners with psychosocial skills in a special school.

### **1.8.2.2 Parents**

Parents were also involved in this study as they are the greatest possible degree of information needed. Interviews were conducted with parents so as to find out the role they play in empowering special needs learners and how they maintain the acquired skills in a home environment.

### **1.8.3 Research instruments**

Since the study used qualitative method, the following research methods or techniques were used:

#### **1.8.3.1 Observations**

The researcher used observation as a qualitative data gathering technique to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the phenomenon being observed. Maree (2007) describes observation as the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them. He further argues that in using observation as a data gathering technique the researcher needs to understand that not all behaviours, and more specifically the intentions behind behavioural patterns, can be observed.

The researcher observed learners as they communicate and interact with each other in class and during play. The researcher adopted the relatively passive role during the entire observation process. This is supported by Maree (2007) when he warns that the researcher should never seek data aggressively at the start of the process (and do not induce behaviour for the purposes of data collection), but observe events as they occur in the natural setting. He further asserts that the researcher can be a participant-observer or a nonparticipant-observer. Kumar (2014) affirms that participant observation is when a researcher participates in the activities of the group being observed, in the same manner as its members, with or without their knowing that they are being observed. Non-participant observation, on the other hand, is when a researcher do not get involved in the activities of the group but remain a

passive observer, watching and listening to its activities and drawing conclusions from this.

The researcher remained uninvolved and did not influence the dynamics of the setting. The researcher had to exercise observation, listening and questioning skills in a focused and strategic manner.

### **1.8.3.2 Interviews**

The researcher administered semi-structured interview schedules for collecting data. Interview schedules were considered because they can be a valuable source of information provided they are used correctly. Maree (2007) defines an interview as a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to collect data and to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participant. This method assisted the researcher in collecting more and rich descriptive data that helped to understand the participant's construction of knowledge and social reality (Creswell, 2014).

### **1.8.3.3 Data analysis**

In analysing data, the researcher used coding which was the exact words used by participants. The researcher then identified themes which were broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea and engage in interpreting the data which involved making sense of it in tables (Creswell, 2014).

## **1.9 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is important in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba cited in Maree (2007) suggest that credibility, applicability, dependability and

conformability are key criteria of trustworthiness and these are constructed to parallel the conventional criteria of inquiry of internal and external validity, reliability and neutrality respectively. Multiple methods of data collection were used to establish trustworthiness. This is supported by Maree (2007) when he confirms that it is generally accepted that engaging multiple methods of data collection such as observation, interviews and document analyses will lead to trustworthiness. In addition, involving several investigators or peer researchers to assist with the interpretation of the data could enhance trustworthiness. Crystallisation was considered for this study. Maree (2007) argues that crystallisation provides with a complex and deeper understanding of the phenomenon. He further confirms that it emerges from the various data gathering techniques and data analyses employed and represents researcher's own reinterpreted understanding of the phenomenon. This crystallisation reality is credible in so far as those reading data and analysis would lead to the same emerging pattern, and this adds to the trustworthiness of the research.

### **1.10 Ethical considerations**

The researcher treated all participants involved in the study with respect, and protect the participant's integrity and anonymity. The researcher did not engaged in any forms of discriminatory factors such as unfair treatment regardless of age, race, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, religion, political belief, or any other significant difference. The researcher indicated at the beginning the purpose of the study and that participating in the study is voluntary and it would not place them at undue risk. The researcher also indicated to participants that they have a right to withdraw from the study at any time if they wish to opt out.

The researcher seek consent to conduct research from the Provincial Head of Department before the study commences. The researcher ensured that teachers and parents fully understand the whole process of the study.



Confidentiality agreements was explained to all those involved in the study. The participants entitlement to privacy was recognized and their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. Despite the need for confidentiality, qualitative research requires conformability, that is, documentation of all activities included in a research study. The researcher did not engaged in falsification of data references, claims, or research findings. The researcher referenced other author's data so as to prevent plagiarism.

### **1.11 Resources**

There were no unique or particular resources needed for the study except for the normal research and travel funding which was required.

### **1.12 Intellectual property and Innovation**

There was no intellectual property rights anticipated to arise from this research except for the common copyright matter.

### **1.13 Knowledge dissemination**

The researcher looked forward to present conference papers on the topic and publish articles in accredited journals.

### **1.14 Summary**

Chapter 1 has given the background to the study. The critical research questions as well as the study objectives were outlined. Some important terms which constitute a formal discourse and a core discussion in the study were defined. The researcher in this chapter has also outlined the methodology and design, as well as looked at the techniques which were adopted to ensure the validity and the reliability of the measuring instrument. The next Chapter will outline the theoretical framework which underpins the current study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Generally, parents are known for their crucial role they play in guiding, supporting, encouraging and empowering children with knowledge and skills from birth through school-entry level up to adulthood. They practice their constitutional right to provide and support their children in almost all aspects of life including education. Teachers also, take from where parents have started and build upon their foundation in empowering learners with skills through teaching and learning. The teacher profession places them in a better position to notice behaviour and learning problems. This is done through observing the learner in different situations in the classroom or outside the learning environment. They are also in a better position to understand and identify factors which may interfere with the child's education and development. Identification of a learner with problems may lead to special programmes being provided for the child or even placement in a special school or a full-service school.

Partnership between parents and teachers should be established or formed in case where there are learners identified and diagnosed as having special educational needs. Regardless of learner's special needs, they have to benefit from the education system in order for them to realize their individual potential and contribute to society as equal citizens of the country. This leads to the research question: what role do parents and teachers play in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills? In this chapter, studies on history of special needs learners' empowerment in South Africa and internationally will be reviewed.

## **2.2 Theoretical framework**

Different perspectives have emerged with regard to the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills. According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996, the provision of education for learners with disabilities has been part of the process of government policy to provide services to all South Africans on an equitable basis and the development of an inclusive education system. Section 29 (the Bill of Rights) states that everyone has the right to a basic education, including basic adult education and further education which the state through reasonable measures should make progressively available and accessible. It further states that the state may not discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including disability. The South African Schools Act of 1996 states that all learners have the right to learn and receive quality education to meet their unique needs (Department of Education, 1997). The Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System Policy (2001) stipulates that no learner should be prevented from participating in the education system regardless of his or her physical, intellectual, social, emotional, language or other differences, which implies that all learners should have access to education, to the curriculum and to support when in need so that the full potential of each learner can be actualised (Department of Education, 2001).

Learners with special needs are often thought to be less capable than they really are. Ryba (2008) states that there is a need to put dynamic assessment and education strategies into place that can enable learners with intellectual disabilities to achieve their full potential. McCoy (2009) affirms and believes that children with disabilities should no longer be thought of as children with anomalies or a broken people who need to be fixed but rather as individuals with strengths and value. Their educational experiences need to prepare them to live in and contribute to a democratic society and to realize their own individual potential.

Learners should have the confidence and skills to empower themselves. Perkins and Zimmerman cited in Cowdery (2012) define empowerment as the process by which people gain control over their lives. By the very definition of empowerment, one may be able to take control of his or her learning. For learners, this is a process of feeling confident about decision-making and feeling recognized as capable by the education system. Only by feeling safe, accepted, valued, and challenged can learners begin to make progress towards empowering themselves (Cowdery, 2012). Cowdery (2012) further reveals that psychosocial skills are the skills that allow learners to interact with, perceive, influence and relate to others. The above-mentioned skills include their ability to appropriately experience, display and perceive emotional states and relate these to the events and environments where they occur. These skills should also work together with the learners' communication skills to enable them to interact appropriately with other individuals and function within a socially meaningful context. Cowdery further believes that learners who feel empowered are more confident and exhibit more self-esteem. Confidence can increase a person's ability to think and cope with basic challenges. Self-esteem can increase a feeling of worthy and the ability to assert one's needs and wants.

Alkahtan (2013) states that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) considers differences in learner's ability and seeks to provide equal access to the information through alternate formats or modes of communication. Alkahtan (2013) cites Burgstahler (2004) who explains that the universal design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people to the greatest extent. Empowerment of special needs learners with psychosocial skills is theoretically grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1978) the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's theories stress the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition. Vygotsky cited by Mcleod (2010) refers to ZPD as the distance between what a learner can do alone (actual performance level) and what a learner can do in collaboration with guidance or more advanced peers (potential performance level). According to Vygotsky, the ZPD may be explained as guidance given

by a more experienced person so that what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow. Vygotsky states that learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when a child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky cited by McLeod (2010) believes that when a learner is in the ZPD for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance will give the learner enough of a boost to achieve the task.

Gindis (2012) notes that in Vygotskian perspective, the ideal role of the teacher is that of providing scaffolding which is a collaborative dialogue to assist learners on tasks within their zones of proximal development. During scaffolding the first step is to build interest and engage the learner. Once the learner is actively participating, the given task should be simplified by breaking it into smaller subtasks. During the task a teacher needs to keep the learner focused while concentrating on the most important ideas of the assignment. The researcher further indicate that one of the most integral steps in scaffolding consist of keeping the learner from becoming frustrated. The final task associated with scaffolding involves the teacher modelling possible ways of completing tasks which the learner can then imitate and eventually internalize.

The study is also based on Alfred Bandura's social learning theory. Bandura (1977) states that behaviour is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning. It stresses the importance of observational learning, imitation and modelling. It proposes that academic and behaviour modelling take place through verbal instruction, live modelling by a person, and symbolic modelling through four steps: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. It further states that using social interaction and active experiences in learning helps learners to feed knowledge to one another. These methods promote social communication skills that learners will need to possess as adults. In society, children are surrounded by many influential models such as parents within the family, characters on children's TV, friends within their peer group and teachers at school (McLeod, (2011). Special

needs learners can capitalize on this theory because they can observe and imitate their peers and teachers academically and behaviourally and their parents at home as well.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development affirms the child's interaction with their environment as an important area for teachers to facilitate in a special educational needs (SEN) learner's cognitive and also behavioural development. It deals with the view that all species inherit two basic tendencies; the first is organisation which is organising behaviours and thoughts into logical systems. The second is adaptation which is adjusting to your environment. As the child develops, they manage to combine the two separate structures into a coordinated higher level structure. Piaget refers to this process as schema. Piaget believes that these schemes are formulated through the interaction of the child's environment specifically parents, teachers, and peers of a similar age. The teacher plays a major role in this adaptation when they introduce a new experience to the SEN. The teacher can facilitate the assimilation of this new experience so that it fits into the SEN's existing scheme or the teacher may have to change the cognitive thinking of the SEN by changing an existing scheme to incorporate the new experience. This process is referred to as accommodation. In order for special needs learners to achieve their full potential and be empowered, the researcher will look at the role played by parents and teachers in empowering them with psychosocial skills.

### **2.3 The role of parents**

Austin (2000) claims that parents play a crucial role in the lives of their disabled children even after their son or daughter has made the transition to adulthood. It is the parents that can guide, encourage and empower their disabled child to take an active role in the transition programme essential in helping their disabled child identify life and career goals and in providing the opportunities to attain those goals. Parents have a significant role to play in assuring that the rights mandated by law are provided to their children. Austin

further suggests that parents can be more fully supported and encouraged to contribute to the transition process and programme planning and implementation by determining the degree to which their child is able to self-determine career goals and future living plans. Parents should also involve the child in all aspects of transition planning such as identifying the child's strengths, weaknesses, needs, goals, preferences, desires and dreams. According to Austin (2000) this is another way of supporting and encouraging the child to contribute to the transition process. Collaboration of parents with the school in the curricula areas such as functional life skills, academic goals, postsecondary goals, developing employment skills, independent living skills as well as related services (i.e. speech therapy, physical/occupational therapy, counselling) encourage the child to contribute to transition process and programme planning and implementation. Developing linkages to community services and agencies by parents would also be supporting their child.

