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Beyond intentions: Problematising policy-practice challenges for inclusive education and social justice in South Africa

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Abstract

This analysis critically examines inclusive education (IE) policies in South Africa within global frameworks. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's (2008) theory of social justice, which includes recognition, redistribution, and representation, the study explores the thinking and assumptions behind policymaking and how these affect the complexities of implementing IE—particularly regarding diverse student needs and identities. Furthermore, it analyses how the policies aspired to equitable resource allocation and democratic participation (representation) within schools. The study employs Bacchi's (2009) "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) approach to trace the evolution of policies for IE from Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) to a recent assessment, the Department of Basic Education's progress report on inclusive education (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023). By analysing underlying assumptions in these policies, the WPR approach helps expose the intended goals and their practical implications for schools. This work enriches the discourse on educational equity and social justice by illuminating the challenges of operationalising IE in diverse contexts. It further examines how policy assumptions, as framed by the WPR approach, can hinder or facilitate achieving genuine inclusion. By exploring these complexities, the study offers valuable insights for fostering inclusive educational environments that align with global aspirations while acknowledging unique South Africa realities.

Keywords: critical analysis, Education White Paper 6, full-service schools, inclusive education, education policy, inclusive schools, social justice, "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR)

Introduction

The concept of inclusive education (IE), as articulated in UNESCO's (1994) Salamanca statement, envisions schools as inclusive institutions that accommodate all children, especially those with special educational needs. Despite commendable progress in expanding access to basic education, UNESCO (2017) has acknowledged that achieving genuine inclusion remains a challenge in almost every country. The Salamanca statement set out how, what it termed, *special needs education* should be an integral part of the "education/school for all" mandate that emanated from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). Among the key contributions of the statement was the call for a new thinking regarding policymaking, and the implementation of inclusive strategies across systems of education. Inclusion is a complex and contested idea both in Northern and Southern educational systems (Armstrong et al., 2011). Importantly, IE encompasses the fourth of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, namely, to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030 (2015, p. 17). Thus, there is global consensus that IE is a key focus of formal systems of education.

The concept of IE has undergone a significant transformation. Initially, it focused on identifying, and potentially fixing, problems students had that prevented them from learning effectively (pathologising learners' difficulties). However, current understanding of IE in South Africa emphasises democratic ideals, equality, and social justice for all learners (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa defined IE as:

> Support [for] all learners, educators, and the system so that the full range of learning needs can be met. The focus is on teaching and learning actors, with the emphasis on the development of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learners. (2001, p. 17)

Our study examines the distinctions and underlying assumptions within these definitions, focusing on the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6; DoE, 2001) and the Guidelines for Full-Service and Inclusive Schools (GFSS; DBE, 2010) policy documents. In our pursuit to understand the current landscape of IE in South Africa, we scrutinised these two key policies in light of the findings of the DBE's parliamentary progress report (PPR) on inclusive education (Parliamentary Monitoring Group [PMG], 2023). Our primary concern was the way the policies had understood and defined the challenges inherent to IE, which, in turn, set the tone for what could feasibly be achieved in terms of advancing social justice through IE. Even though there have been many studies on IE in South Africa (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2020; Engelbrecht et al., 2006; Naicker, 2006; Ntombela, 2011), a gap in this literature is critical examination and problematisation of IE within the core texts of educational policy. Thus, our investigation was guided by the following question: "How is IE problematised and framed within two key policy documents in the context of South Africa?"

Inspired by Fraser's work (2001, 2008, 2010), our research incorporated the dimensions of recognition, redistribution, and representation (3Rs), providing a robust analytical foundation

for understanding IE in the context of South African policies. Fraser's 3Rs framework (Fraser, 2008; Fraser & Honneth, 2003), enabled a nuanced analysis of social justice concerns, addressing issues related to identity, resources, and political participation. Our analytical focus areas are outlined below.

- Focus 1 examines the policies through the lens of Fraser's concept of recognition. We explore how IE policies frame the diverse needs and identities of students, ensuring that every individual is seen and valued within the educational system. Through recognition, Fraser envisioned the transformation of individuals who are othered into, what she described as "full partners in social interaction" (2010, p. 113).
- Focus 2 deals with issues of representation. This dimension allows us to evaluate the level of democratic inclusivity in educational policies, ensuring that marginalised voices and perspectives are not only recognised but also actively involved in decision-making processes.
- Focus 3 entails a critical assessment of the way that the policies aimed to distribute educational resources equitably, particularly focusing on schools catering to diverse learning needs. Principles of redistributive justice guide our examination of resource allocation as well as what is deemed as a priority in terms of funding.

