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Perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream school teachers regarding differentiated assessment

By

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis in Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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"Sometimes the most brilliant and intelligent people do not shine in standardised test because they do not have standardised minds"

\- Diane Ravitch-

ABSTRACT

The need for classroom assessment to be differentiated is gradually gaining momentum in mainstream schools around the globe. Differentiated assessment takes appreciation of the diverse and special needs of learners and seeks to accommodate them. Thus, promoting learners' access to the curriculum. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa makes provisions through the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document and assessment guidelines to manage schools' assessment practices. However, most teachers still use the traditional and standardised approaches to classroom assessments, which the literature criticises as an unfair approach. Although standardised approaches to classroom assessment appear superficially unbiased, it has proven to be exclusive and discriminatory with deeper scrutiny. This study investigated Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers' perception regarding differentiated assessment and their support requirements from the District Based Support Teams (DBSTs). Non-probability purposive sampling was used to identify two mainstream primary schools in Eersterust, Gauteng Province, and five Foundation Phase teachers, two being the departmental heads as the participants. Two Foundation Phase teachers in school 1 and three Foundation Phase teachers in School 2. The study adopted a qualitative multiple case study design within an interpretivist paradigm. The conceptual framework draws from the Psychometric Theory which served as the lens through which standardised one-size-fits-all assessment was analysed. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, and Piaget's cognitive development theory, provided insights into learners' cognition. Furthermore, Sen and Nussbaum's capability approaches served as the lenses for understanding the fairness of assessment policies and practices in mainstream schools. Finally, Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice provided the lens to understand teacher support needs and partnerships with the DBSTs within the participants' sociocultural contexts. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation and document analysis. The findings suggest that the Foundation Phase teachers had a limited perception regarding differentiated assessment, which was hinged on Bloom's taxonomy. The findings further revealed that the teachers are not adequately supported by the DBSTs in differentiating assessment in their

classrooms. It was recommended that mainstream schoolteachers be trained on the meaning and purpose of differentiated assessment and be shown practical ways to differentiate assessment in their classrooms to cater to learners' diverse needs.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

C2005   Curriculum 2005

CAPS   Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement

CoP   Community of Practice

DBE   Department of Basic Education

DBST   District-Based Support Team

EWP6   Education White Paper 6

FP   Foundation Phase

HOD   Head of Department

LoLT   Language of Learning and Teaching

NCESS   National Committee on Education Support Services

NCSNET   National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training

OBE   Outcome Based Education

PT   Psychometric Theory

RNCS   Revised National Curriculum Statements

SASA   South African Schools Act

SIAS   Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support

UDHR   Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

ZPD   Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Around the world, assessment has been pivotal in evaluating and making decisions regarding policies, curricula, schools, and learners (Buckley-Walker, & Lipscombe, 2021; De Sam Lazaro, 2017; Kubiszyn & Borich, 2013; Noman & Kaur, 2014). Due to its importance in education, assessment is gradually transforming in its approach, emphasis, and scope to accommodate learners' diverse and special needs in schools (Buckley-Walker & Lipscombe, 2021; Department of Education (DoE), 2011; Noman & Kaur, 2014). Recently, mainstream schools have taken up the challenging task to accommodate and cater for the learning needs of all learners, to provide quality education for all learners irrespective of their abilities and special needs (Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Hamman, 2014). To achieve this, Foundation Phase (FP) mainstream schoolteachers must have the right perception about differentiated assessment to implement assessment policies that are inclusive and accommodative of the various learning needs of all learners in their classroom (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2013; Taole, 2020).

The increasing need for schools to accommodate all learners gave rise to the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in 1990 in Thailand. EFA which was adopted in 2000 instigated the global walk towards social justice, equitability, fairness, and inclusion of all learners in the same classroom (Hasan et al., 2018; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2005). In 1994, South Africa joined the global walk with the birth of a new democracy that ended apartheid and brought about a new constitution to tackle inter alia marginalisation and exclusion prevalent during the apartheid era (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Thuketana, 2018). The launching of White Paper 6 on 26 July 2001 further advocated for fairness and inclusion in education by including learners with learning barriers and special needs into "normal" classrooms (DoE, 2001). Likewise, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) (DoE, 2011), and the Department of Basic Education: Curriculum Differentiation (DBE, 2017) acknowledges diversity and seeks to accommodate and cater for the learning needs of all learners through differentiated assessment.

Although South Africa has made provision through CAPS and other policy documents such as Education White Paper 6 and the National Protocol for Assessment for Grade R-12 for the curriculum, instruction, and assessment to be differentiated; research has shown that there is a gap between policy and execution (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). In practice, most learners in mainstream schools are still denied access to the curriculum with the prevalence of classroom assessments that are not differentiated to accommodate learners that experience barriers to learning and with special needs (Marishane et al., 2015; Naudé & Reda, 2017).

Differentiated assessment scholars have defined differentiated assessment as an approach that provides learners with diverse pathways of demonstrating what they know; and enables teachers to utilise a range of strategies and methods to gather evidence on the progress of the learners (Moon et al., 2020; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). It is an approach to assessment that allows teachers to modify and adapt an assessment to accommodate all learners' interests, abilities, and state of readiness (Tomlinson, 2014; Varsavsky & Rayner, 2013). Munro (2012) and Taylor (2017) affirm that differentiated assessment enables learners at different levels to reach their full potential irrespective of their current attainment.

From the abovementioned definitions of differentiated assessment, it is apparent that teachers play a significant role in its implementation in mainstream schools. Previous research conducted in South Africa have shown that the perceptions and experiences of teachers in the Foundation Phase regarding assessment is positively associated with their teaching and assessment practices (De Sam Lazaro, 2017; Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015; Mahlo, 2017; Sethusha, 2012). Studies further show that effective teaching and assessment in mainstream schools require the District Based Support Team's (DBST) support. Findings have revealed that teachers are not adequately supported by the DBST (Hamman, 2014; Makhalemele & Nel, 2016; Mfuthwana, 2016). The Department of Education (2005) asserts that members of the DBST should constitute a multidisciplinary team such as psychologists, health workers, learning-support personnel, therapists, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or Community Based Organisations (CBOs), and an Institution-level Support Team (ILST). The

DBST is saddled with the task of catering for the various learning needs of children in mainstream classes (Makhalemele & Nel, 2016). In this regard, the DBSTs are "to assist educators in schools in creating greater flexibility in their teaching methods and the assessment of learning" (DoE, 2005, p. 20).

Against this background, my study investigated the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment and the support they require from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment in their classrooms.

1.2 RATIONALE

The rationale for this study was grounded on my personal, professional, and academic reasons (Sichula, 2018). My personal reason for conducting this study stems from my passion for the Foundation Phase, which developed when I started teaching Foundation Phase learners in 2011. Although I taught high school Grades during my teaching practice as an undergraduate student at the University of Benin, Nigeria, I decided to specialise in the Foundation Phase after obtaining my bachelor's degree in Political Science Education in 2016. In addition, during my Honours degree programme in 2019 at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, I focused on Assessment and Quality Assurance in Education and Training, which stirred up my interest in assessment. I also took an elective module in Educational Psychology on Learning Diversity which examined barriers to learning and how learners can be supported. This study on the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment is, therefore, a convergence of my passion.

My reason for conducting this study is also based on my professional experience as a nursery one teacher in a mainstream school owned by my parents in Lagos, Nigeria. In the school, for playgroup (2-3 years old learners), nursery one (3-4 years old learners), nursery two (4-5 old learners) and reception class (5-6 years old learners) class teachers are encouraged to differentiate the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This is because the differences in how the learners learn and demonstrate what they have learnt is more pronounced. Most of the time, the learners did not progress through the curriculum at the same pace. During classroom assessment, the Pre-Nursery, Nursery and Reception teachers

provided their learners with different ways of demonstrating what they have learnt. For example, a learner could choose to sing the alphabet song or recite it during the literacy assessment. The assessment task was also designed based on the progress the learner had made in the curriculum. For instance, during numeracy assessment, some learners were required to count and write numbers 1–50 in their assessment task, while others were required to attempt numbers 1–80. Although differentiated assessment is practised in the playgroup, nursery and reception classes, Grade 1-6, learners are expected to use the same classroom assessment under the same conditions to ensure fairness. Additionally, for learners in Grade1-6, I believe that there is an exaggerated emphasis on assessment as a means to distinguish and reward top-performing learners. Thus, parents are more interested in their child(ren) receiving a gift on prize giving day than in tracking the progress the learner has made during and after the period of learning. As part of the school management team, I aim to redefine fairness in classroom assessment, which is about accommodating and catering for learners needs to inform effective teaching and learning further. Teachers should provide their learners with classroom assessment that suits their abilities and needs by creating different pathways for learners to show their understanding about the content taught. I also aim to train teachers regarding differentiated assessment and recommend classroom assessment strategies aligned with learners' state of readiness, interest and learning profile.

Academically, my interest in this study stems from the gaps in the literature. Internationally and nationally, curriculum differentiation has received considerable attention from various scholars and researchers, as well as differentiated instruction in accommodating the diverse needs of all learners (Godor, 2021; Iannellia et al., 2016; Ledwaba, 2017, Marishane et al., 2015; Nel et al., 2011; Perry, 2017; Roy et al., 2015). However, a differentiated assessment, largely considered to be the bedrock of teaching and learning, has not received its due attention, particularly within the South African context and Foundation Phase (de Jager, 2019; Reisdorfer, 2020; Taole, 2020; Varsavsky & Rayner, 2013). The numerous benefits of differentiating the curriculum and instruction in mainstream schools are overpowered when assessment is not differentiated but based on the traditional "one-size-fits-all" approach (Noman & Kaur, 2014; Stefanakis & Meier, 2010). According to Noman and Kaur (2014), catering for the full range of

learners' needs is made possible when differentiated instruction is informed by differentiated assessment.

There is no doubt that catering to the needs of all learners in mainstream schools is a challenging task that necessitates teachers stepping out from their comfort zone of uniformity and standardisation towards differentiation (Kaur et al., 2019; Pyle & DeLuca, 2013). In this regard, implementing differentiated assessment in mainstream schools without teachers having the right perception and support from the DBST will be considered a herculean task. Hence, the large gaps in policy and practice (Donohue & Bornman 2014; Dreyer, 2014; Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018).

The African saying, "it takes a community to raise a child" further buttresses the need for support within the South African context (Gcelu, 2019, p. 2). Most studies conducted on the support mainstream schoolteachers receive from the DBSTs are generalised to their effectiveness in supporting teachers to implement inclusive policies in their classrooms (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; du Toit et al., 2014; Mabaso, 2019; Makhalamele & Nel, 2016). Consequently, studies that focus on the support Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers require from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment are lacking. Hence, the findings of this study provide a ground-breaking contribution to the literature.

1.3   PROBLEM STATEMENT

In South Africa, diversity has become the norm in classrooms due to the differences between the learners based on their race, language, socio-economic background, abilities and special needs (Phasha et al., 2017). However, it seems learners are underperforming and referred to special schools because their diverse needs are not accommodated during classroom assessment (Civitillo et al., 2016; Taylor, 2017). VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005), West and West (2016) and Taylor (2017) affirmed that although the differentiation framework is intended to accommodate the heterogeneity that exist in classrooms, some teachers are either unenthusiastic or not adequately equipped to implement it as they are fixated on the traditional approaches to assessment.

The traditional approach to assessment based on uniformity has been revealed to promote   unfairness   and   invalid   assessment   scores   (Buckley-Walker,   &

Lipscombe, 2021). This is because traditional approaches to assessment often employ one assessment tool–the assessment paper–with standardised, right, or wrong questions designed to produce an objective score (Wilson, 2013). This approach to assessment does not take cognisance of learners' differences, neither does it provide the teacher with insight into the cause of learners' errors as it is often assumed that a wrong answer equates to a lack of mastery of the content assessed (Wilson, 2013). Because assessment provides feedback on learners' progress and the effectiveness of the instruction used, such misdiagnosis and misinterpretation of learners' abilities and skills can limit learners' access to the curriculum (Buckley-Walker, & Lipscombe, 2021). Hence, when assessment practices are not differentiated with little attention paid to learners' state of readiness, interest and learning profile, assessment scores may not be a fair and accurate representation of learners' abilities (Tomlinson, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2015).

Differentiated assessment is an approach that advocates employing a range of assessment tools to help provide the teacher with a more holistic picture of the learner's ability and level of mastery (Tomlinson et al., 2015). It is therefore imperative that mainstream schoolteachers have the right perception regarding differentiated assessment to implement assessment practices that are inclusive and fair. Although it is widely believed that the schoolteacher is the sole most significant factor in a learner's academic achievement, it is essential that they are adequately supported. Limited support from the DBSTs often affects teachers' ability to implement assessment policies, limiting learners' academic achievement (Mabaso, 2019). This study was guided by the aim to address the problem statement. Therefore, the study investigated Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers' perception regarding differentiated assessment and their support requirements from the District Based Support Teams.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to investigate the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment to recommend the strategies to the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The strategies may serve to amend/contribute to the differentiated assessment policy and enhance curriculum access for learners in mainstream schools/classrooms. In addition, the purpose of

this study was to investigate the support Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers require from the DBST to differentiate assessment in their classroom. The research questions were formulated as set out in the following section to successfully achieve the purpose of the study.

1.5   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was guided by a primary research question and three sub-research questions. A research question can be defined as an investigation into a particular phenomenon of concern which the study seeks to provide answers to (Mayo et al., 2013). The research questions were vital for this study as they guided me to the appropriate literature and provided the focus for data collection (Mattick et al., 2018).

1.5.1   Primary Research Questions

The primary research question that guided this study was:

What are the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream school teachers regarding differentiated assessment?

1.5.2   Secondary Research Questions

The secondary research questions that guided this study were:

•   How do teachers in mainstream classrooms conceptualise differentiated assessment?

•   How do teachers in mainstream schools assess learners in their classrooms?

•   What support do teachers in mainstream schools require from the DBST to differentiate assessment in their classrooms?

1.6   CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

Concept clarification can be defined in research as analysing an abstract idea to provide deeper insight into its meaning and enable researchers to provide working definitions of key concepts utilised within the context of a study (Burgin 2011). In this section, I define the key concepts I used in this study to explain and clarify their meaning and application for the purpose of this study.

1.6.1 Perception

Perception can be defined as the way someone thinks about, notices and understand a phenomenon. They are often referred to as someone's opinion, view and experiences regarding a phenomenon (Cassim, 2016). Perceptions according to McDonald (2012) can further be defined as the way we recognise, interpret, and respond to sensory information. This study utilised the above definition by Cassim (2016) because it investigated the opinions, views and understanding of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment.

1.6.2 Foundation Phase Teacher

A teacher can be defined as a person with the required teaching qualification that instructs, guides, and impacts knowledge about certain subjects to a group of persons (Cassim, 2016; Martin, 2007). A teacher can further be defined as a professional that is skilled to impart knowledge; skills and values to learners to enable them to develop holistically and function effectively in the society (Senge, 2000). The Foundation Phase in South Africa is the first phase of formal schooling, including Grades R to 3 and learners from six to nine years of age (DBE, 2011). For this study, Foundation Phase teachers referred to Grade 1–3 teachers.

1.6.3 Mainstream Schools

Mainstream schools can be defined as schools that recognise and accept the diverse needs of learners and are well equipped with the appropriate human and material resources needed to accommodate and support those learners' needs to meet their educational goals (Nel, 2018). They are schools that integrate learners that experience barriers to learning and with special needs in the same learning environment as their typical peers (Mahlo, 2017). For this study, a mainstream school is defined as a school in South Africa that accommodates all learners, notwithstanding their learning needs in regular classrooms. The schools are expected to provide learners with equal opportunities for quality education, equal participation, and inclusion.

1.6.4 Differentiated Assessment

Differentiated assessment is an inclusive approach to assessment which involves "accommodations and adaptations" of teaching and assessment to cater for all learners (DBE, 2017, p. 168). This assessment approach helps teachers gather valid data on learners' progress and develop creative ways in learners to allow them to engage with and demonstrate mastery of the content taught (Brown et al., 2013). Tomlinson (2005, 2014) further states that differentiated assessment considers learners' skills, readiness, interests and needs. Within the context of classroom assessment, the above definitions of differentiated assessment were interchangeably used for the purpose of this study as they sum up the holistic definition.

1.7 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review analyses, examines, clarifies and critically evaluates diverse literature relating to a research topic (McCombes, 2019). This preliminary literature review examined relevant literature on mainstream schools in the South African context, differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase, teachers' perception on differentiated assessment and the support teachers require from the DBST in differentiating assessment. It gives a synopsis of key findings and shows current trends and gaps in the reviewed literature in relation to the research topic (McCombes, 2019).

1.7.1 Mainstream Schools in the South African Context.

Following the end of apartheid in South Africa, the educational system was radically transformed to mirror the equality and inclusion of all learners (Engelbrecht et al., 2018). Policy documents such as Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) have been developed and reviewed to accommodate all learners notwithstanding their abilities or special needs, race, socioeconomic status in mainstream schools (Bornman & Donohue, 2013). However, researchers such as Thuketana (2018, p. 89) attest that "South Africa is a country with effective policies; however, the implementation of these documents present several challenges".

Mahlo (2017) and Nel (2018) agree that although mainstream schools serve as a great resource for accommodating the diverse learning needs of learners, it also

comes with its unique challenges that make its implementation appear almost impossible. Nel (2018) highlights inadequate specialised training and pressure due to increased workload as part of the challenges mainstream schoolteachers face. Engelbrecht et al. (2015) posed other challenges in accommodating all learners in mainstream schools: overcrowded classrooms, dealing with an inflexible curriculum, teachers' perceptions and beliefs, and language barriers, especially in multilingual classrooms.

Despite the many challenges present in mainstream classrooms, it remains a celebrated transformation strategy to promote equality and inclusion (DoE, 2001). It is considered a problem-solving approach to the challenges that come with diversity as it seeks to cater for the various learning needs of all learners through inclusion, learner participation, and equality which has been seen as beneficial to both "special" and "normal" learners in the classroom (Mahlo, 2017).

1.7.2 Differentiated Assessment in the Foundation Phase

Learners in the Foundation Phase come into the school environment at different cognitive, affective, and psychomotor levels, with diverse skills and abilities that have implications for mainstream classrooms assessments (Naudé, & Reda, 2017). The Foundation Phase is a crucial time when learners develop holistically, their interest in schooling is promoted, and their self-concepts and confidence are developed (Mahlo, 2017). Hence, if a learner is perceived to be a failure at this phase, the self-confidence of such a learner will be adversely affected which may result in the learner dropping out of school without exploring their unique learning abilities (Hirakawa & Taniguchi, 2020; Sing & Maringe, 2020). Developing self-confidence in learners early in life increases their chance of remaining confident as they develop and engage in more complex tasks (White, 2017). In this vein, research has discovered that expecting all learners to achieve the same learning outcome in the same way and length of time has negative effects on learners' psychology (Noman & Kaur, 2014; Tomlinson, 2015). Therefore, Foundation Phase teachers need to be equipped with the right understanding and perception regarding differentiated assessment.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2017, p.168) state that differentiated assessment involves "accommodation and adaptation" which are "designed to

equalise opportunity for all learners by addressing barriers which learners may experience". Thus, learners' access to the stipulated curriculum and quality education in the Foundation Phase is dependent on how the teachers differentiate assessment in their classrooms. Goddard et al. (2015) acknowledge that differentiation is a useful tool for effective teaching and improving learners' achievement in schools.

Tomlinson and Moon (2013) propose that differentiated assessment should be based on the learner's readiness, interest, and learning profile. Thus, for teachers to differentiate assessment in the FP effectively, they should be familiar with a range of assessment tools that can provide different pathways for learners to reveal their potential and understanding of the content taught. Teachers can differentiate assessment by providing clear instructions on tasks to learners, being flexible with time allocated for assessment and providing assistance to struggling learners through scaffolding (Renard & Vandeputte, 2018). Additionally, role-playing, individual projects, visual, oral and written presentations, and group activities are ways teachers can differentiate classroom assessment (Thuketana & Westhof, 2018; Tomlinson, 2005).

Even though differentiated assessment in the FP is widely perceived to be effective in accommodating the needs of all learners, there is a meagre number of studies conducted on this topic. Hence not much literature is available on this subject nationally and internationally (Norman & Kaur, 2014; Reisdorfer, 2020). Thus, differentiated assessment in the FP is a fallow ground that requires more researchers to break.

1.7.3 Teachers Perception Regarding Differentiated Assessment

It has been noted earlier that teachers are key implementers of assessment practices that are inclusive and fair to all learners. Perused studies on teachers' perception and understanding about assessment practices within the South African context have shown low levels of understanding and poor assessment literacy on the part of teachers (Kanjee & Croft, 2012; Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015). Maba (2017) emphasises that teachers' implementation of assessment in their classroom is mainly dependent on their perceptions and understanding of assessment.

According to the Department of Education (2011), the primary purpose of assessment is for effective teaching and learning. In this regard, Widiastuti (2018) argues that the success of the teaching and learning process is largely based on the way assessment policies are implemented. Therefore, mainstream schoolteachers must have the right perception regarding differentiated assessment to implement assessment policies that are inclusive of all learners.

Studies have also revealed that teachers with a low or basic understanding of assessment practices tend to depend heavily on standardised testing in their classrooms, favouring a group of learners (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015). The implication is that learners with special needs are disadvantaged in accessing the prescribed curriculum and progress through schools with their typical peers (Ledwaba, 2017). Sayed et al. (2014) have pinpointed that large gaps in assessment practices exist, especially in the Foundation Phase. Therefore, teachers' perceptions regarding differentiated assessment must be explored to recommend the needed support for teachers and/or the necessary transformation required.

1.7.4 Support required by teachers in mainstream schools from the DBST in differentiating assessment

Research findings affirm the vital need for an operative support system and collaboration to enable teachers and learners to achieve educational goals and implement inclusive policies (Makhalemele, 2011; Mfuthwana, 2016; Nel, 2018). The Department of Education (2005) pinpoints the DBST as one of the support structures which performs a strategic role in education at the provincial and district level. The DBST is tasked with the primary responsibility of providing educational institutions with cohesive professional support to identify and address learning barriers and foster effective teaching and learning (DoE, 2005; Mfuthwana, 2016). They help strengthen teachers' skills in differentiating the curriculum, instructional methods, and assessment to accommodate and cater to the full range of learners' needs in mainstream schools (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Nevertheless, Mabaso (2019) and Nel et al. (2014) highlight that the DBSTs are not sufficiently trained and supported by the National Department of Education in providing the necessary support.

