

## Article

# Supporting Learners with Mild Intellectual Developmental Disorders with Career Development in Mainstream Schools

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**Abstract:** Many learners with mild intellectual developmental disorders (IDD) in mainstream primary schools in the Free State Province of South Africa require support to maximise their learning potential and prepare them for work post-school. In this study, a qualitative approach and Critical Disability Theory were used to explore the experiences of education stakeholders (teachers, parents, and principals) in how schools support the career development of learners with mild IDD in mainstream schools. There were 25 participants in this study, and data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and demographic questionnaires. The findings indicated that teachers were optimistic that learners with intellectual developmental disorders could thrive if identified early and provided with specialised support services. The findings also showed that teachers had low self-efficacy regarding their training on inclusive education practices and had limited knowledge about career development services. All the participants were optimistic that learners with mild IDD could participate in the labour market if they were taught work-related skills at an early age. It is recommended that stronger collaborative partnerships should be developed between stakeholders to promote inclusive support interventions, transform teaching approaches, and equip mainstream teachers with the required skills.

**Keywords:** intellectual developmental disorders; career development; teaching and learning; mainstream schools; inclusive education; interventions; support strategies



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## 1. Introduction

Approximately 9.7 million people are living with disabilities in South Africa. This constitutes about 15.7% of the population [1]. Securing employment is one of the challenges that people with disabilities face, thus making the percentage of employed people with disabilities in South Africa even lower [2,3]. A significant contributor to this unemployment rate is that many people with disabilities rely on government social grants; they have a lack of access and exposure to the career opportunities and development programs available to them [4,5]. Learners with mild intellectual developmental disorders (IDD) seldom complete Grade 12, and even when they do, their academic performance prevents them from securing university entrance or employment [6,7]. A mild intellectual developmental disorder is defined as any cognitive delay which may affect an individual's academic achievement, social interactive skills, and critical reasoning abilities [8]. South Africa is one of the countries that have modified their education policies to cater to learners with mild IDD in mainstream schools, and additionally, made changes to labour laws to encourage and support those with disabilities in seeking employment [9,10]. There is limited literature on the training received by teachers in mainstream schools regarding the career guidance of learners with mild IDD. Additionally, there is limited literature on the nature and content of any career guidance for persons with mild IDD. It is important to explore this considering

achieving the desired results of inclusive education [11–13]. Because learners spend an average of 35 h a week in school, schools play a vital role in shaping their attitudes toward professional development post-school [14]. Teachers find working with learners with mild IDD challenging as they require constant individual support [15]. Teachers need ongoing professional development and training on special education, curriculum differentiation, emotional and psychological support, and career guidance [16,17].

Mainstream schools must implement a skills-based curriculum to educate learners with mild IDD on practical work skills so that they may support themselves in the workplace post-school. Teachers' and parents' responsibilities, public attitudes towards people with disabilities, perceived possibilities for people with disabilities, and challenges to career development implementation are all factors that contribute to the successful implementation of career development. This emphasizes the importance of teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders in influencing the career development of learners with mild IDD. The purpose of the study reported in this paper was to answer the following question: What are stakeholders' experiences on how mainstream schools in the Fezile Dabi District influence the career development of learners with mild intellectual disabilities? This study explored how school principals, teachers, and parents experience how schools influence the career development of learners with mild intellectual developmental disorders. The objectives included identifying how career support services can be implemented in schools to benefit learners with mild IDD and investigating which factors serve as hindrances towards the implementation thereof. Furthermore, we also aimed to explore stakeholders' knowledge of career development programs and how these programs can be used to assist and benefit learners with mild IDD. Moreover, we analysed how these experiences encourage parents and teachers to have positive attitudes towards learners with mild IDD. This study aimed to create awareness of the career development programs available to learners with disabilities. Furthermore, it examines how stakeholders can make information about community-based programs for career support available to learners and suggest appropriate career options. In addition, this study aimed to explore the factors which affect the implementation of career development in schools. This study focused on the career development of primary school learners with mild IDD in the Fezile Dabi District in the Free State Province of South Africa. Career guidance support services are found in schools, higher learning institutions, the community, and the private employment sector [18,19]. In the past, former Model C (semi-private) schools had the advantage of having an in-house career guidance counsellor; however, life orientation teachers in primary schools have now taken this responsibility. Many unemployed and job-seeking individuals with disabilities need to be provided with career guidance regarding career opportunities through various stakeholder engagements, including community-based initiatives. In addition, schools need to implement a skills-based curriculum to teach learners with mild IDD practical work skills that prepare them for the workforce post-school.