We also employed Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) approach as a methodological tool to critically analyse the selected policy documents. By problematising IE using WPR and Fraser's 3Rs framework, we aim to establish how policy is implicated in the status of IE today and where the gaps are in terms of social justice.

The selected policy documents and report offer a comprehensive and chronological view of South Africa's IE landscape. They provide us with a historical context and foundational principles (EWP6; DoE, 2001), practical implementation guidelines (GFSS; DBE, 2010) and contemporary evaluation (PPR; PMG, 2023) of IE in South Africa. By examining and comparing these documents, our article aims to offer a holistic analysis that spans the historical context, practical applications, and contemporary challenges of IE in South Africa.

Literature review

The legacy of apartheid and the path to IE in South Africa

Children with disabilities initially faced exclusion from South Africa's formal education system. Special needs schools were established in the country as early as 1863 but served primarily White children with hearing and visual impairments (Nkabinde, 1997). "Non-White" children with disabilities often received education from the churches, while many children with disabilities remained at home because school attendance was not compulsory for them (Nkabinde, 1997). It was only in the early 1900s that the DoE took responsibility for special education with the promulgation of the Vocational Education and Special Education Act (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1928).

This period, described as pre-apartheid even though segregation was in full force, witnessed a growing educational divide between White and Black children, reflected in the provision of special education (Hunter, 2019). The apartheid era deepened educational segregation, with legislation such as the Bantu Education Act (RSA, 1953) deliberately promoting inferior education for Black children. Mission schools for the non-White population were either closed or taken over by the state, resulting in the rapid construction of low-quality primary schools for Black learners. The funding gap between White and Black learners reached a peak in 1969, with White learners receiving 18 times more funding (Hunter, 2019).

During the late 1960s, the term *special educational needs* gained prominence as awareness grew regarding learning difficulties affecting children's progress. Children were classified legislatively into 10 disability categories (Kriegler, 1989). By 1990, the apartheid regime was on its last legs, and South Africa was undergoing a historic transition towards a democratic society. This transformation was marked by significant policy changes, including efforts to dismantle the segregated education system and build a more inclusive one (Aitchison, 2003).

Post-apartheid efforts towards IE

The Constitution of South Africa, (RSA, 1996b), enshrined aspirations of social justice, equality, and human rights. It explicitly addressed issues related to historical injustices and outlined the fundamental rights and freedoms of all South African citizens, regardless of their background, stating in the Preamble:

> We, the people of South Africa,
> Recognise the injustices of our past;
> Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
> Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and
> Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity. (RSA, 1996b, p. 1)

The Preamble reflected the commitment to rectify historical injustices and build a society based on social justice and equality. Additionally, the Constitution included various sections that upheld the principles of social justice, including the right to equality (Section 9), the right to education (Section 29), and protections against discrimination (Section 9). Although the Constitution was not explicit as to how social justice should be pursued, it remains a symbolic and influential guarantor of the right to justice—"South Africa belongs to all." The EWP6, for example, explicitly made the connection that its notion of "social justice for all learners" (DoE, 2001, p. 6) emanated from the South African Constitution.

The South African Schools Act (SASA; RSA, 1996a) is a legislative instrument that operationalised the constitutional rights to education, equality, and non-discrimination. It ensured that the principles outlined in the Constitution were implemented in the education system, fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all South African children. Key provisions of SASA included equal access, democratic governance, language of instruction, curriculum, inclusivity, and funding. However, the South African education

system as inherited from apartheid was incapable of executing the high expectations stated in SASA. Therefore, in response to the challenges faced by the education system in post-apartheid South Africa, the DoE (2001) introduced EWP6 (Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system).

According to Naicker (2006), EWP6 emerged as a pivotal policy document, charting a course toward a unified education system for all learners within a 20-year time frame. Consequently, many learners with disabilities were either mainstreamed without appropriate support, or did not attend school at all, leading to an estimated 260,000 to 280,000 children with disabilities being out of school (DoE, 2001). To address these issues, EWP6 (DoE, 2001) proposed a shift towards an IE system where all learners, regardless of their individual needs, could access education and training. The goal was to enable every child, including those with disabilities, to reach their full potential and participate as equal members of society.

EWP6 introduced new concepts such as full-service schools, which were envisioned as ordinary schools equipped to assist students with barriers to learning within the mainstream system. Additionally, the policy advocated for the establishment of district-based support teams to implement strategies and interventions to support educators in addressing diverse learning and teaching needs in mainstream schools. This policy sought to place learners with special needs in inclusive schools while maintaining special education schools for learners with specific needs requiring higher-level intervention. But this path to inclusion was filled with hurdles related not only to physical infrastructure, but also to deeply ingrained attitudes of educators, parents, and students (DoE, 2001).