Calkins (2004) affirms that the quality of the parent-child attachment relationship predicts children's social skills. A number of studies have found that having a secure attachment with a parent allows children to express emotion effectively and develop strong self-regulatory skills. Moreover, studies of attachment highlight the importance of the child's behaviour, including reactivity and responsiveness, in helping to shape the attachment relationship.

Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) state that parents and teachers working together can produce more effective changes in a learner's behaviour than either party can when grappling with the problem alone. Parental involvement can make a great and quick progress in learning and development of a child. Kristensen, Omagor-Loican, Onen and Okot (2006) argue that many parents did not visit their children once they had been admitted to a special school, neither did they take the children home on school vacations. Yet families have a major contribution to make to children's education.

Further affirmation by Al-Shammari and Yawkey (2008) is that clearly, learners with special needs can be impacted greatly by their informed parents who become involved with them in their special education programmes. Also, most parents of learners with special needs actively participate in school meetings and follow their children's progress in the special education programmes. In other words, these parents do participate and become involved themselves in their children's special education programmes. Al-Shammari and Yawkey (2008) also reveal that parents agree that their children benefit through these special education programmes.

These children's achievement and learning levels increase based on parental involvement, school improvement plans, and special education teachers' rich strategies for engaging parents in meetings, activities, projects, and decisions. However, all administrators, teachers, and others in special education programmes should concentrate as parents across the age spectrum as well. This study shows the benefits of particular parents with special needs children who did become involved and participated in these special programmes.

The research results also show that parents who are in specific age groups might be less likely to participate and involve themselves in their children's special education programmes. This result suggests a need to develop additional strategies for engaging younger as well as more mature parents in these special education programmes to foster parental involvement in special education schools.

Based on the results of this study several recommendations were made to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education (KMOE), school administrators as well as universities training pre-service teacher educators. First, school members (e.g., faculty, administrators) of special education programmes affiliated with KMOE should be aware of the mean age of parents in this sample. The characteristics of these family and employment experienced parents as a discrete 41 age group on the average tended to show lower levels of involvement in their children's special education programmes compared to parents less mature with less work experiences.



Second, establishing institutions need definitely to help improve, update and improve parents' understandings of the various disabilities and their characteristics of these disabilities shown by these learners with special needs. In direct relation to his research study, parents of children with special needs need to be trained in the key achievement indicators and learning benchmarks that demonstrate improvements of these learners. Parents of children with disabilities need to know clearly the steps in improvements that are possible and can be made with their children.

Third, KMOE should require all majors in university colleges to offer courses related to learners with special education needs and provide programmes to educate parents in the society. Fourth, KMOE's administrators and teachers should plan important strategies, activities, and projects that entice parents to increase their involvement in their children' special education programmes. This Kuwait's study is related to the South African studies conducted by Weeks and Erradu (2013) and Stephinah (2014), where they emphasize the importance of teacher training in special education and parental involvement. The benefits for parent involvement with children of special needs impact families, society and the country.

Surujlal and Dhurup (2009) approach the role of parental involvement from a recreational angle of children with intellectual disabilities. The focus was on children with special educational needs; that is, those who are intellectually disabled and experience learning difficulties. The purpose was to assess the role of parents in the recreational activities of their children and the extent to which parents of intellectually disabled children are involved in the recreational activities of their children. Surujlal and Dhurup (2009) found that despite the many incentives and opportunities to get involved, many parents did not take advantage of those opportunities which provide the platform to create a symbiotic relationship between teachers and parents. Surujlal and Dhurup (2009) further suggest that it is imperative that teachers at the school create opportunities for them and parents to consult regularly in order to develop innovative ideas to improve the quality of the lives of the children through the medium of recreation. They further recommend that parents be

involved with teachers and children in all aspects of recreation activities, from the planning to the implementation.

Weiss, Viecili, Sloman and Lunsky (2013) in the study of direct and indirect psychosocial outcomes for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their following a parent-involved social skills group intervention, they found that many parent-involved social skills training groups (SSTGs) report improvements in some aspect of child social skills and in child internalizing and externalizing symptoms, self-esteem and emotional self-regulation.

Waters (2014) in the study of the Story Links: working with parents of pupils at risk of exclusion, targeted the special educational needs (SEN) registered as a result of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD's) and poor literacy and as the most vulnerable children in our schools. The findings show a significant increase in parental involvement in their child's learning and improvement in both behaviour and attitudes to learning. Steer cited in Waters (2014) highlights the role of parents in supporting both children's behaviour and their academic attainment. It points out that while there are few parents who do not want the best for their children, some may not have the confidence to engage with the school and some may feel alienated from school as a result of their own educational experience (Waters, 2014).

Dumciene and Sukys (2014) feel that the parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) are not enough involved in their children's education at home and especially at school, which would empower their children for education. They further note that most parents are involved in the education of learners with SEN at home, but they are little involved in the education process at school and other school activities. Less than one-third of parents actually feel equal partners when communicating with teachers, but among them only 63.9% of parents were with higher education. Parents who communicate with teachers feel equal partners, they will more likely engage in ongoing school activities and teachers more often cooperate with them. This kind of communication will be looked at in the next paragraphs on the role played by teachers in empowering learners with psychosocial skills.

## **2.4 The role of teachers**

Milsom (2006) argues that schools can help learners develop tolerance and respect for differences by teaching empathy and anger-management skills and promoting respect for others via the general curriculum. Commonwealth of Australia as cited by Pearce (2009) clearly states that learners with disabilities should not only have physical access to regular schools, but should be able to access the curriculum as well. Pearce (2009) further notes that some of the literature on inclusion argues that teachers need training in special education to include learners with disabilities while other researchers and academics propose that inclusion is simply a matter of good teaching practice.

Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely and Danielson (2010) in the study on Special Education Teacher Quality and Preparation trace changes in conceptions of special education teacher quality and preparation in response to developments in special education research, policy, and practice. This developmental arc is a backdrop for understanding contemporary special education practice and charting future directions for preparing special education teachers. Federal policy, and recent research on teaching and learning, and the response-to-intervention (RTI) movement require a shift in thinking about how to prepare quality special education teachers and the expertise they need to be effective. Brownell et al. (2010) affirm that to function effectively in RTI and fulfil federal highly qualified teacher requirements, special education teachers should master an increasingly complex knowledge base and sophisticated repertoire of instructional practices. They further contend that pre-service preparation is inadequate for this purpose and that preparation for special education teaching should build upon an existing knowledge base and demonstrated competence in classroom practice.

According to Brownell et al. (2010) the changes they propose for improving the quality and preparation of special education teachers are lofty and dramatic and difficult to attain. However, the risks of failing to improve the

quality of instruction are unacceptable. The ability of many learners with disabilities to access the general education curriculum and make adequate annual yearly progress depends on the skill and motivation of their teachers. Learners with disabilities continue to lag well behind their peers. Requiring special education teachers to become highly qualified in the subjects they teach prior to entering the classroom offers less promise as a solution to this problem than recruiting highly qualified general education teachers into special education. Good general education teachers know content and how to teach it, and they are skilled collaborators. They have a framework for understanding and integrating the specialized knowledge they acquire in preparing for RTI and so will be better positioned to meet the needs of learners with disabilities. Of course, encouraging general education teachers to become special educators necessitates fundamental reform in school practice, incentives for teachers, and teacher education.

Cowdery (2012) believes that teachers can play an important role in building the self-esteem and creating an environment in which learners can begin to exercise democratic principles and empowerment. But teachers, too, should feel empowered before they have the confidence to hand over the keys to learners to drive their own education. Without teachers having the confidence to give up the need to control all aspects of learning, learners cannot try, fail and succeed. Both failure and success build learning confidence. Empowering teachers can foster learner empowerment in several ways, firstly, by allowing learners to follow through on their original ideas and solve complex problems. Secondly, it can make learners to be more committed to their own learning. Encouraging and equipping learners with essential skills lead to empowerment (Cowdery, 2012). The teacher-child relationship plays a significant role in facilitating social skill development. Numerous studies have found that warm teacher-child relationships are associated with high levels of cooperation, social competence, and learning-related skills in early childhood and elementary school.

According to McAllister and Hadjri (2013) school is the place where children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and others with special educational

needs (SEN) can be helped to encounter and learn to cope with new challenges or situations in a supportive environment. This can be extremely valuable, as it can then better prepare the learners for later life in the ever-changing and unpredictable world outside school.

The findings of the study conducted by Kudliskis (2013) on neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and altered states: encouraging preparation for learning in classroom for students with special educational needs suggest that visualisation interventions to change a state of mind from a negative state to a positive state can help with learning, particularly when working with learners with mild special educational needs and in relatively small groups reflecting a similarity to those in this study. The outcome suggests that where a strategy such as a guided walk is utilised in the classroom, a desired state can be achieved. In this study, achieving a desired state quickly led to learners complying with instructions and completing class-based tasks and activities quickly and effectively. It could be that the desired state was achieved due to tonality, in that visualisation interventions such as guided walks require a change in voice tone to initiate the process and it could be this that leads to state change. This suggests it is the visualisation of the guided walk that is responsible for state change rather than voice tonality.

Kudliskis (2013) concludes that this study suggests that visualisation techniques and the concept of altering state associated with NLP can lead to behaviours that are more conducive to teaching and learning.

In the study conducted by Tzanakaki, Grindle, Saville, Hastings, Hughes and Huxley (2014) of teaching mathematics to children with autism using Maths Recovery manual found out that the adapted Maths Recovery numeracy curriculum was successfully incorporated within each child's individualised teaching programme and children improved their mathematical ability over the course of the intervention.

Tzanakaki et al. (2014) affirm that the structured layout of the manual and the systematic data collection made it possible for the teaching staff both identify a child's difficulty with specific skill and to accommodate it by adjusting the

teaching procedure. They further note that the generalisation step ensured that the children could perform mastered skills using various materials, in different settings and with different members of the staff. They also affirm that another positive aspect was that motivation for working was kept at high level by the use of the token systems. Tzanakaki et al. (2014) conclude that teachers working with children with autism should revisit mastered targets from time to time and ensure their maintenance. These findings could indicate that teachers play a crucial role in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills which is what this study hopes to achieve.

According to the study conducted by Tekinarslan and Kucuker (2015) on examination of the psychometric properties of the Children's Loneliness Scale (CLS) for learners with and without special needs in inclusive classrooms, early detection of loneliness in children, especially children with special needs who are at greater risk for loneliness, is crucial for planning appropriate interventions. The study notes that dissatisfaction from peer relations at school is considered to be one of the important factors that may lead to loneliness and that children who cannot form positive social relationships with peers are at greater risk for loneliness.

Tekinarslan and Kucuker (2015) affirm that studies show that learners with special needs in inclusive classrooms have more difficulties in relationships with their peers and have higher levels of social dissatisfaction than their peers. Therefore, it is important to identify the loneliness levels of learners with special needs and implement intervention programmes to eliminate loneliness in the learners who are at a greater risk for loneliness in order to prevent the short and long-term negative effects of loneliness on children's psycho-social adjustment. They further state that the findings regarding the validity and reliability of the CLS in the current study show that the scale is an instrument that can be used to assess levels of loneliness in 4th and 5th grade learners with or without special needs. The CLS can be used in studies that examine direct and mediating factors contributing to loneliness in children. Especially in educational settings, the effectiveness of social skills

training programmes on eliminating loneliness in children who have high levels of loneliness can be evaluated by the CLS.

## **2.5 Partnership between teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners**

Supporting the academic success of learners with disabilities and other special needs is necessary to help them thrive in their adult lives. There should be a feeling of respect, trust, and partnership between learners, parents, and teachers. In such an environment, learners will be given the opportunity to express themselves, and their self-determination will rise, knowing that they can make a difference (Cushing, 1994). By empowering learners to make choices, teachers can help lessen learner feelings of powerless. Teachers, parents and learners together can create a list of choices, but the learner, whenever possible, makes the final selection.