Globally, research has revealed that teachers acknowledge that effective support structures could promote learner's academic achievement (Segrott et al., 2013; Datta, 2015). Nel et al. (2014) affirmed that collaboration among teachers and support personnel could be the key to promoting teacher competency in implementing inclusive policies and addressing barriers to learning. Likewise, Swart and Pettipher (2011) postulate that when support and collaboration is practised in schools, all stakeholders- learners, teachers, professionals, and even parents benefit from it. Hence, effective support from the DBST in mainstream schools could be a powerful strategy in implementing differentiated assessment.

Despite the acknowledged benefits of collaboration and the provision of support structures in mainstream schools, research reveals that in practice, teachers are not adequately supported by the DBST (du Plessis, 2013; Makhalemele & Nel, 2016; Nel et al., 2014; Mfuthwana, 2016). This lack of support has played a vital role in widening the gap between inclusive policies and implementation (du Toit, et al., 2014). Mfuthwana (2016, p. 58) highlighted the kind of support teachers require from the DBST to include "hands-on follow-up and in-class support, feedbacks on addressing learning barriers and issues they raise concerning learners, practical guidance on implementing inclusive policies in their classrooms". In this vein, support for teachers from the DBST regarding differentiated assessment could include creating a safe space for open communication about effective assessment strategies for diverse learners. Furthermore, providing the needed resources to differentiate assessment in their classrooms and practical examples of how assessment can be differentiated and used to inform effective teaching and learning will support effective assessments (Nel et al., 2014).

1.8 WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

- Foundation Phase teachers have a level of understanding of the concept of differentiated assessment.

- The teachers' perceptions would have an impact on their assessment practices.

- The teachers are not adequately supported by the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their classrooms.

Table 1.1

Suppositions and biases

Supposition	Biases	Action to counteract their influence on the study
Participants have an acceptable level of understanding about differentiated assessment	Asking basic questions about differentiated assessment	Confirmability to ensure that I do not present my opinion in the findings but ensure that the results are drawn based on the data collected or presented the responses verbatim.

1.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A Conceptual framework can be defined as a structure developed by a researcher from existing theories, models, approaches and key concepts in the study to explain the phenomenon studied (Adom et al., 2018). It shows the relationship between the variables that make up the study and how they were used to support the research (Adom et al., 2018).

The conceptual framework that guided this study was drawn from the Psychometric Theory (PT), which served as the lens through which standardised one-size-fits-all assessment was analysed. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Piaget's (1953) theory of cognitive development (PCD) provided insights into the cognition of learners in mainstream schools and the implications of one-size-fit-all assessments. Furthermore, Sen (1992) and Nussbaum's (2000) capability approach (CA) served as the lens for understanding equality and fairness of assessment in mainstream schools. Finally, Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (CoP) served as the lens to understand teacher support and partnerships with the District Based Support Teams (DBSTs)

and teachers in other schools. The study discussed the conceptual framework in detail in Chapter 2.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual framework guiding the assessment of learners in mainstream schools
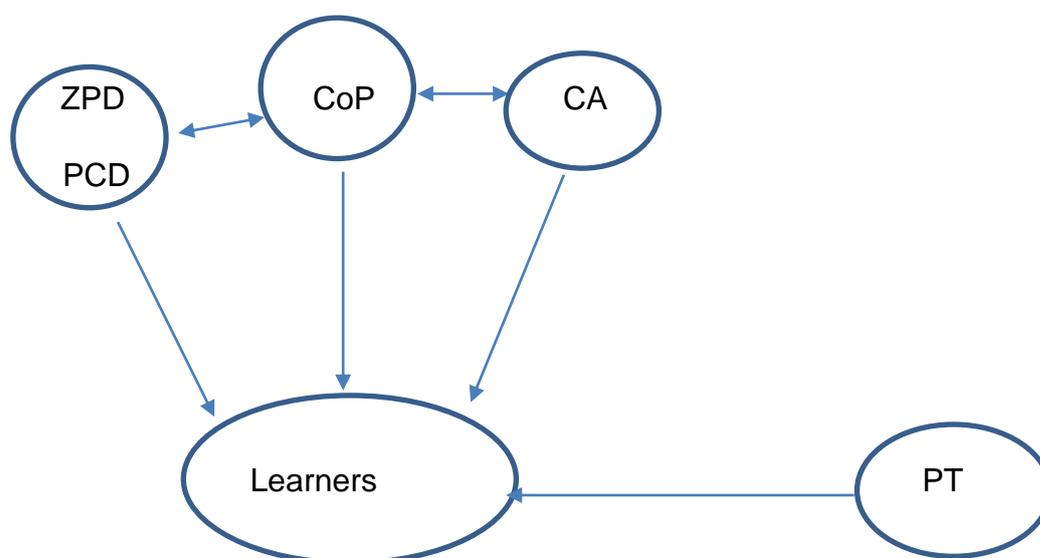
1.10 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The word paradigm has its origin in the word *paradeigma,* a Greek word interpreted to mean "pattern" (Cheema, 2018). Research paradigm can be defined as established beliefs, principles, and assumptions shared by a community of scholars concerning the nature and conduct of research (Kuhn, 1962). The interpretivism paradigm guided this study.

1.10.1 Interpretivism

According to Flick (2014), the interpretivism paradigm, sometimes referred to as anti-positivism, believes that truth and knowledge are subjective and rooted in the experiences and understanding of individuals. Interpretivist researchers derive truth subjectively from the experiences and understandings of the participants (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the perspectives of participants on a phenomenon are widely accommodated and regarded as reality (Maree, 2016).

Interpretivist researchers also assume that studying individuals in their sociocultural context provide a better understanding of a phenomenon as humans are best "understood from within" (Maree, 2016, p. 61). The distinctiveness of a particular context or situation is imperative in interpreting the data collected, as realities may differ when applied to a different sociocultural context (Maree, 2016). In researching the perceptions of Foundation Phase teachers in mainstream schools regarding differentiated assessment, interpretivism as the chosen paradigm enabled me to get a comprehensive apprehension of the participants' views and understanding about the phenomenon. Furthermore, the chosen paradigm enabled me to observe and analyse data in the context where the phenomenon was studied.

Notwithstanding of above strengths, the interpretivism paradigm is saddled with weaknesses. The major challenge of employing the interpretivism paradigm is its subjective nature, which allows room for possible bias on the researcher's part (Dudovskiy, 2017). Thus, research findings might be distorted due to the researcher's interpretation, background and cultural preference.

In overcoming the abovementioned challenges, I collected data using various sources such as interviews and observations to provide triangulation, which contributed to the trustworthiness of the research findings generated (Flick, 2018). Furthermore, I tested the consistency of the data collected across the various sources by examining the data from the semi-structured interviews and the observations to ensure that the findings from the study were based on the gathered and analysed data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Another challenge in employing this paradigm is that findings gathered from this study cannot be generalised due to the small sample size (Cohen et al., 2011). However, the purpose of this study was not to generalise the findings to the total population but to gather rich, in-depth data concerning the participants' perceptions regarding differentiated assessment.

1.10.2 Methodological approach

A methodological approach can be defined as a strategy or a technique used in conducting research; that connects the research methods to be used in answering the research questions (Sefotho, 2018). The methodological approaches used in research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2014). For this study, a qualitative approach that aligns with the interpretivism paradigm was used to explore the perceptions of Foundation Phase teachers in mainstream schools regarding differentiated assessment.

Qualitative research, which is closely knit with interpretivism, includes words, symbols and written texts rather than numbers and figures to produces rich descriptions and understanding of a phenomenon (Gephart, 2017). In understanding a phenomenon, the approach focuses on representing the meanings participants ascribe to it. That is, viewing a phenomenon through the eyes of the participants (Maree, 2016). Thus, this approach enabled me to explore how the participants conceptualise differentiated assessment.

According to Maree (2016), qualitative research is naturalistic as research is carried out in the socio-cultural context of the participants where interaction occurs. Therefore, this approach enabled me to relate with the participants in their social context and observe how they assessed the learners in their classrooms. Furthermore, qualitative research recognises the value of collecting data from diverse sources as part of any given study (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Collecting data from a variety of sources enabled me to retrieve quality data while also checking against possible bias on my part. I analysed the data for consistency, thus evaluated credibility and trustworthiness of the findings drawn (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

1.11 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design can be defined as a strategy that comprises of the research type, the selection of participants, and the methods to be used in collecting and analysing data (Maree, 2016). There are various research types used in qualitative research. They include case studies, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative research and grounded theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, a multiple case study research type was employed. The chosen research

type aligns with the interpretivist paradigm and was well suited for generating the required data needed to answer the posed research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

1.11.1 Case Study

A case study can be defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). A research case can be understood as a "bounded entity" which could be a person, an organisation or phenomenon (Maree, 2016, p. 81). The combination of more than one case in a study may be referred to as a multiple or collective case study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

I utilised a multiple case study to explore the perceptions of Foundation Phase teachers in mainstream schools regarding differentiated assessment. Multiple case studies allowed me to investigate and evaluate the variations and similarities between cases (teachers), identify how each case might be impacted by different contexts (schools), and the individual settings under which a finding may emerge (Chmiliar, 2012). This made the presentation of findings more interesting (Chmiliar, 2012). Thus, Yin (2014) encourages examining multiple cases if applicable because a multiple-case study could strengthen the findings compared to single-case studies.

Multiple case study also enabled me to answer the research questions in this study which aimed to produce an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Maree, 2016). Furthermore, using multiple case studies provided me with the opportunity of using a range of data collection tools that generated rich data and insights for the study (Maree, 2016). Data collection such as interviews and observation promoted collaboration with the participants and accommodated their perceptions regarding the phenomenon studied in their naturalistic setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A significant weakness associated with multiple case studies is that it is prone to bias on the researcher's part (Creswell, 2014). To reduce possible bias on my part, I gathered data by utilising multiple methods, which enabled me to

triangulate the data, therefore increasing the trustworthiness of the findings that emerged from the data and conclusions (Maree, 2016).

1.11.2 Sampling/selection of participants

The literature defines sampling as the procedure of choosing a certain number of units from a population of interest (Trochim, 2020). For this study, non-probability purposive sampling was used in selecting five Foundation Phase teachers in two mainstream schools. According to Maree (2016), qualitative research in general employs non-probability purposive sampling, whereby the participants are selected based on predetermined criteria. Since this study aimed to examine teachers' perceptions in mainstream schools regarding differentiated assessment, the participants consisted of five teachers teaching Grade 1–3 in two mainstream schools, two teachers in School 1 and three teachers in School 2. I could only interview and observe five teachers as they were the ones who willingly consented to be part of the study amongst the 16 teachers that I approached. Additionally, the study took place during the Coronavirus pandemic in South Africa, with restrictions that guided against contact with many people. The participants were class teachers, teaching learners with diverse learning needs to enable me to answer the primary research question: W*hat are the perceptions of mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment?*

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), purposive sampling provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon studied. This sampling was also feasible for the study in terms of its cost, time effectiveness and the COVID-19 regulations, which limited contact with many persons. The subjectivity and non-probability based nature of the selected sample made purposive sampling prone to researcher bias (Regoli, 2019). However, "when there is an accepted criterion in place, the issue is minimised" (Regoli, 2019, n.p).

1.11.2 Data Collection

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the process involved in data collection entail delimitation of the research, gathering data with a range of data collection tools and establishing the procedure for recording and analysing information. For the purpose of this study, observations, interviews and document analysis were used to collect data.

1.11.2.1   Observation

Observation in qualitative research can be defined as a systematic process whereby a researcher records the behaviour and actions of the participants of the study at the research site using field notes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher records the behavioural patterns and activities of the participants in these field notes without necessarily questioning or communing with them (Maree, 2016).

Observation in qualitative research is a vital data collection method because it provides the researcher with an insider's viewpoint of the phenomenon studied. Although observation is highly subjective, as an observer, I got into the situation without influencing the setting to focus on gathering relevant data needed in answering the research questions. Furthermore, this data collection method constituted one of the many that were used in collecting data for the study.

With observation, I could collect data on how teachers in mainstream schools assess their learners in their respective classes. Observation enabled me to gain deeper insider understanding of the phenomenon under study to answer my research questions (Maree, 2016). Due to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), social distancing was maintained, and I wore a facemask throughout the period of observation and my stay at the schools. I adhered strictly to all safety measures identified by the South African government and the school to prevent the spread of the virus.

1.11.2.2   Semi-structured interviews

An interview is a valuable source of data in qualitative research, which involves a dialogue between the interviewer and the participant(s) (Maree, 2016). The interviewer questions the participant(s) to collect relevant information regarding their perspectives, thoughts, and views (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The researcher develops semi-structured interviews in advance of the interview to obtain rich descriptive information about the participants' understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This study used semi-structured interviews, which helped me collect relevant data on teachers' perceptions in mainstream schools regarding differentiated assessment. The selected mainstream schoolteachers were interviewed to investigate their perceptions, assessment practices, and the

support they require from the DBST in differentiating assessment in their classrooms.

A significant advantage in using semi-structured interviews was that it enabled me to control the questions I asked to avoid unnecessary digression and obtain relevant information from the participants (Maree, 2016). In addition, it helped to save time, as the questions asked were precise and relevant to the study (Maree, 2016). The data from the interview were captured meticulously using a recorder for which permission was first obtained from the participant. I also took notes in order to "review the answers and ask additional questions at the end of the interview" (Maree, 2016, p. 94). The challenge often encountered in conducting an interview is that the researcher's presence might influence the responses from the participants. Consequently, I did not rely solely on the interview in generating my findings, but I used other sources of data collection such as observations to ensure credibility and triangulation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing was maintained, and I wore a surgical facemask during the interviews and throughout my stay at the school. I adhered strictly to all safety measures identified by the South African government and the school to prevent the spread of the virus.

1.11.2.3 Document analysis

Document analysis in qualitative research is an important source of secondary data. It enabled me to gather data from documents such as policies, published and unpublished materials relevant to the study, and I used it to further investigate the phenomenon studied (Maree, 2016).

For this study, policy documents including Education White Paper 6; National Protocol for Assessment for Grade R-12; Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and Department of Education (DoE) Guidelines for District Based Support Teams (DBSTs), were analysed. In addition, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) Responding to Diversity in Grades R To 9: Practical Approaches To English and Mathematics Curriculum Differentiation and the assessment papers of the learners were analysed. These documents were used

to ascertain compliance in terms of differentiated assessment as prescribed in the policy documents.

The table below presents a summary of the data that I collected using the different data collection strategies above.

Table 1.2

Summary of data collected

Observations	Semi-structured interviews	Documentation
How do teachers assess learners in their classrooms?	Teachers' perception regarding differentiated assessment	To collect data on assessment policies and the roles of the DBST.
	Teachers' assessment practices in their classroom	In addition, I collected data to check if the policies are being implemented in the classrooms.
		Teachers' compliance with the differentiated assessment policy.

1.12 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis is an iterative process of organising data gathered from the research sites, transcribing and reducing them to generate findings that answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Maree, 2016). As the researcher, I was tasked with the responsibility of extracting meaning from the data collected from multiple sources (Maree, 2007).

For this study, I utilised thematic descriptive data analysis to analyse and interpret my gathered data. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing and presenting emerging themes from the gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In analysing the collected data for the study, I followed the steps described by Braun and Clare (2006), which include reading through the collected data, getting

immersed in it, and transcribing the recorded interviews. Then, codes were created from the data, which were sorted into potential themes. The themes were revised and refined into emerging and sub-themes. Finally, the data were interpreted, and findings reported in accordance with the emerged themes and sub-themes in answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is interpretive and, therefore, provides an opportunity for the participants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences to be transcribed, analysed, and interpreted logically and concisely (Maree, 2007).

1.13 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness can be defined as the systematic rigour used in qualitative study by researchers to guarantee the integrity and truthfulness of the research methods, quality data, accurate interpretation, and authenticity of findings (Rose & Johnson, 2020). The study used four trustworthiness criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, to establish the study's rigour and quality control (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

1.13.1 Credibility

Qualitative researchers widely consider credibility to be the first and most important criterion in establishing trustworthiness (Polit & Beck, 2014). It helps to guarantee and establish confidence in the authenticity and truth of the collected data (Polit & Beck, 2014). Various sources of data collection such as semi-structured interviews, observations and documentation were used to triangulate data and establish credibility in this study. In addition, field notes were included with comprehensive descriptions of the procedure of data analysis and interpretations to substantiate the findings and claims (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

1.13.2 Transferability

Transferability can be defined as the degree to which findings can be transferred to other contexts (Polit & Beck, 2014). Qualitative studies are not considered to be generalisable to the total population like quantitative studies due to their small sample size. To establish credibility like quantitative studies in this study, researchers can make up for this limitation with a comprehensive description of

the context, phenomenon studied and participants, thus ensuring a chance of transferability to other sites with similar contexts (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

1.13.3 Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research can be defined as the consistency of the research (Miles et al., 2014). Dependability implies the degree to which similar findings are obtainable within the same context, using the same research methods and participants. The rationale for selecting participants, research sites, data collection, and analysis was clearly outlined to establish dependability in this study and ensure repeatability.

1.13.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is used in qualitative research to establish the degree to which collected data, interpretation and findings are rooted in the participants' perceptions and not altered due to researcher bias (Connelly, 2016). To establish confirmability Anney (2014) pinpointed that qualitative researchers should be reflective and assess their expectations of the research study. Hence, I stated my assumptions of the study beforehand (see Section 1.8). In addition, I triangulated the data to ensure that the findings truthfully represented the participants' perceptions and were void of errors and bias on my part.

1.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), researchers need to protect their participants and shun any form of misconduct that might affect them and their institution. Researchers should develop trust with the participants and promote the integrity of their research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

For this study, approval was sought from the ethics committee at the University of Pretoria, the Gauteng Department of Education, and the identified schools and participants. The purpose of the study was disclosed to ensure that the participants were well informed about the study before making their decision to be part of it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the participants were informed that they are allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Potential risk to the participants was avoided and eliminated at all costs. Additionally, participants were informed that their anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed and protected (McMilan & Schumacher, 2014)

1.15 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

This study comprises five chapters, and the layout thereof is set out below:

- Chapter 1 introduces and presents the background of the study. In addition, I presented the rationale, purpose, and problem statement of the study. Thereafter, I clarified the key concepts used in the study. I also provided a preliminary literature review and presented an overview of the conceptual framework used in the study. I then outlined the procedures I followed in gathering and analysing my data. Finally, I presented the ethical considerations of the study.

- In Chapter 2, I review diverse literature on the emergence of mainstream schools in South Africa, differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase, teachers' perception regarding differentiated assessment, and the support teachers require from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment. In this chapter, I also present the conceptual framework I used in more detail.

- Chapter 3, I discuss the research methodology I used in answering the research questions. This chapter includes the interpretive paradigm, qualitative approach, and case study design. This chapter also presents the methods and instruments I used to gather and analyse my data.

- Chapter 4 presents the empirical data, interpretation, and findings of the study that emerged from the themes during data analysis. I used the emerged themes and sub-themes as the headings and sub-headings to present and interpret the findings. I also present the findings to reveal how the participants conceptualise differentiated assessment, their assessment practices, and the support the participants require and get from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment in their classrooms.

- Finally, Chapter 5 presents a summary of the literature, empirical findings, and the research questions. The outline of the findings, as they relate to the conceptual framework, are also presented. I also present my recommendations for future research, the limitations of the study, and the conclusions based on the study's research questions.

1.16 Concluding remarks

Chapter 1 discussed what the study was about as I introduced the topic of the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment. Furthermore, I presented the research questions that guided the study. Thereafter, I discussed why I undertook this study as I presented the study's rationale, purpose, and problem statement. Finally, I clarified how I conducted the study using the interpretivism paradigm, a qualitative approach and multiple case studies research type. I also discussed how I gathered and analysed the data. In the next chapter, chapter 2, I discuss the reviewed literature of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I provided the introduction and background of the study with its main argument, which examined differentiated assessment in mainstream schools. I further presented the study's rationale, problem statement and purpose. Additionally, I clarified the key concepts utilised in the study, presented the preliminary literature review, and briefly discussed the study's chosen conceptual framework and methodology. Finally, the chapter discussed the ethical considerations, and presented the structure of the study.

This chapter reviews literature related to the topic by critically examining diverse international and national books, research studies, and journal articles on the study. The reviewed literature focused on the emergence of mainstream schools, differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase, teachers' perception of differentiated assessment and the support teachers require from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment. Furthermore, this chapter provides a detailed discussion of the conceptual framework used for this study.

2.2 THE EMERGENCE OF MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

Mainstreaming and integration are concepts often used interchangeably by scholars in the literature to denote inclusive education (Dreyer, 2017). However, Smit et al. (2020) define mainstreaming as the inclusion of all learners, including those with learning barriers and special needs in the same learning environment to provide them with quality education. Thus, mainstreaming requires infrastructural, human, financial and material resources to provide learners with the support they require to "fit in" or be included in a general school, access the general curriculum, and participate in classroom activities. Mainstream schools are therefore inclusive schools that foster human rights, equality, equitability, and social justice by accommodating and catering for all learners, notwithstanding their differences in the same learning environment (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). These schools acknowledge that all learners can learn with effective support systems (Naicker, 2018). The emergence of mainstream schools internationally and in South Africa are discussed in Sub-sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 below.

2.2.1 The emergence of mainstream schools internationally

To provide a review of literature on the emergence of mainstream schools internationally, it is imperative to briefly discuss the history of the inclusive education policy, which fostered the development of mainstream schools internationally and nationally. This section examined the legal frameworks, legislations and policies that brought about the emergence of mainstream schools internationally. For this study, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) (2.2.1.1), the Salamanca Statement (1994) (2.2.1.2), and Education for All (EFA) (2000) (2.2.1.3), were examined below.

2.2.1.1   The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

The term "inclusion" was proposed as a global movement by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 after the Second World War (McFarland, 2017; UN General Assembly, 1948). The declaration's objective was to protect every person's right and ensure that each child is granted equal access to quality mainstream schooling that is appropriate to cater to their needs (McFarland, 2017; UN General Assembly, 1948). It is widely believed that the declaration (Article 26) by the United Nations has served as the bedrock of human rights developments worldwide (McFarland, 2017). Amongst other things, the declaration emphasised freedom from discrimination, equality, and access to compulsory education at no cost; particularly within the Foundation Phase (Greaves, 2019).