### *1.1. Career Information in Schools*

One of the core functions of career development is raising awareness and offering career information on the various career opportunities available for learners post-school [20,21]. This core function assists learners in making informed decisions about the career paths they seek to follow [22]. For career development programs to impact economic growth meaningfully, a coordinated approach is necessary for unemployed youth in South Africa have access to quality career information and career support services; that is, coordinated career development programs need to be created for learners to make meaningful contributions to the economy and increase economic growth [20,23]. This approach tends to forget about unemployed youth with disabilities. To address this issue, work-based learning opportunities are provided to learners with mild IDD when they exit special schools. These opportunities include arranging career expos that provide information on job shadowing, apprenticeships, and enrolling in higher education and training institu-

tions [24,25]. Such programs prepare learners and contribute to the economy by creating a skilled workforce capable of making meaningful contributions.

People with disabilities are more likely than their non-disabled counterparts to face poverty, unemployment, and unpaid work due to a lack of work-related qualifications [26]. This scenario could result from companies refusing to employ people with disabilities because they do not have the necessary experience, skills, or qualifications [27]. Furthermore, people with disabilities tend to work in low-paying, unskilled jobs, and are underrepresented in managerial or supervision positions [28]. Despite government efforts and employer initiatives, the employment rate of people with disabilities remains low [29]. Expanding career support services to explicitly include people with disabilities is vital to enhance their post-school employment prospects [30]. Access to quality career information alone does not necessarily lead to employment. However, comprehensive career development programs can empower individuals with disabilities to pursue entrepreneurship and small business opportunities, thereby expanding their employment options and allowing them to contribute economically [31].

Policies aimed at integrating learners with mild IDD in mainstream schools highlight the need for accessible career education. According to Shen [21], aligning career planning with educational policies ensures that career guidance programs are inclusive and cater to all learners, especially those with disabilities. In addition, implementing a skills-based curriculum is essential for equipping learners with the practical skills needed for the job market. Indrawati and Kuncoro [23] emphasize that vocational training and career-focused education are crucial for improving employability, particularly for those with learning challenges. Makola et al. [22] stress that teachers must receive continuous professional development to manage inclusive classrooms effectively. Training in special education, curriculum differentiation, and career guidance is crucial for ensuring that learners with disabilities receive the appropriate support they need.

### 1.2. Conceptualising Disabilities

Disability can be conceptualised through three primary models: the medical model, the social model, and the biopsychological model [32]. Babik asserts that *“The medical model considers disability a feature of the person, directly caused by diseases, disorders, traumas, or other health conditions, which would require medical treatment or intervention with the primary goal to “correct” the problem within the individual”*. In contrast, the social model considers the disability a socially created problem rather than attributed to the individual [32]. The biopsychological model integrates the medical and social models to cover the complex nature of disability that exists in the context of biological, psychological, and societal factors. Culture influences the definition and perception of disability. Babik and Gardener [32] highlight that the definition of disability is subject to the traits and capacities valued in a specific culture. In the United States, the Disabilities Education Act has ensured that children with disabilities receive education in conventional, inclusive settings, which has led to improvements in acceptance and social inclusion for these students [32]. However, cultural factors, including ethnic and linguistic diversity, pose challenges for teachers in managing inclusive classrooms effectively, as these cultural differences can shape how disability is perceived and understood within the classroom environment [33]. Babik and Gardener [32] highlight that structured experiential learning, such as guided activities and cooperative play, is particularly effective in promoting social inclusion and improving attitudes. Experiential learning is limited in terms of setting standards for effective involvement and communicating expectations in a culturally sensitive way [34]. While cultural sensitivity is essential in enabling inclusion, there is a lack of a definition for culturally sensitive classroom management and a small research base for management pedagogy [35].