Forlin and Hopewell (2006) note that the importance of parental choice and parents' participation in educational processes continue to be highlighted in strategies, acts and policies around the world. Partnership with parents is given an even higher profile in relation to educational opportunities for children with special needs. Yet many trainee teachers have only limited understandings of the impact on family life of a child with special needs; are uncertain how best to work with parents; and are not confident about the choices that parents may wish to make for their children.

Forlin and Hopewell (2006) conclude that the depth of reflection of the comments from the trainee teachers and the anticipation that they could also make a difference if they were prepared to engage in a meaningful way with parents augers well for future collaborative partnerships. Providing that such partnerships are enacted out of a sense of need and a genuine willingness to engage on an equal footing, rather than a purely mechanical response to legislation, such collaboration has the potential to result in an empowerment model that will enable parents and teachers each to bring a different range of

expertise, knowledge, understandings and competence, that may truly enhance the further development of inclusive and democratic school communities.

## **2.6 Programmes aimed at empowering special needs learners**

Coates and Vickerman (2010) also examine in their study the perspectives of children with special educational needs (SEN) attending both mainstream and special schools in relation to their experiences of physical education (PE). The findings demonstrate that children with SEN in both mainstream and special schools enjoy PE, although issues were raised in mainstream schools regarding bullying and the appropriateness of activities in PE lessons. The findings show how children offered suggestions about how to improve PE and make it more beneficial. The findings identified how children are empowered through consultation, and are aware of their needs and abilities. The study concludes that as such it is evident that schools and those supporting inclusive physical activity for children with SEN should use consultation as a tool for empowering pupils as a means of providing them with choices while gaining a rich insight into their lived experiences of PE. Finally, the research indicates that children with SEN are empowered by the opportunity to propose ways to improve PE. Similarly, other studies indicate that children with SEN are empowered by the opportunity to have their opinions heard and taken seriously. Findings show that suggested changes were not SEN specific, but could be representative of all children. Other studies (for example, Cushing 1994; Austin 2000; Cowdery 2012 & Tzanakaki et al, 2014) also argue that while it is sometimes not possible to implement changes, it is important for schools to work alongside children to develop strategies to improve learning.

Metlife Foundation (2014) affirms that providing inclusive learning environments in and out of school gives learners with disabilities and other special needs the opportunity to take part in activities that support their development, encourage perseverance and highlight their capabilities. Afterschool programmes create a safe space where learners of all abilities



can learn and grow side-by-side, respecting and appreciating one another's similarities and differences. The flexible and adaptable nature of afterschool programmes make them a valuable source of support for all learners, including learners with disabilities and other special needs, helping them reach their full potential in school, in work and in life.

In the study conducted by Zhang and Wu (2012) exploring issues related to spirituality and disabilities, and the relationship between spirituality and education for learners with special needs, they make implications for educational programmes that by incorporating spiritual elements such as beauty, truth, wonder and goodness into the curriculum, teachers can foster the children's inner life and spiritual curiosity. For example, through art, learners with special needs can express their own inner world and join in the celebration of life, developing a sense of reverence for creation. Through expressive arts such as sculpture, painting, drama and dance, learners can explore chosen activities that engage their spirit and senses, while at the same time expand the ways in which they know and experience the world. Even children with severe special needs are able to create their own musical expressions by singing, humming, chanting or using toys or instruments. Play can also become spiritual when a child is allowed to follow his or her natural interests freely, using toys and materials as an expression of the soul. They further note that stories and literature can capture the imagination, heart and mind of children. Meaningful literature can be used to stimulate, enrich and touch a child's inner life. Stories, when used appropriately, allow children to learn about themselves and others by appealing to both intellect and heart.

Zhang and Wu (2012) believe that there are many children's books that contain spiritual elements of love, kindness, wonder and magic; others directly encompass principles of spirituality such as the cycle of birth, life and death. Inspiring books and stories can become powerful tools to develop an individual's self-concept, to provide a way for a person to find interest outside their self, to improve reading comprehension and to foster emotional and spiritual development.

They also affirm that social and emotional skills help learners with disabilities understand their unique personalities, strengths and weaknesses. Programmes and activities that teach learners life management skills in all aspects will help them live a balanced life and grow spiritually. For instance, teachers can integrate spirituality into the social skills lessons, using parables and stories from different faiths as examples to teach morality. Learners can bring in lyrics from popular songs and critique them from the point of view of the Ten Commandments.

Zhang and Wu (2012) conclude by confirming that though the role of spirituality in special education is a recent phenomenon, its discussion has the potential to contribute to the field of diversity and education for children with disability. Since spirituality is an integral element of learner development and learning, teachers and other professionals working with learners with disabilities need to acknowledge and honour the spiritual dimension of life and see beyond the physical and academic aspects of disability. Looking at the teaching/learning process and special needs through a holistic lens reveals a different view of the classroom and of the interaction between teacher and learner, giving teachers opportunities to touch and foster the inner growth of learners with special needs. Therefore, work in addressing issues related to spirituality and the implications it brings for working with learners with disabilities need to be given serious consideration.

Zhang (2013) suggests that teachers working with special needs children should firstly recognise that spiritual life is an important dimension in the growth of children with and without disabilities alike, and that they have the unique opportunity to facilitate sacred experiences for children with special needs as pathways to growth, transformation, and healing. Secondly, while providing interventions for learners with special needs, it is important for teachers to attend to the sense of having a purpose and meaning, provide social support/psychological support, and facilitate positive change in children with disabilities. The following sections suggest some practical strategies that are appropriate for most kindergarten and elementary classrooms in both special and general education settings (since many learners with special

needs are taught in general education classes for the major part of their school day), and can be easily adapted (and used by both the special education teachers and the general education teachers) for learners with special needs as well as for children without disabilities.

Zhang (2013) notes that the literature also indicates that the spirituality of people with disabilities can be a valuable source of social and psychological support. Benefits of good quality spiritual care include: improved relationships, with self, others and with God/creation/nature; and a new sense of meaning, resulting in a reawakening of hope and peace of mind, enabling people to accept and live with problems not yet resolved. Many have also found that spiritual care helps one experience a feeling of belonging and being valued, a sense of safety, respect, and dignity. Zhang further believes that to provide the social and psychological support that learners with disabilities need, information should be given to help them make informed spiritual choices. Support should also be provided to help them make and sustain meaningful friendships. Furthermore, when developing a programme to address spirituality for learners with disabilities, it may be important to provide opportunities for learners to explore their sense of meaning and purpose. The child's spiritual life and psychological condition can help him or her discover coping strategies and learn to resolve personal problems.

According to Zhang (2013) although children often love to explore and inquire, for various reasons learners with disabilities often lack opportunities to explore natural environments and experience feelings such as awe, curiosity, and wonder; responses which form the basis of spiritual development. For many people, an appreciation of the beauty of the world around them enables them to make connections with important aspects of their lives. For example, encounters in natural environments such as wild places, forests, or meadows with plants and animals can foster spiritual sensitivities and help children to learn qualities such as empathy and compassion. Therefore, outdoor exploration has a vital part to play in developing spiritual awareness in children with disabilities. It is also important to help the child reflect between self and the world, connecting between what has been taught and how it

relates to the world. Zhang further argues that habits such as stillness and reflection may not come naturally to children (both those with and without disabilities); nevertheless, they can be acquired over a period of time in an atmosphere of trust and encouragement. Over time, even young children can enjoy moments of calm in a relaxing atmosphere by sitting still, breathing deeply, and listening to soft music. Just like their peers without disabilities, children with special needs should be allowed to ask big questions about life. In fact, questions about values, morality, belief and behaviour, and the meaning and purpose of their lives in light of their disabilities help them.

Zhang (2013) also notes that children with special needs also have their own values and goals, and teachers should recognise their needs and limitations beyond their emotional/physical disabilities. Children can be encouraged to talk about important things and people in their lives, aspirations, and dreams. Learners with disabilities often need help viewing their disabilities with perspective and finding their own unique calling and purposes. Learners should also be encouraged to talk about their religious beliefs, values, and how they see themselves as someone with special needs. Spiritual reflections such as these can help increase learners' self-understanding and acceptance. This can be done in one-on-one or small group settings where a good rapport has been established among the teachers and children. Zhang concludes in his article by arguing that looking at the teaching/learning process and special needs through a holistic lens gives teachers opportunities to foster the inner life of learners with disabilities. Therefore, this article calls for attention to the potential role of spirituality in interventions and the significance of spiritual development in the life of children with special needs.

## **2.7 History of special need learner's empowerment in South Africa**

In 2008, the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (NSSIAS) was launched, providing strategies for educators to implement the main elements of an inclusive education system in a collaborative working relationship with parents and learners. The aim of this

policy is to improve access to quality education in South Africa, and include teachers, parents and learners in the process of assessment, as a process to provide clarity on the support each learner requires, as well as provide guidelines for learners admission to special education environment, aiding in the placement of learners in the least restrictive environment (Department of Education, 2008).

Weeks and Erradu (2013) in the study of how teachers can support the intellectually impaired Foundation-phase learners argue that the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (NSSIAS) document focuses mainly on support packages for learners who do not have cognitive barriers to learning, with the result that teachers at these special schools and special school-resource centres have been left to develop their own innovative ideas in designing support programmes and differentiating the curriculum for learners who experience severe intellectual barriers to learning. The findings show that teachers do provide high levels of support to foundation-phase learners who experience severe intellectual barriers to learning.

Weeks and Erradu (2013) further suggest that additional support in terms of curriculum differentiation is vital if the learner is to succeed, since these learners need high levels of support. With regards to the use of learning and teaching-support materials (LTSM), the study concurs that LTSM are being used by teachers to provide high levels of support to learners who experience severe intellectual barriers to learning, which can take many forms that are adapted to suit the learner's needs. They include books, magazines, newspapers, posters, worksheets, picture cards, games, puzzles, calculators, toys, embossed diagrams, models, puppets, drama therapy, videos and computers. Weeks and Erradu conclude that it is imperative that teachers who are employed at special schools are suitably qualified in special-needs education and strongly recommend that universities and teacher training colleges include courses or modules on special-needs education or barriers to learning in their teaching qualifications. Every teacher who graduates as a

professional should be able to recognise barriers to learning, and be skilled in teaching at a special school (Weeks & Erradu, 2013).

According to Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (KZN Dept. of Education, 2005) learner support will be provided on three levels. Low- intensive support will be provided for learners at ordinary schools; while moderate support will be provided at full-service schools. High-intensive support will be provided at special schools/ special school-resource centres. To determine the level of support required, the needs of the learner, the teacher, the school and the system have to be taken into consideration (KZN Department of Education, 2005).

The Guidelines to Ensure Quality Education and Support: Special Schools as Resource Centres informs parents of their rights and this information should be disseminated to parents to empower them in their decision-making and involvement in their child's education (Department of Education, 2005). In the study conducted by Stephinah (2014) it appears that both parents and teachers have the educational mandate to empower children with intellectual disabilities through education although in South Africa empowerment is still a national problem. Stephinah (2014) notes that recognising individuals with disabilities as people first should be fully embedded in the education system and society in general. Stephinah's study found that there is a lack of important facilities; teachers were not trained to teach in special schools; male teachers were fewer than female teachers; learners with severe, moderate and mild disabilities were accommodated in one class and not much parent involvement in some schools, especially in rural areas. Children with intellectual disabilities find it difficult to perform various functions such as communicating and socialising with others, and in many situations, even looking after themselves. Stephinah (2014) further suggests that when these individuals are made to feel good about them, the stage is set for effective learning. A supportive environment where there is collaboration amongst teachers, parents and community and learner support teachers is key to success (Stephinah, 2014).