In addition, the declaration emphasised that citizens be enlightened and educated about their human rights by member states (Thuketana, 2018). However, studies have shown that although there has been a sharp decline in human rights abuses around the world and increased access to children regardless of their perceived differences to education institutions, curriculum access to learners with special needs and learning barriers is still low (Lupu, 2013; Thuketana, 2018). Each learner should be able to access the curriculum, as the curriculum utilised in a country reflects the aims and objectives of education determined by the society's core values and needs (Hrivnak, 2019). Therefore, access to the curriculum for all learners should be promoted as a human right through differentiated assessment in mainstream schools. The curriculum prepares learners to be functional

members of society. If learners are effectively mainstreamed by accessing the curriculum, they will be mainstreamed into the society at large.

Thuketana (2018, p. 61) noted that although most nations embraced UDHR, "it was not legally binding" as most nations signed agreements "only to yield to and avoid sanctions but continued with the status quo". The International Bill of Human Rights was developed as a yardstick to measure compliance among members of the international community (UN, 2015), to ensure that the nations of the world complied with the declaration to promote and implement human rights. Hence, it is not enough for schools to pose as mainstream schools; they must comply with the requirements, including learners' access to the curriculum and quality education. Scholars have consistently revealed that access to the curriculum for all learners can be made possible through differentiated assessment (Kaur et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2015).

2.2.1.2 The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994)

In 1994, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education emerged during the Salamanca Conference held in Spain and attended by 300 participants from 92 countries and 25 international organisations (Marumo, 2018; UNESCO, 1994). The conference prioritised the inclusion of children with special needs into mainstream schools where their diverse learning needs could be catered for without any form of discrimination (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; UNESCO, 1994). According to the Salamanca Declaration, inclusive education necessitates that:

> *Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic population, children from linguistic, ethnic and cultural minorities, or children from disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups.* (The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, para 3)

To achieve inclusive education globally, the Salamanca statement highlighted that governments prioritise education institutions' support to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all learners irrespective of their differences and learning needs (UNESCO, 1994). Furthermore, organisations, communities, and parents of learners with special needs should be encouraged to foster inclusive policies. Early screening, identification, and intervention strategies should be implemented to effectively accommodate and cater to learners with special needs and learning barriers. UNESCO (1994) further suggested that teachers should be adequately trained to implement inclusive policies and principles in mainstream schools adequately.

As a result of the issues mentioned above in the Salamanca statement, schools needed to take due cognisance of the differences in learners whilst structuring their buildings, facilities, personnel, values, and policies. In this regard, it can also be said that assessment practices in mainstream schools should be structured in a manner that does not disadvantage any learner because of their background, gender, or special needs. In addition, learners with special needs should have access to the mainstream schools in their neighbourhood except in a situation where their needs could not be met in mainstream schools (Mphanda, 2018). Although the Salamanca statement and framework of action on special needs education created a template for nations worldwide in fostering inclusive education, it is imperative that its implementation is carried out to suit different social contexts of application (Thuketana, 2018).

2.2.1.3   Education for All (2000)

The Education for All (EFA) conference took place in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, with most countries, governments, non-governmental departments and organisations, and the World Bank in attendance (UNESCO, 2002). The conference primarily sought to "assess the achievements, lessons and failures of the past decade" (UNESCO, 2002, p. 12) as regards inclusion. It was noted during the conference that the majority of marginalised learners were still excluded from education institutions around the world (Miles & Singal, 2010).

The conference further highlighted the necessity for basic education institutions to provide quality primary education to all learners by 2015 (UNESCO, 2002).

Notwithstanding the timeframes set for implementing the discussed goals at the conference, the Education for All Global Monitoring Report revealed that minimal progress was reported by 2015 (Thuketana, 2018, UNESCO, 2015). This report heightens the fact that implementing policies to facilitate the inclusive education strategy is a global challenge and should be tackled with gravity (Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Smit et al., 2020).

Given the discussion above, teachers who are strategic implementers of inclusive policies in schools must be adequately equipped with the proper knowledge, skill, and support to reach the learners who are the ultimate beneficiaries of these policies in schools. Kaplan and Lewis (2013) affirm that irrespective of well-formulated policies, teachers ultimately determine if the learners will benefit from these policies or not. Wahl (2017), in this regard, argues that the EFA is not making headway as anticipated. Therefore, failure to implement inclusive education policies could pose a barrier to learning, especially for learners with special needs. It is from this perspective above that the study argues the importance of differentiated assessment in mainstream schools.

2.2.2 The emergence of mainstream schools in South Africa

The international walk towards inclusive education, particularly the Salamanca Treaty signed in Spain, had an effect on the emergence of mainstream schools in South Africa (Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2019; Thuketana, 2018). Before democracy in South Africa, the then government implemented a segregated system of education based on a racial classification to perpetuate unequal access to education that solely profited the white minority and marginalised the black people and those with special needs (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2020; Spaull, 2015). Mphanda (2018, p. 10) described the relegation of black learners with special needs as "double" exclusion because black learners with special needs were excluded based on their colour and their special needs. In addition, there were regular schools that accommodated only "normal" learners and special schools which catered for learners with "special needs" (Kirul & Cooc, 2018). The then government prioritised the schools for the whites with larger portion of resources allocated to them while schools for black children were neglected (Greaves, 2019). The special schools available were equipped and well-resourced to cater solely for white learners and, in some cases, Indian and coloured

learners. In contrast, approximately 80% of black learners with special needs and learning barriers were neglected (Walton, 2018).

The apartheid regime in South Africa ended with the election of a democratic government in April 1994, which began a radical reformation and transformation of the political, legal, educational, social, and economic institutions (Steyn et al., 2017). To set this transformation in motion, South Africa introduced a new constitution, formulated policies, legislation, and frameworks to rectify the ills of the past. The regime ushered in a new culture hinged on human rights, inclusion, equality, and social justice (Mphanda, 2018). The new era spurred the emergence of mainstream schools in South Africa.

The Constitution of South Africa (1996), The South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996), The National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training (NCSNET), the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS), the Department of Education (DoE) White paper 6 (2001), and Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Strategy (2014) are discussed briefly in the following sections to provide further insights into the emergence of mainstream schools in South Africa.

2.2.2.1 The Constitution of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996)

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was drafted by the parliament elected in 1994, passed by the Constitutional Court in December 1996, and became operational on 4 February 1997 (RSA, 1996). The Constitution was adopted to redress the inequalities that triumphed during the apartheid era and rebuild a society founded on fundamental human rights, democratic principles, and social justice (RSA, 1996). The constitution provides a framework and a legal foundation of equality, inclusion, and social justice on which the country should be governed.

In addition, the constitution embodies an extensive Bill of Rights with a commitment to restore the human rights of previously marginalised groups (Dixon & Roux, 2018). The Bill of Rights states that every South African citizen, regardless of their gender, race, language, religion, sexual orientation, and disability, is authorized to access basic education and educational establishments (RSA, 1996). The human right of every South African citizen is enshrined in the

constitution to redress the past inequalities and promote access to the curriculum (Greaves, 2019).

In the book chapter, "Mission in Progress: Toward an Assessment of South Africa's Constitution at Twenty", O'Regan (2018) argued that although the Constitution promises to establish a just and egalitarian society, social, educational, and economic disparity continues to prevail. In this regard, authors such as Dixon and Roux (2018), Mphanda (2018) and Spaull (2016) agree that the South African schooling system inherited the current concerns of racial disparity from the apartheid regime with well-resourced schools still dominated by white learners. Thus, Thuketana (2018, p. 75) highlighted that "the Constitution alone could not address all the matters for the successful implementation of inclusive education." In this vein, South Africa has enacted acts and institutional policies in line with the principles stated in the constitution to support implementing inclusive policies such as the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act No. 84 of 1996).

2.2.2.2   The South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996)

The South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act No. 84 of 1996) came into being in 1996. This act is regarded as a vital feature of post-apartheid legislation as it provides a comprehensive framework that officially governs all South African schools (RSA, 1996; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Soudien, 2019). Grounded on the fundamental values of the Constitution, the SASA states, "a public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way" (SASA, 1996, p. 4). The Act further advances the development of inclusion in South African schools as it seeks to eradicate all forms of discrimination based on diversity and promote effective governance and funding of public schools (RSA, 1996). In this regard, the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to assessment, which does not accommodate learner differences, can be seen as a form of discrimination. It should no longer be tolerated in mainstream schools.

The SASA provides a framework for the management of public schools regarding the roles of the school governing bodies. However, research findings reveal that

the structures do not fulfil their roles as majority of the learners with barriers to learning and special needs are still discriminated against in mainstream primary schools (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Kern, 2020). Such discrimination often hinges on the notion that mainstream schools are not adequately equipped to accommodate and cater for learners with special needs and barriers to learning (Thuketana, 2018). Donohue and Bornman (2014), Engelbrecht et al. (2016) and Kirul and Cooc (2018) report the lack of resources in mainstream schools as one of the significant challenges inhibiting the implementation of inclusive policies in South Africa. If the challenge is not duly addressed, more learners will be unduly placed in special schools, thereby undermining SASA which seeks to cater to learners' diverse learning needs in mainstream schools.

2.2.2.3 *The National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) (1997)*

In 1996, the then Minister of Education, Prof. Sibusiso Bengu, appointed the National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) to investigate and recommend findings regarding special needs and the provision of support services in education (DoE, 1997). The 14 member Commission and the ten-member Committee represented the views of diverse stakeholders ranging from parents of children with special needs, school psychologists, school doctors, therapists, community organisations, and different race groups in South Africa (Daniels, 2010).

The commission and the committee members reported both the findings and recommendations to the Department of Basic Education. Some of the findings revealed issues that relate to this study. The matters include a rigid and inflexible curriculum that often leads to standardisation in teaching and assessment and ultimately the exclusion of learners with special needs or learning barriers (DoE, 1997). Decades after the findings were reported, studies have shown that an inflexible curriculum is still a cause of disagreement in mainstream schools (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). Consequently, learners are still excluded from accessing the curriculum, which infringes their human rights.

An inflexible curriculum and inclusive education are two parallel lines that do not meet in a mainstream school. The former fails to take cognisance of the differences that exist among learners. Hence, many scholars have explored and investigated the need for the curriculum to be differentiated (Ledwaba, 2017; Marishane et al., 2011; McKenzie, 2021). However, differentiated assessment, which informs instruction and promotes access to the curriculum, has not been given its deserved attention in mainstream schools.

Another finding reported to the Department of Education was inadequate human resource development in schools (DoE, 1997). Human resources in schools is the most important resource as it drives all other resources. In this vein, it can be said that teachers are the core stakeholders in schools as regards implementing inclusive policies-if they fail, so does the policy (DeLuca et al., 2016). Teachers in mainstream schools still lament that they are not adequately trained and equipped to implement inclusive policies and differentiate assessment to learners with special needs in particular (Donohue & Bornman 2014; Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2019). It was, therefore, important to investigate the perceptions of mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment.

Recommendations proposed by the two bodies above relating to this study include providing a unified system of education (DoE, 1997). The separation of the schooling system into special and mainstream schools and dedicated special education for learners with severe educational needs was to be abolished. Furthermore, the development of an inter-sectorial community-based support structure was recommended as a structure to assist both learners and teachers in the newly integrated schooling system. It was also proposed that personnel be trained to adequately provide support services in schools (DoE, 1997).

The recommendations that emanated from NCSNET and NCESS provided a quantum leap in fostering inclusion in South African schools. The recommendations were of utmost importance as they sought to foster social integration, community responsiveness, and learner access to a unified schooling system and curriculum.

2.2.2.4   Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) (2001)

The development of Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) was initiated in 1996 with the appointment of the National Commission on Special Needs on Education Support Services, which investigated and made recommendations concerning special needs and support services in South African schools (DoE, 1997). Based on the findings gathered in 1997, a document emerged which consisted of policies to develop inclusive schools. In 2001, Consultative Paper 1 emerged from the report in 1999, which later resulted in the development of Education White Paper 6 Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DoE, 2001; Hess, 2020; Mphanda, 2018).

Education White Paper 6 is an inclusive policy that comprises principles of social justice, equal access to education, social integration, human rights, participation, and a healthy environment (Dalton et al., 2012; DoE 2001; Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Hess, 2020). It is a national strategy to accommodate and cater to all learners' diverse needs regardless of their special needs and learning barriers as much as possible in a mainstream classroom (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). EWP6 acknowledges that each learner is different and can learn with the proper support.

The implementation of EWP6 necessitates the transformation of schools to include diverse learners with varied learning needs. However, the focus of transformation has been on the infrastructure and resource provision, while the transformation of assessment practices in promoting curriculum access has been neglected in practice and literature (Engelbrecht, 2020). Engelbrecht et al. (2017) have pointed out that the subject advisers in South Africa are also not equipped regarding differentiated assessment to support teachers to assist learners with special needs to access the general curriculum.

It is imperative that the curriculum, instruction and assessment are differentiated to suit learners' needs to accommodate all learners in mainstream schools (Wahl, 2017). Additionally, teachers must be equipped to align their classroom practices with the provisions made in EWP6 (Thuketana, 2018).

2.2.2.5 Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) strategy (2014)

The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) strategy was developed in South Africa to provide collaborative, systematic and holistic support to learners and teachers where learners are assessed or screened and provided with the needed support (DBE, 2014). The effective identification and assessment of every learner who experiences barriers to learning are vital. It is a prerequisite for them to access the required support they need to be accommodated in mainstream schools (DBE, 2014). The assessment process ensures that learners are rightly placed in schools depending on the level of support they need (Smit et al., 2020). In this regard, mainstream schoolteachers should be conversant with the SIAS strategy.

Concerning the SIAS strategy, the class teachers are saddled with the responsibility of gathering relevant information regarding the learner to identify their basic needs, developmental delays and possible learning challenges that the learners experience (DBE, 2014). The teacher is further expected to diagnose challenges experienced by learners with special needs and identify learners that require additional support to improve their participation in mainstream schools (Dalton et al., 2012; DBE, 2014). Mkhuma et al.'s (2014) study revealed that many teachers are not conversant with the learning challenges learners experience. Furthermore, they are deficient in utilising the SIAS strategy, making it difficult for teachers to cater to learners' diverse learning needs. In their empirical research, the authors further revealed that teachers experienced the SIAS strategy as burdensome with too much paperwork (Mkhuma et al., 2014). According to Tomlinson and Moon (2013), knowledge of differentiated assessment can help teachers effectively locate learners' current knowledge level and the support they require to progress to their next possible level.

2.2.3 Factors that hamper the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools in South Africa

South Africa has no doubt made commendable efforts to formulate inclusive laws, policies, frameworks, and legislation to provide quality mainstream schooling for all learners. However, it has become glaring that the dawn of a democratic system with the formulation of inclusive laws and guidelines in itself does not translate to

effective implementation, particularly at the classroom level (Badat & Sayed 2014; Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Smit et al., 2020).

The formulated policies guarantee every learner in South African schools' access to mainstream schools regardless of their learning needs. However, some mainstream schools still reject the learners' access as the teachers feel incompetent to implement inclusive education (Wahl, 2017). Donohue and Bornman (2014) also affirmed that the failure to act by stakeholders in schools could be due to the inadequate understanding of the specifics and the practical ways of implementing the stated goals of inclusive education. Therefore, teachers must be equipped with the right perception and knowledge regarding differentiated assessment to promote inclusive assessment practices.

McKenzie et al. (2020) pointed out that during Apartheid, the teachers were qualified for either mainstream or special school teaching. Thus, some mainstream schoolteachers lack the self-confidence to cater to the diverse learning needs of learners as, in most instances they do not find the training they have received practical and applicable in their classrooms (Kozleski & Siuty, 2014; Nel et al., 2014). Therefore, for mainstream schoolteachers to cater adequately to learners with diverse educational needs, continuous professional development training should be restructured to suit the new normal of diversity prevalent in South African schools. In this regard, inadequate training programs and workshops may limit mainstream schoolteachers' perceptions and knowledge regarding differentiated assessment, which may negatively impact their assessment practices.

The implementation of inclusive education is further complicated by an inflexible curriculum, instructional practices and assessment that do not take due cognisance of learner differences (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). The curriculum has undergone significant changes over the years with the current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) making provision for learners with special needs (DoE, 2011). Scholars such as Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) have argued that CAPS is not flexible enough to attain the requirements embedded in White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001).

Although the majority of South African teachers favour the inclusion of all learners in principle, researchers such as Thomas and Loxley (2007), Hansen (2012), and Goodall (2018) revealed in their study that there are teachers who perceive and experience inclusion as limiting with a negative bearing on learners with special needs. Hebron and Humphrey (2014) and Goodall (2018) highlighted bullying, anxiety, and loneliness as some of the negative impacts of inclusion on some learners. According to these authors, young learners with special needs and learning barriers in mainstream schools are usually bullied by their peers, leading to the learners frequently experiencing loneliness and anxiety (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014; Goodall, 2018). Although some authors believe mainstream schools may not be the best approach for learners needing extensive support, they also highlight that special schools are also not adequately structured to meet their learning needs (Goodall, 2018). Hence, learners may feel misplaced when inclusive policies such as differentiated assessment are not sufficiently implemented in mainstream schools.

In addition, many mainstream schoolteachers state that learners with special needs and learning barriers demand too much attention from them, and as a result, their peers are neglected (Wahl 2017). Typically developing learners are usually neglected by teachers as they believe that they will still do well without assistance and extra attention, which in my opinion leads to another form of exclusion (Rimm et al., 2018). Mainstream schools should benefit all learners with no learner neglected due to their ability or special needs.

Contextual issues such as overcrowded classrooms and funding constraints pose a major challenge in mainstream schools in enabling the operation of inclusive policies (Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Kirul & Cooc, 2018). It has been reported in diverse studies such as John (2013), Khumalo and Mji, (2014), Marais (2016) and Matsepe et al. (2019) that some classrooms in South Africa accommodate over 50 learners and, in some cases, 130 learners (Guardian Africa Network, 2013). In addition, in some classrooms in the Eastern Cape, three to four learners occupy a desk designed for two learners resulting in congestion and inhibited movement (John, 2013). Overcrowded classrooms make individual support and attention to learners in need of additional support burdensome for teachers catering to diverse needs. Marais (2016) affirmed that overcrowded classrooms negatively impact

learners' academic performance as teachers spend more time trying to curb disciplinary problems than on teaching. In similar vein, trying to differentiate assessment in a large class might be tedious for teachers especially when the DBSTs do not adequately support them.

2.3 DIFFERENTIATED ASSESSMENT IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

The Department of Basic Education (2017, p. 168) highlighted that the primary aim of the Foundation Phase is to nurture the vital "foundational skills and competencies necessary for the senior years of high school". The Foundation Phase focuses on developing basic foundational abilities, knowledge and competencies by integrating vital learning programmes, such as Numeracy, Literacy, and Life Skills to lay a solid foundation for further learning (Mahlo, 2017). In addition to learner acquiring competencies, Skae et al. (2020) affirm that the Foundation Phase is a vital phase where the learner's values, behaviours, self-confidence, and attitudes are shaped to produce a holistic learner who is active, responsible, and functional member of the society.

Hence, learners must get a solid foundation for lifelong learning where their interest in education is stimulated, and their self-concepts developed positively (Mahlo, 2017). The resultant effect of a faulty educational foundation in a learner's life may have grave consequences for their holistic social, psychological, and mental well-being. Young learners come into the schooling system at different stages of development with diverse abilities, interests, socioeconomic and sociocultural backgrounds (Naudé & Reda, 2017). They also come with their natural curiosity and eagerness to explore the world around them. Noman and Kaur (2014) argue that Foundation Phase teachers should acknowledge and accommodate learner differences into their instructional and assessment plan to provide the learners with learning experiences that are useful and worthwhile. The range of capabilities that exist among learners can no longer be ignored. Inclusion in the Foundation Phase should support the right of learners to engage in a variety of classroom tasks and assessment practices (Skae et al., 2020).

For this study, key assessment policies and guidelines such as (i) Outcome based education (OBE) (ii) Curriculum 2005 (iii) the revised national curriculum statement (RNCS), (iv) the Curriculum and Policy Statements (CAPS) (v) the

National Protocol for Assessment: Grades R–12 and (vi) Guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom through CAPS will be examined.

2.3.1 Brief history of assessment policies and guidelines in South Africa

The educational system is often a reflection of society. It is therefore important that the educational system evolves as society evolves. In this light, the South African educational system has experienced key transformations since 1994 to provide learners with inclusive assessment policies. The transformations in the assessment policies are discussed briefly in the sections below.

2.3.1.1   Outcome-Based Education (OBE)

The Outcome Based Education (OBE) curriculum policy was the first that included assessment principles after the apartheid era in the South African education system (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015). The policy aimed to bring about a paradigm shift from an education system previously dominated by standardised high stakes examination and whose main purpose was "to rank, grade, select and certificate learners," to an education system that "informs and improves the curriculum and assessment practices of educators" (DoE 1998, p. 4).

OBE highlighted that assessment should focus on "clearly defined outcomes to credit learners' achievements at every level, whatever pathway they may have followed, and at whatever rate they may have acquired the necessary competence" (DoE, 1998, p. 5). Thus, OBE introduced a departure from the undue reliance on standardised assessment, which does not take cognisance of learner differences but views all learners as having the same ability, which is untrue (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015).

Although OBE was introduced mainly to do away with the inequality of the past, implementation of the curriculum was achievement-oriented without considering the diversity that exists in the classroom (Hendricks, 2010). The then Minister of Education, Professor Bengu, declared the termination of OBE on 24 March 1997 to adopt Curriculum 2005 (Moodley, 2013).

2.3.1.2   Curriculum 2005 (C2005)

Curriculum 2005 was adopted as a coherent policy initiative in 1998 primarily to transform the curriculum and schooling environment in all South African schools (Fataar, 2000). Within two years of implementing C2005, it was further reviewed

and criticised by education stakeholders that teachers were not trained regarding the new learning areas introduced (Moodley, 2013). The then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal set up a committee to liaise with relevant stakeholders such as departmental officials and teachers to review C2005 (DoE, 2000). The committee discovered that C2005 had several weaknesses, such as; the terminologies used were difficult to understand, which led to confusion and de-motivation on the part of the teachers (Makgato, 2018).

Therefore, it is imperative that assessment policies are clear to the relevant stakeholders in education, particularly the teachers who implement them at the classroom level. Teachers should also be trained on practical ways to differentiate and implement assessment policies in the classroom. Otherwise, the learners may not benefit from the provisions in the curriculum. Due to several weaknesses identified in the C2005 policy, the Review Committee recommended that it be phased out and the Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS) be adopted (Makgato, 2018).

2.3.1.3   *Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS)*

Hinged on the key findings of the Curriculum 2005 Review Committee (DoE, 2000), the Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS) were presented in 2002 (DoE, 2002). RNCS aimed to provide unambiguous terminology and use clear language. It also supported teacher orientation and training (Makgato, 2018). As regards assessment, it was "a continuous, planned process of gathering information about the performance of learners measured against the Assessment Standards of the Learning Outcomes" (DoE, 2002, p. 93). The assessment aims were revised to promote and monitor learners' individual progress.