Nevertheless, despite these policy changes, studies continued to underscore significant obstacles to achieving IE in South Africa. Engelbrecht et al. (2016) shed light on the dilemmas and constraints that policy implementation has encountered, and Donohue and Bornman (2014) highlighted policy ambiguity and the pressing need for re-evaluation. Sayed and Motala (2012) argued that even though the policy ideals were persuasive, they lacked a holistic and coherent approach to educational transformation. They concluded that a more explicit, proactive, and equity-driven approach prioritising the most vulnerable and marginalised learners was needed. Similarly, Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) examined the implementation of IE in mainstream primary schools in the Eastern Cape and identified several challenges. These included a lack of cohesiveness in terms of preparedness among education system stakeholders at different levels, the non-functioning or unavailability of support structures resulting from inadequate training, and the reluctance of these stakeholders to embrace IE within the various layers of the education system. A research report by the British Council South Africa (Majoko et al., 2018, p. 13) raised the following concerns:

1. There are inadequacies in current statistics for IE.
2. There is wholesale exclusion of learners with disabilities from the education system, with about 70 per cent of such learners excluded.
3. But there is also exclusion within the classroom that stems from limited literacy skills because of language policies.

4. Teacher training programmes for IE are underpinned by a siloed and non-integrative approach.
5. Less than 20 per cent of pre-service teachers display a positive attitude towards IE.

Clearly, extensive research has scrutinised the repercussions of inclusive policies and the state of IE in South Africa, particularly with reference to EWP6 (DoE, 2001). These inquiries revealed multifaceted schooling realities and a labyrinth of implementation challenges. Although some studies painted a hopeful picture of progress and successful inclusion in specific contexts, a conspicuous gap in the literature emerges: an absence of substantial research addressing inclusion in full-service/inclusive schools and other special schools offering an academic curriculum aligned with the national Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements framework. This glaring omission underscores the need for a more comprehensive exploration of inclusive policy expectations and their implications in these settings.

Walton and Engelbrecht (2022) argued that the development and establishment of IE in educational systems should be viewed as an ever-changing and interconnected process. They explained that overcoming obstacles to IE is not simply a matter of overcoming one challenge after another in a competitive race but rather, involves comprehending the intricate network of education systems. They explained that this network includes different participants and a blend of socio-cultural, historical, and economic factors that shape these systems. The PPR (PMG, 2023) presented an analysis of the headway made in implementing IE policies in South Africa. That progress report found that South Africa has made strategic attempts to enhance IE. These attempts include the conversion of special schools into resource centres, improvements in screening processes, and the mobilisation of out-of-school disabled children. But the report also emphasised persisting challenges in ensuring accessible infrastructure.

Overall, the journey towards building an IE system in South Africa has been a multifaceted one, shaped by the enduring legacy of apartheid and intricate policy processes. The nation's commitment to IE is evident in a series of legislative instruments and policies, each aimed at addressing historical disparities and paving the way for a more equitable educational landscape. But, as this brief review has revealed, the journey toward inclusion has been fraught with complexities and challenges, with far-reaching implications for realising social justice in education in the post-apartheid dispensation.

Theoretical framework

Our analysis is underpinned by a social justice in education framework, based on Nancy Fraser's (2008) 3Rs concepts (recognition, redistribution, and representation). These three concepts formed the basis of her theory of social justice, and are important because they provide a framework for understanding and addressing different forms of social inequality. One of the recognitions is that inequalities manifest in intersectional ways and should be studied as such. We applied this framework to our analysis of selected IE policy documents to uncover how they framed or promoted social justice and addressed the needs of marginalised groups in the South African education system.

Fraser (2008) introduced the concept of recognition to refer to the acknowledgment and validation of the cultural differences and identities of marginalised groups. This involves challenging the dominant cultural norms that exclude and marginalise certain groups and recognising their contributions and perspectives. According to Fraser (2001, p. 24), her model of recognition involves examining "institutionalised patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors." This means going beyond the politics of identity and creating institutional gateways for diverse participation. Therefore, IE policy must do more than recognise and value the cultural differences and identities of all students (DoE, 2001), but also create institutional structures that allow and promote this. Thus, an IE policy might include a curriculum that reflects the diversity of cultures and experiences of students, and also advocate that teacher be trained to be culturally responsive to the needs of their students.