## **2.8 International studies of special needs learner's empowerment**

Hegarty (2000) affirms that learners with severe to profound mental retardation (intellectual disability) need an extensive and pervasive array of support to fully participate in everyday learning situations, community events, adaptive skills, self-determination, and social relationships.

Kincaid and Jackson (2006) in their study on how teachers learn to use problem based learning (PBL) units as a tool to empower learners with special needs to become more confident, independent, successful learners, they found that learners benefit from adding real life learning situations to their traditional classroom learning and the goal of PBL unit was to enable the learners to solve real-life problems outside of the classroom, a skill that will enable learners to be successful in their careers and personal lives. They also found out that learners who always had a passive role in their education prior to the study, later, became leaders. Learners who had histories of problem behaviours and hostile personalities became caring and compassionate classmates. Learners who normally had poor academic performances were given a chance to shine under the admiration of classmates whose challenges were more severe than theirs.

The inclusive teacher does not pretend the learner does not have a disability but helps the other learners understand and support their peer. This could require the learner with a disability, parents, a teacher or a disability support group providing peers with information about the learner's disability and ways they can assist the learner.

Kristensen, Omagor-Loican, Onen and Okot (2006) conducted the study on the education of learners with special educational needs and disabilities in special schools in Uganda; they found that many parents did not visit their children once they had been admitted to a special school, neither did they take the children home on school vacations. Yet families have a major contribution to make to children's education. Partnership can only be built up if

both professionals and families themselves respect this contribution and understand the part they can play. Kristensen et al. (2006) argue that if the segregation of learners with disabilities is to be accepted, it should be under the condition that special school teachers are able to meet each learner's individual and special educational needs in a specifically designed manner. This study has indicated that 34% of the teachers in the 15 special schools did not have any training in special needs education and that 8% of the teachers were untrained. The educational methods used were not geared to meeting the individual learner's special needs. In classes with two teachers, the extra teacher was not occupied with training or teaching individual learners. Only eight of the 15 schools used individual educational programmes for some of the learners with severe disabilities. They further suggest that class teachers need to be prepared to adapt their own teaching methods and to modify the curriculum so that all learners could have access to learning (Kristensen et al, 2006).

Kristensen et al, (2006) further recommend that strengthening the quality of work in special schools will involve developing procedures for the proper assessment of learners; offering comprehensive programmes for each learner, including life-skills training; and providing appropriate learning materials, assistive devices and hearing aids, which should be maintained and adjusted to suit the individual learner. To ensure that teachers are able to provide high quality education services after the completion of their training at the Faculty of Special Needs and Rehabilitation in Kyambogo University, the component of educational methods in the curriculum for training teachers in special needs education should be adjusted and further developed. Further, tutors trained in special needs education should be recruited and deployed in Primary Teachers' Colleges (PTCs) to ensure that all newly-trained teachers have knowledge about inclusive and special needs education.

Pearce (2009) notes that inclusive teachers accept responsibility to teach all the children in their classes rather than try to give it to an assistant or recommend that the learner with disabilities selects another course. They believe that all learners learn so have high expectations. Accordingly,



opportunities are created for everyone to succeed. Successful learning builds the self-esteem and status of the learners amongst their peers. Learners can improve their status when they are given responsibilities in the classroom, leadership roles or age-appropriate praise. The inclusive teacher celebrates even small achievements. They do not blame the child for failing but change their teaching methods or strategies until they find one which works. Their understanding of inclusion motivates the inclusive teacher to devote the extra time and effort required to differentiate the curriculum or support the learners.

Having a learner with a disability in the class does not mean that the child's needs are the most important or that they have to dominate the learning activities of the class. The needs of all the learners and how the teacher can support everyone in the class are considered.

The study conducted by Hussein (2010) found that one of the requirements when designing a special school is to provide an accessible outdoor environment, which emphasises multi-sensory experiences for therapy, educational and recreational use. Having an accessible school ground, for example a playground or a sensory garden, is highly important for children to give them the opportunity for free play and choices for exploration and learning. They also value an environment that can provide them privacy. Four elements identified that children looked for in school grounds: a place for doing (opportunities for physical activities); a place for thinking (opportunities for intellectual stimulation); a place for feeling (to provoke a sense of belonging); and a place for being (to allow them to be themselves). The study focused on the value of improved school grounds as an educational resource to demonstrate how children's attitudes, behaviours and learning skills could be enriched.

According to Hussein (2010) having a multi-sensory environment in special schools is beneficial for both teachers and pupils as it provides a two way learning process. External spaces can provide opportunities for observation, investigation and problem-solving and form a flexible facility often more readily adaptable to change in user requirements than the building itself. They

can offer a stimulating environment suited to practical activities from which many pupils with special needs can benefit. Among the other special benefits of having outdoor areas in special schools is that they can assist in reducing aggressive behaviour and bullying. Outdoor areas can also be used as a setting for counselling sessions and thus they encourage positive behavioural change.

Hussein concludes that multi-sensory environments are used by individuals with all kinds of disabilities in special schools where this offers them the opportunity to engage in self-stimulating activities. It is clear that sensory gardens were used in an educational context to stimulate the senses, to increase tactile qualities to support way finding and mobility, to encourage behavioural changes and social interaction as well as to support their mental development, hence renewing their functioning through engaging with and responding to the environment. These observed positive developments are important in outdoor environmental education; for example, plants found in both school settings encouraged a greater understanding of and exploration by users, afforded easy way finding and generated activities. Thus, children with special educational needs recognised the functional properties of their outdoor environment. However, if these needs are not met, users may feel frustrated and even threatened; thus it will add to their fears and apprehension.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, sensory gardens should be incorporated in the design of special schools as part of their sensory learning curriculum. Design of the sensory garden should be considered during the pre-planning stage of the special school development, which would allow the architect, teachers and therapists to allocate space to the sensory garden and to see it as an extension of the school's indoor classroom rather than just as an outdoor space.

In Australia, the study conducted by Weiss, Viecili, Sloman and Lunsky (2013) of direct and indirect psychosocial outcomes for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their following a parent-involved social skills group

intervention, found that many parent-involved social skills training groups (SSTGs) report improvements in some aspect of child social skills and in child internalizing and externalizing symptoms, self-esteem and emotional self-regulation (Weiss et al, 2013).

Foley (2013) argues that many parents are raising children whose mental, physical, cognitive, emotional, or developmental issues diminish their capacity to be educated in the same ways as other children. Over six million of these children receive special education services under mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, called the IDEA. Once largely excluded from public education, these children are now entitled to a free appropriate public education, or FAPE. Foley argues that the promise of the IDEA cannot be realized unless more attention is paid to the child's parents. Under the IDEA, as in life, the intermediary between the child and the educational system is the child's parent. The law appears to empower parents to participate in the planning, execution, and revision of the child's individual educational plan. The experience of parents, however, is often not empowering, to the detriment of both child and parent. Instead, many parents confront school systems that fail to support parental competence or help parents conserve their resources.

Foley (2013) further proposes three significant reforms to the special education system that better serve the needs of parents while improving the chances that children in need of special education will receive it. The three reforms are: (1) requiring schools to help parents be in touch with each other; (2) requiring school systems to commit to common special educational plans through a public process; and (3) adopting universal design pedagogies in general education when practicable. Although the most expensive of the three proposals is the preference for universal design pedagogies, the most controversial is requiring school systems to commit to common special educational plans for similarly-situated children. If the proposal were adopted, every child with the same problem would be provided with the same educational plan. The individualized plan now mandated would be provided

only where a child's situation is an uncommon one. None of the proposed reforms is cost-free.

Foley (2013) concludes by demonstrating that the costs of parent-oriented reforms are justified in order to comply with congressional expectations, for reasons of pragmatism, and to advance social justice for parents with special needs children as compared with other parents and with each other.

The study conducted by Bell, Hirvonen, Kukemelk, Pancocha, Vadurova, and Hion (2014) of examining the changing role of the special educational needs (SEN) teachers in vocational education and training (VET) from Finland, England, The Czech Republic and Estonia found that in inclusive education, special educational needs (SEN) teachers are expected to adjust their work patterns according to new demands. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether more attention should be paid to reviewing current training and working practices in the field. The requirements of inclusive teaching clearly expand SEN teacher's work from that of traditional class teachers towards consultation, support and interaction with colleagues and other stakeholders. The authors suggest that there is a need for transparent and thorough discussion by international stakeholders in order to maintain the professional position of SEN teachers in VET and, at the same time, advance in developing new work roles (Bell et al. 2014).

The study conducted by Arrah and Swain (2014) gives a deeper understanding of secondary teachers' perceptions of students with special educational needs (SEN) in Cameroon. Arrah and Swain (2014) note that teachers have a positive perception of learners with special educational needs. However, the lack of support from principals, insufficient resources, and lack of skills in working with learners with special education needs some consideration. This research points to the issues that impact the effectiveness of inclusive education in Cameroon. With a positive perception of learners with SEN, secondary school teachers can play a significant role in educating all learners in an inclusive environment if they have the resources, skills, and support that they need in their classrooms. Gender played a significant role in

the results of this research; it showed that male and female teachers perceive the challenges of working with learners with SEN differently (Arrah & Swain, 2014).

Since most of the teachers surveyed had not taken a course in special education, the study recommends that the universities should include a course in the educator and administrator preparation, and that current teachers receive professional development on strategies for serving students with SEN. In order to achieve an effective inclusive education in Cameroon, the recommendations from this research need to be taken into consideration. Awareness among teachers and school administrators on the need for more support can be a motivating factor for the government and other stakeholders in Cameroon to consider some positive action to support students with special education needs (Arrah & Swain, 2014).

## **2.9 Summary**

Studies on the role played by parents and teachers in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills have been conducted for decades. Most studies affirm that parents and teachers play crucial role in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills, although few studies were conducted in South Africa. Partnership between parents and teachers also affirms to be the most important thing in empowering special needs learners in all aspects. Through supportive environment learners with special needs feel empowered and can be encouraged and reach their own individual potential. Programmes that are created make them feel confident to contribute to the society as equal citizens of the country. It is noted in most studies that in order for special needs learners to be empowered, teachers need training in special education and parents to be involved in decision making concerning the learner since they are partners in the learner's education.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter constitutes an essential part of any research process. It covers an overview of methodology used in the study. The discussion in the chapter is structured around the research design, research method, research instruments, data collection and data analysis. Ethical considerations and measures to provide trustworthiness are also discussed.

#### **3.2 Research design**

Qualitative case study research served as the main design for this study. A qualitative research approach was considered suitable because it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative researchers focus on describing and understanding phenomena within their naturally occurring context (naturalistic context) with the intention of developing an understanding of the meaning(s) imparted by the respondents so that the phenomenon can be described in terms of the meaning that they have for the participants (Maree, 2007). The researcher selected a case study design on the basis of a thorough, holistic and in-depth exploration of the aspects that she wanted to find out about. It is a very useful design when exploring an area where little is known or where the researcher wants to have a holistic understanding of the situation, phenomenon, episode, site, group or community (Kumar, 2014).

Teachers and parents who are the participants were selected using purposive sampling and data were collected through in-depth interviews.

### **3.3 Research method**

The case study methodology was chosen with the purpose of having a holistic view of how teachers and parents empower special needs learners with psychosocial skills and to answer the research questions. Kumar (2014) notes that case study is a useful design when exploring an area where little is known or where the researcher wants to have a holistic understanding of the situation, phenomenon, episode, site, group or community. From an interpretive perspective, the typical characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a comprehensive (holistic) understanding of how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon under study (Maree, 2007).