Literature postulates that the RNCS significantly increased teachers' workload (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013). Inclusive policies have placed additional demands on teachers (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). I argue that the increased workload stemming from inclusive assessment policies should be accepted as part of the "joys" of inclusion; otherwise, teachers may not be motivated to adjust their attitudes and assessment practices to reflect inclusive policies. However, to bear the burden that inclusion brings, mainstream

schoolteachers must be adequately supported. Support structures such as the DBST are vital and non-negotiable to effectively implement inclusive assessment policies (Smit et al., 2020). Research conducted on teachers' experiences regarding RNCS implementation revealed inadequate training and insufficient support for teachers in mainstream schools (Selesho & Monyane, 2012). In response to the weaknesses of RNCS, the Department of Basic Education introduced the Curriculum and Policy Statements (CAPS) (DBE, 2011).

2.3.1.4   *Curriculum and Policy Statements (CAPS)*

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is a policy document that guides the teaching and learning process in South African schools and aims to equip learners as functional members of the society while taking cognisance of global imperatives (DBE, 2011). The Minister of Education, Ms Angelina Angie Matsie Motshekga, stated that CAPS aimed to clarify what must be taught and assessed in schools (DoE, 2011). Therefore, it is essential that mainstream schoolteachers are well acquainted with CAPS and with differentiated assessment embedded in CAPS.

Previous studies indicate that teachers have both positive and negative views about CAPS. An example of such a positive view is a case study conducted by Maharajh et al. (2016) on "teachers' experiences of implementing CAPS, using three primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal". The authors' findings suggest that the teachers viewed CAPS as a valuable policy as it brought about significant reforms in the methods of assessment when compared with previous curriculums (Maharajh et al., 2016). Du Plessis and Marais' (2015) study affirmed that teachers view CAPS as assessment-oriented and comprehensive as it guides teachers on what to teach and assess. Additionally, the teachers praised the annual teaching plan for providing guidance on the specific amount of tasks for formal assessment (du Plessis & Marais, 2015). Furthermore, Foundation Phase teachers view CAPS as user-friendly due to its simplicity, making it easy for teachers to comprehend the content (Magagula, 2015).

Notwithstanding, teachers also have negative views about CAPS. Previous studies revealed that teachers view CAPS as ambitious due to the teachers' workload to cover each term. According to the participants, CAPS does not

consider the slow learners who need more time to master the content taught (du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Magagula, 2015). Another negative view about CAPS is that assessment in CAPS is designed in a rigid way, which does not provide enough room for the diverse learning styles of learners (du Plessis & Marais, 2015).

Although previous studies revealed that teachers possess both positive and negative views of CAPS, the findings suggest that teachers agree that implementation of CAPS has not been successful due to inadequate training, limited resources and support (Maharajh et al., 2016; van der Nest, 2012). In addition, teachers have identified language as the main challenge in implementing CAPS in the Foundation Phase as learners are not taught in their mother tongue, especially in English medium schools (Subramoney, 2017).

CAPS must be flexible enough to accommodate and cater for learners with special needs and learning barriers. However, it is also important to consider that teachers often neglect gifted learners, believing they do not need extra attention (Marumo, 2018; Oswald & de Villiers, 2013). Gifted learners are often bored in class as they do not find the class activities and assessment tasks challenging and stimulating (van Wyk, 2018). CAPS should therefore be beneficial to all types of learners in mainstream classes, which include gifted learners. CAPS comprises the National Protocol for Assessment, which regulates assessment processes (DBE, 2012).

2.3.1.5 The National Protocol for Assessment: Grades R–12

The National Protocol for Assessment (DBE, 2012) is a concise document that provides a policy framework on how assessment should be employed to ensure adequate assessment records for effective teaching and learning (Makeleni & Sethusha, 2014). The policy document promotes continuous classroom assessment and the end-of-year examinations (DBE, 2012). The Department of Basic Education (2012) states that the national policy on assessment "must comply with the prescriptions as set out in Education White Paper 6" (DBE, 2012, p. 2) to accommodate and cater for learners with special needs and who experience barriers to learning. Furthermore, the policy highlights that diverse

assessment tools should be employed to gather information of learner progress effectively and efficiently (DBE, 2012).

The National Protocol for Assessment further states that the various classroom assessment methods used by teachers should be appropriate and aligned with the learners' developmental level (DBE, 2012). This links with Piaget's theory of cognitive development and Vygotsky's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), highlighting the need for teachers to consider the mental processes of learners in the teaching and learning process. According to DBE (2012, p. 15), the aim of reporting assessment results is to provide learners, parents/caregivers, schools, and district offices with regular feedback on the learners' progress. In addition, assessment should inform effective teaching and learning; and inform intervention strategies that respond to learners' diversity in classrooms.

2.3.1.6 Guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom through CAPS

The Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom through CAPS provide teachers with strategies to cater to learners' diverse learning needs in classrooms (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The District Based Support Teams are also required to utilise these guidelines when supporting teachers in schools.

These guidelines aim to guide mainstream schoolteachers on acknowledging and understanding the diversity among learners in the classroom and ways to respond to those. The guidelines further demonstrate how the curriculum and assessment can be differentiated and provide teaching strategies like groupings and multi-level teaching (DoE, 2011). The guidelines emphasise the importance of differentiated assessment within an inclusive framework, as assessment of learners is fundamental to the teaching and learning process. In addition, the guidelines as regards differentiated assessment is grounded on the fact that learners with diverse learning needs differ and, consequently, cannot be taught and assessed the same way (DBE, 2012; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Therefore, the traditional approach and methods of assessment based on uniformity should no longer be accepted in schools to enable all learners to access the curriculum (Macy et al., 2015). Differentiated assessment should "meet learners where they are and to help them progress to the next step in their learning" (DBE, 2012, p.

13). Mhlolo (2015) emphasised that implementing assessment guidelines has been discouraging as teachers are fixated on the traditional assessment methods, which has posed a barrier to learning in mainstream schools. This fixation may be due to teachers' lack of understanding about the purpose of differentiated assessment in mainstream schools. Hence, the purpose of differentiated assessment is discussed below.

2.3.2 The purpose of differentiated assessment

The assumption that fuelled the traditional method of assessment is hinged on the notion that all learners within the same age bracket, in the same class have the same cognitive ability, which has been consistently proven to be farfetched from reality (Förster et al., 2018; Macy et al., 2015; Stefanakis & Meier, 2010). Around the world, it is no longer news that the average classroom, which reflects society, is filled with diverse learners from diverse backgrounds, with various abilities and skills, which are largely attributed to globalisation, migration and inclusive policies (Engelbrecht, 2020; Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020).

In the book "Assessment Literacy for Educators in a Hurry", Popham (2018) pointed out that although large-scale standardised assessment and classroom assessment has been in use for over a century, fairness within an inclusive framework is only a recent concern. Fairness in assessment was previously defined as meaning uniformity; assessment was designed, conducted and interpreted to mean the same thing for all learners (de Sam Lazaro, 2017). The traditional uniformity-based method of assessment has been criticised by scholars internationally, such as Popham (2018), Tomlinson (2015), Wormeli (2018) and nationally, such as Taole (2020). The criticism is that traditional assessment does not consider the wide range of differences among learners, resulting in grades, school placements, and decisions that are highly questionable (Taole, 2020). The grades, placements and decisions made based on traditional assessment are questionable because many learners are disadvantaged when assessment is not differentiated.

Wormeli (2018) highlighted in his book, "Fair Isn't Always Equal" that the term assessment is obtained from the Latin word *assidere,* which means "to sit beside" (Wormeli, 2018, p. 35). The definition implies that assessment is a "coaching tool"

or a "way to nurture learning" (Wormeli, 2018, p. 35). In this regard, the primary purpose of differentiated assessment is to promote effective teaching and learning, not to keep a record of learner deficiencies to rank them with their peers. Teachers' assessment practices should emphasise fairness over equality as learners learn at different paces, ways and benefit from using differentiated strategies (Wormeli, 2018).

Majuddin and Khambari (2019) emphasised that differentiation enables learners to recognise and accept others as different with different abilities and skills, not as inferior or weak. In this vein, differentiated assessment fosters tolerance and acceptance among learners in the classroom as it teaches them to acknowledge and accommodate others irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses. Differentiated assessment also fosters creative thinking among learners due to the range of assessment tools employed (Brown et al., 2013).

In addition, differentiation experts Tomlinson and Moon (2013) argued that differentiated assessment is vital in classrooms for three major purposes, namely, accessibility, motivation, and efficiency. The authors argued that differentiated assessment makes learning and ultimately the curriculum accessible for all learners as it creates diverse pathways for them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. In a similar vein, Engelbrecht et al. (2016) affirmed that differentiation promotes curriculum access for learners with special needs and learning difficulties. Tomlinson and Moon (2013) further argued that differentiated assessment promotes motivation based on the learners' interest and learning profile, which stimulates learner participation. Furthermore, Tomlinson and Moon (2013) argued that differentiated assessment promotes efficiency as information gathered produces valid information, which can be used to make effective decisions regarding the learner progress and further learning.

2.3.3 Strategies to differentiate assessment in the Foundation Phase

According to the Department of Basic Education (2017, p. 171) some of the strategies used to differentiate assessment for learners with special needs and learning barriers include:

- The provision of extra time for learners with processing difficulties or slow handwriting;

- The use of braille and large print materials for learners with visual impairments;

- The use of personal assistants to assist learner who is unable to perform basic tasks independently;

- The use of scribes whose duty is to write the learner's response to questions verbatim; and

- The use of sign language interpreters for deaf learners.

A study conducted by Subramoney (2017) on the assessment of support strategies in inclusive education in the Foundation Phase found that the teachers supported their learners who struggled with class activities by providing them with individualised support and extra time. In addition, the teachers provided the learners with remedial classes after school to support them (Subramoney, 2017).

Assessment benefits all learners, not only learners with special needs, when it is differentiated based on the learners' readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2011; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Tomlinson and Moon (2013, p. 10) defined readiness as "a student's current proximity to specific learning goals, targets, or outcomes", which is not farfetched from Vygotsky ZPD (Vygotsky 1978). When classroom assessment is differentiated based on learners' readiness, it meets the learners where they are and supports them to move to the next possible level in the curriculum. Differentiating assessment based on learners' readiness is vital to learners' academic achievement because when assessment is constantly beyond or below the learner's state of readiness, it hinders the learner attainment of further knowledge and skill (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Tomlinson, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2015). A teacher can attend to learners' readiness needs by providing explicit instructions or utilising technology to support learners with reading difficulties (DBE, 2017; Kaur et al., 2019).

Assessment can also be differentiated based on learners' interests. Interest refers to the learner's passion or inclination which can be harnessed to demonstrate their knowledge and skills (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). In the book "Softening the Edges: Assessment Practices That Honor K-12 Teachers and Learners", White (2017) proposed that learners' interests can bear on the validity of a teacher's assessment practices and results. Differentiating assessment based on the learners' interest allows learners to demonstrate their knowledge and skill optimally. For all learners to benefit from differentiated assessment, teachers can employ a range of assessment strategies, including providing learners with options to complete their assessment tasks using their preferred colours, or pictures (Kaur et al., 2019). Differentiating assessment based on learners' interests keeps learners stimulated and motivated to engage in tasks.

Learners' profiles include aspects that define the learner personality and learning preferences (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Differentiating assessment based on learners' profiles provides learners with diverse ways to demonstrate mastery of the content taught (Kaur et al., 2019). For example, a learner may feel more confident working in a group than working individually (Westhof & Thuketana, 2018).

2.3.4 Misconceptions regarding differentiated assessment

Notable scholars such as Birnie (2015) and Tomlinson and Moon (2013) have highlighted misconceptions regarding differentiated assessment in the differentiated assessment field. A common misconception found in literature is that differentiated assessment involves designing different assessment papers for every learner in the classroom. Birnie (2015) argued that this misinterpretation of differentiated assessment is untrue as most heterogeneous learners' abilities and learning needs are often located within three or four flexible ranges. These flexible ranges may include visual learners, auditory learners, reading learners and kinetic (self-practice learners) (Boland & Amonoo, 2021). In addition, most learners can be located within the average range as learners move at a similar pace, while fewer learners are gifted learners with the ability to do more (Heacox & Cash, 2020).

Another prevalent misconception about differentiated assessment is that it is only for learners with special needs and learning barriers. Differentiated assessment is often discussed and practised as a support mechanism only for weak learners (Hertberg-Davis, 2009; Westwood, 2013). This misconception puts the more able and gifted learners at a disadvantage as they are often bored and demotivated with the assessment task employed (Heacox & Cash, 2020). Differentiated assessments should be designed and practised with all learners in mind (Taylor, 2017).

Teachers allocating bonus scores and unearned marks to assist struggling learners and enable them to progress through the grades is another misconception of differentiated assessment (Gottlieb, 2006; Silva et al., 2005; Taylor, 2017). In this regard, Tomlinson and Moon (2013) proposed that teachers must be professional and ethical in their assessment practices. Thus, they should not falsify assessment scores to accommodate some learners, as assessment is beneficial when it provides accurate evidence of learners' progress (Noman & Kaur, 2014). According to Majuddin and Khambari (2019), differentiated assessment should provide all learners with the appropriate difficulty level that will enable them to thrive. Some authors have highlighted that when assessment is differentiated based on factors other than the intended purpose and learning needs, it may have a greater potential for unfairness (Mislevy et al., 2013).

2.4 Teachers' perception regarding differentiated assessment

It is a common finding in the literature that teacher perception is positively associated with their classroom practices (Barnes et al., 2017; Deneen & Brown, 2016; Deneen et al., 2019; Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015). Wormeli (2018, p. 64) reiterates, "when all we have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail". Therefore, it is important to investigate the perception of FP mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment as Popham (2009) stressed that teachers' knowledge of assessment could either make or mar the quality of education.

For this study, teachers' perceptions consist of their beliefs, understanding and conceptions of the purpose of differentiated assessment (Lam, 2019; Xu & Brown, 2016). In this regard, this section below will be discussed under three subheadings: teachers' conceptualisation of differentiated assessment (Section

2.4.1), teachers' classroom assessment practices (Section 2.4.2), and the relationship between teachers' assessment practices and learners' academic success (Section 2.4.3).

2.4.1 Teachers' conceptualisation of differentiated assessment.

Literature has documented that how teachers conceptualise assessment hinges on various reasons and experiences. Teachers' understanding regarding differentiated assessment may be formed by how they were assessed as learners at school (Lam, 2019). Vogt and Tsagari (2014, p. 391) have described this understanding as "testing as you were tested." Because standardised methods of assessment based on uniformity have been passed down from one generation to the other for over a century, it will take deliberate and structured "rehabilitation" to purge it out of the education system (Starr, 2021; Wilbrink, 1997). The one-size-fits-all approach to assessment has been the norm for many decades, and many teachers found comfort in this approach. Thus, teachers require constant training and support to embrace the paradigm shift that differentiated assessment brings.

In South Africa, studies have revealed that although assessment policies (DoE, 2011, DBE, 2017) and guidelines (DBE, 2012) are shifting from the traditional one-size-fits-all assessment to inclusive approaches, teachers still cherish and practice traditional methods (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015). Some researchers', such as Kanjee and Sayed (2013) and Kanjee and Mthembu (2015), have attributed this fixation to the teachers' lack of understanding about assessment policies. The authors argue that CAPS is not clear enough about using assessment to improve teaching and learning (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013; Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015). In this regard, if teachers are not equipped with a sufficient understanding of differentiated assessment as outlined by the Department of Basic Education, they will continue to conceptualise assessment in a standardised manner.

In addition, how teachers conceptualise assessment may also be shaped by the contextualised culture of assessment for external accountability purposes (Barnes et al., 2017). Teachers' fixation on traditional methods of assessment may be due to an examination-driven culture in most schools where schools and learners are ranked as top-performing based on the assessment results of the learners (Barnes et al., 2017; Lee & Coniam, 2013). In a similar vein, Sethusha (2012)

revealed that in South Africa, the schoolteachers understanding of assessment was primarily about the accumulation of marks. This view about assessment can limit teachers focus and decisions about assessment scores and instructional techniques to "placing students into categories," "assigning grades," and determining "if students meet qualification standards" (Brown, 2006, p. 168). Thus, school culture and undue emphasis on learner achievement in relation to their peers could negatively influence teachers' assessment practices.

However, in the book "What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Assessment", Wilson (2013) argued that accountability systems will not unduly pressure teachers who are well informed about the purposes of assessment as they will know how to utilise assessment scores to improve the teaching-learning process. The teacher will also be able to utilise learners' assessment scores to determine the learners' current level and the next possible level the learner can attain through improved instruction (Wilson, 2013). Mainstream schools need to redefine the primary purpose of assessment: to foster effective teaching and learning (DoE, 2011).

Lam's (2019) study reported that some teachers understood classroom assessment as standardised and high-stakes, although classroom assessment is widely documented in the literature to be low-stake, continuous and contextualized. This misunderstanding regarding assessment terminologies and the purpose of assessments shows that there is a need for teacher training to focus on assessment. In South Africa, a major reason why Curriculum 2005 was phased out was its ambiguous terminologies that teachers found confusing (Makgato, 2018). Although it is expected that continuous teacher professional training would bridge this gap in understanding, Lam (2019) further reported that Hong Kong teachers had a basic level of knowledge regarding assessment despite their high academic qualification and professional training. In this regard, differentiated assessment is important as a focus point in teacher training programmes and workshops.

In addition, some teachers understand assessment narrowly and insufficiently as testing the intelligent quotient (IQ) of learners based on the pencil and paper type

of assessment and assigning marks based on the learners' performance (Dayal & Lingam, 2015). However, differentiated assessment is broader than testing the knowledge and understanding of learners using an assessment task. It further includes informing differentiated instruction to promote curriculum access for the learners.

Some teachers conceptualise assessment as insignificant in the teaching-learning process (Barnes et al., 2017). Research has revealed that if teachers have negative perceptions of assessment, such as viewing assessment as unimportant or irrelevant to learning, they may struggle with or undermine assessment policies and recommended practices (Brookhart, 2011; Brown et al., 2019). Negative conceptions about assessment may have a bearing on the education system because assessment is often used to inform instructional strategies, which provide learners access to the curriculum (Barnes et al., 2017). Deneen and Brown (2016) argued that if teachers' conceptions of assessment are not upgraded, their assessment practices will also not be upgraded. It is therefore important that FP mainstream schoolteachers' perception regarding differentiated assessment is explored.

2.4.2 Teachers' classroom assessment practices.

There is a positive association and constant interaction between teachers' knowledge, belief, and practice (Barnes et al., 2017; Opre, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers' classroom assessment practices be examined as they are pivotal in implementing assessment policies.

Kanjee and Croft (2012) found in their study that two-thirds of the teachers demonstrated "basic" and "below basic" understanding regarding the use of formative assessment. Consequently, most of the teachers did not employ formative assessment in their classroom (Kanjee & Croft, 2012). This finding reveals that teachers' classroom assessment practices are often based on the methods they understand and with which they are comfortable. Differentiated assessment requires teachers to step out of their comfort zone to effectively design and employ inclusive assessment strategies (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Teachers who have found comfort over the years in employing traditional

assessments should be encouraged and adequately supported to differentiate assessment.

In the Foundation Phase, studies have found that teachers' knowledge of assessment and their classroom assessment practices are deficient regarding identifying learning gaps and catering for learners learning needs (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015; Sayed et al., 2014). In this regard, Yeung (2012) affirmed that the current schooling system in Hong Kong seems to focus unduly on assessment for achievements; thus, the development of the learner is often ignored. The resultant effect of this undue emphasis has created a backwash effect concerning teaching in mainstream schools (Yeung, 2012). Effective assessment practice is hindered when teachers cannot use assessment results to foster effective teaching and learning (Popham, 2018).

Popham (2018) pointed out that teachers often use the wrong types of assessments to evaluate learners' progress in their classrooms. Similarly, Wilson (2013) echoed that one assessment tool might be inadequate to capture the learner level of understanding about the content taught. This may be due to the way the assessment was designed, which could be misleading. In addition, the questions asked might be beyond the developmental level of the learner. Factors such as inadequate resources and language barriers that can inhibit a learner from efficiently demonstrating their knowledge and skill about the content taught, should be considered when designing assessment (Wilson, 2013). Therefore, teachers should seek to use a range of assessment styles in their classrooms.

2.4.3 The relationship between teachers' assessment practices and learners' academic achievement

Studies on teachers' assessment practices have revealed a positive relationship between teachers' assessment practices and learners' academic achievement (Hidayat, 2020; Munro, 2012; Taylor, 2017). Adequate assessment strategies can help to boost learners' motivation as the instruction and assessment constructively build on learners' prior knowledge, which leads to academic achievement (Mellati, & Khademi, 2018). In addition, research findings reveal that learners taught by assessment literate teachers and teachers who participated in professional development training perform better academically compared to

learners taught by less assessment literate teachers (Andersson & Palm, 2017; Mellati, & Khademi, 2018).

Hence, teachers should be adequately equipped with the right knowledge to conduct classroom assessments effectively. Teachers with the right perception regarding differentiated assessment improve the chances of learners' academic success (Popham, 2018). Foundation Phase teachers need to have the right perception regarding differentiated assessment as the learners are at the formational stage of development (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015). Teachers that are knowledgeable about the purpose and use of assessment are better equipped to design and conduct classroom assessments and utilise the scores to inform their instructional methods and further promote learning (Chappuis et al., 2012; Pastore & Andrade, 2019).

Even though it is acknowledged that differentiated assessment is the foundation of effective assessment and learning, there is still a lack of studies exploring and investigating differentiated assessment in the literature particularly within the South African context (Kaur et al., 2019; Varsavsky & Rayner, 2013). Therefore, this study aimed to bridge the gap by investigating FP mainstream schoolteachers' perception regarding differentiated assessment, thus suggesting differentiated assessment strategies/principles.

2.5 SUPPORT REQUIRED BY TEACHERS IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS FROM THE DBST REGARDING DIFFERENTIATED ASSESSMENT

Inclusive education is an approach that influences the whole system of education and depends on adequate and effective support services, thus emphasising the important role of the DBST (Tebid, 2019). Therefore, mainstream schools should be seen as a socio-ecological, community-based system where stakeholders come together as a collective to share their knowledge and skills, make decisions and solve problems. Additionally, mainstream schools should create an enabling environment towards shared outcomes in which contextual factors are investigated regarding learners needing support (Makhalemele & Nel, 2016). Mfuthwana and Dreyer (2018) have expressed their concerns that within the inclusive schooling system in South Africa, the sustained development of effective collaboration between the DBST and teachers have remained a challenge. In a

similar vein, findings affirmed that learners in need of support services are increasingly referred to special schools, which raises the question of whether teachers actually know and understand the function of the support structures provided to assist them in implementing inclusive education (Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden, 2018). Similarly, Mfuthwana (2016) and Nel et al. (2014) highlighted that mainstream schoolteachers must be adequately informed about the functions of the DBST and the processes to seek support for the learners.