Redistribution is the attempt to address the consequences of unequal distribution of economic and material resources in society. And, it involves addressing the structural inequalities that result in the concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of a few and redistributing them more equitably (Fraser, 2008). Therefore, an IE policy must address the economic inequalities that prevent some students from accessing quality education. This might involve ensuring that schools in low-income areas receive adequate funding to provide resources and support for their students.

The unequal distribution of political power and decision-making authority in society is central to Fraser's (2008) notion of representation. True representation involves marginalised groups having equal access to the political process and positions of power. In the context of education, this translates to ensuring all stakeholders have a voice in shaping educational policy.

We believe these three concepts cover a comprehensive approach to promoting social justice and address the interrelated dimensions of social inequality. They emphasise the importance of recognising and valuing the diversity of cultural identities, addressing economic inequalities, and promoting political representation and participation. Applying Fraser's framework to our policy analysis of select IE policies could help to ensure that policy decisions are made with social justice and equity in mind.

What's the problem represented to be for education policy analysis?

To complement our theoretical framework, we employed a methodological tool to analyse policy data. This aligns with Ball's (1993) emphasis on utilising multiple perspectives in policy analysis. In this paper, we adopted Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach and Nancy Fraser's (2008) 3Rs framework to dissect key IE policy documents. The former is a tool and method, the latter provides a theoretical lens.

Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) defined the WPR approach as a tool that challenges conventional categories and governing practices. Traditionally, policies have been perceived as responses to civic problems. In that view, civic problems pre-exist policy, they are seen as objects "out there" awaiting government processes to identify and resolve them. On the other hand, WPR posits that governments wield their discursive power by formulating the problems within policies before any institutional response transpires. The WPR approach delves into how problems are constructed within policies, unveiling the underlying assumptions that policymaking authorities hold about the issues they aim to address. It shifts the focus from what a policy proposes prima facie, to understanding how imputed problems are manufactured in the policymaking process.

The WPR approach is grounded in poststructuralism, drawing from concepts of governmentality and discourse popularised by Michel Foucault. Our study utilised this as a layered approach, deconstructing and scrutinising the thinking behind IE issues in EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and the GFSS (DBE, 2010), while also considering the PPR (PMG, 2023). Through techniques such as textual analysis and discursive examination, we explored the implicit imputed problems embedded in these documents. As Bacchi and Goodwin contended:

> Governing takes place through the ways in which issues are problematised. Critical attention, therefore, is directed to analysing governmental problematisations—how [imputed] "problems" are represented or constituted *within policies*, and how they have come to be represented in this fashion. (2016, p. 39)

In other words, the analytic task becomes not just understanding what a policy says or the actions it proposes, but also analysing how imputed problems are created in the process of bringing a policy into existence. We approached Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) six questions as stages in the analytical process (see Table 1).

Table 1
WPR approach to policy analysis (adapted from Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 20)

Question 1	What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
Question 2	What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions (conceptual logics) underlie this representation of the "problem" (problem representation)?
Question 3	How has this representation of the "problem" come about?
Question 4	What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualised differently?
Question 5	What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the "problem"?
Question 6	How and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated, and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?
Step 7	Apply this list of question to your own problem representations.

The WPR approach starts with problematisation—analysing the process by which an imputed problem is identified and presented as requiring policy intervention. This stage delves into the

ideological, cultural, and institutional factors shaping the definition of a problem within policies. We probed the assumptions and values underpinning policy discourses, unveiling normative judgments informing problem representations. Importantly, we explored alternative problem representations, acknowledging the political nature of issue framing and power dynamics inherent in policymaking.

This study adopted a critical approach to analysing policy documents related to IE in South Africa. Combining Fraser's 3Rs of social justice framework with Bacchi's WPR approach allowed us to delve into how the policy documents had defined and portrayed imputed problems in realising IE, and to analyse how these policies addressed issues of resource allocation, recognition of diverse student needs, and opportunities for participation. Thus, in this multi-stage process, we explored the underlying values and assumptions within the policy documents, and followed this with an in-depth analysis of them. Ultimately, our goal was to uncover the core ideologies embedded within these policies and offer fresh perspectives on achieving IE by deconstructing policy assumptions and identifying new insights into the complexities of this pursuit.

Analysis and discussion

In this section, we analyse and discuss our research findings using Nancy Fraser's (2001, 2008) 3Rs framework. By applying this framework to a WPR reading of the key policy and policy review documents (EWP6, DoE, 2001; GFSS, DBE, 2010; PPR, PMG, 2023), we delve into the intricacies of how these policies approach IE. Specifically, we examine how the documents defined imputed problems, outlined operational practices, and allocated resources—all with a view to understanding how these aspects contribute to, or undermine, the ideals of social justice in education. In line with our guiding question, our objective here is, using the WPR as a methodological tool, to understand how the targeted policy documents framed their imputed problems and, in so doing, set up policy in a way that either enabled or disabled social justice.

