Strategies to enhance the inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in Gauteng schools: Teachers' perspectives

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The inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in schools remains a global challenge and South African schools are no exception. The increasing number of national and international immigrants and refugees contributes to cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD) in classrooms. Teachers thus grapple with the inclusion of CLD learners. In this study we explored the perspectives of teachers on strategies that could enhance the inclusion of CLD learners in secondary schools. We contend that the inclusion of CLD learners has not been fully addressed in South African schools. A qualitative phenomenological design located within the interpretivism paradigm was used. We employed culturally responsive pedagogy as theoretical framework for the study. From a population of South African teachers in Gauteng, South Africa, 12 secondary school teachers were sampled through critical case sampling. Data were generated through interviews. Research findings identify the need for amendment of government policies, in-service training, and workshops for teachers, incorporating ethnically and culturally diverse content during instruction. Within this study, we extend awareness of the strategies that teachers in CLD classrooms can use to enhance inclusive education and propose further strategies that can also be considered in teaching in CLD classrooms. It is concluded that there is a great need to incorporate inclusive education in the higher education curriculum to capacitate pre-service teachers on the inclusion of learners – CLD learners included.

Keywords: cultural diversity; inclusion; inclusive strategies; linguistic diversity

Introduction

The number of international migrants worldwide has increased from 248 million in 2015 to 258 million in 2017. The numbers were 173 million in 2000, 191 million in 2005 and 220 million in 2010 (United Nations, 2017). More so, the world's economy has become increasingly globalised, also fuelling the rapid increase of immigration to industrialised countries. These immigrants and refugees add to and complicate the cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD) of mainstream schools of receiving countries since all these countries are required to comply with international human rights instruments such as the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) (United Nations, 2006), and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994) to ensure access of CLD learners in schools. The United States of America has the largest number of migrants at 50 million, which was equivalent to 19% of the world's total migrant population in 2017 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017). The large numbers of immigrants bring with them children of school-going age which increases the number of CLD learners in the classrooms. Therefore, it is important to establish strategies that can be used to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners in secondary schools.

South Africa is host to over 260,000 refugees and asylum seekers, and most of them are from Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Wachiaya, 2019). The increase of foreign nationals has intensified the CLD in mainstream schools in South Africa as the country is also obliged to adopt inclusive education to align with the international fraternity.

Nonetheless, international studies demonstrate that the inclusion of CLD learners poses serious challenges to teachers who teach in these classrooms since the teachers are not equipped with the necessary skills to facilitate the inclusion (Moloney & Saltmarsh, 2016). In addition, De Jager (2017) argues that one of the challenges hampering the academic progress of South African CLD learners is the lack of teaching skills to adjust the curriculum to meet the diverse learning needs of CLD learners.

Moreover, there are limited studies on the inclusion of CLD learners in mainstream secondary schools in South Africa. Hence, the choice of strategies to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners in mainstream secondary schools as a research focus was motivated by the assumption that most schools in the Gauteng province have learners from CLD backgrounds but teachers struggle to accommodate these learners in order for them to reach their full potential. This suggests the need for teachers to get more information on how to accommodate CLD learners in their classrooms. Following this observation, we sought to explore teachers' perspectives on strategies to enhance the effective inclusion of CLD learners in secondary schools to capacitate teachers who are confronted with CLD learners in their mainstream classrooms.

Literature Review

CLD in schools is an inescapable reality. It is crucial to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners as it creates equitable and supportive learning environments. It is, therefore, important to advocate for policies that clearly address the inclusion of CLD learners (Diallo & Maizonniaux, 2016; Obiakor, Aluka, Obiakor & Obi, 2024). Ball (2020) and Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) reiterate the need for policymakers and educational researchers to prioritise diversity in the educational system. Thus, it is vital to ensure that policy documents use inclusive language and recognise the value of CLD (Fettes & Karamouzian, 2018). Such policy documents should align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, target 5 which stipulates that all learners, irrespective of their language, ethnicity, background, whether migrant or indigenous should have access to inclusive education. Alignment of national education policies with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 ensures that no learners are left behind. The national policies should be reviewed and assessed regularly (Ilomäki, Lakkala, Kallunki, Mundy, Romero, Romeu & Gouseti, 2023) to curb any challenges that may arise during the implementation of inclusive education.

In addition, the professional development of teachers is of paramount importance. The inclusion of CLD learners can be enhanced if teachers are trained on inclusive policies. According to He and Bagwell (2022), teachers who teach in CLD classrooms should receive high-quality professional development in order to do so. Likewise, Troyan and Auger (2023) affirm that teachers in mainstream classrooms do not have the confidence to implement culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies since they do not receive adequate professional development to address the needs of CLD learners. Similarly, Cruz, Manchanda, Firestone and Rodl (2020) and Hoover, Erickson, Patton, Sacco and Tran (2019) confirm the need for professional development among teachers for them to be able to effectively use culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies. Therefore, the training of teachers on relevant government policies related to inclusion, diversity, and equity empowers teachers to implement effective inclusive practices.