Children with disabilities rely on their parents or caregivers for support, including education, social integration, and vocational planning [36,37]. As a result, parents become overprotective of their children, leading to parents influencing career decisions that they deem safe and appropriate rather than allowing the child to explore diverse career

paths [38,39]. Parents, therefore, need to be supported in a manner that allows them to assist their children with strategies to adapt to the evolving school curriculum and work environments post-school [40]. Additional support on the various types of vocational program options can be given to parents. Parents influence how their children perceive the idea of employment by highlighting the necessity of working and earning an income [40]. When children are not exposed to these concepts early on, they may make uninformed career choices later in life, underscoring the importance of introducing the idea of work through family and school programs. Though career support services are available at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, and in public and private workplaces, the services are unsupervised and range from highly qualified to untrained. There is currently no organization at the national or provincial level in charge of managing or providing information, guidance, and services connected to the employment market or careers. Without proper coordination, the effectiveness of these services in supporting learners with disabilities is limited [41]. Furthermore, learners', teachers', and parents' awareness needs to be raised about the existence of career support programs that facilitate career development goals and benefit all learners, including those with mild IDD. For school-based career development to succeed, there must be a collaborative effort between teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Raising awareness about existing career support programs is crucial to achieving career development goals that benefit all learners, including those with mild intellectual developmental disorders (IDD) [42]. Implementing a whole-education approach, as discussed by Kenny et al. [41], can provide a more integrated and effective model for supporting inclusive career development programs. Such an approach emphasizes collaboration between schools, families, and the broader community to create an environment conducive to the success of learners with diverse needs.

Previously, many former Model C (semi-private) schools provided career advice through psychometric testing before learners selected appropriate school subjects based on their interests and preferences [43]. However, this practice has evolved, and schools now play a more significant role in facilitating subject choice, particularly as learners transition to the further education and training (FET) phase. Adapting curricula to ensure that learners with mild IDD acquire practical and vocational skills is essential. However, challenges such as large class sizes, insufficient resources, and inadequate teacher training often hinder the provision of adequate support [42]. Addressing these obstacles requires targeted efforts, including infrastructure development and enhanced teacher training programs [39]. Financial limitations are a significant barrier to inclusive education and the implementation of effective career development programs. Adu et al. [44] highlight the impact of these constraints, which affect both the availability of resources in schools and the ability of parents to support children with learning difficulties. Schools must seek alternative funding solutions and collaborate with Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and NGOs to address these issues.

### *1.3. Critical Disability Theory (CDT)*

Critical Disability Theory emerged in the late 20th century and views disability as a socially constructed phenomenon according to an individual's interaction with their social and physical environment [45]. CDT is based on the critique of traditional views of disability, which were initially created to isolate and oppress people with disabilities from being active members of society [46]. This perspective shifts the focus away from the medical model, which treats disability as an inherent impairment, and instead emphasizes a socially constructed model that highlights the influence of cultural, social, and political constructs on the experience of disability [47,48]. The theory calls for the removal of socially constructed barriers and promotes policies that enhance inclusivity by adapting environments to better accommodate people with disabilities, rather than expecting individuals to conform to existing societal norms [45,49]. In addition, CDT attempts to divert from making people with disabilities adapt to their environment to treating them as equal members of society [50]. Doing so provides a framework for understanding and evaluating the

progress made towards the social acceptance and inclusion of people with disabilities. This theory has paved the way to explore the progress made by people with disabilities in their attempts to be socially accepted individuals [50].

Applying CDT as a theoretical framework for this study allows the researchers to explore how values and convictions toward disability influence people's experiences of people with disabilities in terms of integrating them as active members of society [51]. This approach is especially relevant for exploring the factors that affect the implementation of career development programs for learners with mild intellectual developmental disorders (IDD) in schools, aligning with the study's objectives to investigate inclusivity and support structures.