#### **3.3.1 Sample size**

In qualitative design, the sample size depends on the qualitative design being used (Creswell, 2014). The initial plan was to interview twenty participants (ten teachers and ten parents) who were requested to participate in the study. Only eight parents were available for interviews since two later declined. Again, out of the ten teachers (two males and eight females) that were contacted, all agreed initially to participate but one later declined leaving nine. The withdrawal of the other participants did not have a significant impact on the data generation process.

The sample ultimately comprised of two male and seven female (nine) teachers since one declined. The other eight participants were parents of children with special needs enrolled in the school.

#### **3.3.2 Sampling technique**

The purpose of sampling in qualitative research is designed to gain in-depth knowledge either about situation, event or episode or about different aspects of an individual on assumption that the individual is typical of the group and

hence will provide insight into the group (Kumar, 2014). The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants that would best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2014). The researcher has chosen a convenience non-probability sampling design. The selection criteria were based on the school's potential to add to the understanding of the processes and procedures used to empower special needs learners with psychosocial skills. The selection of participants for this study was based on a strategy referred to as purposeful selection which can provide the researcher as far as possible with the detailed, accurate and complete information that she is looking for (Kumar, 2014). Hence, the researcher was guided by convenience and judgement in the selection of participants. Selecting teachers and parents to be interviewed for this study was purposeful, in that teachers are the ones who teach special needs learners and are brought to school by their parents to be empowered. It was convenient for the researcher to easily access the potential respondents because of their geographical proximity and their known contacts. The researcher made sure that this sample of parents and teachers was interested to participate. The teachers provided information and helped in contacting parents who were involved in the study. Rural special school was selected and used as the most convenient site of data collection and to ensure rich and required source of information for the study. One of the reasons to select a rural school was based on the resources available in such or similar settings.

Out of the ten parents (one male and nine female) that were contacted, all agreed initially to participate but later two declined leaving eight. The researcher recruited nine teachers from all phases (i.e. Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phase) in the school but one declined leaving nine. Their withdrawal did not have a significant impact on the data generation process.



### **3.4 Data collection procedures**

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZNDOE) was approached with the request to grant permission to conduct the present study. Once the permission was granted by the KZNDOE, contact was then made with the relevant school as well as the governing body in order to obtain their permission to conduct the study on the school premises. Teachers for the school and parents for special needs learners who are enrolled in the school were identified most suitable for the present study.

The researcher collected data from primary sources who are teachers and parents. The purpose and relevance of the study were explained to potential respondents for the quality of data required. The researcher made sure that the participants clearly understood the purpose and relevance of the study.

#### **3.4.1 Research instruments**

##### **3.4.1.1 Interviews**

During this study, in-depth phenomenological interviews were held with individual participants to assist the researcher in identifying the role they play in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills. The semi-structured interview schedule has been used to collect data in order to allow for probing and clarification of answers. It was also used because they are extremely useful in exploring intensively and extensively and digging deeper into a situation, phenomenon, issue or problem (Kumar, 2014).

As a first step in the interview process, the researcher reminded participants of the purpose of the study, research procedures, expected benefits, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and protection of confidentiality. The researcher also asked participants if they had any questions about the research study or research procedures. The interviews were conducted at the school and the time frame for conducting the interviews was three months. All interviews were conducted face to face and lasted from thirty to forty-five

minutes for the individual participant. With participant's approval, the researcher took handwritten notes during each interview which enabled her to track key points to return to later in the interview or to highlight ideas of particular interest or importance. The interviews were noted and transcribed for analysis.

Ten semi-structured interview questions were generated from the research questions and used for teachers and ten semi-structured interview questions were also used for parents who had special needs learners enrolled in the special school. The researcher used open-ended questions so that the participants could share their views. The researcher translated the English version of the interview questions into IsiZulu language so that interviewees (especially parents) could answer in the language with which they were most comfortable.

The themes included in the interviews were focused on the research question: what role do teachers and parents play in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills?

#### **3.4.1.2 Observations**

After the interviews, permission was obtained from the same teachers who were interviewed to observe a lesson in the classroom. Observation as a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place (Kumar, 2014) took place a week after the completion of the interviews in the respective classrooms (natural conditions). The researcher spent the whole day in each phase as a non-participant observer. As a non-participant observer, the researcher did not get involved in the activities of the group but remained passive, watching and listening to its activities and draw conclusions from it.

The behaviour of the learners was recorded on an observation schedule developed or designed by the researcher in order to rate various aspects of

the interaction or phenomenon (Kumar, 2014). It was noted that a range of varied behaviours were exhibited.

### **3.6 Validity and reliability**

The main aim of any research that is undertaken is that the results should be valid and reliable. According to Guba and Lincoln cited in Kumar (2014), trustworthiness in a qualitative study is determined by four indicators closely related to validity and reliability: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In establishing the validity in qualitative research, credibility seemed to be the only indicator of internal validity and is judged by the degree of respondent concordance with the findings (Kumar, 2014). The research instruments designed by the researcher used in the study were given to the experts in the field for verification in relation to the objectives of the study. The reliability of the research instruments used was assured by the responses from the individual participants when collecting the data. The research instruments used when collecting information were used more than once and got the same or similar responses or results under the same or similar conditions (Kumar, 2014). So, the instruments were considered reliable. In this qualitative research, validity and reliability was assured by the accuracy and credibility of the instruments used and their findings (Creswell, 2014).

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

The need for ethical considerations in research is most apparent in clinical research (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). The participants individually signed informed consent to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from the participants after the researcher has explain the purpose of the study and the procedures to be used since one of the essential components of all research is that of obtaining informed consent from participants. (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Participants were informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the study and that

their participation was voluntary. Participants were also assured that there was no risk or harm associated with their participation in the study. The researcher assured the participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of being part of the study. High standard of ethical behaviour was maintained throughout the study.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Data analysis entails gathering information, determining themes, allocating information into categories and ultimately, writing a qualitative report (Creswell, 2014). The study used content analysis technique to analyse data. Content analysis means analysing the contents of interviews or observational field notes in order to identify the main themes that emerge from the responses given by respondents or the observation notes made by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). In analysing the data, notes of the participants' responses were taken by the researcher with a view to write a more complete report (Huysamen, 2001) and aggregated into a small number of themes (Creswell, 2014). The researcher looked at the common themes from different interviewees. On the basis of the descriptions of the individuals' experiences, the researcher attempted to capture accurate essence of its contents and of the recurring themes which bind them together (Huysamen, 2001).

### **3.9 Summary**

The chapter elaborated on the type of research design and methodology used in the study. The sampling method, research instruments, data collection and analysis were discussed. Ethical considerations were also considered in conducting the study. The next section will pay much attention on the analysis of collected data and how it should be interpreted.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine the role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills. The following research questions informed the objectives of the study: (a) What role do teachers and parents play in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills?; (b) How do teachers and parents form partnership in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education?; and (c) What programme is there, if any which is aimed at empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in a special school? In this chapter the data obtained during semi-structured interviews and observations was analysed. The themes that emerged from individual interviews were presented, analysed and discussed qualitatively.

#### **4.2 Characteristics of the teacher participants**

All teachers who participated in the study consented and each of the nine teachers had the experience although few of them were new in the institution. The sample included teachers from different phases i.e. Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phases.

#### **4.3 Presentation of data**

##### **4.3.1 Individual interviews**

The purposes of the initial, group meetings were for the researcher and the participants to get to know each other before the individual interview started. The initial interviews were conducted with the teachers in the school who

have different qualifications and experience in special education. The table below provides the responses of teachers according to their gender, qualifications and experience:

**Table 1: Gender, qualifications and experience of participants**

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Experience</b>
Teacher 1	Female	Diploma in Education & courses in special education.	12 years
Teacher 2	Female	None	1 year, 3 months
Teacher 3	Male	None, only workshops in special education & registered.	13 years
Teacher 4	Female	Certificates in Special education & currently doing honours.	10 years
Teacher 5	Male	Certificates in special education.	8 years
Teacher 6	Female	Certificates in special education.	1 year, 10 months
Teacher 7	Female	No qualifications	5 months
Teacher 8	Female	Diploma in Education, diploma in Abet & currently registered for special education course.	6 years
Teacher 9	Female	Certificates in special education	18 years

### **Qualitative data**

Each participant's responses are presented below and the themes that emerged from the responses were identified in this section.

### **4.3.2 RESPONSES FROM TEACHERS**

Themes of similar responses were grouped together and make four themes. Sub-themes were formulated under each theme. The table below presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analytic process:

**Table 2: Themes and sub-themes**

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
4.3.2.1 Role of teachers in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- teaching and checking the strengths</li> <li>- role of reinforcement</li> <li>- teaching of skills e.g. sports</li> <li>- teaching discipline</li> </ul>
4.3.2.2 Programmes aimed at empowering special needs learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- school environmental educational programme (SEEP)</li> <li>- Isibindi programme</li> <li>- Printing programme</li> <li>-Alternative argumentative communication programme (AAC)</li> </ul>
4.3.2.3 Formation of partnership between teachers and parents	-Through discussions in formal and informal meetings
4.3.2.4 Teacher skills/training	-Level of teachers' training/qualifications

#### **4.4 Discussion of the results**

The following is the discussion of the results of the study.

##### **4.4.1 Emergent teachers' themes**

The themes from respondents were identified. This section will discuss the common themes identified in respect of the role played by teachers in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills. Themes will be

discussed using content analysis. The researcher will analyse identified themes in relations to the presented literature.

#### **4.4.1.1 Role of teachers in empowering special needs learners**

The literature consulted did give some indication that encouraging and equipping learners with essential skills leads to empowerment. Cowdery (2012) claims that learner's skills enable them to interact appropriately with other individuals and function within a socially meaningful context. Cowdery further maintains that learners who feel empowered by having psychosocial skills are more confident and exhibit more self-esteem. Forty four percent (44%) of the respondents revealed that their role is to teach special need learners psychosocial skills with an aim of empowering them to be independent, sociable, and presentable, also to be recognized by the community.

*“We teach learners basic skills to be able to be independent, socialize, presentable and so on. We also teach them other skills like singing, performing whatever activities, cultural festival performance, beadwork which they make for themselves so that they can be able to sell and get money”.*

One of the respondents said that:

*“The most important thing to the learners is to show them love so that they can be able to love and accept themselves and others”.*

The participant believes that by showing special needs learners love and accepts them, they are able to love and accept themselves as they are. In that sense they are empowered with psychosocial skills. Another view from one respondent in support of psychosocial skills teaching was that:



*“Another thing is to teach those skills that the community will recognize them and accept them as they are, for example, to move them from home environment to school environment such as toilet training. The important role is to make a shift in behaviour, discipline and so on”.*

On a more practical side, one respondent said that:

*“We teach learners basic skills to be able to be independent, socialize, presentable and so on”.*

Twenty two percent (22%) of the respondents (teachers) outlined that they teach skills to learners by focusing on the strengths in order to utilize them to overcome the weaknesses. The respondents indicated that they teach learners handwork if, for example, the learners are unable to write in order for them to acquire skills.

*“I teach special needs learners by checking on their strengths or on what the learner is able to do better and work on those strengths to overcome his/her weaknesses”.*

Coates and Vickerman (2010) affirms that children with special educational needs (SEN) in both mainstream and special schools enjoy physical education (PE) and are empowered by given the opportunity to propose ways to improve PE. Twenty two percent (22%) of the respondents revealed that they empower special needs learners through sports which most of the learners enjoy compared to in-door games.

*“I teach learners sports which will empower them to be able to participate and compete with others in any sports outside school”.*

Only eleven percent (11%) of the respondents (teachers) put emphasis on the role of discipline they instil to special needs learners which empower them to

love, respect and accept themselves and others so that they should be able to obey the rules outside school for future living.