Recognition in IE in South Africa

Recognition in Fraser's (2001, 2008) framework is inseparable from issues of redistribution and political representation. We present here an artificial delinking to allow the reader to comprehend how the 3Rs manifest as imputed problems in the targeted policy documents. Our interest here is not if the policies resolve issues around IE in a socially just way; that would require that we engage with different, empirical data. Our goal is to interrogate if the policies constituted any of the 3R-related issues as imputed problems that demand government's attention, and the assumptions that allowed them to be constituted as such. Our analysis here hinged on three factors: recognition in the face of historical injustices, from assimilation to inclusion and the associated problems, and operational conundrums (systemic transformation and cultural recognition).

Recognition in the face of historical injustices

An essential aspect of IE in South African discourse is the historical context. Both EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and GFSS (DBE, 2010) were acutely aware of the scars left by apartheid-era racial and cultural prejudices. They proposed a seismic shift from a racially delineated educational paradigm to a more universally inclusive one. As explained above, the policies of the past were grossly unequal. The aim highlighted in EWP6 and GFSS, was not just to redress these imbalances, but to build a coherent, unified educational framework. But the challenge is no longer just racial; as Fraser noted, "justice today requires both redistribution and recognition" (2001, p. 286). Significant economic disparities influencing accessibility to education have also become part of the new divide.

Even though EWP6 proposed transforming special schools into culturally sensitive resource centres, the policy did not detail how this would create the participatory parity understood by Fraser's theory. Similarly, the GFSS acknowledged cultural barriers but lacked specific strategies to empower marginalised communities and ensure their voices were heard in decision-making processes, especially at the level of the DBE. These limitations highlight the imputed problem setting in the policies themselves, and the need for a more comprehensive approach that goes beyond mere acknowledgement of past wrongs. True recognition, as envisioned by Fraser, requires dismantling structures that perpetuate historical injustices and actively creating opportunities for equal participation for all groups within the education system.

From assimilation to inclusion and the associated problems

EWP6 (DoE, 2001) marked a significant shift from previous policies. Unlike its predecessors, which focused on assimilating learners into a rigid system, EWP6 recognised the need for change within the education system itself. The policy introduced a crucial distinction between mainstreaming, integration, and inclusion, noting that mainstreaming aims to simply place learners with disabilities into existing classrooms without addressing the potential mismatch between their needs and the system's structure. Integration is a step forward, but still places the onus on learners to adapt to the system. Inclusion therefore, was delineated as a transformative approach recognising and respecting the diverse needs and learning styles of all students. EWP6 explicitly stated this, noting that the system itself needed adaptation in order to support a wider range of learners.

It becomes clear then, that how an imputed problem is conceived greatly impacts the operational responsibilities that follow. The move from mainstreaming to inclusivity is not only ideological, but also an operational orientation. The shift that EWP6 introduced into South Africa's IE discourse, although appreciated, opened a new domain of responsibilities that fall on government. It is one thing to say a system must adapt to learners' needs, and another to adapt a system. This shift, therefore, has profound implications. On paper, it represents a seismic shift. However, operationally it compounds the operational responsibility on government—not at all bad, if said government can rise to its own challenge. Next, we

expand on the imputed problem of operational responsibility arising from the wide definition of IE presented in the policy documents.

The challenge of systemic transformation

Based on the analysis of EWP6's (DoE, 2001) definition of inclusion, the core issue is the challenge of transforming a historically rigid education system to effectively implement this new vision. Although EWP6 represented a significant shift towards a more inclusive approach, it acknowledged the inherent difficulty in changing a system that had not adequately catered to diverse learning needs. The policy document highlighted an array of factors influencing IE, ranging from societal factors such as poverty and HIV/AIDS to more direct factors such as cognitive impairments. However, EWP6's emphasis for the most part leant towards curriculum adaptation, particularly focusing on learners with cognitive and physical impairments. It somewhat presumptuously suggested that larger structural overhauls might not be essential or of immediate consequence. The GFSS (DBE, 2010), reflecting this sentiment, appeared to prioritise human capital solutions over substantial infrastructural commitments. This operational outlook inadvertently overshadows essential components of transformation.