The research questions which this study aimed to answer were the following:

- What are the experiences of stakeholders in how schools in Fezile Dabi implement career development for learners with intellectual disabilities?
- How are career guidance practices implemented in Fezile Dabi schools?
- What are the factors that influence the implementation of career development in Fezile Dabi schools?

## 2. Methods

A qualitative approach was used to guide this study, as participants were asked to share their experiences of teaching and caring for learners with mild IDD. The research study's purpose was to explore mainstream education stakeholders' experiences of how schools influence the career development of learners with mild IDD. Data were collected from 25 participants from two schools in the Fezile Dabi District in the Free State Province of South Africa. Individual semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and demographic questionnaires were used to gather data from 2 school principals, 14 teachers, and 9 parents. The inclusion criteria for parents were that they needed to have a learner with an intellectual developmental disorder [52]. The inclusion criteria for teachers were that they needed to have high numbers of learners with mild IDD in their classrooms. They had to have between five and eight learners with mild IDD in the classroom. The principals formed part of the sample as they are in charge of school administration and have the power to influence the policies that affect the academic achievement of learners with mild IDD. They understand the regulations and processes that must be followed when referring learners to specialized schools. Participants were asked to share their experiences of teaching and caring for learners with mild IDD and whether they were aware of the career development services and programs available in their surroundings. In addition, they were asked to expand on their experiences of how learners with mild IDD are excluded from the labour market post-school.

Institutional ethics approval and Free State Department of Education permission were obtained prior to the commencement of the study. The study subscribed to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation protocols. Informed consent letters were signed by the participants after the purpose of the study and the details of the benefits/risks were highlighted. These informed consent forms were used to obtain the participants' formal approval to participate in the study. To ensure confidentiality, the participants were given pseudonyms to link them to their responses. The identities of the participants were protected, and the school's names and exact locations were not disclosed. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were given for participation.

### *Data Collection Process*

The study reported in this paper used conversational interviews, demographic questionnaires, and focus group discussions to collect data. Conversational interviews with teachers, parents, and principals were audio-taped with the participants' consent. Three interview schedules were used for each data set (teachers, principals, parents). The principal interviews included five open-ended questions. Those with teachers consisted of eleven open-ended questions. Those with parents consisted of nine open-ended questions.



The duration of the interviews was about 20 min long. All participants were expected to complete a demographic questionnaire in English. However, the questionnaire was verbally translated into Sesotho for participants who could not read English. The demographic questionnaire for teachers collected information such as gender, age, teaching experience, special needs training, and teaching qualifications. The demographic questionnaire for principals collected data on gender, age, principal experience, number of learners in the school, and the number of learners identified as “at risk” or with mild IDD. The demographic questionnaire for parents was designed to collect data on gender, age, marital status, highest grade completed, number of people in the household, age of child with mild IDD, and employment status. This information helped us to evaluate the research findings and determine if age, experience, marital status, or qualifications impacted how participants responded to questions. Two focus group discussions of about 45–60 min each were conducted with school A parents and school B teachers. Open-ended questions guided the discussions, which were 45–60 min long. The questions were translated into Sesotho to guide the discussion with parents, as most of them could not express themselves in English. The duration of the individual interviews conducted after the focus group discussions was shorter, as most of the information was already captured during the discussions.

The first step in the inductive data analysis involved transcribing the audio-recorded interviews and focus groups. Braun and Clarke’s [53] six-phase framework for thematic analysis was used to analyse data from this study. Codes were searched, initial codes were generated, and themes were established and examined, resulting in the final themes being identified. The first phase in Braun and Clarke’s [53] six-phase framework for thematic analysis was to become familiar with the data. The researchers undertook this by examining the transcripts generated from the individual interviews and focus group discussions. The second phase was to generate initial codes. The researchers undertook this by coding each piece of information that would assist in answering the research questions. The third phase was to search for themes. The researchers undertook this by interpreting the codes and grouping similar codes to generate preliminary themes. The fourth phase was to review the themes. The researchers undertook this by categorising the preliminary themes into similarities and differences. The fifth phase involved defining and naming the themes. The researchers undertook this by generating theme names and their definitions thereof. Lastly, the sixth phase involved producing the final written report.

Credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability were the quality criteria used to ensure the trustworthiness of the reported findings. Member checking was used to confirm credibility, and transcriptions were used to check against the generated themes. The researchers checked and reviewed all the collected data to ensure confirmability. To ensure dependability, the findings were discussed among the researchers, and additional recommendations for analysis were made where applicable. Detailed descriptions of the types of schools and participants were included to ensure transferability.

A limitation of the study was that it only involved two schools. While valuable insights can be gathered from the depths of the findings, they cannot be generalized to all mainstream and special schools in the Free State. Another limitation was that the teachers and parents were only from primary schools. In addition, due to the sensitivities around disability, some parents were reluctant to share detailed descriptions of their experiences of caring for learners with mild IDD.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Demographic Information

Tables 1 and 2 below display the details of the participating schools located in the Fezile Dabi District in the Free State.

Most teachers in both schools had over ten years of teaching experience, with an average of 18 years for School A and 19 years for School B. All the teachers in school B had a minimum of a Bachelor of Education degree, while in school A, 10 out of 14 had a Bachelor of Education. The rest had the Advanced Diploma in Education as their

highest qualification. Seven out of nine of the participating parents had at least a Grade 12 certificate. This information is essential as it helps to put into perspective the expected level of information regarding the support and career guidance of learners with disabilities.

**Table 1.** Description of selected schools.

	School A	School B
Type of school	Full-service school	School for learners with mild intellectual developmental disorders
Number of learners	1261	370
Number of learners in need of remedial attention	96	370
Language of learning and teaching	Sesotho (foundation phase) English (intermediate and senior phase)	English and Afrikaans
Location of school	Free State	Free State

**Table 2.** Summary of participants.

School	Designation	Experience	Gender	Grade Taught	Highest Qualification
<b>Principals</b>					
School A	Principal	22 years	Female	Not applicable	Advanced Certificate in Education, Bachelor of Education Honours
School B	Principal	3 years	Male	Not applicable	Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Education Honours
Total number of principals: 2					
<b>Teachers</b>					
School A	T1	25 years	Female	5,6	Senior Primary Teachers Diploma, Bachelor of Education
	T2	10 years	Female	2	Advanced Certificate in Education
	T3	29 years	Female	6	Advanced Certificate in Education
	T4	28 years	Female	5	Bachelor of Education, Teaching English as a Foreign Language
	T5	22 years	Female	1–7	Advanced Certificate in Education, Primary Teachers Diploma
	T6	6 years	Female	7	Bachelor of Education
	T7	4 years	Female	4	Bachelor of Education
	T8	4 years	Female	Junior	Bachelor of Education
	T9	15 years	Female	Senior	Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Education Honours
	T10	12 years	Male	Senior	Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Education Honours
School B	T11	32 years	Female	Junior	Bachelor of Education, Certificate in Welding
	T12	11 years	Female	Senior	Bachelor of Education, Certificate in Beauty
	T13	35 years	Male	Senior	Bachelor of Education
	T14	23 years	Female	Junior, Senior	Bachelor of Science
Total number of teachers: 14					
<b>Parents</b>					

Table 2. Cont.

School	Designation	Experience	Gender	Grade Taught	Highest Qualification	
	Designation	Age	Number of children	Marital status	Highest qualification/grade passed	Employed (yes/no)
School A	P1	47	4	Widowed	Grade 12	Yes
	P2	51	4	Married	Grade 11	Yes
	P3	32	3	Single	Grade 12	No
	P4	33	2	Single	Grade 12	No
	P5	26	1	Single	Grade 12	No
	P6	42	4	Married	Grade 12, Welding certificate	Yes
	P7	25	1	Single	Grade 12	No
School B	P8	46	2	Married	Diploma	Yes
	P9	37	2	Single	Grade 12	No
Total number of parents: 9						

Four themes were generated from the data analysis:

1. The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in learner support and career development.
2. Attitudes towards learners with mild IDD.
3. Experiences of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
4. Factors that serve as hindrances towards the implementation of career development.