*“I assist learners during lesson in progress to be disciplined and assist them in any activity that is done in class. By being disciplined in class, they are learning that in life people do not just do things in any way they like. There are rules that need to be followed”.*

The theme of discipline did not appear in many respondents, but was equally important because teaching discipline assist in moving learners from home environment to school environment, especially in Foundation phase. It was important to note that this theme was not found in any literature available to the current researcher. Learners are offered the opportunity to choose who to work well with and also to work independently depending on their disabilities. Looking at the efforts of teachers in teaching psychosocial skills, social learning theory plays a role since learners observe and imitate the teachers.

The table below provides the summary to support data presented above according to teacher’s role and percentage:

**Table 3: Teacher’s role in percentage**

<b>Teacher’s role</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Teaching learners to be independent, sociable, and presentable and be recognised by the society.	4	44,4%
Teaching skills and focus on the strengths to overcome weaknesses	2	22,2%
Empower learners through sports	2	22,2%
Teaching discipline	1	11,1%

#### **4.4.1.2 Programmes aimed at empowering special needs learners**

It emerged from the analysis of data that the most important thing for special needs learners to acquire psychosocial skills is to design programmes that are suitable for them to achieve this goal. These programmes depend on learners disabilities. At least four programmes were identified as they emerged from the data analysis process. Firstly, is a programme called school educational environmental programme (SEEP) which includes green vegetable garden, flower garden, cleanliness, recycling and so on. This programme enables teachers to observe different skills from learners such as creative arts. Secondly, it is a printing programme where learners are taught computer skills to put pictures and flowers in t-shirts and cups. Theoretically, teachers provide scaffolding by collaborating dialogue to assist learners on tasks within their zones of proximal development (ZPD) which is applied here. These kinds of skills that special needs learners acquire assist a lot to those learners who are lacking behind in class and empower them to be independent and recognised by the community. This theme was deducted from eighty nine percent (89%) of the respondents. Thirdly, only eleven percent (11%) of the respondents indicated the alternative argumentative communication (AAC) programme which caters for learners who are struggling with basic activities such as those with limited speech where they would indicate if, for example need to go to the restroom or to drink water.

*“There is also an AAC programme which assist more to those learners who have a limited speech, where they indicate if for example, want to go to the restroom or to drink water”.*

Fourthly, thirty three percent (33%) of the respondents outlined Isibindi programme where teachers display learner’s work for community to recognise it and buy or put orders.

*“There is also Isibindi programme where teachers sometimes take learners to let them display their work to be known by the community”.*

The learners skills are also recognised during closing functions when community and nearby schools are invited which serve the purpose of this study.

#### **4.4.1.3 Partnership between teachers and parents (teacher perspective)**

Cushing (1994) indicates that there should be a feeling of respect, trust, and partnership between learners, parents and teachers. Cushing further claims that supporting the academic success of learners with disabilities and other special needs is necessary to help them thrive in their adult lives. In such an environment, learners will be given the opportunity to express themselves, and their self-determination will rise, knowing that they can make a difference (Cushing, 1994). Almost hundred percent (100%) of the respondents asserted that partnership between teachers and parents is formed during parent's meetings where issues concerning children and school are discussed. They revealed that during the meetings, parents are able to check on their children's work and progress. Teachers, on the other hand get a chance to advice parents to encourage, support and to assist learners in practising and maintaining acquired skills at home. One of the respondents said that:

*“During parent’s meeting, partnership is formed and parents are asked to check on children’s work”.*

Other respondents indicated that in some parents, partnership with them is easy but with some, is tense and difficult in a sense that they do not respond even if they make phone calls, it is not easy to find them. To them school is like a dumping site, they are the first to bring the child at school and are the last to fetch the child for holidays.

*“There are those who are more concerned about their children’s education but some are not. Special school to them is like a dumping site, they are the first to bring the child at school and are the last to*

*fetch the child for holidays. Those who are concern, we as teachers encourage them and even phone them to discuss what a child is good at so that parents would continue doing it during holidays”.*

#### **4.4.1.4 Teacher skills/training**

With reference to teacher training, the results showed a need for strict education planning which could be achieved by providing special education training. This had implications for establishing strategies to improve teaching quality through training in special education in order to increase the level of teacher skills in special schools.

Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely and Danielson (2010) reveal that the ability of many learners with disabilities to access the general education curriculum and make adequate annual yearly progress depends on the skill and motivation of their teachers. Brownell et al. further contend that teachers need training in special education to include learners with disabilities. Seventy seven percent (77%) of the respondents revealed that they have no basic training in education except certificates received from attending workshops in special education. One of the respondents said that:

*“I have no qualifications but I have certificates for attending workshops in special education. I also registered for special education programmes with the college”.*

Twenty two percent (22%) of the respondents have teacher’s diploma and certificates for attending workshops in special education. Thirty three percent (33%) of the respondents are currently registered to further their studies in special education programmes while twenty two percent (22%) of the respondents have not receive or attend any workshop in special education since they are new in the special school. One of the respondents stated that:

*“There is no training nor qualifications in special education because I am new in the school. I have never attended a workshop or a course”.*

#### **4.4. RESPONSES FROM PARENTS**

This section will discuss the common themes identified in respect of the role played by parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills. The researcher used content analysis to analyse responses from the parents.

##### **4.4.1 Emergent parent’s themes**

Themes of similar responses were grouped together and make five themes. Sub-themes were formulated under each theme. The table below presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analytic process:

**Table 4: Themes and sub-themes**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUB-THEMES</b>
4.4.1.1 Role of parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills.	-Give love, accept and support the child -Motivate to improve identified skills -Understanding the condition/disability
4.4.1.2 Partnership between parents and teachers	-Discussions in formal and informal meetings
4.4.1.3 Programmes aimed at empowering learners	-Programme supported by Municipality -Programme from Nkungumathe Youth Centre

4.4.1.4 Parental support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role of reinforcement</li> <li>- Assistance from other professionals</li> </ul>
4.4.1.5 Challenges faced by parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discrimination</li> </ul>

## 4.5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The following is the discussion of the results of the study.

### 4.5.1.1 THEME 1: Role of parents in empowering special needs learners

Austin (2000) claims that parents play a crucial role in the lives of their disabled children even after their son or daughter has made the transition to adulthood. Austin further affirms that it is the parents who can guide, encourage and empower their disabled child to take an active role in the transition program and essential in helping their disabled child identify life and career goals and in providing the opportunities to attain those goals. Almost hundred percent (100%) of the respondents believed that their role as parents is to give their special needs children love and support in whatever skill that has been identified by teachers. They also make their children feel important to the family and to the community.

*“My most important role is to love and support my child. I also encourage and motivate her in doing what teachers have discovered or identified as her skills that need to be improved”.*

Austin (2000) suggests that parents should also involve the child in all aspects of transition planning such as identifying the child’s strengths, weaknesses, needs, goals, preferences, desires and dreams because this is another way of supporting and encouraging the child to contribute to the transition process. One of the respondents said that:

*“I love my child as he is. I pay attention on what I see as his strengths and encourage, support and motivate him to do what he is able to do. I make him feel important to me and the family”.*

By playing these role, parents believe that they are contributing a lot in the child’s progress in learning and development. This is supported by Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) who state that parental involvement can make a great and quick progress in learning and development of a child.

#### **4.5.1.2 THEME 2: Partnership between parents and teachers (parental perspective)**

Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) state that parents and teachers working together can produce more effective changes in a learner’s behaviour than either party can when grappling with the problem alone. Forlin and Hopewell (2006) further note that partnership with parents is given an even higher profile in relation to educational opportunities for children with special needs. One hundred percent (100%) of the respondents revealed that partnership between them (parents) and teachers is formed when they are called for meetings where they discuss issues related to the child’s progress and the school. One of the respondents said that:

*“I avail myself during parent’s meeting to discuss the child work and check on the progress. The relationship with teachers is very good because I support the child by accompanying school if they have a trip”.*

Another view from one respondent was that:

*“During parent’s meeting, I always avail myself because that is when I discuss with teachers the progress of the child so that I could do what I can to support my child to learn and improve her identified skills”.*



The kind of partnership parents have with teachers is supported by Dumciene and Sukys (2014) who indicate that parents who communicate with teachers feel equal partners, they will more likely engage in ongoing school activities and teachers more often cooperate with them.

#### **4.5.1.3 THEME 3: Programmes aimed at empowering special needs learners**

Al-Shammari and Yawkey (2008) reveal that learners with special needs can be impacted greatly by their informed parents who become involved with them in their special education programmes. Al-Shammari and Yawkey further affirm that parents agree that their children benefit through these special education programmes. Seventy five percent (75%) of the respondents revealed that there are no programmes on their perspective which is aimed at empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills at school but they wish to encourage parents who have disabled children to love, not to hide their children and take them to school so that they would discover their skills and be recognized by the society.

*“There are no programmes so far, but I wish to encourage parents who have special needs children to love their children, not to hide them and take them to school so that their skills will be identified and be recognized by the community”.*

One of the respondents said that:

*“There are no programmes but I wish to advice parents with special needs children to take them to school where they will acquire skills that will make them recognized by the society as social beings”.*

Twelve comma five percent (12, 5%) of the respondents asserted that there is a programme that is supported by the Municipality which assists parents in taking special needs children to practice their acquired skills after they have

exited school. This programme is done with an aim of special needs children to be recognized and be accepted by the community.

*“There is a programme that is supported by the Municipality which is done to assist special needs learners to practice their acquired skills after they have left school so that the community will recognize and accept them as the citizens of the country”.*

Twelve comma five percent (12, 5%) of the respondents also revealed that the Nkungumathe Youth Centre provide a programme that accommodate special needs children to practice their acquired skills. This programme allows parents to encourage and support their children to participate in the centre in order to benefit and improve their skills.

*“Nkungumathe Youth Centre has the programme which allows parents to encourage their children to practice their skills such as sewing and so on after they exit special school. This programme allows children to improve their skills and to be recognized with the things they do”.*

#### **4.5.1.4 THEME 4: Parental support**

Zhang (2013) believes that to provide the social and psychological support that learners with disabilities need, information should be given to help them make informed spiritual choices. Support should also be provided to help them make and sustain meaningful friendships. Steer cited in Waters (2014) highlights the role of parents in supporting both children’s behaviour and their academic attainment. It points out that while there are few parents who do not want the best for their children, some may not have the confidence to engage with the school and some may feel alienated from school as a result of their own educational experience. In supporting special needs learners, almost hundred percent (100%) of the respondents believe in showing love, praising, keeping promises and encouraging learners in improving their acquired skills as the best way of showing support. One of the respondents said:

*“I support my child by giving him love, praise and encourage him to continue doing the right thing of improving his acquired skills. I also keep the promises for whatever promise I have made to him”.*

Among the hundred percent respondents, fifty percent (50%) of them also revealed that in supporting their special needs children, they get assistance and advice from other professionals such as physiotherapists, social workers, doctors and Municipal officials on how to support the children. One of the respondents further said that:

*“Sometimes when Municipal officials call the meetings, they encourage parents with special needs children to love their children, not to lock them up but to support them and let their skills known or to be recognized by the society”.*

The results reveal that besides the assistance that parents get from their co-partners (teachers), they also get assistance from other professionals that they used to consult about the condition of the child in order to strengthen the support for their children.

#### **4.5.1.5 THEME 5: Challenges faced by parents**

Foley (2013) argues that many parents are raising children whose mental, physical, cognitive, emotional, or developmental issues diminish their capacity to be educated in the same ways as other children. Zhang (2013) believes that learners with disabilities often need help viewing their disabilities with perspective and finding their own unique calling and purposes. Zhang further notes that learners should also be encouraged to talk about their religious beliefs, values, and how they see themselves as someone with special needs. Spiritual reflections such as these can help increase learners' self-understanding and acceptance. Stephinah (2014) also indicates that recognising individuals with disabilities as people first should be fully embedded in the education system and society in general. Seventy five

percent (75%) of the respondents revealed that the challenge that they face is that people are looking down upon them and their special needs children as well. People take children otherwise and discriminate them by calling names.