2.5.1 Functions and roles of the DBST

The DBSTs are multidisciplinary teams of experts from provincial and regional departments of education and special schools with a variety of knowledge, skills, and experiences (DoE, 2005; Mfuthwana, 2016; Mabaso, 2019; Smit et al., 2020). The goal of the DBST is to acquire resources to adequately and efficiently support mainstream schoolteachers and learners (Mabaso, 2019). The functions and roles of the DBST within an inclusive education system are stated in White Paper 6, "Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System" (DoE, 2001), and "Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education: District Based Support Teams" (DoE, 2005). The DBST must support mainstream schoolteachers and learners as stipulated in White Paper 6 and other policy guideline documents on inclusive education.

The Department of Education states that the primary role of the DBST is to evaluate and provide continuous collaboration, to enhance the capability of inclusive schools to identify learners with special needs and learning barriers and to accommodate and cater for their range of learning needs (DoE, 2001; DoE, 2006; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Mfuthwana, 2016). The School Based Support Team initialises the process by identifying learners' needs in respective classrooms. After that, a multidisciplinary team of experts, including those from local communities, are drawn to provide professional support services to educational institutions (DoE, 2001; Makhalemele, 2011). The DBST and the teachers are responsible for evaluating learning programmes, developing learner support programmes, developing teaching and differentiated assessment strategies (DoE, 2001). Additionally, the DBST and the teachers diagnose the effectiveness of learning and support programmes, suggest modifications and

provide assistive learning devices to learners in need (DoE, 2001; Mfuthwana, 2016).

2.5.2 Importance of support structures in differentiating assessment

Friend and Cook (2013, p. 6) define collaboration as "a style of direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work together towards a common goal". The importance of partnership and collaboration between schools and the DBST is emphasised by different policy documents (DBE, 2010; DoE 2001, 2005, 2008) and various researchers (Makhalemele, 2011; Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018; Tebid, 2019). The policy documents and policies aimed to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools (Nel et al., 2014). Research studies have revealed that teachers and learners both acknowledge that effective support structures could boost the academic achievement of learners (Datta 2015; Engeström 2016; Nel, Nel & Lebeloane, 2016).

Support structures and collaboration have been recognised as a skill that heightens the competency of teachers in the successful implementation of inclusion in mainstream schools (Nel et al., 2013). Taylor (2017) argued that teachers need to be supported and guided by skilled and experienced professionals to enhance their confidence in implementing differentiated classroom strategies. Hence, if the DBSTs do not adequately support teachers in differentiating assessment in their classrooms, teachers may feel less confident, which may eventually diminish their level of self-efficacy (Aðalsteinsson et al., 2014; Hofman & Kilimo, 2014; Nel et al. 2014).

In the study conducted by Makhalemele and van Staden (2018), the findings revealed that the resultant effect of the lack of support from the DBSTs was that the teachers felt demotivated and frustrated with a desire to resign from teaching. In this regard, support from the DBSTs can motivate and empower teachers to differentiate assessment in their classrooms. As with all inclusive policies, differentiated assessment should not be viewed as the sole responsibility of mainstream schoolteachers; else, the teachers might be overwhelmed (Burkett, 2013). Therefore, collaboration and support in mainstream schools will enable

teachers to implement differentiated assessment policies and guidelines in their classrooms better.

2.5.3 Support mainstream school teachers require from the DBST to differentiate assessment

Previous studies have revealed that more than a decade after the introduction of education support services, there is still a gap between policy and implementation (Du Toit et al., 2014; Nel et al., 2014; Makhalemele & Nel, 2016). Support structures are wanting in providing adequate support to teachers and learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Mfuthwana's (2016) study reported that teacher participants highlighted their need for practical training and assistance from the DBST in implementing inclusive policies. This finding was echoed in Ngubane (2019) study, where the teachers highlighted their need for ongoing structured contextual responsive workshops and training. The participants further insisted that in addition to training by the DBST, they also needed hands-on support in their classroom. Concerns were also raised regarding the inconsistent monitoring by the DBST as they proposed that the DBST be based at their school to ensure constant access to them when they require their assistance (Mfuthwana, 2016). It might be unrealistic to request that the DBSTs had to be based in a specific school, considering the number of mainstream schools in South Africa. The DBSTs are assigned to schools within the district and not to a specific school (DoE, 2005).

Studies have also reported that schools, particularly in rural areas, are often neglected by the DBSTs (Makhalemele, 2011; Ngubane, 2019). Some schools are not certain about the type of support that the DBSTs should provide to them, as the DBSTs are constantly inaccessible with little or no evidence of collaboration, training, guidance and visitations to schools (Subramoney, 2017). The unequal and insufficient distribution of support services may further disadvantage learners rather than being a service that contributes to effective learning. Therefore, effective collaboration between the DBSTs, teachers and parents where members share expertise as a group is an important prerequisite in fostering inclusion and differentiated assessments in mainstream schools as a collective goal (DBE 2010; Nel et al., 2014).

However, some researchers attributed inconsistent monitoring of schools by the DBST to the reality of an ineffective transportation system to convey the DBST to the schools in need of support, particularly, in the rural areas (Makhalemele, 2011). In addition, the large distances between the DBST and most rural schools have resulted in long travel hours. The implication is that time is spent travelling rather than with the educational institutions in need of support. The DBSTs should be provided with adequate resources and infrastructures to regularly visit schools and attend to reported concerns in time (Makhalemele & Nel, 2016). Furthermore, the DBSTs seem to lack human resources such as psychologists and language therapists, contributing to their inconsistency (Smit et al., 2020; Tebid, 2019).

In addition, most teachers are discontented with the support provided by the DBST in assisting learners referred to them (Nel et al., 2014; Subramoney, 2017). Furthermore, the participants remarked that they experienced the DBST as not effectively trained and ineffective in supporting them or the learners with learning barriers and special needs (Nel et al., 2014; Subramoney, 2017). Schoeman's (2012) study reported similar findings where participants noted that the DBSTs are not adequately skilled to "provide curriculum, assessment and instructional support in the form of illustrative learning programmes, learner support materials and equipment, assessment instruments and professional support" (DoE 2001, p. 49). It has been noted earlier that most studies conducted on the support mainstream schoolteachers require from the DBSTs have been generalised to the support needed to implement inclusive education policies. However, studies on the support mainstream schoolteachers require from the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their classrooms are almost non-existent particularly within the Foundation Phase. Hence, the findings of the study aimed to bridge this wide gap in the literature.

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework is a systematic integration of concepts, theoretical perspectives and approaches that sufficiently explains the phenomenon studied (Imenda, 2014; McGregor, 2019). It serves as the lens the researcher utilizes to examine the phenomenon, explore the research problem, analyse, and interpret the findings (Adom et al., 2018). Therefore, utilizing a conceptual framework

enabled me to "bridge existing theories [and concepts] in interesting ways, link work across disciplines, and provide multi-level insights" about the phenomenon (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015, p. 128).

I utilized a conceptual framework as there was no single dominant theory or concepts within a theory that could sufficiently explore the phenomenon and answer my research questions posed in Chapter 1. Additionally, I utilized a conceptual framework due to my consideration of the context in which the phenomenon was explored (Adom et al., 2018). I sought to investigate the perception of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding the use of differentiated assessment within the South African context. Furthermore, I sought to develop a conceptual framework that would enable researchers to further investigate differentiated assessment in similar context as it is evident from literature that it is an understudied aspect of the differentiation framework.

The theory-based conceptual framework that guided this study was formulated from diverse theories and approach that aligned with the study's key concepts. Psychometric Theory (PT) served as the lens through which standardised one-size-fits-all assessment was analysed. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and Piaget's cognitive development theory (PCD), provided insights into learners' cognition. Furthermore, Sen and Nussbaum's capability approaches (CA) serve as the lenses for understanding the fairness of assessment policies and practices in mainstream schools (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1992). Finally, Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (CoP) provides the lens to understand teacher support needs and partnerships with the District Based Support Teams within the participants' sociocultural contexts.

2.6.1 Psychometric theory (PT)

Psychometric theory views intelligence as a construct that is innate, fixed and easily measured (Gipps, 2012). The results derived from psychometric tests are considered a true reflection of a learner's ability (Sternberg, 2015). Consequently, the test results are often used to categorise learners into cadres from worst performing to top-performing, as test scores are interpreted in relation to the performance of others (Obiakor et al., 2021). Theory and practice currently disregard as unfair the model of standardised evaluation of mainstream learners' performance in mainstream schools (Gipps, 2012). The psychometric theory

assesses all learners the same way and under the same conditions to ensure standardisation (Obiakor et al., 2021). However, scholars such as Wormeli (2018) argue otherwise that fairness in assessment does not always mean equality and uniformity. Therefore, teachers should design and employ assessment that is developmentally appropriate for learners while being flexible enough to accommodate learners that significantly differ from their typical peers.

The assumption of this theory is that test scores should be interpreted the same way to mean the same thing for all individuals (Gipps, 2012). This assumption does not take cognisance of the learners' differences and learning styles. A learner might fail a reading test not because the learner is not cognitively competent but because the language of teaching and assessment is the learner's second or third language which is often the scenario in South African mainstream schools (Maseko & Mkhize, 2021; Subramoney, 2017). Psychometric theory does not recognise the many factors such as socio-cultural background, language, and resources that influence learners' ability to demonstrate mastery of the content taught. Furthermore, this theory often employs one assessment tool or test item to measure learners' mastery of the content taught (Gipps, 2012). Validity scholars have argued otherwise that there is a need for diverse sources of evidence in drawing inferences and making decisions based on assessment scores (Cizek, 2016).

Vygotsky's concept of ZPD criticised the psychometric assessment method in Russian schools as there was no evidence to show that the results derived from psychometric assessment could be used to improve learners' achievement (Shabani et al., 2010). Classroom assessments that are hinged on this theory are now globally regarded as an unfair approach in examining learners' performance (Mislevy et al., 2013; Obiakor et al., 2021). The primary purpose of assessment is to promote effective teaching and learning (DoE, 2011). Accordingly, assessment should foster further teaching and learning among learners and provide information on their capabilities and individual progress (Hill et al., 2017). The Psychometric theory guided this study in investigating traditional assessment methods and how teachers in mainstream schools assess learners in their classrooms.

2.6.2 Vygotsky ZPD and Piaget Theory of Cognitive Development

Cognitive theories explore the mental processes and capabilities of children (Meadows, 2017). That is, how children acquire information, perceive, understand, recall, and learn. Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1978) propounded the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is broadly defined as the learner's present level of development or mastery achieved without assistance and the next possible level the learner can attain with assistance (Awadelkarim, 2021; Shabani et al., 2010). In a study conducted by Ebrahim (2019), the findings revealed that differentiated homework was positively associated with the learners' academic achievement. The homework was designed to enable the learners to progress from a simpler to a more difficult question (Ebrahim, 2019). This progression in the homework motivated the learners to attempt more questions as they answered the less difficult questions. Therefore, learning outcomes and classroom assessment should neither be too easy nor too difficult for the learners to achieve.

Vygotsky further argued that different learners have different state of readiness (Shabani et al., 2010). Consequently, teaching and assessment activities should be flexible enough to accommodate the state of readiness of diverse learners. Learners' state of readiness may influence the pace at which learners grasp new information and demonstrate mastery of the content taught (Kaur et al., 2019). Consequently, teachers' capacity to select and utilise a range of methods that are suitable for learners' cognitive level is essential to successful assessment practices in mainstream schools. It is also imperative that teachers in mainstream schools are armed with the knowledge to identify the state of readiness in learners and create appropriate learning outcomes and assessment strategies within their ZPD (Taylor, 2017).

Jean Piaget is well known for his theory of cognitive development (Kouicem, 2020). He devoted over sixty years to studying the intellectual development of children at different stages (Kouicem, 2020). Unlike Vygotsky, Piaget classified the cognitive development of children into four progressive stages. The stages include the sensory-motor (0-2 years), preoperational (2-7 years), concrete operational (7-11 years) and formal operational stage (11 years to adulthood)

(Hebe, 2017). Piaget provided a general overview of children's cognitive development at different ages as he believed that children are motivated to learn when the cognitive goals are within their ability (Khalid, 2015). For this study, I focused on the concrete operational stage. This is because my study focused on Grade 1-3 Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers with learners within the age bracket of 6-9 years (DBE, 2011). The concrete operational stage is the stage whereby learners are introduced to logical thinking and problem-solving. However, the learners' ability to reason logically is restricted to concrete objects (Astuti, 2018). In this regard, teachers in the Foundation Phase should be equipped to utilise concrete objects during the teaching-learning process to facilitate the learners' understanding of the content taught. To enable learners to see, hear and feel what they are learning, teachers should utilise audio-visuals and concrete objects during teaching and assessment. For example, during mathematics, the learners should have counters to assist them in counting and should be taught mathematics vocabulary during language lessons. The learners should be able to hear the sounds and see the letters associated with the objects. In addition, learning and assessment should be real to the learners and should connect with the learners' interest, environment, and background (Astuti, 2018).

While Piaget gives a general overview on the cognitive development expected of all learners, Vygotsky's ZPD provides insight on how development can occur in learners whether they progress with their typical peers or not, by locating their ZPD. With an understanding of cognitive development theories, teachers are better equipped to design assessments that are not only age appropriate, as Piaget would suggest, but also flexible enough to accommodate the diverse ZPD of learners. Furthermore, the teachers understanding of these theories will enable them to differentiate assessment informed by the learner's state of readiness, interest and learning profile (Tomlinson, 2005; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). For differentiated assessment to be effective, mainstream schoolteachers need to know each learner's current ability and utilise assessment as a tool to foster further learning towards meeting the intended goals (Hattie, 2012).

As with most theories, Piaget's theory of cognitive development equally has its fair share of criticism (Lefa, 2014). Some scholars argue that Piaget underestimated the mental capacity of children (Meadows, 2017). Other scholars have highlighted

the inconsistencies in the stages of development. It is argued that the formal operational thinking stage is not universal (Sanghvi, 2020). In addition, some scholars believe that Piaget did not focus on the socio-cultural impact on children's cognitive development (Alahmad, 2020). However, I argue that Vygotsky's ZPD complements Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Irrespective of the criticisms and loopholes in Piaget's theory of cognitive development, it still influences the educational system globally as most curriculums are informed by the theory (Hatch, 2019; Lefa, 2014).

2.6.3 Capability approach (CA)

Sen's (1992) capability approach, which Nussbaum further developed in 2000, emphasised the need for equality and fairness in the development of human potential. Although Sen (1992) examined an individual's capability concerning economic development, scholars have applied his work in the field of education to enhance learners' well-being by providing learning that is hinged on democratic practices and discourse (Schrage & Lenglet, 2016). Thus, the capability approach is a promising approach for examining inclusion and social justice in assessment within the context of mainstream schools and democratic societies (Broderick, 2018).

The two vital concepts of this approach are "capability" and "functioning" (Broderick, 2018). According to Nussbaum (2000, p. 5), capabilities refer to "what people are actually able to do and to be when given real opportunities". They are the inborn potentials present in every individual to realise certain outcomes. Functioning refers to "various states of doings and beings" (Sen, 1992, p. 40). Thus, they are the achievements or outcomes that an individual has realised. The capability approach sees every individual as having capabilities to realise a certain functioning in society (Broderick, 2018). For the purpose of this study, the capability approach examined the discussed assessment policies in South Africa and how they are implemented to promote fairness during assessment in mainstream schools. According to the approach, assessment policies should consider the diversity that exists among learners and how it impacts the assessment process (Mbhele, 2019). Therefore, assessment policies and guidelines under the capability approach seek to promote all learners' capability and functionality in mainstream schools (Mbhele, 2019).

In mainstream schools', learners have diverse capabilities and do not realise the same level of functioning in the same way. Achieving a predetermined outcome is functioning, while the opportunity given to the learner to be tested based on their cognitive level is the corresponding capability. For instance, as we permit learners to use their prescribed eyeglasses to see more clearly in classrooms, which provides them with a fair opportunity to see better, learners should also be fairly supported to access the curriculum. This approach allows learners to realise functioning by providing them with an assessment based on their capability. Thus, test results should reflect the learner's own best performance (Underwood et al., 2012). In a similar vein, assessment should expand learners' capabilities and valuable functions and not limit them (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016).

UNESCO (2017 p. 18) admonished countries to ensure that "inclusion and equity are the overarching principles that guide all their educational policies, plans and practices." The capability approach is strongly rooted in the principles of fairness, human rights, and social justice, which are the foundations on which the South African constitution and assessment policies are built (RSA, 1996). Therefore, this approach guided this study in investigating how teachers implement assessment policies in their inclusive classrooms, as stated by the Department of Basic Education.

2.6.4 Community of practice

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger were the first to use the term Community of Practice (CoP) to mean a group of persons sharing a common passion or goal for a defined course with opportunities to grow in their expertise (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Three fundamental elements must be operational to enable a community to qualify and be referred to as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The elements include a domain, community, and practice (Wenger et al., 2002). According to the theory, a domain can be defined as key issues that members regularly experience and to which they are committed. In mainstream schools, learners do not access, engage, and demonstrate mastery of the content taught uniformly due to the range of differences that exist among them. In this regard, the Department of Education states that assessment should be adapted with the due support of the DBSTs to accommodate learners who experience barriers to

learning (DoE, 2005). Hence, for this study, the key issue that the teachers and the DBSTs should be committed to is how to differentiate assessment in mainstream schools to enable all learners access to the general curriculum.

According to this theory, a community are persons with a common interest who are committed to the domain (Wenger et al., 2002). It is therefore important that mainstream schoolteachers collaborate with the DBSTs to differentiate assessment. Collaboration is becoming accepted widely as a vital skill needed in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Payle, 2020). Community of practice provides educators and relevant stakeholders with a framework for support and collaboration to build their knowledge base and develop their expertise about their professional practice (Slatter & France, 2018). A CoP also serves as a social structure for members to interact and share useful information regarding their domain (Padilla & Kreider, 2020). In this regard, Nel et al. (2013) highlight that collaboration and partnership of teachers and DBST in mainstream schools will provide teachers with the avenue for professional growth, encouragement and support in implementing inclusive policies. "In practice, this means that we need to talk and listen to one another; identify what we can and need to do together; and identify what each person needs to do to contribute to the whole" (DoE, 2005, p. 38).

Lastly, the practice can be defined as using enabling resources (such as frameworks, models, experts, best practices) effectively within the field of practice (Wenger et al., 2002). Teachers through the CoP have the opportunity to glean from the knowledge bank of the more experienced teachers and professionals while observing how they differentiate instruction and assessment in their different classrooms (Slatter & France, 2018). The DBSTs are required to "draw on the expertise from local education institutions and various community resources" in order to "assist education institutions identify and address barriers to learning and promote effective teaching and learning" (DoE, 2005, p. 6). As community members synthesize their expertise and pull available resources together, they are better able to improve on their practices, break new grounds and test innovative ideas, which may lead to holistically developed communities. With CoP, teachers are guided and supported on differentiating assessment practically and applying their knowledge of cognitive development theories into practice.

Therefore, CoP guided this study in investigating the support teachers require from the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their classrooms.

2.7 Concluding remarks

This chapter discussed and reviewed diverse literature relevant to the aim of the study, which was to investigate the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the theory based conceptual framework used for the study. The next chapter furnishes the methodology I used to collect data to answer my research questions. In addition, the research design, research methods, and data analysis are discussed with the ethical considerations of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I critically examined and reviewed a variety of literature related to the study to provide a synopsis of current trends and gaps about Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers' perceptions regarding differentiated assessment. According to Saldaña (2011), reviewed literature is important as it provides good sources of data for the research study that could either support or mitigate the study's findings. This chapter provides a rationale for the methodology used to collect data to answer the research questions. After that, the research design and research methods, that recount how I planned and conducted the study are discussed. Subsequently, the data analysis and ethical considerations of the study are discussed. The discussion is followed by a discussion of the study's trustworthiness, after which I conclude the chapter.

The figure below outlines the research methodology that was used to collect the data for this study.

Figure 3.1.

Summative outline of the contents of Chapter 3

Research paradigm	•interpretivism
Research approach	•qualitative approach
Research type	•multiple case study
Research context/setting	•selection of research sites •selection of participants
Data collection instruments	•semi-structured interview •non-participant observer •document analysis
Data analysis and interpretation	•thematic descriptive data analysis
Trustworthiness	• Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability

3.2   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sefotho and du Plessis (2018) define a research methodology as the overall empirical process utilised to solve the identified research problem. It includes the methods and techniques used in the research process to ensure coherence throughout the research process (Sefotho & du Plessis, 2018). It is, therefore, important that the methodology chosen aligns with the purpose of the study and the research questions. The research methodology includes the research paradigm, research approach, and research type discussed in the subsequent sections for this study.

3.2.1   Research paradigm

Thomas Kuhn (1962) is widely acknowledged to have propounded the word paradigm, which is defined as established beliefs, principles, and assumptions shared by a community of scholars concerning the nature and conduct of research. Paradigms have become a fundamental "concept in social science research methodology" as researchers employ them as lenses to examine and analyse the phenomenon studied (Morgan, 2007, p. 49). Therefore, a paradigm can be summarised as "a comprehensive belief system, world view, or framework that guides research and practice in a field" (Wills, 2007, p. 8). This section discusses the interpretivist paradigm which guided the planning, designing, and conducting of the study.

3.2.1.1   Interpretivism paradigm

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment and the support they require from the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their classrooms. The interpretivism paradigm was best suited to investigate the phenomenon within the mainstream school contexts as the study purpose. In a similar vein, Kumar (2018) proposed that the study's purpose and focus determine the research paradigm to be employed. Interpretive researchers aim to investigate how a particular group of participants understand and experience a specific phenomenon in their context. Studying individuals in their socio-cultural context provides a better understanding of a phenomenon as humans are best "understood from within" (Maree, 2016, p. 61). Particular contexts or situations' distinctiveness is imperative in interpreting

the data collected. Realities may differ when applied to a different socio-cultural context (Maree, 2016).