The inclusion of CLD learners can be enhanced by meeting learners' cultural and linguistic diversity during instruction. Using culturally and linguistically responsive instructional methods helps teachers incorporate the values, beliefs, practices, experiences, and materials that are relevant to the learners' cultural backgrounds (Bottiani, Larson, Debnam, Bischoff & Bradshaw, 2018; Cruz et al., 2020). In addition,

teachers can enhance the inclusion of CLD learners by ensuring that the curriculum is relevant to the diverse needs of learners (Hoover, Baca & Klingner, 2016). This implies that the resources in schools should allow teachers to cater for individual differences in teaching and learning as this helps learners to develop a linguistic repertoire. However, some teachers do not pay attention to CLD during teaching (Hoover et al., 2019). This suggests the need for sensitising all teachers to CLD in order to create and enhance an inclusive classroom environment where learners feel valued and respected.

Theoretical Framework: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The study is underpinned by the culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). According to Howard (2021), CRP is situated in a framework that considers the rich and different knowledge skills of learners and the cultural wealth that learners from diverse backgrounds bring to the classroom. CRP is based on the belief that learners' success should become more of a reality by developing dynamic teaching practices that accommodate all the learners in the classroom (Howard, 2021). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), CRP as a learner-centred approach to teaching takes into consideration the importance of the learner's cultural background and experiences in all facets of teaching and learning. In addition, Villegas and Lucas (2007) argue that CRP aims to promote learner engagement, and achievement of all learners by embracing their diversity. This means that teachers may integrate culturally and linguistically relevant teaching approaches that are aimed to reflect the learners' lived experiences. To enhance the inclusion of CLD learners, teachers can broaden the learners' perspectives through role-play or debates, and allow diverse assignment formats such as visuals, presentations, written forms, and peer tutoring. Teachers may also use multiliteracy pedagogies such as code-switching and multi-modal approaches such as clay modelling and audio-visual devices.

In addition, Samuels (2018) argues that CRP is characterised by teachers who are both facilitators and life-long learners. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) discuss the four conditions necessary for culturally responsive teaching which include establishing inclusion, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence. This may suggest that teachers should receive pre-service and in-service training to enhance their cultural and linguistic competence to teach in CLD classrooms. In addition, if teachers have sufficient knowledge of CRP, they can be diligent when teaching in CLD classrooms. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995)

argue that the key to CRP is to assist learners to relate lesson content to their cultural experiences. Thus, to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners, teachers should tap into the learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This may be challenging in South Africa starting from 12 diverse recognised official languages to the diverse languages of immigrant learners who are accommodated in the inclusive mainstream classrooms.

Research Methodology
With this study we sought to explore the teachers' perspectives on the strategies to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners in secondary schools in the Gauteng province in South Africa. We employed a qualitative approach that focused on participants' written and spoken words (Taylor, Bogan & DeVault, 2015). Yin (2016) argues that qualitative research represents the perspectives of the participants. The study is underpinned by the interpretive paradigm (Thanh & Thanh, 2015) where teachers were viewed as social actors whose experiences contributed to the ongoing construction of reality. We used purposeful sampling to select 12 secondary school teachers from three selected mainstream secondary schools in Gauteng, South Africa. A critical case sampling method was used to select the teachers who had profound experiences (Silverman, 2016) on the strategies to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners in secondary schools. Individual participants from different secondary schools were interviewed to elicit strategies that could enhance the teaching of CLD learners in secondary schools.

Data Analysis
The data collected were thematically analysed to identify themes from text data which provided detailed and credible data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011) on the strategies that can be used to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners in mainstream secondary schools. We analysed data using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic data analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2019) which includes, familiarisation with data, coding data to describe the content, searching for patterns (themes) in the codes, reviewing themes, naming and defining themes, and producing a report (findings). Thematic data analysis was relevant for this study because of its flexibility and the ability to be used to identify data within and across data on the participants' perspectives and lived experiences (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The themes that emerged from the face-to-face interviews are discussed in the findings section.