Table 3 below displays the themes and sub themes.

Table 3. Themes and subthemes.

Theme	Subthemes
1. Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Parent roles</li> <li>• Department of Education roles</li> </ul>
2. Attitudes towards learners with mild IDD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher attitudes</li> <li>• Parent attitudes</li> </ul>
3. General experiences of employment opportunities available for people with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career opportunities available for people with disabilities</li> </ul>
4. Factors hampering the implementation of career development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner behaviour</li> <li>• Financial challenges</li> <li>• Parental support</li> <li>• Societal stigmas</li> </ul>

### 3.2. The Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders

Stakeholders are individuals who have an influence on the career development of learners with mild IDD at the school level. The roles of stakeholders are defined as how teachers, parents, and the Department of Education influence the implementation of career development in schools. Responsibilities are defined as the duties expected to be carried out by teachers, parents, and the Department of Education. The inclusion criteria for this theme were any references made by participants regarding the efforts needed to enhance the career development of learners with mild IDD. The subthemes included teacher roles, parental roles, and the roles of the Department of Education. The results revealed that



teachers and parents believed they played a vital role in learners' career development. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that student behaviour is influenced by people's experiences and attitudes toward learners with disabilities. One of the challenges that arose was that parents do not understand what career development entails. As a result, this adds to the underutilization of the career development programs available in the Fezile Dabi District in the Free State. Financial constraints, a significant issue, also significantly influence career development, as participants emphasized how additional financial support from the Department of Education would assist them.

When the participants were asked to mention the career development programs available in Fezile Dabi, 12 out of 25 had some knowledge, 7 out of 25 did not know, and 6 out of 25 chose not to respond. The data from the interviews and focus group discussions indicated that teachers and parents had limited knowledge about the career development programs in Fezile Dabi. The participants mentioned their perceived ideas of the available career development programs but could not elaborate on their intended purpose. The principals mentioned that they implement all policy requirements in referrals for special school placement. In addition, learners in special schools are exposed to career information evenings once a year, where different companies share the career paths available to learners post-school. One principal mentioned the need to expose learners to a skills-based curriculum in preparation for placement at a special school. Another principal mentioned that learners with mild IDD benefit from a specialized curriculum.

### 3.3. Attitudes Towards Learners with Mild IDD

Attitudes towards learners with mild IDD are defined as generally positive or negative perceptions. This includes references to the social, emotional, and behavioural characteristics of learners with mild IDD. The subthemes that emerged were teacher and parent attitudes. The results revealed that the teachers' attitudes towards learners with mild IDD included sympathy and an assumption from mainstream teachers that learners with mild IDD are better off in special needs schools than mainstream schools. Teachers are expected to adapt their classrooms and teaching strategies to accommodate different learners, adapt to changing policies to keep up with educational trends, and improve the well-being of learners. The teachers mentioned that there is an overall need for the implementation of a skills-based curriculum for these learners. Some of the teachers indicated that they were motivated to support their learners and optimistic that with the right kind of training, teachers would be able to support the learners better.

*"Although there are many children in the class, you try to make sure they understand, and they keep up with other learners in class."*

*"Learners with intellectual disabilities should not be ignored in class because they still have much to learn and have to, we still have much to teach."*

*"We want a special school, or we want, even if it is not built, we want a skilled curriculum which addresses learners with different abilities."*

In terms of the parents' attitudes, the participants believed that people with disabilities would be able to thrive, provided that they are adequately supervised or monitored. Some of the parents were not optimistic about the learners' ability to thrive. Others stated that labelling these learners as slow and dumb reduces the expectations placed on them and results in a lack of effort on the part of the learners. The parents compared their children with other learners and were concerned about their children's academic performance. Some parents believed that aftercare would help improve their children's academic performance, while others believed their children would benefit from psychological testing. Some demonstrated an attitude of frustration at not being able to assist or support their children effectively. This results in parents being unable to exercise patience towards their children when they require academic support, and thereby relying on teachers to support their children, or taking them to aftercare services to obtain the extra assistance. Parents appeared unwilling to take responsibility for contributing to their children's academic performance.