Furthermore, I chose the interpretivism paradigm because of the nature of the study's research questions (see Sections 1.5, 3.2). My research questions aligned with the interpretivism paradigm as they do not focus on quantity by asking "How many?" or the frequency of an event by asking "How often?" as is the case with most positivist quantitative studies, but rather seeks to investigate the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding assessment, their assessment practices, and the support they get from the DBSTs. Another reason why I chose the interpretivism paradigm was that my study aligned with its ontological and epistemological stance.

3.2.1.2   Ontological assumptions of interpretivism

Contrasting with the positivist paradigm, which seeks to establish an absolute reality, the interpretive paradigm is based on the ontological stance that multiple realities are socially constructed by individuals (Bryman, 2012). This implies that interpretivism is dependent on the meaning individuals and social groups ascribe to phenomena based on their specific social context, mind, space, and time which cannot be generalised (Creswell, 2014). My study is aligned with interpretivism's ontological stance as it supports the multiple realities ascribed to a phenomenon by different participants in a study. Thus, employing an interpretivism paradigm enabled me to collect data on the participants' perceptions regarding differentiated assessment. Interpretivist researchers derive truth subjectively from the experiences and understandings of the participants (Creswell, 2014). I regarded different participants' perspectives about the phenomenon as a reality in this study (Maree, 2016).

I needed to understand how my research participants perceived and interpreted differentiated assessment in mainstream schools. According to Sefotho (2018), an epistemological assumption follows an ontological assumption. Below are my epistemological assumptions.

3.2.1.3   Epistemological assumptions of interpretivism

Epistemology in this study is concerned with the participants' perception and knowledge of the phenomenon of differentiated assessment in mainstream

schools. In acquiring knowledge about the phenomenon, this paradigm allowed me to interact with the participants in their social context through semi-structured interviews on collecting comprehensive and in-depth data about their perception of the phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2016; Yin, 2011). The semi-structured interviews enabled me to acquire information about the phenomenon needed to answer the research questions. Furthermore, knowledge using the interpretivism paradigm is acquired and validated based on the social context, as reality must be embedded within a particular context (Spencer et al., 2014). Considering this, my research questions were context specific, and with a specific set of participants. For example, my third research question was, *what support do teachers in mainstream schools require from the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their classes*? This question is specific to the Foundation Phase teachers in South African mainstream schools, as DBSTs are non-existent in Higher Institutions and many countries, such as Nigeria.

3.2.1.4   Criticism of interpretivism paradigm

Researchers such as Cohen et al. (2011) have argued that though researchers must understand participants' perceptions, intentions, and feelings, interpretivism may undermine scientific verification methods. The rigour and objectivity of the interpretivism paradigm are questioned and contested by critics as being prone to biases due to the role of the researcher in data collection and interpretation of the findings (Dudovskiy, 2017). According to Saldana (2011), bias cannot be eliminated completely but can be minimised. To minimise my possible bias in this study, I meticulously maintained the trustworthiness of this study stated in Section 3.7 by employing various data collection methods such as interviews and observations to provide triangulation. In addition, I maintained rigour by testing the consistency of the data collected across the different data collection methods. I also ensured that the data and findings presented emerged solely from the retrieved and analysed data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

The interpretivism paradigm has further been criticised as disregarding the possibility of generalisation due to its small sample size (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014). Although scholars such as Clifford Geertz, Reinhard Bendix and Benedict Anderson attempted to provide possible methods and procedures for generalising findings in interpretive research (Sichula, 2018), they have achieved

minimal results. This is because interpretive research is context-specific with a small sample size and the findings are open to additional interpretations (Flick, 2014). In addition, generalisation may seem impossible as human behaviour and perceptions are not constant but vary depending on the individual, time, and context (Girvan et al., 2016). However, the purpose of this study was not to generalise the findings but to investigate differentiated assessment through the eyes of the participants within their social contexts.

3.2.2 Research approach

A methodological approach is a strategy, or a technique used in conducting research that connects the research methods to be used in answering the research questions (Sefotho, 2018). The methodological approaches commonly used in research include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell 2014). This study used a qualitative research approach which aligns with the interpretivism paradigm to explore the investigated phenomenon.

3.2.2.1   Qualitative approach

The qualitative approach is closely knit with interpretivism, which views a phenomenon through the participant's eyes (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The approach focuses on representing the meanings participants ascribe to a phenomenon instead of seeking to discover a single truth to understand the phenomenon (Leedy & Omrod, 2013). A qualitative approach is best suited for this study as it acknowledges that different participants can hold different perspectives regarding a phenomenon (Saldaña, 2011). This approach enabled me to investigate how the teachers interpreted and experienced differentiated assessment. Pascale (2011) pinpointed that human interpretation is the most suitable starting point in investigating the social world.

The social context plays a vital role in the qualitative approach as it provides insight into the possible reasons why the participants think and act in a certain way (Kumar, 2014). Thus, data in this approach is better understood within a specific social context. Employing a qualitative approach enabled me to investigate the phenomena in the natural setting where the phenomenon occurs and is experienced (Denzin, 2013). I spent time at the mainstream schools identified and had direct contact with the teachers to collect data as qualitative

researchers are not likely to take the participants out of their natural setting, for example, into a laboratory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Another advantage of utilising the qualitative approach in this study was having physical interaction on the research site with the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Consequently, I could probe deeper during the semi-structured interviews as the participants shared their perceptions about the phenomenon. I was also able to gather data beyond what the participant voiced, such as the facial expression, emotive content, and body language that the participants attributed to their perceptions.

Qualitative research approach is richly descriptive and supports multiple forms of data collection strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In addition to the empirical data collected on the field, the study used data from documents and field notes to support the research findings. Furthermore, the qualitative approach made me the key research instrument for this study. I collected data myself at the research sites through semi-structured interviews and observations and examined the necessary documents. I gathered the data, transcribed, analysed and interpreted it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I also did member-checking to ensure that the data's interpretation was accurate, enhancing the study's trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

A common weakness and criticism against the qualitative approach is the view that it is prone to bias due to its subjective nature and the active role of the researcher in the research process (Kumar, 2014). However, Sichula (2018) argued that this criticism is due to the unparalleled comparison authors made with the quantitative approach. As stated earlier, researchers cannot eliminate bias but can reduce it to its barest minimum through triangulation and quality assurance measures to enhance the study's trustworthiness (Spencer et al., 2014). Thus, I provided a detailed description of the study's research methods, and I reviewed the findings to guarantee that the findings were trustworthy. To further reduce bias, I stated my assumptions about the study in Chapter 1 (see section 1.8) and declared my role as the researcher. Creswell and Creswell (2018) argued that researchers must reflect on how their background, experiences, and functions in the study shape their interpretations and the meaning ascribed to the data.

Another weakness in utilising the qualitative approach is that the research findings cannot be generalised to the total population studied (Maree, 2012). Hence, generalisation can only be suited to a similar problem such as this while using the procedure. In response to this perceived weakness, Sichula (2018) argued that this view may be due to the lack of adequate understanding of qualitative research's main purpose, which is not to generalise findings. This study aimed to investigate differentiated assessment within a specific social context; therefore, a qualitative approach suited the task (Creswell, 2014). To ameliorate the effect of this weakness on the study, I provided the research context, the phenomenon under investigation, the participants and the technique used for data collection.

3.2.3 Research design

Yin (2011) defines a research design as the fundamental structure of a research study. It is a plan or blueprint used to investigate a phenomenon to answer the study's research questions. According to Maree (2016), a research design is a strategy that comprises the research type, the selection of participants, and the methods used in collecting and analysing data. The research design was chosen and employed based on my ontological and epistemological assumptions, motivated by the research paradigm. The section below discusses the research type.

3.2.4 Multiple case study

A case study can be defined as a research-based, in-depth exploration and analysis of a bounded system from multiple viewpoints and methods in a real-life setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Yin (2014, p. 16) defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident". Defining a case study in more details, Creswell (2013, p. 97) highlighted that it is "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes". The definitions above are evidence that a case study aligns with the qualitative approach. It supports multiple sources of data and the phenomenon investigated

in the context. Case study research is best suited in answering "how" or "why" questions that seek to dig deep into a phenomenon within a real-life setting (Yin, 2014).

What comprises a case is often contested (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), a "case" refers to a single entity to be studied. It could be an individual, an incident, a program, an institution, or a community. Swanborn (2010) further elaborated that a case or cases can be situated at the micro level such as an individual, the meso level such as an institution, or at the macro levels such as communities. For this study, a multiple case study was employed. Multiple case studies involve gathering and analysing data from more than one case which, may have sub-cases embedded within (such as teachers within a school) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study utilised multiple case studies in investigating the perception of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment. Multiple case studies were suitable for this study as it is valuable for investigating a phenomenon which has been under studied (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The existing gaps in the reviewed literature revealed that too little is known about differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase within the South African context (de Jager, 2019; Reisdorfer, 2020; Taole, 2020). The literature indicates that considerable attention has been paid to differentiated curriculum and differentiated instruction, but minimal attention has been given to differentiated assessment.

In addition, utilising multiple case studies enabled me to gather data using a variety of methods, which produced a rich perspective of the phenomenon. Gathering different sets of data on differentiated assessment produced a rich and broad understanding of the phenomenon, thereby enhancing the study's trustworthiness. Multiple case studies enabled me to investigate five participants in two mainstream schools, which provided me with the opportunity to compare and contrast the findings within each context (Saldaña, 2011). The more cases used in a research study, the more persuasive the findings will be, as employing multiple cases can be used as a strategy to strengthen the credibility of the findings (Miles et al., 2014).

Case studies have been generally criticised due to the inability of the findings being generalised to the total population studied as they focus on a phenomenon within a specific context (Yin, 2012). Although it is often not advised to generalise findings from case studies, Flyvbjerg (2011) points out that case studies' detailed descriptions provide the blueprint of study repetition in similar contexts. The author further argued that the rich in-depth description of a phenomenon that multiple case studies provide makes it more valued than a shallow search for universal truth (Flyvbjerg, 2011). In support of this view, Kumar (2014), Maree (2012), and Nieuwenhuis (2016) emphasised that this perceived weakness is based on an inadequate understanding of the purpose of case studies which is to investigate a phenomenon within its natural context and not to generalise to other settings.

Another possible weakness of a case study is that it is more susceptible to deviations in orientation and focus (Sichula, 2018). This possible deviation may be due to the researcher considering other areas from the emerged findings, which may not focus on the study (Creswell, 2014). Yin (2014) proposed that the researcher highlights the study's purpose as it progresses, which I did as I frequently referred to the purpose of this study, which was to investigate Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers' perceptions regarding differentiated assessment. In addition, I ensured that the research questions, interview questions and observation schedules were aligned with the focus of the study.

3.3   RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods can be defined as the specific strategies and procedures utilised in research for data collection to answer the research questions of the research study (Chu & Ke, 2017; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018).

3.3.1 Sampling method for the selection of participants

Scholars such as Creswell (2014), Maree (2016) and Nieuwenhuis (2016) widely agree that purposive sampling is best suited in qualitative research to identify and select both the participants and the research site as it enables a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied within a specific context. Thus, using purposive sampling allows the researcher to identify and select research sites and

participants with specific criteria to produce rich data regarding the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007). In this regard, I employed purposive sampling to select the participants and research sites for this study based on key characteristics needed to answer the research questions.

I purposively selected two mainstream schools as the research sites to investigate the perception of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment. The schools are located at Eersterust, Gauteng Province, South Africa which is a coloured township. Although the schools are located at a coloured township, many of the learners are blacks with diverse home languages such as Sepedi, isiZulu, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, and IsiNdebele. The schools are quintile 4 schools with many learners on feeding scheme programme. The research sites were selected based on the access I have to the schools as a member-volunteer with a Non-Profit Organisation. The principals gave their consent willingly. In addition, the schools were selected due to their size and population. Because they are public schools with multiple Foundation Phase classes and teachers for each grade, they had a larger sample from which willing teachers could consent to voluntary participation. The schools were also selected based on their language of learning and teaching (LoLT), the Afrikaans and English languages. Both schools are dual-medium schools, with each teacher catering to learners from different socio-economic backgrounds with varying home languages and learning needs.

The participants selected for this study were Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers from two mainstream schools. On arrival at the research sites, I spoke with the principals of each school, and they directed me to the Head of Department (HOD) of the Foundation Phases. In the first school, out of 16 Foundation Phase teachers, two teachers voluntarily consented to be part of the study after I briefly explained the purpose of the study to them and their role in the study. The two teachers included the HOD of the Foundation Phase who is also the Grade 3 teacher and a Grade 1 teacher. In the second school, the Foundation Phase teachers that I approached appeared more willingly to participate in the study compared to the first school. I briefed the HOD, who is also a Grade 3 teacher, about the purpose of the study, and she was happy and willing to participate. Three teachers willingly consented to participate in the study. The

three teachers included a Grade 1 teacher, one Grade 2 teacher and the HOD, who is a Grade 3 teacher. I was, therefore, able to select teachers from each Grade to investigate how the teachers experienced the phenomenon in their Grade.

3.3.2 Data collection strategies

I used three data collection methods to take cognizance of the purpose of the study, the research methodology, and the research questions. They include semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. This study employed multiple data collection strategies to augment the trustworthiness of the findings (Thorne, 2016). The data collection strategies employed are discussed below.

3.3.2.1   Semi-structured interview

The word interview can be broken down as inter-view, which is literally defined as an exchange of views between two or more persons communicating about a topic of common interest (Brinkmann, 2014). People have always conversed with others to understand how they feel, think, and experience a phenomenon. In recent years, such insightful conversations have been developed and refined as qualitative interviews (Brinkmann, 2014). As a data collection strategy, the literature defines an interview as a process where the researcher engages the participant with a series of questions related to their study to obtain information to answer the research questions (DeMarrais, 2004). Qualitative interviewers can acquire in-depth information about a phenomenon, resulting in an in-depth understanding of the participants' views (Brinkmann, 2014). Interviews can be unstructured, semi-structured or highly structure.

For this study, I used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are often utilised with qualitative research and are possibly the most prevalent ones used in social sciences (Brinkmann, 2018). Compared to highly structured interviews, semi-structured interviews are better able to produce rich information as the interviewer has more opportunity to probe deeper and follow up responses to gain clarity rather than sticking with a predetermined set of questions (Brinkmann, 2018). In addition, compared to unstructured interviews where very little structure is present, semi-structured interviews enables the interviewer to focus the conversation on relevant issues that will produce data needed to answer

the research questions (Brinkmann, 2018). Semi-structured interviews enabled me to use a prepared list of questions to collect data from the participants about the phenomenon studied (Kvale et al., 2018). As a less experienced qualitative researcher, employing semi-structured interviews helped me to be better prepared and more confident than I would have been with unstructured interviews. The prepared question also guided the participants to remain focused on the topic and provide the necessary information that I needed about the phenomenon (Saldaña, 2011). In this light, semi-structured interviews can be defined "as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 6). Brinkmann (2018) highlighted that the keywords in the definition are *purpose, descriptions, life word, and interpretation of meaning* which is discussed further.

Semi-structured interviews are always conducted in research for a well-defined *purpose* (Brinkmann, 2018). I utilised semi-structured interviews to gather relevant information regarding the participants' perceptions of differentiated assessment and the support they require from the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their classrooms to enable me to answer the research questions. *Descriptions* of the phenomenon is often sought during semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, 2018). I was provided with the opportunity to collect data on the participants' descriptions, perceptions, and conceptions of differentiated assessment through the questions asked and follow-up questions posed.

The concept of *lifeworld* according to Husserl (as cited by Brinkmann, 2014, p. 287) refers "to the intersubjective shared world of meanings in which humans live their lives and experience significant phenomena". Using semi-structured interviews enabled me to collect data on the teachers' lived experiences and understand how they experience the phenomenon in their specific contexts. Furthermore, in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer can inquire about the *interpretations* participants ascribe to the phenomenon investigated, thereby allowing multiple interpretations. Participants often interpret a phenomenon in different ways (Flick, 2014). Therefore, to gather relevant data on a phenomenon, the interview questions should be semi-structured to accommodate different interpretations. The participants included Foundation Phase teachers in Grades 1-3, of which some had different viewpoints and experiences about the

phenomenon. Researchers conduct semi-structured interviews in the form of individual face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions. For the purpose of this study, face-to-face interviews were conducted.

3.3.2.2   Face-to-face interviews.

At the research sites, I conducted five semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the Foundation Phase teachers, which included heads of the departments. At the first school, I conducted two face-to-face interviews. One face-to-face interview with the HOD of the Foundation Phase who is also a Grade 3 teacher and one face-to-face interview with a Grade 1 teacher. At the second research site, I conducted three face-to-face interviews. I conducted one face-to-face interview with one Grade 1 teacher, one Grade 2 and one Grade 3 teacher who is also the HOD of the Foundation Phase. All the interviews were audio-recorded with consent from the participants, which enabled me to capture all the responses. The questions asked during the face-to-face interviews were predetermined before the interview to ensure that the information collected was relevant to the purpose of the study. During the face-to-face interviews, I could collect in-depth and rich information about the participants' perceptions regarding differentiated assessment in mainstream schools. I was also able to probe deeper by asking follow-up questions to accommodate the different meanings the participants ascribed to the phenomenon and gain clarity about the participants' views (Creswell, 2014). I will provide an in-depth explanation of the probing questions I conducted with the teachers in the next chapter – Chapter 4.

The face-to-face interviews with the Foundation Phase teachers took place at the time and venue of their choice and convenience. At the first research site, the face-to-face interviews were conducted after school hours in the staff room while at the second research site, the interviews were conducted in the participants' classrooms. Before the interview, I informed the teachers about the ethical issues involved in their participation. The interview was conducted with each participant only after they willingly consented to be part of the study and signed the consent form. The face-to-face interviews lasted between 15–30 minutes. It was easier for questions, which might have been a bit sensitive to be answered by the participants as they were assured confidentiality throughout the process (Brinkmann, 2014). I explained to the teachers that there were no right or wrong

answers but encouraged them to give honest responses to the research questions (Brinkmann, 2014). Throughout the interviews, I maintained a non-judgmental, neutral stance to minimise possible bias and produce findings that are valid and consistent with the participants' perceptions (Roulston, 2010).

3.3.2.3 *Observation*

Observation is beyond watching passively. Instead, it is watching systematically with the intent to gather relevant information about a person, event, or community (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Observation in qualitative research can be defined as a systematic process whereby a researcher takes field notes of the behaviour and activities of the participants at the research site (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Simpson and Tuson (2003) proposed that to collect relevant data, observers should reflect on the focus and purpose of the observation. The focus of my observation was to explore how Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers assess learners in their classrooms. The authors further proposed that the observation should be guided by the research questions, which determine what to include (Simpson & Tuson, 2003). My observation was guided by my observation schedule, which was prepared in advance to enable me to note important events relevant to my study's purpose. The observations enabled me to capture the phenomenon as it occurred naturally and record it. I observed how teachers assessed learners and experienced the phenomenon in their respective classes. In addition, observational data are first-hand accounts, and they are context-specific with ecological validity (Moyles, 2002).

My role during the observation was that of a non-participant observer as I focused on observing and documenting the assessment practices of the participants. My intention was not to interact with the teachers or involve myself with any class activity. I sat at the back of the classroom and observed the teachers' assessment practices. (Flick, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2016). My field note journal was my research instrument during the observation. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommended that researchers name and label their fieldnotes with a phrase that best captures the essence of the phenomenon observed. My field notes captured the focus of my study as the observation schedule guided me on what to document and what to exclude.

One major limitation of employing observation to collect data is that oftentimes, some participants struggle to continue with their activities naturally due to their awareness that a researcher is observing them. As some of the participants taught their lesson, they explained to me what they were doing and why they were doing it. I will further elaborate on the teacher's explanation in Chapter 4. Notwithstanding the limitation associated with observation, it is still an important data collection method in qualitative studies as it explores the phenomenon in context as it occurs (Merriam, 2009). Observation constituted one of the data collection methods in which I also analysed documents on differentiated assessment as a data collection strategy, which I discuss below.

3.3.2.4   Document analysis

Documents are considered an important source of data in qualitative research as they provide a rich source of data regarding the phenomenon investigated (Creswell, 2014). Document analysis as a data-gathering technique enables the researcher to focus on written communications such as policies and materials relevant to the study and may be used to further investigate the phenomenon studied (Maree, 2016). I utilised documents as a data collection method in this study as they provided rich data on differentiated assessment in mainstream schools and how they should be implemented in the Foundation Phase. I discussed the analysis of document data in Chapter 4 (see section 4.5). In addition, the information stated in the documents enabled me to analyse the teachers' perceptions regarding differentiated assessment and the roles of the DBSTs in differentiating assessment. I reviewed, policy documents including Education White Paper 6; National Protocol for Assessment for Grade R-12; Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement; and assessment guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom. I used the documents to ascertain teachers' and the HODs compliance on differentiated assessment at the schools.

Document analysis is convenient and saves time as transcription is unnecessary (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It further provides the researcher with written evidence of the phenomenon studied. The use of multiple data collection methods provided triangulation, which increased the trustworthiness of the study.

3.3.2.5 *Triangulation of data collection methods*

Triangulation enabled me to combine multiple sources of data and utilise multiple perspectives on the phenomenon under study to answer my research questions (Flick, 2018). It also enabled me to utilise different data collection methods to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the research findings. In addition, data triangulation provided depth and breadth to the research findings. Flick (2018) explained that the findings from the different types of data might converge and mutually confirm the same findings and conclusions. Other times, the results from the different methods may contradict each other. However, when the findings from different methods focus on diverse aspects of the phenomena and at the same time complement each other, it results in a fuller picture of the phenomenon.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data usually involves a large amount of paperwork due to the transcribed semi-structured interviews, field notes and other documents involved (Brinkmann et al., 2014). The raw data retrieved from the research sites are usually large and need to be reviewed, organised, and analysed. Data analysis is an iterative process of organising data retrieved from the research sites, transcribing, and reducing them to generate findings that answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Maree, 2016). Thus, data analysis enables researchers to make sense of the data collected and draw conclusions (Rule & John, 2011). The researcher is tasked with the responsibility of extracting meaning from the data collected from multiple sources by organising it into codes and themes that cross across all the data sources (Creswell &Creswell, 2018).