Several key operational responsibilities arise when implementing an IE model as wide as envisioned in EWP6 and GFSS. Firstly, resource allocation becomes paramount. This includes ensuring the education system has sufficient human resources, such as qualified teachers and support staff, as well as access to a variety of materials and tools. Secondly, human capital development plays a crucial role. Are educators adequately equipped with the skills and knowledge to implement inclusive practices? These include pedagogical practices that respond to diverse learning styles and the ability to address the specific needs of learners within an inclusive classroom environment. Finally, fostering a positive school culture is essential. Schools need to cultivate a climate of acceptance and celebrate diversity among students, teachers, and managers. By addressing these operational responsibilities, a truly IE system could be achieved.

These issues highlight the gap between the policies' aspirations and the operational realities of implementation. However, addressing these operational conundrums requires going beyond acknowledging the historical roots of educational inequality in South Africa.

Cultural recognition

Both EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and the GFSS (DBE, 2010) stressed cultural recognition as a core principle for achieving social justice, inclusivity, and equal access for all students. The policies outlined strategies like transforming special schools into culturally sensitive resource centres (DoE, 2001) and promoting culturally responsive professional development (DBE, 2010). Although these efforts aimed to address cultural diversity within the classroom, applying Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach to the policies reveals underlying assumptions and invites further critical analysis.

Through the lens of WPR, cultural diversity is presented as a challenge that necessitates specific solutions. Both EWP6 and GFSS acknowledged cultural factors as potential barriers to learning, suggesting that cultural differences could hinder the achievement of policy goals. This problem representation implies that schools lack the inherent capacity to address cultural diversity and require additional resources or training. Furthermore, the focus on "celebrating" cultural identities could downplay potential conflicts or tensions arising from these differences.

WPR encourages us to consider alternative perspectives on cultural diversity within education. Could cultural differences be viewed as assets and resources for learning rather than solely as obstacles? Do the proposed solutions adequately address potential power imbalances between dominant and minority cultures within the educational system? By applying WPR, we can move beyond simply accepting cultural diversity as a problem to be solved. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how cultural recognition can be fostered in South African schools. Furthermore, WPR highlights the need to consider who benefits from the current problem representation, and whether the focus on individual schools overlooks systemic issues that could hinder cultural recognition across the entire education system.

To sum this section up, even as EWP6 introduced an expansive language of the meaning IE into South Africa's education discourse, it also made a second contribution, which was to contextualise this imputed problem within the county's education history. These are welcome shifts. But a gap remains in translating these aspirations into concrete operational responsibilities in the absence of sufficient institutional structures. Our analysis shows that even though the policy documents acknowledged issues like historical racial injustice and an array of barriers to learning, they did not go beyond this acknowledgement to create opportunities for participatory parity by creating pathways for greater participation and access for those affected by years of subjugation and intentional misrecognition.

Representation, expertise, and inclusive pedagogy

Fraser's (2001) concept of representation critically addressed the disparities in power and decision-making processes in the realm of education policy. It emphasised the need to ensure that historically marginalised groups participate equitably in shaping educational policies and practices. Analysing South Africa's IE policies through the lens of representation, appropriate expertise, and inclusive pedagogy reveals significant challenges and potential solutions.

Addressing power imbalances: EWP6's commitment to equity

EWP6 (DoE, 2001) aspired to a laudable goal: equitable access to quality education for all learners. The policy emphasised government commitments to expand opportunities, but the specifics of how these commitments translate into concrete actions for dismantling existing power structures could be further elaborated. The focus on reviewing policies, based on research is positive. However, ensuring that these reviews involve diverse stakeholders and address the historical roots of power imbalances within the education system is crucial.

The GFSS represented a significant step towards ensuring representation and participation for historically subordinated groups within schools. However, ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts are crucial to assess the effectiveness of these policies. Such efforts can identify areas where progress is lagging and inform adjustments to bridge the gap between policy and practice. In addition, the GFSS took a step forward by advocating for diverse leadership in schools and collaboration with stakeholders. Translating this aspiration into reality remains a challenge. Although the policies promoted diverse leadership, the gap between policy and practice persists. What specific mechanisms are in place to overcome these implementation hurdles?

The PPR (PMG, 2023) rightly stressed capacity building for a collaborative approach. But is the focus solely on building capacity for collaboration, or are there efforts to address the underlying power dynamics that might hinder true collaboration between diverse stakeholders? These documents highlighted a noble ideal—creating an equitable and IE system. However, the persistent policy–practice gap necessitates a more critical examination of how effectively these policies addressed the historical power imbalances that continue to impact educational opportunities for many learners.