One of the respondents said that:

*“The challenge that I have is the discrimination in the society. People take these children otherwise, look down upon them and call names”.*

Another view from one respondent in support of the challenges they face was that:

*“My child does not want to be absent from school even if he is not feeling well and during holidays, he wants to go to school simple because people just use him and not even ask him from me. They just do whatever they like with the child and even abuse him emotionally”.*

Twenty five percent (25%) of the respondents affirm that they have never observe or experience any challenges so far in as far as the empowerment of special needs learners with psychosocial skills is concern. One of the respondents said that:

*“No challenges observed so far except that the child is stubborn. So I just use his strengths to overcome his weaknesses”.*

The results reveal that discrimination is the biggest challenge that other parents are experiencing which could affect their role of empowering their children if not addressed appropriately because they feel underestimated. This could also affect special needs learners negatively.

#### **4.6 Presentation of observation results**

Observation was done a week after the researcher conducted the interviews with teachers in order to indicate the degree to which special needs learners had acquired psychosocial skills. The researcher took the whole day in each phase. The categories that appeared on the far left side of the table below were observed and rated from each phase respectively. Observation was

recorded in an observation schedule by making use of a nominal ranking scale which rates from one to four, where 1 = not present; 2= slightly present; 3= present and 4= excellent.

The acquired skills presented below depend on the condition or disability of each child. Upon the completion of the observation, there was an emerging category identified and it was presented in the table. The results revealed that active listening was excellent in all phases although it was for a short period of time.

The table below provides the results of overall observations conducted in different phases (i.e. Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phase):

**Table 5: Results of observation**

Category	Foundation phase	Intermediate phase	Senior and FET phase
Active listening	4	4	4
Critical thinking	2	3	3
Creative thinking	2	2	3
Decision making	3	3	3
Problem solving	3	3	3
Communication skills	3	3	3
Coping skills	2	3	3
Interacting with others	3	3	4
Cooperating	3	4	3
Sharing	3	3	3
Empathy	3	3	3
Respecting one another	2	3	3
Responsibility	2	3	3
Independence	2	3	3
Emerging category			
Discipline	3	4	4

## **4.7 Summary**

This chapter presented a detailed discussion on the results of the study. Open-ended questions that the researcher used in conducting interviews were analysed and observations were also analysed. The main themes were identified and discussed. The interpretation of the findings was also done. The researcher was able to determine from the research findings the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills. It can be concluded that the study has yielded positive results. The next chapter will discuss the conclusions that were drawn from the findings of the study followed by the recommendations, limitations of the study and avenues for further studies.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter gave details about the field work for the study. Data collected were presented, analysed and interpreted. The researcher, in this chapter concludes the data collected on the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills on the basis of literature consulted. The researcher provides the implications from findings of the study, including limitations, and recommendations.

#### **5.2 Discussion of the results**

The study was designed to investigate the role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills. The results of the study are interpreted in light of the qualitative data obtained. The study intended to answer the following questions:

- (i) What role do teachers and parents play in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills?
- (ii) How do teachers and parents form partnership in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education?
- (iii) What programme is there, if any, which is aimed at empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in a special school?

#### **5.3 The objectives of the study**

- (i) To determine the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills.

(ii) To establish whether or not there is a partnership between teachers and parents in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education.

(iii) To establish whether or not there is a programme which is aimed at empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in a special school.

### **5.3.1 Findings with regard to the first aim**

The role of teachers in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills comes in various ways as compared to the role played by parents. Some teachers believe in teaching special needs learners' skills to be independent, sociable, and presentable and be recognised by the society. Other teachers teach skills by focusing on the learner's strengths to overcome their weaknesses.

*"I teach special needs learners by checking on their strengths or on what the learner is able to do better and work on those strengths to overcome his/her weaknesses".*

Others empower learners through sports in order for them to participate and compete with other children outside school while others believe in teaching discipline so that learners should be able to obey the rules outside school. In looking at the role played by teachers, the researcher takes their various efforts to empower special needs learners as of equal importance because it all depends on the child's condition or disability.

Parents, on the other hand believe in giving their special needs children love and support in whatever skill that has been identified by teachers as their role of empowering them. They also make their children feel important to the family and to the community.

*"I love my child as he is. I pay attention on what I see as his strengths and encourage, support and motivate him to do what he is able to do. I make him feel important to me, to the family and to the community".*



Parents believe that once the child feels loved, she or he is able to love him/herself and others.

The results show that teachers play a crucial role in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills compared to parents. This is evidenced by various responses and percentage from the role played by teachers as opposed to hundred percent (100%) of the same role played by parents. However, their role should never be underestimated.

Cowdery (2012) indicates that encouraging and equipping learners with essential skills lead to empowerment. Cowdery further claims that learners' skills enable them to interact appropriately with other individuals and function within a socially meaningful context. Cowdery further maintains that learners who feel empowered by having psychosocial skills are more confident and exhibit more self-esteem. The high percentage (44%) of teacher's role is in line with this study. The study by Coates and Vickerman (2010) affirms that children with special educational needs (SEN) in both mainstream and special schools enjoy physical education (PE) and are empowered by given the opportunity to propose ways to improve PE. This is evident by (22%) of the respondents in the current study when revealing that they empower special needs learners through sports which most of the learners enjoy compared to in-door games.

Austin (2000) suggests that parents should also involve the child in all aspects of transition planning such as identifying the child's strengths, weaknesses, needs, goals, preferences, desires and dreams because this is another way of supporting and encouraging the child to contribute to the transition process. Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) state that parental involvement in education can make a great and a quick progress in the learning and development of a child. The results of the study reveal that parents play the role of encouraging and supporting children with love in their identified skills which empower them.

### 5.3.2 Findings with regard to aim number two

The results reveal that there is a partnership between teachers and parents in supporting special needs learners to help them benefit from their education. Hundred percent (100%) of parents and teachers affirm that partnership is formed through discussions in formal and informal meetings and is reported to be good. It is mentioned that during the meetings, parents are able to check on their children's work and progress while teachers, on the other hand, get a chance to advice parents to encourage, support and to assist learners in practising and maintaining acquired skills at home. However, teachers indicate that there are those parents who to them school is like a dumping site, they are the first to bring the child at school and are the last to fetch the child for holidays.

*“There are those parents who are more concerned about their children's education but some are not. Special school to them is like a dumping site, they are the first to bring the child at school and are the last to fetch the child for holidays. Those who are concern, we as teachers encourage them and even phone them to discuss what a child is good at so that parents would continue doing it during holidays”.*

Cushing (1994) indicates that there should be a feeling of respect, trust, and partnership between learners, parents and teachers. Cushing further claims that supporting the academic success of learners with disabilities and other special needs is necessary to help them thrive in their adult lives. Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) state that parents and teachers working together can produce more effective changes in a learner's behaviour than either party can when grappling with the problem alone. Forlin and Hopewell (2006) further note that partnership with parents is given an even higher profile in relation to educational opportunities for children with special needs. The results of the study show that special needs learners possibly benefit from education through partnership between teachers and parents.

### 5.3.3 Findings with regard to aim number three

This aim addressed the issues of programmes which are aimed at empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in a special school. The results reveal that there are programmes in the school such as school educational environmental programme (SEEP), printing programme, *Isibindi* programme and the alternative argumentative communication (AAC) programme. These programmes empower special needs learners in various ways, depending on the condition or disability of the child. The study conducted by Al-Shammari and Yawkey (2008) reveal that learners with special needs can be impacted greatly by their informed parents who become involved with them in their special education programmes. Parents seem not to be well knowledgeable about these programmes since seventy five percent (75%) of them indicated that they do not know of any from their side. However, 12.5% of them mentioned that there is a programme that is supported by the Municipality which assists parents in taking special needs children to practice their acquired skills after they have exited school. Another 12.5% asserted *Nkungumathe* Youth Centre which is a programme that accommodate special needs children to practice their acquired skills. This programme allows parents to encourage and support their children to participate in the centre in order to benefit and improve their skills.

The results reveal that special needs learners benefit and are empowered by these programmes in the school and parents only support what teachers have done. Al-Shammari and Yawkey (2008) affirm that parents agree that their children benefit through these special education programmes. The results reveal that with these programmes allow special needs learners the opportunity to be recognised by the community as the equal citizens of the country who need not be discriminated.

### **5.3.4 Findings emanating from additional information regarding learner support**

#### **5.3.4.1 Parental support**

Looking at the role of parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills, parents need assistance from other professionals for support. This is in line with the findings of Steer cited in Waters (2014) highlights the role of parents in supporting both children's behaviour and their academic attainment. It points out that while there are few parents who do not want the best for their children, some may not have the confidence to engage with the school and some may feel alienated from school as a result of their own educational experience. Zhang (2013) believes that to provide the social and psychological support that learners with disabilities need, information should be given to help them make informed spiritual choices. In supporting special needs learners to be empowered with psychosocial skills, 50% of parents revealed that they get assistance and advice from other professionals such as physiotherapists, social workers, doctors and Municipal officials on how to support their children.

#### **5.3.4.2 Teacher skills/training**

The results reveal that there is a lack of teacher training in special education. Seventy seven percent (77%) of the respondents revealed that they have no basic training in education except certificates received from attending workshops in special education. This showed a need for strict education planning which could be achieved by providing special education training to teachers. This had implications for establishing strategies to improve teaching quality through training in special education in order to increase the level of teacher skills in special schools. This is in line with the findings of Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely and Danielson (2010) who reveal that the ability of many learners with disabilities to access the general education curriculum and make adequate annual yearly progress depends on the skill and motivation of their teachers.

### **5.3.4.3 Challenges faced by parents**

The results indicate that there is discrimination that special needs learners are experiencing from the society. Seventy five percent (75%) of the respondents revealed that the challenge that they face is that people are looking down upon them and their special needs children as well. People take children otherwise and discriminate them by calling them names. Stephinah (2014) indicates that recognising individuals with disabilities as people first should be fully embedded in the education system and society in general. Zhang (2013) believes that learners with disabilities often need help viewing their disabilities with perspective and finding their own unique calling and purposes and also be encouraged to talk about their religious beliefs, values, and how they see themselves as someone with special needs.

### **5.4 Implication of findings**

In the study conducted by Stephinah (2014) it appears that both parents and teachers have the educational mandate to empower children with intellectual disabilities through education although in South Africa empowerment is still a national problem. Generally the findings of this study indicate that teachers and parents play a crucial role in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in special schools. However, there is a gap in between their roles that need to be filled in order for the purpose of empowering special needs children to be effective. The existing programmes in the school give an indication that teachers play crucial role in empowering special needs learners. The implication of this finding is that there is a possibility for special needs learners to be recognised by the society as social beings through their acquired skills.

The results reveal that there is a serious issue with regard to teacher training. Stephinah (2014) also found that teachers were not trained to teach in special schools. The implication of this finding is that teachers should be given an opportunity to obtain training in special education even before they enter the

special school premises. The reason is that teacher's role in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills needs high intensive learner support (KZN Dept. of Education, 2005).

Parents, on the other hand seem to put more burden on teachers since learners with severe, moderate and mild disabilities are accommodated in one class and some parents are not much involved for support. The implication of the findings is that parents should be made to feel as equal partners with teachers from the word go in order to fill or close the gap between their roles. In such a supportive environment where there is collaboration amongst teachers, parents and community and learner support teachers is key to success and the stage is set for effective learning (Stephinah, 2014). Also implied is that parents should be considered as important stakeholders in the programmes designed to empower special needs learners because their input is of value. This would make them aware of the programmes available for their children after they exit school. One respondent revealed that these children become stranded after they exit school meaning that she is not aware of the programmes available for special needs children. The findings also imply that in designing and implementing support programmes concerning special needs learners in and outside school it is imperative that these programmes lead to development that is holistic.