For this study, thematic descriptive data analysis and content analysis were used to analyse and interpret the data. I utilised thematic descriptive data analysis to analyse the face-to-face interviews and observation data as themes are important to understand qualitative data. Content analysis was utilised to analyse the relevant documents. Themes are fundamental in qualitative research as they enable the researcher to identify, describe and capture meanings from the textual data through the participants' eyes (Flick, 2014; Yin, 2012). Thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing and reporting emerging themes from the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps described by Braun and Clare (2006) were followed in the data analysis process. The first step involved transcribing the

recorded interviews, reading the collected data, and being immersed in it. Then I created codes from the data and sorted them into potential themes. The themes were revised and further refined into emerging themes and sub-themes. Finally, the data were interpreted, and the findings were reported in accordance with the themes and sub-themes that emerged to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is interpretive and, therefore, allows the participants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences to be transcribed, analysed, and interpreted logically and concisely (Maree, 2007). I discussed the themes that emerged from the data analysis process in detail in the following chapter - Chapter 4.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethics was central to this research as it involved human participants. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), researchers need to protect their participants and shun any form of misconduct that might affect them and their institution. Researchers should develop trust with the participants and promote the integrity of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The following ethical principles were adhered to for the purpose of this study.

3.5.1 Institutional approval and access to research site

I sought ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria, the Gauteng Department of Basic Education, the schools, and the identified participants before commencing data collection.

3.5.2 Informed and voluntary consent.

This research study necessitated obtaining the consent of the identified participants (Dankar, 2019). I disclosed the purpose of the study to ensure that the participants were well informed about the study before making their decision to be part of it. It is also important that the participants are informed about any possible discomfort or risk and how they will be addressed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Therefore, the participants could weigh the possible risks or benefits of being involved before deciding to be part of the study. There was no potential risk or harm to the participants during the study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I wore a facemask to cover my nose and mouth during my engagement with the participants. I maintained social distancing throughout my

stay at the research sites and adhered strictly to the rules provided by the schools to promote safety. Furthermore, I informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study without prejudice. The participants voluntarily chose to be part of the research study.

As a fundamental ethical principle, informed and voluntary consent is the foundation upon which other ethical principles are established (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). It ensures that the rights of the participants to decide for themselves to be part of the study is protected. It further establishes a contractual relationship of trust between the researcher and the participants during the research study (Dankar, 2019; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). After the participants agreed to be part of the study, they signed the consent letters.

3.5.3 Anonymity, Privacy, and confidentiality

Anonymity is an ethical principle ensuring that the information disclosed by the participants during the study does not reveal their identity in any way (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Tourangeau, 2018). To ensure the anonymity of the participants, I used codes and pseudonyms to conceal their identity. I did not disclose the information provided during the face-to-face interviews and what I observed in their classes with anyone at the research sites. I did not share the information from the interviews with any other person except my supervisor. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) highlighted that when the participants are not assured and convinced of privacy and confidentiality matters, they might withhold information on sensitive issues. Hence, I explained to the participants about their anonymity and confidentiality. Furthermore, in the consent letter, I stated and signed that the data provided by the participants would be protected and treated with confidentiality.

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness can be defined as the systematic rigour researchers use in a qualitative study to ensure the credibility of the research methods, quality data, accurate interpretation, and authenticity of the findings of the study (Rose & Johnson, 2020). I used four quality criteria strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. The strategies include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility is defined as confidence in the truth of the data collected. Credibility is based on "the logical consistency that exists between the theoretical reference, research question, collection techniques and data analysis" (Santiago-Delefosse et al., 2016, p. 149). The diverse data collection methods and instruments used to triangulate the data were diligently documented to ensure the credibility of this study. The data were gathered from the two research sites and five participants (Foundation Phase teachers and HODs). Additionally, I meticulously analysed the data and ensured that the findings were consistent with the gathered data and conceptual framework (Arriaza et al., 2015).

3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the possibility of obtaining similar findings of a research study in a similar context (Daniel, 2018). Due to the small sample size in qualitative research, transferability does not aim to generalise the findings to the total population. Rather, transferability advocates that the emerged findings in a particular context "can offer valuable lessons to other similar settings" (Daniel, 2018, p. 266). To achieve transferability in this study, I was as explicit as possible in presenting a detailed description of the context, phenomenon, and participants provided. The findings of this study could be replicated based on the "the degree of similarity of the receiving context" (Lincon & Guba, 1985, p. 297).

3.6.3 Dependability

Dependability can be defined as the consistency of the research study and "the stability of findings over time" (Bitsch, 2005 p. 86). Dependability in qualitative research guarantees that the findings and conclusions that emerged from the research are grounded in the gathered data (Amankwaa, 2016). To establish dependability in this study, I systematically presented the procedures that I followed throughout the research process. I ensured that my chosen methodology aligned with the research design, and research methods that I used to collect data. Additionally, I ensured that the data collection methods and procedures I utilized were suitable to answer the research questions (Munn et al., 2014). The conceptual framework which acted as the lenses through which the study was analysed where also discussed in detail.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Tobin and Begley (2004, p. 392) argued that confirmability is "concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but are clearly derived from the data". Due to the subjective nature of qualitative research, confirmability ensures that the findings, interpretations and conclusions were not altered to suit the researcher's bias (Connelly, 2016). The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and verified with my supervisor to ensure that the findings presented are an accurate representation of the meanings intended by the participants to establish confirmability in this study. I also presented the participants' responses verbatim during the data analysis process.

3.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS.

This chapter discussed the methodology used to investigate the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment. Subsequently, the procedures employed for data collection, research design, research methods and the rationale behind those were discussed. Thereafter, I explained the data analysis procedure and the methods I used to ensure the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study. The following chapter (Chapter 4) will provide a discussion of the findings of the study, which emerged from the collected data.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 discussed and justified the methodology I adopted to collect the data needed to answer my research questions. I utilised the interpretive paradigm and followed a qualitative approach which enabled me to use multiple case studies. The case studies consisted of five teachers from two mainstream schools. Each participant was purposefully selected for the study, as they were Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers. I utilised semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations to gather data about the teachers' perceptions regarding differentiated assessment. I also explained the procedure for data analysis and the quality assurance measures that I followed to ensure the study's trustworthiness. After that, I discussed the ethical adherence of the study.

In this chapter, I present the codes and biographical data of all the participants that participated in this study. After that, I analyse and interpret the empirical data based on the various data collection methods to identify the similarities and differences in the participants' perceptions of differentiated assessment and the support they require and get from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment. I conclude this chapter by discussing the themes and categories that emerged through the data analysis process and I integrate them with my conceptual framework and the reviewed literature.

4.2 CODES AND BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF PARTICIPANTS

The codes and biographical data of the different participants employed in collecting the empirical data in this study are presented.

4.2.1 Teachers

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below present the codes and biographical data of the participants from the two identified schools.

Table 4.1

Codes: Teachers

Teacher 1 school 1	T1S1
Teacher 2 school 1	T2S1
Teacher 1 school 2	T1S2
Teacher 2 school 2	T2S2
Teacher 3 school 2	T3S2

Table 4.2

Biographical data of the participants

Codes	Gender	Class	Language of learning and teaching	Race	Years of experience in FP
T1S1	Female	Grade 1	English	Coloured	20 years
T2S1	Female	Grade 3 (HOD)	English	Coloured	38 years
T1S2	Female	Grade 1	English	Indian	10 years
T2S2	Female	Grade 2	English	Black	24 years
T3S2	Female	Grade 3 (HOD)	Afrikaans	Coloured	29 years

4.3 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

At the research sites, I collected data using semi-structured interviews and observations with field notes. I used interview schedules with ten semi-structured questions to collect data from five teachers: two teachers from School 1 and three teachers from School 2. The responses to the semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of all the participants concerned. The semi-

structured interview data are presented by the various questions posed to participants.

Question 1a: Have you heard about the term differentiated assessment?

In both schools, I asked the teachers if they had heard about the term differentiated assessment before asking them to describe it because I did not want to assume that they were familiar with the term.

T1S1 in school 1, T2S2, and T3S2 in School 2 did not respond orally but nodded their head to affirm that they had heard about the term differentiated assessment.

T2S1, who is the HOD of School 1 affirmed with confidence that she was familiar with the term. She remarked, "*yeah…you know I have been teaching for 38 years, and you have to do it".*

T1S2 in School 2 responded with uncertainty and laughter as she remarked, "*kind of*".

Question 1b: How would you describe differentiated assessment?

In both schools, the teachers generally described the term differentiated assessment as an assessment that accommodates learners with various abilities using Bloom's taxonomy.

According to T1S1 in school 1, differentiated assessment is

> *when we accommodate the different learners cause children are divided into different categories, the gifted learners and the average learner, and those who have learning barriers so err, in order to accommodate them in assessment we have to differentiate assessment according to Bloom's taxonomy because that is the guideline.* (T1S1)

T2S1 stated that each child "*is on his own level*". Therefore, differentiated assessment is about catering "*for each child".* T2S1 elaborated that as a teacher,

you must use all your skills to reach "*every single child*". However, T2S1 pinpointed that due to the coronavirus pandemic, *"it is very, very, very difficult now"* as the teachers have about 6-8 weeks to cover their assessment activities and task.

In describing differentiated assessment in school 2, T2S2 explained that:

> *These children we cannot use one-size-fit because they are different ne, so, we have children who can answer orally, but they cannot put it on paper, and we have children who answer very slowly, so we need to accommodate all of them because of the diversity that they have. For us to give full potential to the children we need to understand that they are different. For them being different, then they need to be assessed differently.* (T2S2)

T3S2 described differentiated assessment as *"assessment done to learners to accommodate the different challenges and levels of the learners"*. T3S2 further stated that Bloom's taxonomy is needed to differentiate assessment. According to her, "*When we are doing our assessment, we usually include questions on the higher level, middle and then lower to accommodate everybody*" (T3S2).

Question 2: In your opinion, what is the purpose of differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase?

In general, the teachers in both schools believe that the purpose of differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase is to accommodate all learners.

According to T1S1, *"each learner develops in his own pace and in his own space as well"*.

T2S1 stated that:

> *you have to differentiate because some of the children are on different levels. You have the strong ones, the middle ones, and you have the weak ones. So, you have to have the higher order questions, lower order questions, and middle order questions. When*

you do things like that, then the clever ones will definitely benefit from

it, but you must look after the weaker ones also so. (T2S1)

She further elaborated that differentiated assessment is about giving "*everybody a chance to succeed*" (T2S1).

In School 2, T2S2 remarked that if assessment is not differentiated in the Foundation Phase, "*we lose a lot of children along the way not because they cannot, but because we didn't accommodate them*".

To T3S2 "*the purpose is to accommodate all the learners so everybody can achieve according to their level.*"

From these quotes, it is evident that the Foundation Phase teachers in both schools acknowledge that learners have different abilities and skills which should be accommodated in assessment. The teachers also noted that differentiated assessment enables learners to achieve at their levels.

Question 3a: As a teacher, do you find CAPS and the assessment guidelines on differentiated assessment to be clear?

In both schools, the majority of the teachers agreed that CAPS and the assessment guidelines on differentiated assessment are clear.

In school 1, T1S1 stated that "*CAPS is great because you assess what you have just done…*". However, she stated that "… *on the long line there is not time to reinforce what you have taught especially in the Foundation Phase … children need repetition.*" In agreement, T2S1, who is the HOD of the Foundation Phase in School 1, stated that it is very important to work "*hand-in-hand with CAPS*". She further stated that "*we have the annual teaching plans, those annual teaching plans are aligned with CAPS, so you need to consult your policies before you do anything. Policies is very important*" (T2S1).

In school 2, T2S2 does not view CAPS and assessment guidelines as clear. She explained that a teacher must be guided by her instincts and the needs of the learners in the class. According to her,

I cannot say that they are clear; it's just that you must use your instincts. As you teach the children, you realise their needs. When you are hands-on, you pick up the needs because you cannot just say at the beginning of the year 'I am going to do differentiated assessment', it will just come up as you teach them you will see, 'oh this one need this, this one needs this'. (T2S2)

T3S2 who is the HOD of School 2 is of the opinion that CAPS "*is clear and instructive*". According to her,

It gives you an indication what you must concentrate on and how you must adapt to the different learners and also how to set up your question papers. It gives you guidelines how to do it… they tell you what you must assess, what is the weighting and what is the mark. So, some of the things have higher weighting than the others so you know I must concentrate more on this specific concept. (T3S2)

Question 3b: What challenges do you face implementing the guidelines?

Most of the teachers in both schools stated that they were struggling to implement CAPS and assessment guidelines in their classrooms. Only T2S1, the HOD in School 1, who has been teaching for 38 years, stated that with her years of experience, she has no challenge implementing CAPS and the assessment guidelines. According to her, with years of experience teaching, "*anything can come your way … you are prepared*" (T2S1).

A major challenge noted by the other teachers in implementing CAPS and assessment guidelines is their class size.

In School 1, T1S1 with 47 learners lamented as follows:

We don't reach all of them because they have different abilities, the class is too big, and by the time you get to assessment, you haven't reached everybody, but you have to assess them in any case. Large classes is a major issue, especially in Grade 1. I think a maximum of 35 would be okay. (T1S1)

In School 2, with a class size of 50 learners, T1S2 stated with joy and laughter that "*all the teachers are enjoying the smaller groups now*" due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She also stated that the school is a poor school with limited resources.

T2S2, with 53 learners before the COVID-19 pandemic, referred to the size of her class as an *"abnormal situation"*. According to her,

> *When you start to normalise the abnormal situation, it is normal. Sometimes you even say whoo! 53.. I am lucky because some people have 60 so [pause]. To be honest, some of the children, you are going to lose them along the way because they are too many. Those who are lucky you will pick up, and you will do provision for them, but the numbers make us lose most of the children. Most of the children are misplaced because of the numbers.* (T2S2)

T2S2 also remarked that the administrative work she must do is "*a challenge on its own..."* (T2S2) as it is time demanding.

Still, regarding class size, T3S2 stated that she can now concentrate on learners individually due to fewer learners in class as a result of the rotation system employed during the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce the numbers of learners in the class for social distancing purposes. According to her, "*you can see very clearly where the problems are, who is falling behind and where you can help the learners as an individual*" (T3S2). T3S2 wished that the rotation system would continue. She stated that "*in future, I hope it stays like this, but it will not because the moment the vaccine comes, they will tell all the children to come back to school (laughs) but this is a dream. This is really a dream even with discipline everything is better*" (T3S2).

However, T3S2 also stated that the workload on teachers and learners have increased with the pandemic as the Department of Basic Education expects the teachers to do *"certain activities."* According to her,

> *You are going to fall behind... because we do a week's work in one day because of the COVID-19, then we are rotating. I see a group and we are divided into 3 groups, so I need to do everything in one day but even if it is not COVID-19 the department they count your*

activity. They look at your ATP (annual teaching plan), the ATP comes from the CAPS, and you must work exactly according to what is stated in the ATP which give you a guideline and it tells you when to assess, how to assess, what to assess with the CAPS. And sometimes the time is limited to complete all those activities in one day but you must just do it so you work fast (snapping her fingers), and it is a bit difficult especially for the learners that cannot complete them …it is difficult to complete every activity everyday but I try. (T3S2)

From the participants' responses, it is quite evident that most of the teachers are struggling to implement assessment policies in their classrooms.

Question 4: How do you assess learners in your classroom?

Teachers in both schools generally use the same type of assessment activity/papers for all learners with questions ranked from easy to difficult using Bloom's taxonomy to assess their learners.

According to T1S1 "*during formal assessment we differentiate according to Bloom's taxonomy".* She further explained that

We have one question paper the difference is that there are some questions that they are able to answer, in other words, about 50% of the question at all levels because 50% is like the pass mark, and with maths, it is 40% questions that should be answerable, and the other questions are higher order, that is, to accommodate the gifted learners. (T1S1)

T2S1 stressed the need to provide support to the learners during assessment "*because you can't expect that the child will know everything."* She explained that one way to support the learners during an assessment, is to provide them with similar examples in their assessment papers and explain them. T2S1 further stated that if after the learners have been assessed and it is discovered that they did not "*know the work*", they must be given a "*second chance.*"

In addition to ranking questions based on Bloom's taxonomy, teachers in School 2 assess their learners as they teach to ascertain if they understand what they are teaching.

According to T2S2, "*as I teach, I ask questions, and I realise that I have to change my style … that's how I do my assessment, when I am teaching*." T2S2 further explained that during formal assessment:

> *our questions are in order. In the same question paper, we have first order questions for those who doesn't understand. We have second order for those who are in the middle. We have all types of questions. The challenging questions, the easy questions…When we realise that most of the children did not understand we do expanded opportunity. We give them another opportunity to improve their marks because the aim is not to just to see if they understand.* T2S2

T3S2 stated that learners are assessed in groups. According to her, "*we have different activities, so usually we take them in groups, you take the boys to sit on the mat, and then the girls write, and then they change*" (T3S2). She further elaborated that:

> *If it is concept you did earlier maybe a long time ago then you just refresh their memory and give them activities for them to do at home, you go over, do revision and they write the following day. If it is a very very, very, difficult concept then you teach and assess them, you teach and assess, you teach and assess, otherwise when they go home and they come back and they are lost.* (T3S2)

T1S2 explained that during assessment, she works with her learners as a team. According to her:

> *we all work together as a team, and we do everything together. We make our work sheets we do the same pages everyday together. We work as a team. I actually enjoy that, then we know that we are on par with each other so when it comes to assessment the child is not confused because we are teaching them the same methods.* (T1S2)

However, T1S2 pinpointed that her learners struggle to work independently during formal assessment as the learners wait for her to provide them with the answers.

According to her, "*you do the answers with them but when it comes to the assessment time what happens is that they get so used to doing the answers with you that they actually wait for you to give them the answers*" (T1S2).

Question 5: What are your views about standardised assessment and the implication (if any) on learners with diverse learning needs?

Generally, the teachers in both schools have different views about standardised assessment and its implication on learners with diverse learning needs. In School 1, the teachers are more in support of standardised assessment.

T2S1, who is the HOD of Foundation Phase in School 1, views standardised assessment as good for comparing learners with their peers. According to her, standardised assessment is "*actually good, especially for the clever learners to find out are those learners really clever? Then you can distinguish okay this one[pause]. I like them because you can measure your learners against other schools, and you can measure yourself*" (T2S1). T2S1 is also of the view that standardised assessment does not have any implication on learners with diverse needs. She stated, "*no, I don't think so. Like I said, you measure yourself against the others at the school*" (T2S1).

Although T1S1 stated that she prefers standardised assessment does not take place, she added that "*it has its advantages because at the end of the school year when they get to matric, they all answer the same questions, they won't give them different papers. So, it prepares them for the exam*". Regarding the implication of standardised assessment, T1S1 stated that "*most learners fall out*".

In School 2, the teachers view standardised assessment as a disadvantage because the learners are different.

T1S2, a Grade 1 teacher, explained that standardised assessment has "*a huge impact on them because not many children can cope*" if assessment is standardised as some of the learners come into the grade without prior formal learning.
T2S2 stated that standardised assessment

is working for the department but for me, personally, I don't like standardised because these children are different. I don't want the child to give me an answer from the book for reproduction. I want the child to show me that I understand and that they can take the knowledge to everyday situation. You need to bring your assessment into everyday situation. They must apply it every day. (T2S2)

Concerning the implication of standardised assessment, T2S2 stated that "*there are some children who need more time, some of the children, the front is too small for them*".

Question 6: What are your experiences in assessing learners with diverse learning needs in your classroom?

In both schools, the majority of the teachers noted that assessing learners with diverse needs is challenging when the learner's home language is different from the medium of instruction used in the classroom.

In school 1, T1S1 stated that her experience in assessing learners with diverse learning needs is "*frustrating, really frustrating*". According to her:

> *what is more frustrating is the language barrier. A lot of language problems because the children are being taught in a second language. It is not their mother language…and I think that many of these parents say I want my child in that school but they forget there is a language the school uses and the child does not speak that language every day and and they must be able to remember and comprehend and answer questions and write test or assessment on that.* (T1S1)

T2S1 who is the HOD thinks otherwise. According to her, "*I won't say that language is a problem… they can speak it but, the thing is where we experience problems is when they are writing sentences*" (T2S1).

In school 2, T1S2 confirmed that language barrier is a challenge. According to her:

You know some children when they go home, they speak their mother tongue so when they come to school it is difficult for them. Like if they speak Afrikaans at home and they come to school everything is in English so that confuses them too. Even with other languages… I have got two children with different languages. One Afrikaans speaking I think, the other one is Sepedi or something. So, the home language is different from what we do in class. So, the mother tongue plays a huge impact with the kids. We do encourage parents. We tell them, you know what, you are sending them to English schools try to speak more English that helps to encourage even reading. (T1S2)

T2S2 spoke from her experience assessing a learner with a speech impediment. According to her, the "*child is very intelligent*", and she knows how to "*assess him*". She stated:

If he doesn't want to do work, I know what to do. The only problem with him is speech; he's got speech problem. He is educable. He is even more intelligent than the others. I even tell them when they laugh at him when he talks; I say no, you shouldn't be laughing at him; you should be honouring him because he is the one who is giving you answers in the class. He gets frustrated when you ask him 'what?' because you can't hear him, but with me, he knows when I say 'what?', then he writes (T2S2).

T3S2 explained that although the assessment task is differentiated using Bloom's taxonomy, there are learners that need to be assessed differently to accommodate their learning needs. To assess a learner differently, she explained that she needs to obtain permission from the Department of Education. T3S2 stated that

although we have middle order, higher order, lower order it is a disadvantage to the learner that doesn't know how to comply. So, for instance, learners that can't read for example… you read then say do the assessment… so you supposed to take that group maybe to read to them and they can read it verbally the answers to you. But there is no time to do that. We never apply for it at the department we are

supposed to apply for it at the beginning of the year already to show that all the test and assessment you will read it to them, and they write, or you read it to them then they say, and you write it. (T3S2)

When I asked T3S2 if she had ever taken permission from the department to assess a learner differently, she stated that: "*I am going to be honest with you, I have never tried, I have never done it, but the department takes a long time to do anything.*

Question 7: What strategies do you use to assess learners with diverse learning needs in your classroom? Please give examples.

In general, the teachers in both schools employ different strategies in assessing learners with diverse learning needs in their classrooms.

T1S1 stated that intervention and the peer buddy system are strategies she uses to assess learners with diverse learning needs. According to her: *"Intervention is all the learners who do not achieve. We take two days in a week, Tuesday and Thursday, to do extra maths lessons with them, and we pack activities out with practical work"* (T1S1). T1S1 further highlighted that she used the peer buddy system in the past, "*but now with COVID, it is a challenge we cannot peer anymore*".

For T2S1, one on one assessment is her main strategy for assessing learners with diverse learning needs. According to her, "*some learners, they can't do things on their own. You find out that when you do one on one assessment that these children are actually clever, they just need extra help*" (T2S1).