Expertise and representation

South Africa's IE policies acknowledged the importance of both expertise and representation in achieving IE. They foregrounded the role of advisory bodies to guide decision-making (DoE, 2001; PMG, 2023). There is a lingering assumption in the policies under review, which places significant enactment responsibility for IE in South Africa on schools, curriculum adaptation, classroom practice, and ultimately, teachers. However, more than two decades after EWP6's introduction, a significant policy–practice gap persists. This gap highlights a crucial missing piece, which is the preparation of teachers in initial training programmes. Although the policies advocated for capacity building and diverse leadership, these efforts seem primarily focused on in-service teachers and school managers.

A more sustainable solution lies in addressing the root cause of the expertise gap—equipping future educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement inclusive practices effectively when their careers commence. This necessitates a thorough revision of initial teacher training programmes, for example. Studies like Majoko et al. (2018) highlighted the need for teacher training programmes that challenge the traditional siloed approach and cultivate inclusive mindsets in pre-service teachers. Graduates entering the workforce should possess a strong foundational knowledge in several key areas. These include a deep understanding of diverse learning styles, the principles of special needs education, and a comprehensive toolbox of differentiated instruction strategies. Future educators must be prepared to work effectively with a wide range of stakeholders including colleagues, specialists from various disciplines, and families from diverse backgrounds. By integrating these elements into initial teacher training, the expertise gap in IE can be bridged and a new generation of educators empowered to create truly inclusive classrooms.

Building the foundation for inclusive pedagogy

South Africa's IE policies, particularly EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and the GFSS (DBE, 2010), outlined a compelling vision for IE—one that accommodates diverse abilities, languages, and cultures within the classroom. These documents emphasised the importance of flexible curriculum design and differentiated instruction, equipping learners with the tools they need to thrive (PMG, 2023). However, a critical gap exists between this expansive policy framework and its practical implementation in schools.

The current approach suffers from a significant shortcoming—the failure to translate the expanded understanding of IE into a comprehensive training approach for teachers. EWP6 and the GFSS identified a wide range of barriers faced by learners, from diverse learning styles to socioeconomic disadvantages. Inclusive pedagogical approaches should equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to address this range of learning barriers. The lack of specialised training created a dangerous ledge from which the policy aspirations of IE fell short. Twenty-two years after EWP6's introduction, the gap between policy and practice remains a significant hurdle.

The GFSS acknowledged the importance of representation and participation for historically subordinated groups in education. Although the document outlined valuable strategies such as school governing body inclusion and capacity building for educators, further research is needed to explore the extent to which these goals are achieved in practice. Future studies could investigate the lived experiences of these groups within school governing bodies, their level of influence on decision-making processes, and any remaining barriers to their full participation. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts are crucial to assess the effectiveness of these policies. Such efforts can identify areas where progress is lagging and inform adjustments to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

Narrowed redistribution: Funding challenges

In her work on social justice, Nancy Fraser (2001) advanced a dual-focused framework that emphasised both recognition and redistribution. Fraser articulated redistribution as a critique of individuals' positions within the economic structure, scrutinising their relationships with the market and the means of production. She posited that these economic positions often stem from systemic injustices within an unfair economic system, as detailed in her collaboration with Honneth (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Unequal socioeconomic conditions and, by extension education systems, have become emblematic of South African society buttressed by an unjust political past as already outlined.

Our study draws on Fraser's theoretical foundation to analyse the educational support for students facing various learning barriers. Applying Fraser's framework, we contend that effective schooling should aim to reposition these students economically. This repositioning encompasses not only the cultural recognition of their identities and needs but also provision of necessary material resources (redistribution).

EWP6 (DoE, 2001) explicitly, and GFSS (DBE, 2010) generally, acknowledged the intricate interplay between recognition and economic positioning, including the principle of redistribution. Among the policy documents' foundational elements, the strategy on broad funding particularly illustrated an acknowledgment of this dual aspect. Our critical examination of EWP6 and the GFSS raises a pivotal question regarding the government's approach to the redistributive challenge within IE: "What do the funding allocations and levels indicate about the government's prioritisation of the redistributive issue in IE?"

Employing the WPR approach to problematisation, our analysis identifies two primary concerns within the documents. The first issue, which is a consistent theme throughout both EWP6 and GFSS, was the acknowledgment of historical ideological biases and their adverse effects on the current educational landscape in the democratic era. This recognition suggests a critical reflection on past injustices and a commitment to rectifying their enduring impact on educational equity and inclusivity. The second emerges from the reflections of the PPR (PMG, 2023), which is that of a narrow funding scope in an educational landscape with vast needs.