Ethical Considerations
Ethical approval to carry out this study was sought from the University of South Africa's (UNISA)

Institutional Review Board and the Gauteng Department of Education. We explained the nature of the study and provided a brief explanation of the study to the principals, school governing bodies, and to the teachers. We ensured confidentiality and anonymity by assigning pseudonyms to the participants. The participants signed the consent forms. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Trustworthiness
Assessing trustworthiness is the cornerstone of data analysis, findings, and conclusions (Maree, 2016). We used four criteria to ensure trustworthiness in this research, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

To ensure credibility in research, the research findings and conclusions should reflect the world that was studied (Yin, 2016), hence well-established research methods, design, and theoretical framework were adopted (Maree, 2016). To ensure transferability, thick descriptions of data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic data analysis, and this enabled the transfer of aspects of the study findings to be compared to other contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, we also have evidence to show how the data were collected, recorded, and analysed to ensure dependability. In addition, to ensure confirmability in this study, we kept some records such as raw data from individual interviews.

Demographic Profiles of Participants
Six male and six female teachers were interviewed for this study. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants for anonymity purposes. Of the 12 participants, four were Tswana, two Shona, two Zulu, one Xhosa, one Tsonga, one Pedi and the other one was Ngie. The participants were teachers of different subject groups that included mathematics, mathematical literacy, life orientation, English first additional language, physical science, business studies, creative arts, accounting, and history. The participants' teaching experience ranged from 5 to 29 years. and their ages ranged from 30 to 64 years. We interviewed the 12 participants to explore the best strategies to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners.

Findings and Discussion
Data generated were thematically presented and substantiated by relevant literature. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. The themes include incorporating ethnically and culturally diverse content during instruction, training, workshops for teachers to develop knowledge about diversity, and amendment and formulation of government policies.

Incorporating Ethnically and Culturally Diverse Content during Instruction

It emerged from the participants' responses that teachers can enhance the inclusion of CLD learners through meeting ethnic diversity during teaching and learning. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) allude that the use of CRP helps learners to relate lesson content to their own cultural experiences. The following vignettes confirm the participants' perspectives: "... *we have looked at the content from an African perspective, ... we integrate the content then we teach using the English language, is important to integrate content in CLD classrooms*" (Mosa).

The above suggestion implies that, for effective inclusion of CLD learners, teachers are required to blend content from different cultures. Mosa used the phrases, "... *content in African perspective*", "... *it is important to integrate content....*" Furthermore, Nonhle confirmed that she used cultural examples, but that she had challenges in expressing herself in some home languages and that code-switching has not been formalised. The verbatim excerpt below expresses Nonhle's sentiments about meeting ethnic diversity in instruction.

> *I am Xhosa. In class, I have Xhosa, Zulu, and Tswana and when I code-switch and would want to give a cultural example or an African example that would make us united somehow in one view, then I would first do it in Xhosa, and then the Xhosa will get me, and I will do it in Zulu and then I would get a bit of help here from the learners and then the Tswana and foreign languages would become a problem, I would then ask from them, what does this word named in Tswana, I am doing that because I want everybody to be included even though code-switching has not been formalised. I have a bit of a challenge with certain languages that we have in the school classroom.* (Nonhle)

Nonhle's perspective on the strategies to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners shows an understanding of how learners can benefit from meeting ethnic diversity in instruction. She used the following phrases: "*I code-switch*", "... *give a cultural example.*" This implies that the learners' schema would be activated by incorporating their real-life experiences during teaching and learning. However, Nonhle also indicated that code-switching had not been formalised. This suggests that although teachers know how to meet ethnic diversity during instruction, they may not be able to freely do so because code-switching had not been formalised in schools. The participants' perspectives on meeting ethnic diversity in instruction is in line with Diallo and Maizonniaux (2016) who mention the importance of using CLD resources in CLD classrooms. These findings are consistent with the CRP which advocates for teachers to use dynamic instructional strategies during teaching and learning (Howard, 2021). However, not all teachers can incorporate ethnically and culturally diverse content during instruction (De Jager, 2017) as some teachers lack teaching skills to adjust the curriculum to meet the diverse learning needs of CLD learners.

Training and Workshops for Teachers

Some participants from the selected schools confirmed the need for pre-service and in-service training of teachers to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners. Hoover et al. (2019) allude that the professional development of teachers is important so they can effectively use culturally and linguistically responsive teaching pedagogies. The following verbatim statement confirms this perception:

> *It was before the advent of democracy, you know, the education we got was Eurocentric. The presumption was we use a one-size-fits-all teaching approach ... we use English as a medium of instruction, and no ethnicity, no diversity, or inclusivity was considered. We need training.* (Kimbo)