## **5.5 Limitations of the study**

There were limitations in the study, of which some were inherent to the design of the study and others were independent of this.

- The fact that this is a case-study, the results of which are non-generalizable is a limitation on its own. The confidence in the results could be strengthened by increasing the sample size and gathering information from other special schools since this was a qualitative study and the sample size was very small.

- The education level and age of parents were not considered in the study. Therefore, this might have influenced the findings of the study in terms of how these characteristics may affect or have an impact in the role of parents in empowering learners.
- The time spent during observation process was too short. If there was more time spent, the researcher would have observed more from learners indicating that they are empowered with psychosocial skills or not.
- The study was conducted in a rural setting where important resources are lacking or unavailable such as professionals, for example, psychologists or social workers to support teachers in empowering special needs learners.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and the discussion of the study, recommendations have been made which could point to avenues for future research. These recommendations include the following:

- The research should increase the sample size and include the special schools from urban areas in order to improve the findings since the current study was conducted in a rural setting.
- The researcher suggests the other methods of data collection such as quantitative data collection method since the current study was limited to the case study method.
- The researcher suggests that future research should look at the characteristics of parents such as the age and the level of education whether it has an impact on the role played by parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills.

- To fill the gap between teachers and parents' role, the researcher suggests that parents be involved in designing special needs programmes for learners that would assist them after they exit school.
- The study gives some indication pertaining to the issue of teacher training/skills that they lack training in special education which should be taken seriously. The researcher recommends that the education system should employ teachers who have a background in special education in order to achieve their role of empowering special needs learners.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The chapter began with the discussion of the findings of the study. The objectives of the study were achieved. The limitations of the study were identified and the recommendations were made. In spite of the mentioned limitations, the study has managed to determine the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills. The study found that there is partnership between teachers and parents in supporting learners to benefit from their education and it is good. As much as these learners are recognised in society for the skills they have there are, however, challenges experienced by teachers and parents as well.



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**ANNEXURE A: Access letter for permission to conduct research from the Department of Education**

University of Zululand

PO Box X 1001

KwaDlangezwa

3886

KZN Dept. of Education

Private Bag X 9137

Pietermaritzburg

3200

Dear Ms/Mr

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

I am a registered Masters' student in the Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education at the University of Zululand. My supervisor is Prof. D.R Nzima.

The proposed topic of my research is: The role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla Circuit. The objectives of the study are:

- (a) To determine the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills.
- (b) To establish whether or not there is a partnership between teachers and parents in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education.

I am hereby seeking your consent to carry out the study. To assist you in reaching a decision, I have attached to this letter:



- (a) A copy of an ethical clearance certificate issued by the University
- (b) A copy of the research instruments which I intend using in my research.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

Nene S.S. [sbekenene@yahoo.com](mailto:sbekenene@yahoo.com) – 072 301 0848,

Nzima D.R. [NzimaD@unizulu.ac.za](mailto:NzimaD@unizulu.ac.za) – 035 902 6237

Upon my completion of the study, I undertake to provide you with a bound copy of the dissertation.

Your permission to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

-----

Sibekezelo Sphiwe Nene

## ANNEXURE B: Ethical Clearance Certificate

**UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**  
(Reg No: UZREC 171110-030)



### RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Website: <http://www.unizulu.ac.za>  
Private Bag X1001  
KwaDlangezwa 3886  
Tel: 035 902 6837  
Fax: 035 902 6222  
Email: [ManqelaS@unizulu.ac.za](mailto:ManqelaS@unizulu.ac.za)

### ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Certificate Number	UZREC 171110-030 PGM 2015/166		
Project Title	The role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla Circuit		
Principal Researcher/ Investigator	SS Nene		
Supervisor and Co- supervisor	Prof DR Nzima		
Department	Educational Psychology and Special Education		
Nature of Project	Honours/4 <sup>th</sup> Year	Master's <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Doctoral <input type="checkbox"/>
			Departmental <input type="checkbox"/>

The University of Zululand's Research Ethics Committee (UZREC) hereby gives ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project proposal and the documents listed on page 2 of this Certificate.

**Special conditions:**

- (1) The Principal Researcher must report to the UZREC in the prescribed format, where applicable, annually and at the end of the project, in respect of ethical compliance.
- (2) Documents marked "To be submitted" (see page 2) must be presented for ethical clearance before any data collection can commence.

The Researcher may therefore commence with the research as from the date of this Certificate, using the reference number indicated above, but may not conduct any data collection using research instruments that are yet to be approved.

Please note that the UZREC must be informed immediately of

- Any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the documents that were presented to the UZREC
- Any material breaches of ethical undertakings or events that impact upon the ethical conduct of the research

**ANNEXURE C: Letter to the Principal requesting permission to conduct research at school**

University of Zululand

PO Box X 1001

KwaDlangezwa

3886

The Principal

Special School

Nkandla

3855

Dear Sir/Madam

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

I am a registered Masters' student in the Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education at the University of Zululand. My supervisor is Prof. D.R Nzima.

The proposed topic of my research is: ***The role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla Circuit.*** The objectives of the study *inter alia* are:

- (c) To determine the role played by teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills.
- (d) To establish whether or not there is a partnership between teachers and parents in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education.

I am hereby seeking your consent to ***use your school as data collection site***. To assist you in reaching a decision, I have attached to this letter:

- (c) A copy of an ethical clearance certificate issued by the University
- (d) A copy of the research instruments which I intend using in my research.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

**Ms S.S. Nene**

**Prof D.R. Nzima**

[sbekenene@yahoo.com](mailto:sbekenene@yahoo.com)

[NzimaD@unizulu.ac.za](mailto:NzimaD@unizulu.ac.za)

Upon my completion of the study, I undertake to provide you with a bound copy of the dissertation.

Your permission to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

**Signature: -----**

**Name: Ms Sibekezelo Sphiwe Nene**

## **ANNEXURE D: Letter to teachers requesting their permission to participate in the research**

Project Title: The role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla Circuit.

Nene S.S. from the Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education, University of Zululand has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to find out the role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla circuit.
2. The University of Zululand has given ethical clearance certificate.
3. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards the development and the implementation of an on-going programmes, presentations and publication of papers which will assist in motivating parents to be more involve in empowering learners with the skills and also maintain them in home environment.
4. I will participate in the project by answering questions scheduled for interview conducted by the researcher.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.
7. There will be no risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that:
  - a. There is 0% chance of the risk materialising

- b. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of journals and presentations. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and that my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conduct of the research.
- c. I will not receive feedback/ receive feedback in the form of presentations regarding the results obtained during the study.
- d. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by the researcher's supervisor, Prof D.R. Nzima on 035 902 6237 or the researcher, Nene S.S., on 072 301 0848.
- e. By signing this informed consent declaration I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
- f. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I, -----have read the above information/ confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

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Participant's signature

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Date

## **ANNEXURE E: Letter to parents requesting their permission to participate in the research**

Project Title: The role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla Circuit.

Nene S.S. from the Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education, University of Zululand has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

8. The purpose of the research project is to find out the role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla circuit.
9. The University of Zululand has given ethical clearance certificate.
10. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards the development and the implementation of an on-going programmes, presentations and publication of papers which will assist in motivating parents to be more involve in empowering learners with the skills and also maintain them in home environment.
11. I will participate in the project by answering questions scheduled for interview conducted by the researcher.
12. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
13. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.
14. There will be no risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that:
  - g. There is 0% chance of the risk materialising

- h. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of journals and presentations. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and that my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conduct of the research.
- i. I will not receive feedback/ receive feedback in the form of presentations regarding the results obtained during the study.
- j. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by the researcher's supervisor, Prof D.R. Nzima on 035 902 6237 or the researcher, Nene S.S., on 072 301 0848.
- k. By signing this informed consent declaration I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
- l. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I, -----have read the above information/ confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

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Participant's signature



## **ANNEXURE F: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION**

### **INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION**

**(Participant)**

Project Title: The role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla Circuit.

Nene S.S. from the Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education, University of Zululand has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

15. The purpose of the research project is to find out the role of teachers and parents in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills in Nkandla circuit.
16. The University of Zululand has given ethical clearance certificate.
17. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards the development and the implementation of an on-going programmes, presentations and publication of papers which will assist in motivating parents to be more involve in empowering learners with the skills and also maintain them in home environment.
18. I will participate in the project by answering questions scheduled for interview conducted by the researcher.
19. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
20. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.

21. There will be no risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that:

- m. There is 0% chance of the risk materialising
- n. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of journals and presentations. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and that my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conduct of the research.
- o. I will not receive feedback/ receive feedback in the form of presentations regarding the results obtained during the study.
- p. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by the researcher's supervisor, Prof D.R. Nzima on 035 902 6237 or the researcher, Nene S.S., on 072 301 0848.
- q. By signing this informed consent declaration I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
- r. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I, -----have read the above information/ confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

-----

Participant's signature

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Date

## ANNEXURE G: RESEARCHER'S DECLARATION

### RESEARCHER'S DECLARATION

I, Nene S.S. declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to

-----

- requested him/her to ask questions if anything was unclear and I have answered them as best I can.
- I am satisfied that s/he sufficiently understands all aspects of the research so as to make an informed decision on whether or not to participate.
- The conversation took place in IsiZulu / English.
- I used/ did not use an interpreter

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Researcher's signature

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Date

**ANNEXURE H: Questions for Teachers**

1. What role do teachers play in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills?

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2. What programme is there, if any, which is aimed at empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills?

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3. How do teachers and parents form partnerships in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education?

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4. What kind of skills or training or qualifications do teachers have to work with special needs learners?

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5. How do teachers go about ensuring that the acquired skills by the learners are maintained during school holidays?

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6. How do teachers monitor the progress in learners when they return back from holidays?

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7. How do teachers offer the opportunity to the learners to make choices in a given tasks as a way of empowering them?

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8. Are there any opportunities given to learners to work independently to demonstrate that they have acquired skills? If yes, how?

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9. What special activities are there, (if any), organised to support learners who are lacking behind?

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10. What programme is there, (if any), for activation of support of special need learners in the community?

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**ANNEXURE I: Questions for Parents**

11. What role do parents play in empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills?

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12. How do parents and teachers form partnerships in supporting special needs learners to benefit from their education?

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13. How do parents maintain the learner's acquired skills at home during school holidays?

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14. How parents do motivates the learners if they show some improvement in their skills?

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15. What support do parents give the learners as a way of empowering them?

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16. What programme is there that would make learners with special needs recognizable in the community?

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17. What challenges do parents face in the process of empowering special needs learners with psychosocial skills?

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18. How do parents make learners feel their importance at school as well as in the society?

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19. Are there any skills which parents acquire from other professionals so as to empower learners with special needs?

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20. Do parents able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their learners with special needs so as to work on improving weaknesses through their strengths?

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## ANNEXURE J: OBSERVATION SHEET

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

### FOUNDATION PHASE

OBSERVER \_\_\_\_\_

1= Not present  
Excellent

2=Slightly present

3=Present

4=

Active listening	1	2	3	4
Critical thinking	1	2	3	4
Creative thinking	1	2	3	4
Decision making	1	2	3	4
Problem solving	1	2	3	4
Communication skills	1	2	3	4
Coping skills	1	2	3	4
Interacting with others	1	2	3	4
Cooperating	1	2	3	4
Sharing	1	2	3	4
Empathy	1	2	3	4
Respecting one another	1	2	3	4
Responsibility	1	2	3	4
Independence	1	2	3	4