Narrowed funding scope: Limited recognition and redistribution

The limited scope of funding for IE raises serious concerns about genuine recognition and redistribution of resources. Policy documents have suggested that integrating students with disabilities primarily requires curriculum adjustments. However, this contradicts the earlier emphasis on a broad understanding of inclusion that goes beyond a student's disability. When discussing funding, the policy reverted to a disability-centred approach focused solely on physical and cognitive limitations. Issues like poverty, class, health, and sexuality were relegated to inter-ministerial collaboration but were absent from budgetary allocations, which were restricted to addressing only physical and cognitive barriers.

This creates a disjuncture between recognition and redistribution as defined by Fraser (2008). While acknowledging diverse needs, the policy failed to provide adequate funding for the infrastructure and support services necessary for truly inclusive education. Care, teacher training, and support services were not prioritised in budgets, they were seen as "good-to-haves" rather than essential investments. This lack of investment is further evidenced by unspent budgets rolling over year after year (PMG, 2023) and a continued reliance on under-trained teachers (Equal Education Law Centre, 2021). Despite 22 years of EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and 13 years of the GFSS (DBE, 2010), we see a focus on special schools rather than a broad base of inclusive services. This disjuncture between policy rhetoric and resource allocation undermines the government's commitment to IE.

So, what's the problem represented to be?

EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and the GFSS (DBE, 2010) undeniably broadened the definition of IE in South Africa. They acknowledged the nation's complex history and the ongoing effects of past injustices on the education system. However, through a WPR process and 3Rs lens, we can analyse what these policy documents give voice to, as well as leave silent. By examining

what is voiced and silenced, we can identify underlying assumptions and thinking (govern*mentality*) around IE.

Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) argued that the WPR approach focuses on what governments believe needs to change about a problem, revealing their underlying assumptions about the problem itself. In this case, EWP6 and GFSS acknowledged the depth of the problem (educational inequalities) but proposed solutions that primarily focused on changing how things are done (procedures) rather than the underlying structures themselves. These silences suggest two assumptions.

First, that procedural adjustments are sufficient for a project of this magnitude. The narrow recommendations in these policies, compared to their expansive definitions of IE, imply that procedural changes alone can achieve systemic transformation. This overlooked the significant resource reallocation and infrastructural overhaul likely needed to address historical inequalities. The broad conceptualisation of IE in EWP6 and GFSS could be interpreted as shifting some of the responsibility for implementation away from government, potentially creating an ambiguity regarding the extent of state obligation.

A second underlying assumption within these policies appears to be the prioritisation of pedagogical adjustments over addressing systemic inequalities within the education system. This focus on teacher-centred solutions, however, is likely to raise concerns among educators familiar with the resource constraints inherent in public education. The framing in EWP6 and GFSS underplayed the role of infrastructural investment as a prerequisite. Emphasising pedagogical adjustments over structural transformations overlooked crucial components such as infrastructural upgrades, school-based resources, comprehensive teacher training, and parental involvement. The myopic focus on pedagogy excluded broader structural issues, hindering the holistic implementation of IE. The silences emerging from the WPR point to a recognition–redistribution disconnect that manifests as a constant policy–practice gap as highlighted in the PPR (PMG, 2023) and other key research (Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Equal Education Law Centre, 2021).

Beyond intentions: Moving forward

The persistent policy–practice gap in implementing IE policies necessitates decisive action. As highlighted in the PPR (PMG, 2023), ongoing dialogue, evaluation, and capacity building are crucial for success. However, achieving true inclusion requires a broader understanding of social justice that moves beyond solely addressing cognitive barriers.

To bridge this gap, we need a multifaceted approach. Firstly, teacher training programmes must not only focus on diverse teaching methods but also cultivate empathy and understanding among educators (Majoko et al., 2018). Secondly, schools require infrastructural upgrades to ensure physical accessibility and provide facilities catering to learners with diverse needs. Thirdly, strengthening partnerships between schools, families, and communities is essential. Community outreach programmes, support networks, and awareness campaigns can foster collaboration and bridge the gap between schools and

families. Finally, a fundamental shift in resource allocation is paramount. Economic redistribution should encompass a wider range of support services, from mental health counselling to specialised educational support. Specifically, dedicated budget lines for both mainstream schools (not just special schools) and infrastructure improvements are necessary. Furthermore, schools should receive adequate funding based on their specific needs, ensuring that historically disadvantaged institutions have the resources to level the playing field.

In conclusion, South Africa's journey towards IE must move beyond mere policy aspirations. It demands bold, transformative action coupled with plausible structural pathways that translate ideals into tangible, inclusive practices. The nation's commitment to social justice and equity must be reflected not only in words but also in the everyday experiences of its learners. Only through genuine recognition that links to meaningful representation and is supported by comprehensive resource allocation can South Africa achieve a truly inclusive education system that empowers every learner to access their learning in meaningful ways.

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