Kimbo confirmed that she did not have the knowledge to teach in CLD classrooms as evidenced by the phrases; "... *education before democracy*", "... *one size fits all*", "... *no diversity or inclusion.*" This may suggest the need for teachers to receive pre-service and in-service training on inclusive policies such as Education White Paper 6 ([EWP6] Department of Education [DoE], 2001) and the screening, identification, assessment and support document ([SIAS], Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2014) in order for them to understand the principles of inclusive education. Mosa also confirmed the need for more in-service training and workshops and added the need for training on the EWP6 and the SIAS:

> *We have not been trained on the Education White Paper 6, we have not been trained on the SIAS, ... the policies are in the files, but we do not have training on how to teach in CLD classrooms....* (Mosa)

It is evident from Mosa's response that there was a need for intense training on inclusive education policies as a strategy to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners. District-based support teams are tasked with the responsibility of training teachers on all education policies including inclusive policies. The findings of the study concur with Cruz et al. (2020) and He and Bagwell (2022) who emphasise the need for professional development of teachers for them to become competent enough to teach in CLD classrooms. These findings are also in line with the culturally responsive teaching framework which advocates for the training of teachers so that they can enhance the inclusion of CLD learners. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) discuss the four conditions necessary for culturally responsive teaching which include establishing inclusion, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence.

Amendment and Formulation of Government Policies

Participants mentioned that the inclusion of CLD learners can be enhanced through the amendment and formulation of government policies. This agrees with Ball (2020), and Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) who established the need for policymakers to prioritise diversity. The following quotations reflect the participants' perspectives: "*I can say we are on the path of successful inclusion through the government policies that are being done, the curriculum that is being drafted by the government is promoting inclusion, although it can be difficult*" (Bongai).

Bongai assumed that the inclusion of CLD learners could be enhanced by the formulation and amendment of government policies. This is evidenced in the phrases that he used: "*… through the government policies being crafted and*", "*… the curriculum being drafted.*" This may suggest that the new policies that are being drafted would be inclusive enough to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners in secondary schools. One participant concurred with Bongai, but he bemoaned the lack of institutional support in cascading the government policies to the teachers for them to be able to support CLD learners in the classrooms. Botshelo had this to say:

> At my school ... we have never had a meeting where we dealt with White Paper 6. We have never even identified CLD learners and how to accommodate them. We just apply what is immediate to us. The government policies must be developed to support the needs of CLD learners and information must be shared with the teachers. (Botshelo)

Although Botshelo shared the same sentiments as Bongani, he added that the existing policies have not been shared with the teachers, and when the policies are developed, information should be cascaded down to the teachers: "*... we have never had a meeting where we dealt with White paper 6, ... information must be shared with the teachers.*" This implies that, for inclusion of CLD learners to be a success, the government should formulate and amend government policies and equip teachers on the implementation of policies such as EWP6. The participants' responses agree with literature that advocates for educational policies that address the inclusion of CLD learners (Diallo & Maizonniaux, 2016; Obiakor et al., 2024). Thus, the inclusion of CLD learners can be enhanced if the government plays a pivotal role in amending and formulating educational policies.

Conclusion

In this study, we explored the perspectives of teachers on the strategies to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners in mainstream secondary schools in the Gauteng province, South Africa. The findings established various strategies to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners. These include incorporating ethnically and culturally diverse content during instruction, training, workshops for teachers to develop knowledge about diversity, and amendment and formulation of government policies. We argue that teachers should be proactive in enhancing the inclusion of CLD learners. Pre-service and in-service training of teachers is important for teachers to be conversant with CLD pedagogies. The training of and workshops for teachers on CLD teaching strategies such as differentiated instruction may necessitate the inclusion of CLD learners in mainstream classrooms. There is also a great need to incorporate inclusive education in the higher education curriculum to capacitate pre-service teachers on strategies to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners. The findings of this study may be used by officials of the DoE and curriculum developers for Higher Education to develop teaching and learning materials that recognise and value diversity in the classrooms. The formulation and amendment of educational policies in South Africa play a pivotal role as they ensure that policies cater for the needs of all learners – including learners from diverse contexts.

For the inclusion of CLD learners to become a reality in South African education, pre-service and in-service teachers must attend workshops and receive training on the amended inclusive policies to promote the teachers' use of CLD instructional pedagogies. It is also important to note that CLD learners can benefit from code-switching. Therefore, it is paramount to formalise code-switching as an instructional method in CLD classrooms since there is no written documentation guiding teachers on the affordances of code-switching. Based on the theoretical framework used for this study, teachers may find it important to become lifelong learners through professional development.

It is necessary to note that the study was limited to three secondary schools in Gauteng, South Africa. Involving more schools and other districts may yield more results on the strategies to enhance the inclusion of CLD learners. It would also be captivating to repeat this study in primary and private schools where CLD is also prevalent.

Authors' Contributions

Both authors contributed to the research. AM prepared the article.

Notes

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