*“They want their kids to learn like other normal kids.”*

*“The government should have schools for slow children. They say they are dumb and that they are in the class with dumb learners.”*

*“I have even resorted to finding extra classes for him to attend on Saturdays.”*

*“I would have taken my child to aftercare services where he will be able to be helped and where they can identify his problem lies.”*

*“Maybe after school, these learners that have trouble understanding the work, should have extra classes.”*

### 3.4. General Experiences of Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

The third theme focused on participants' experiences with the employment opportunities available to people with disabilities. This theme is defined as the perceived knowledge of job opportunities that are available for people with disabilities within the South African context. Any references that the participants made about skills development opportunities for people with disabilities were categorised under this theme. A subtheme that emerged was career opportunities available for people with disabilities. Employment opportunities for people with disabilities were mentioned by the participants. Parents mentioned skills-based opportunities, while teachers referred to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The findings exposed participants' insufficient knowledge about the various curriculum development programs in Fezile Dabi. As a result, this insufficient knowledge influenced how learners with mild IDD could access them and use them effectively.

*“They will be able to work by using their hands.”*

*“I think they can be taken to be taught practical work like to be a mechanical fitter.”*

*“They can start their own businesses. They can run their own businesses if they are good with working with their hands.”*

### 3.5. Factors That Serve as Hindrances Towards the Implementation of Career Development

Factors that influence the implementation of career development in schools established the fourth theme. All the factors which negatively affected career development implementation were defined. This included any references regarding what makes implementing career development practices in schools difficult. The subthemes included learner behaviour, financial support, parental support, and social stigmas. When the parents were asked to mention the challenges they face in raising their children, three out of nine parents said their children had behavioural challenges, three out of nine parents said they had concentration challenges, and two out of nine parents mentioned they had financial challenges. In comparison, one out of nine parents said they had no challenges. Both principals mentioned needing additional financial assistance from the Department of Basic Education to provide specialized teaching and career support resources. In addition, both principals mentioned a need for an additional special school to be built in the Fezile Dabi District.

## 4. Discussion

This study investigated the career development support available to learners with mild IDD in mainstream schools. The study's findings can be viewed from multiple levels involving all stakeholders: from the nuclear family to community involvement and awareness, to engagement with teachers and institutional levels. Furthermore, participation at the education district level was considered. The findings reveal that school career development programs should be prioritized from early childhood development until school completion. This creates a link from the home and family environment to schools at the institutional level. Learners in the foundation and intermediate phases must be made aware of the various jobs available and be taught to internalize the desire to pursue a certain career. In addition, the Department of Education needs to prioritize teacher training on differentiated

learning and assessment for learners with diverse learning styles and career interests. A critique of early career development is that learners undergo personality changes as they mature. There is a gap in the literature that documents how personality changes influence childhood career development. Understanding the preparation of individuals/learners with mild IDD for the world of work and exploring how teachers and parents approach career development has illuminated the areas where the stakeholders involved must be further equipped to deal with this task. The findings revealed that career guidance is implemented in schools when learners select certain subjects to streamline their career interests and meet specific course requirements at the tertiary level [22]. This was evident in the special school, where learners selected specific vocational routes (welding, beauty, or food production). International studies show that age-appropriate career information is introduced to learners at an early age. An example of this is the practice in Germany, where learners with mild IDD have access to workshops that offer skills development and gradual integration into the world of work [54]. There is evidence of career guidance implementation in South African schools in the form of completing all curriculum subjects, including Languages, Life Skills, Social Sciences, and Mathematics. Curriculum adaptations to support the career development of learners with mild IDD are expected to be carried out by teachers. These adaptations ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary skills in preparation for the workplace post-school [55]. Teachers' roles, as described by the participants, included modifying teaching and assessment techniques, responding to learner diversity, giving learners individual attention through teaching specific skills, and improving overall learner well-being. The findings highlight the necessity for involvement at the sectoral level, i.e., policy and practice can be structured to address the gaps in teachers' career development knowledge, and information stands can be provided at community centres. Other interventions could be focused on the establishment of additional special needs schools in Fezile Dabi and similar contexts where low-income families may enrol their children.

The factors that hampered the implementation of career development included learner behaviour, financial constraints, and societal stigmas. Teachers mentioned that learner behaviour is a severe issue in schools and society [50]. They mentioned that some learners are unwilling to learn, which negatively impacts the learning environment. This negative behaviour became a challenge, as teachers ended up focusing on the behaviour rather than the learners' well-being. These challenges are prevalent in the classroom. Teachers mentioned that learners are capable of learning; however, they cannot fully grasp what is being taught, despite teacher efforts to differentiate the curriculum to accommodate their learning styles. Low academic expectations at family and community levels could also contribute to learners' attitudes to learning and schooling. Building supportive learning environments involves collaboration between families, schools, and the community to raise awareness about mild IDD and to encourage learners to be intentional in their self-efficacy, encouraging them to develop the required skills and competencies to thrive. Financial restrictions influence the help parents seek for their children. In this study, more than half of the parents were unemployed [56]. Perceived inadequate funding from authorities contributed to a lack of specialized learning and teaching support material that could be used to help learners with mild IDD. Parents mentioned that they could not afford to purchase additional support material, which disadvantages learners and teachers [56]. This is similar in low-income countries where the inability to buy learning and teaching support materials creates hindrances for both learners and teachers [57,58].

In every community, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) support community members on a social and economic level. Parents and teachers were unaware of the function of career development programs or how they can be accessed. Inadequate information sharing is a barrier for parents, as these programs can benefit their children. Teachers lacked the information on where to refer parents after identifying learning barriers. Similarly, in Australia, a lack of information given to parents serves as a barrier to the inclusion of learners [59]. If teachers and parents are unaware of such programs, learners are unlikely

to become aware of them. These programs were only known by a small percentage of the community, and those who do not require them regard them as a luxury service. Furthermore, there is limited promotion for these programs, so parents should be proactive about learning where they are and the services they offer. Australia provides training and post-school apprenticeships, Disability Employment Services, and job placements that are specifically tailored for learners with mild IDD [60]. This research could lay the groundwork for enhancing and potentially broadening access to and knowledge of communities' current career development programs.

The participants mentioned that people with disabilities would be better off if they created their own businesses using their vocational skills. These small businesses included operating a bakery or tuckshop, selling harvested fruits and vegetables, and selling hand-crafted items. Career development programs allow learners to enhance their learning potential and improve their self-awareness. This process is facilitated by teaching learners about different careers. However, career development is constrained, as many employers seek a minimum of a Grade 12 certificate to qualify for a certain job. Therefore, schools promote career development by teaching learners the occupational skills they will need to sustain themselves post-school. In Sweden, local businesses play a significant role by creating skills-based jobs for people with mild IDD while providing ongoing emotional, physical, and psycho-social support [61]. These findings could benefit learners with mild IDD by introducing them to careers that are beyond their current abilities, providing them with information about different career paths, allowing them to explore their interest in a particular career, and helping them develop their self-concept. Companies can expand their employment opportunities to offer basic skills-based training to learners with mild IDD post-school.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that although stakeholders make attempts to improve the well-being of learners with mild IDD, a variety of challenges prevent them from being effective in terms of actual outcomes. Stakeholders require additional support in understanding the range of available career support options and offerings in their community. The insufficient information sharing among stakeholders concerning community-based career support programs limits learners' ability to benefit from them post-school. The findings of this paper relate to a social model of disability. Parents and teachers are more concerned with improving the academic performance of learners with mild IDD, whilst principals are concerned with increasing practical and vocational abilities. Learners with intellectual developmental disorders are more prone to drop out of school. It is recommended that the Department of Education set up transdisciplinary task teams to find innovative ways to ensure that information about career support services for learners with mild IDD is readily available to all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, school principals, NGOs, counsellors, and community members. Furthermore, this will provide learners with mild IDD with practical, work-related skills to prepare them for post-school employment.

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