For T1S2, creativity and practicality are key for assessing learners with diverse learning needs. She stated:

> *I give them things to count, object, so we count with that… and for me I like to use colours and practical, so I like to be a bit creative with the kids. We make things, like to make objects, shapes, we make stuff. I like the creative part, and that is what actually makes them remember for me… you have to find a way that will catch their attention whether it is a flower and you've got words or letters there*

and then you ask them let's put them together and make a sentence. (T1S2)

She also stated intervention as a strategy "*especially with the weaker kids*" and she also sends "*extra work home for those kids that need that help*" (T1S2*).*

T3S2 explained that she allows her learners to use different strategies that work best for them during the assessment. According to her:

> *Some learners use a ruler to get their answers. They have different ways to get to the answers. Other children draw, then they get to the answer, other children count. You leave them; other children use counters and things, you leave them, especially the learners that struggle; you give them counters* (T3S2).

Question 8a: Are you familiar with cognitive development theory?

Generally, most teachers in both schools are not familiar with cognitive development theories.

In School 1, T1S1 explained that she was not familiar with cognitive development theories because she did not study Foundation Phase. She stated that:

> *Uhm, [pause] not to a great extent because in my case I didn't study Foundation Phase, I did something else, I did senior primary because I didn't want to battle with little children. Then I got here, and they needed a Grade 1 teacher, so they said to me go there. So I try my best to just learn a few things* (T1S1).

T2S1, who is the HOD in School 1, was also not conversant with the theory and asked that I elaborate on it.

In School 2, T1S2 stated that she was familiar with Piaget's theory of cognitive development because she did a bit of his work when she did her research.

T2S2 was uncertain about the cognitive development theory.

Initially, T3S2, the HOD in School 2, did not remember the cognitive development theories, but when I began to explain, she remarked, *"we did yeah [laughs], that was a long time ago"*.

Question 8b: How do cognitive development theory of the child impact on your assessment strategy?

T1S2 believes that Piaget's theory of cognitive development does not apply to all learners but only to the smart ones. She explained that:

> *With some of the kids, it works, not with all of them. Piaget's theory helps a lot with our smarter kids. It actually encourages them with their thinking levels and creativeness and also to use their imagination. I feel that [it] actually helps them to become better, and good and smarter. I encourage that all the time.* (T1S2)

Although T3S2, the HOD in School 2 was unable to recall the theories of cognitive development at first, but after I mentioned Piaget's theory of cognitive development, she explained that it was one of the theories that impacted her assessment strategies.
According to T3S2:

> *We did, yeah [laughs]; that was a long time ago. I believe in all those theories because it helps you and give you a guideline where to start and where to stop so you can give the child to develop as much as possible on that level. So, if you go too fast, you will lose the child somewhere, so there are levels of development within the different age groups.* (T3S2)

Question 9: What type of support do you receive from the DBST regarding differentiating assessment in your classroom?
Generally, the teachers in both schools stated that they do not receive enough support from the DBST in differentiating assessment. In addition to the limited support received in the community, the teachers also stated that the DBSTs are short-staffed.

The teachers in School 1 could not remark on the assistance they receive from the DBST in differentiating assessment.

T2S1 stated that the DBSTs "*come to the school but not much. They concentrate on certain schools and certain areas*".

T1S2 remarked that:

> *To be honest, because there is a backlog… we only have one psychologist and therapist that can come around and visit schools in this community. And we have been asking can't we use people from our community, and they refuse, so we just have to be patient… I have a child who would sit and he would look around. He can't write. If you ask him 'okay, why are you in school today?', he will answer you 'I don't know' and the kids laugh and what do you do, I say 'no you don't laugh at him, he is not understanding what the teacher is asking him'. Although we have attended these workshops sometimes it doesn't work with them. I feel they need a physical teacher to actually be with that child on a one-to-one basis.* (T1S2)

T2S2 stated that "*They give us trainings, we have seculars that they send to advice*".

T3S2, who is also the HOD, affirmed that the DBST provide them with workshops although "*they concentrate more on the reading*". As the HOD, she stated that she "*must attend everything but the others; it is difficult sometimes, and the workshops are mostly during weekends and during holidays*". T3S2 further stated that she is expected to "*give feedbacks to the teachers. Not all the teachers can attend especially now we do virtual meetings, so we sit in and listen*".

Question 10: What type of support do you expect to receive from the DBST in differentiating assessment in your classroom?

The teachers at both schools require hands-on support from the DBSTs as they lamented that they are left alone to do the work. In addition, the teachers in both schools require useful and practical workshops from the DBSTs showing them how to differentiate assessment.

In School 1, T1S1 remarked that:

I expect them to be really hands-on to come and take a look at the children's work it seems as though when you explain to them what is happening, they seem to be distant; they don't understand what you are trying to say; if they were there physically, at least one class. We are battling on our own. In the school in Eersterust for example, we only have one person assigned to them I mean there are six schools in Eersterust, how do you assign one person to 6 schools? (T1S1)

T2S1 added that, "*they only have expertise, they must come with their skills and tell us how to address each and every problem and tell us the materials the teachers can use in order to assist*".

In School 2, T3S2 stated with frustration that:

They must give practical, Not just telling us 'do this' but it doesn't work [hitting the table gently as sign of frustration]. So, if they can give us and see themselves that it is very difficult, maybe they will understand. They don't come and give demonstrations, for examples; they must just come one day. We don't have the ability. You can do intervention, intervention, intervention but they still remain the same. It is very difficult. If they bring a child that is blind, I must be able to help the child because it is inclusion, but I don't have the ability, I can't read braille, or do sign language. I don't know it, maybe training, because maybe one of those children will come to you and you must help that child. Physical disability is not that challenging because the child is on wheelchair but when the child is blind, deaf or so.. it is better to send the child to a special school. Just around, there is a special school for children who have challenges. (T3S2)

T1S2 required a teacher assistant, smaller class size and regular visits. She stated that:

I would actually like a teacher aid or something to help assist so while you are busy with children that are weak at least you know you've got someone just watching over them to do their work. Also, if they could give us smaller classes. With smaller classes you work better, and children also give you good results instead of them giving you like average result because we do have children that are intelligent, it's just because they are in a big class, they don't get that attention that they are supposed to get. They need to visit our school to understand what we want from them, then, when it comes to the practical part they can assist us better. (T1S2)

4.4 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS: NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I also observed the teachers' assessment practices at the two schools with an observation schedule. I observed the teachers' assessment practices as a non-participant observer as I did not participate or interrupt the lessons. During the observations, I made field notes to document my findings and to triangulate my data.

The data analysis and interpretation of the non-participant observation data is presented below.

4.4.1 Evident method of assessment.

The evident method of assessment in both schools is oral assessment, where the teachers assess the learners as they teach and formal assessment where the learners answer questions in their assessment books/task. In T1S1's class, the teacher used flashcards to assess the learners orally. When it was time to read, the teacher divided the class into two groups. She brought one group to the front of the class and gave them a story book to read while the second group of learners were told to write in their books. However, as the teacher was reading the story book with the learners and correcting their reading errors, most of the learners who were supposed to be writing were watching the reading activity going on in front of the class. The teacher noticed the distractions and, at intervals, told the learners to concentrate on what they were writing. Even with fewer learners in the classroom, TIS1 struggled to keep both groups engaged with their class activity. While some learners were on the mat reading a big story book

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with the teacher, the other learners struggled to concentrate on their class activity as they watched the reading activity.

In T2S1's class, the teacher counted in ascending and descending order using her fingers and toes, which the learners enjoyed doing. As she taught the lesson, she asked questions orally, and she called on learners who raised their hands to answer the questions. In School 2, in T3S2's class, when it was time to read the comprehension passage in the DBE book, the teacher called each learner to read a portion of the passage. Although I did not ask questions or seek explanations from the teacher, T3S2 explained to me during the observation that she would have sat on the mat with the learners to read but due to social distancing she could not. The teacher used the DBE book to assess the learners reading and corrected their errors. She also assessed the learners orally and made them repeat the phonics words on the board many times. During formal assessment in T2S2's class, the teacher gave all the learners the mathematics assessment task. The assessment task had different categories of questions with different weightings allocated to each category. The questions included multiple-choice questions, addition and subtraction, problem solving, number pattern, shapes, and measurement questions.

4.4.2 Support/ clear instructions/accommodations

In School 1, each table in the class had a paper ruler with orange and green beads to assist the learners in counting. The teachers in this school questioned the learners and prompted them to help them get to the right answers. In T1S1's class, a learner identified the letter "b" as "d", and the teacher reminded the learner that the letter is facing the right side. She also told some learners to stay back after school to read the alphabets again in their classwork books. In T1S2's class, she went around the class to check what the learners were writing, and she provided them with feedback on the letters that they wrote in their books. T1S2 commended some learners and asked some to rewrite their letters. During formal assessment in T2S2's class, she read the mathematics assessment questions with the learners and explained to them what they were expected to do. She asked struggling learners to do the addition by using their fingers and the numbers (1-100) written at the back of their books. T2S2 also demonstrated on the board the systematic process of solving each mathematics question which

were very similar to the ones in the assessment task. She also went around the class to check what the learners were writing, and she provided them with cues to correct their mistakes. She waited for all the learners to finish answering a question in their assessment paper before she explained the next question. T2S2 told the learners who finished answering the first question to wait for the others. She said, "*let's give the others a chance because it is taking them a bit long*".

4.5 ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENT DATA

Content analysis is used in qualitative research to produce and communicate meaning and insights about a phenomenon (Flick, 2014). It involves analysing the content of relevant documents by identifying themes and categories that represent the important attributes of the documents used in the study. I had access to all the documents, including policy documents such as Education White Paper 6; National Protocol for Assessment for Grade R-12; Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement; Guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom through CAPS; and a copy of the teachers' assessment papers. The document data were examined and analysed using a content analysis strategy to investigate differentiated assessment in the identified mainstream schools and the teachers' support from the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their classrooms. As I examined and analysed the relevant documents, I took cognisance of all the concepts that defined differentiated assessment and the roles of the DBSTs in differentiating assessment to gain a deeper understanding of their meanings and draw conclusions from the findings. In this regard, I generated notes and organised them based on the content of each document as regards differentiated assessment and the DBSTs. Afterwards, I read through the notes I had generated from the document data multiple times to familiarise myself with the content. Then I coded the data and merged similar themes together to draw out the findings that emerged from the data.

4.6 THEMES AND CATEGORIES

Through the responses of the participants in this study, I collected enough data to use inductive analysis to identify themes and categories. The following themes and categories emerged from the data collected through the interviews, observations as well as the document data.

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Table 4.3.

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Conceptualisation of differentiated assessment	**Sub-theme 1.1:** Teachers understanding of differentiated assessment.
	Sub-theme 1.2: Purpose of differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase
	Sub-theme 1.3 Participants' views about standardised assessment.
Theme 2: Assessment practices in the Foundation Phase	**Sub-theme 2.1**: Participants' assessment practice.
	Sub-theme 2.2: Teachers' experiences assessing learners with diverse learning needs.
	Sub-theme 2.3: Differentiated assessment strategies used in the Foundation Phase.
	Sub-theme 2.4: Impact of COVID-19 on differentiated assessment.
Theme 3: Assessment policies in mainstream schools	**Sub-theme 3.1**: Participants' views about CAPS and assessment policies.
	Sub-theme 3.2: Challenges participants face in implementing assessment policies.
Theme 4: Knowledge of cognitive development theories	**Sub-theme 4.1**: Participants' understanding of cognitive development theories.

	Sub-theme 4.2:
	Impact of cognitive theories on assessment in the Foundation Phase.
Theme 5: Teachers support requirements from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment	**Sub-theme 5.1:**
	Support participants receive from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment.
	Sub-theme 5.2:
	Support participants require from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment.

4.7 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.7.1 Theme 1: Conceptualisation of differentiated assessment

This theme corresponds with the first research question: How do mainstream schoolteachers conceptualise differentiated assessment? For details concerning this theme, the following two sub-themes are presented: Sub-theme 1.1, teachers understanding of differentiated assessment; and Sub-theme 1.2, purpose of differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase. The data sources under this theme were semi-structured interviews and document data.

4.7.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Teachers understanding of differentiated assessment.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews revealed that the participants had a fair understanding of the concept of differentiated assessment. T1S1 in School 1 and T3S2 in School 2 described differentiated assessment as ranking questions from easy to difficult using Bloom's taxonomy to accommodate the slow, average, and fast learners. This definition provides a limited view of differentiated assessment as it is based mostly on how written assessment tasks are constructed and the difficulty level of assessment questions. Similar findings are reported in the reviewed literature where teachers viewed assessment as pen and paper testing of learners' understanding of the content taught (Dayal & Lingam, 2015; Smit et al., 2020). Therefore, the teachers (T1S1, T3S2) believe that differentiated assessment is basically about providing learners with questions on their assessment task that they can answer, which is achieved using Bloom's taxonomy. Although Bloom's taxonomy is widely used to differentiate learners'

cognitive abilities, differentiated assessment is not limited to how questions are ranked from simple to complex on the assessment task (Stephenson, 2020). Differentiated assessment also involves creating diverse pathways for learners to demonstrate their knowledge and skills (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013).

The findings of this sub-theme further suggest that how teachers understand differentiated assessment influences how they perceive their learners and their assessment practices. In the teachers' (T1S1, T3S2) description of differentiated assessment, they stated that Bloom's taxonomy was important in accommodating all learners categorised as slow, average and fast. Scholars have warned about the negative implication of categorising and labelling learners (Tomlinson, 2015). These labels may influence how teachers engage with their learners and the expectations they have of them. A teacher might not expect much from a "slow" or "weak" learner, and as such, provide the learner with lower-order questions which may not be intellectually stimulating and engaging. Differentiated assessment views learners as heterogeneous individuals with diverse abilities capable of learning and provides them with equally engaging ways to demonstrate mastery of the content taught to access and progress within the curriculum (Tomlinson, 2015). In other words, the teacher formulates meaningful classroom assessments for learners at "levels of difficulty slightly beyond their current points of development" (Tomlinson, 2015, p. 207). In this way, all learners are motivated and challenged to achieve their possible best on their level. Hence, Vygotsky's ZPD encourages teachers to locate the state of readiness of learners and guide them to their next possible level of attainment.

Having a broader view about differentiated assessment, T2S1 in School 1 understands differentiated assessment as an assessment that reaches every single learner. In this regard, it is clearly stated by the Department of Basic Education (2011) that learners should not be "disadvantaged by the assessment strategy" (p. 12). A significant critique for standardised classroom assessment based on the psychometric theory is that it serves as an advantage to some learners and a disadvantage to other learners, especially those with special needs and barriers to learning (Obiakor et al., 2021). T2S2 in School 2 affirmed that learners demonstrate what they know in different ways because of their diversity. In this regard, the Department of Basic Education (2017, p. 168) defined

differentiated assessment as "assessment that is different in some way to the standard delivery involving accommodations and adaptations designed to equalise opportunities for all learners by addressing barriers which learners may experience". The capability approach to assessment advocates for assessment policies that are fair and inclusive, bearing in mind the diversity that each learner brings to the classroom (Broderick, 2018). Therefore, no learner should be disadvantaged due to how assessment is designed and administered.

4.7.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Purpose of differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase

The findings of this sub-theme reveal that the purpose of differentiated assessment in the FP is to accommodate the intellectually strong, average, and weak learners, as stated by T2S1. According to the Department of Basic Education, the purpose of differentiated assessment in the FP is to enable learners to "give a true account of their knowledge and/or skills" without compromising the standard of the assessment or giving a learner an undue advantage over their peers (DBE, 2017, p. 168). In this regard, T2S1 view of the purpose of differentiated assessment is insufficient as it only seeks to accommodate the cognitive difference between the learners. It is important to note that there are variables other than a learner's cognitive ability such as language barriers that impact on the learner's ability to "give a true account of their knowledge and/or skills" (DBE, 2017, p. 168). A learner may have the intellectual capacity to comprehend the content taught but may struggle to engage with the content and demonstrate mastery if they are not proficient in the LoLT which is a common finding in South African schools (Maseko & Mkhize, 2021; Subramoney, 2017). Hence, the purpose of differentiated assessment is to remove the possible barriers that limit learners from demonstrating mastery of the content taught by providing them with the needed accommodations and adaptations.

The findings also revealed that the teachers (T1S1, T2S1) in School 1 and School 2 (T3S2) understand the purpose of differentiated assessment in the FP as giving each learner a chance to succeed as they do not progress evenly within the curriculum. Differentiated assessment aims to provide equal opportunities for all learners to progress within the stipulated curriculum by "addressing barriers which learners may experience" (DBE, 2017, p. 168). Assessment enables learners to

move forward and upward within the stipulated curriculum as the results reveal if a learner has understood the content taught and is ready to access the next content. T2S2 in School 2 further stated that learners fall away when assessment is not differentiated. Therefore, if the assessment is not differentiated, some learners might be denied of their chance to succeed and progress "to the next step in their learning" (DBE, 2011, p. 13). Differentiation experts, Tomlinson and Moon (2013), argue that differentiated assessment makes learning accessible for all learners as it creates diverse pathways for them to demonstrate their knowledge and skill. According to the capability approach, it will therefore be unfair if a learner is made to repeat a grade or referred to a special school based on assessment results obtained from standardised assessment.

4.7.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Participants' views about standardised assessment.

The findings of this theme revealed that the teachers have different views about standardised assessment. The findings suggest that the teachers in School 1 view standardised assessment from a more positive angle. T1S1 stated that although she is not in support of standardised assessment, she believes that it has its advantages which include preparing the learners for matric, which is a standardised assessment that the learners must write in Grade 12. In this regard, T1S1 believes that when assessment is standardised from the FP, the learners will be more acquainted with standardised assessment when they get to Grade 12. Matric examinations are viewed by education stakeholders in South Africa, such as the principals, teachers, and parents, to be a crucial examination (Letsoalo & Masemola 2017). Its results are used to determine which learner can progress to Higher Education and which learner cannot (Letsoalo & Masemola 2017). Some teachers view matric examinations as the climax of the primary and secondary schooling system. In this regard, Lee and Coniam (2013) and Scarino (2013) argued that teachers' fixation on traditional methods of assessment might be due to an examination-driven culture in most schools where learners/schools are ranked as top-performing based on their assessment results.

T2S1, the HOD of the Foundation Phase in School 1, favours standardised assessment and believes that it is beneficial in distinguishing the clever learners. Hence, when assessment is standardised, teachers can use the assessment

scores to decide which learners are clever and which are not clever. T2S1 also favours standardised assessment as it enables her to measure her performance. Based on psychometric theory, standardised assessments use assessment scores to rank learners from the worst-performing to the best performing learner by judging them against their peers (Macy et al., 2015). Since assessment scores are primarily used to rank learners, standardised assessments are often insensitive to learners' differences to ensure standardisation (Gipps, 2012). The Department of Basic Education states that assessment scores should be used to evaluate "learner achievement against predetermined criteria" (DBE, 2011, p. 12), not against their peers. However, when asked about the purpose of differentiated assessment, T2S1 stated that *"you have to differentiate because some the children are on different levels".* Nevertheless, she views standardised assessment as good in measuring the learners against their peers and measuring herself. This contradiction could mean that some Foundation Phase teachers are not fully convinced about the differences between learners in mainstream schools and the possible impact of standardised assessment on learners.

Standardised assessment, which is based on psychometric theory, has been criticised in literature for largely ignoring the differences between learners within the same age group. Supporting this view, most of the teachers (T1S2, T2S2) in School 2 view standardised assessment as unfair and disadvantageous to most learners because of the learners' differences. In this regard, the Department of Basic Education also highlighted that the traditional approach to assessment should be rethought to give way to an assessment approach that is "flexible enough to accommodate a range of learner needs" (DBE, 2011, p. 13). T2S2 stated that there are learners who need more time to complete their assessment task and learners who due to physical impediment such as poor vision and partial deafness may need diverse accommodations.

4.7.2 Theme 2: Assessment practices in the Foundation Phase

This theme corresponds with the second research question: How do teachers in mainstream schools assess learners in their classrooms? According to Leuchter et al. (2020) there is a positive association and constant interaction between teachers' knowledge, belief, and practice. Thus, teachers' assessment practices are often a reflection of their knowledge about assessment. The findings of this

theme draw from semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations and the document data. The details of this theme are discussed under four sub-themes: sub-theme 2.1, participants' assessment practice; sub-theme 2.2, teachers' experiences assessing learners with diverse learning needs; sub-theme 2.3, differentiated assessment strategies used in the Foundation Phase; and sub-theme 2.4, the impact of COVID-19 on differentiated assessment.

4.7.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Participants' assessment practice.

The findings of this sub-theme reveal that the teachers in both schools have similar assessment practices, which include an informal assessment, formal assessment, and extended opportunity. T1S2 in School 2 stated that she conducts weekly low stake informal assessments in her classroom to ascertain if the learners understood the content taught during the week. Similarly, T2S2 remarked that she employed oral assessment as she taught her lesson to determine if the learners understood what she was teaching and if the method of instruction was effective. Informal assessment, which is sometimes referred to as assessment for learning, monitors and enhances learners' progress (DBE, 2017). This assessment practice is part of the teaching-learning process as it provides "feedback to the learners and teachers" regarding the progress of the learners and the effectiveness of the instruction employed (DBE, 2017, p. 196). The Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2017, p.196) states that informal assessment is often conducted through "teacher observation and teacher-learner interactions". Therefore, as the teacher interacts with their learners during the informal assessment, the teacher can better determine what the learner understands or does not understand and adjust the method of instruction accordingly.

In addition to the interviews, I also observed the participants' assessment practices in both schools, which further revealed that they practice informal assessment. In T1S1's class, in School 1, the teacher used flashcards to assess the learners. She brought flash cards with different alphabets on each card for the learners to identify orally as a class and individually. Similarly, in T2S1's class, as she taught the lesson, she asked questions orally, and she called on learners who raised their hands to answer the questions. In School 2, T3S2 wrote some phonics words on the chalkboard and asked the learners to repeat each word

after her. As she sounded the words on the board with the learners, she asked if they understood the word's meaning. She asked some learners to explain the meaning of the words, and when the learner could not explain the word, she explained it. When it was time to read the comprehension passage in the DBE book, the teacher called each learner to read a portion of the passage as she corrected their errors.

The findings of this sub-theme further show that the teachers in both schools utilise formal assessment where the learners are given the same assessment task/papers with questions ranked from easy to difficult using Bloom's taxonomy. During the non-participant observation in School 2, T2S2, a Grade 2 teacher, used the same assessment paper to assess her learners on mathematics. The questions included multiple-choice questions, addition and subtraction, problem solving, number pattern, shapes, and measurement with different marks allocated to each question. This assessment practice affirms that teachers' perceptions impact their assessment practices as some of the teachers view differentiated assessment as ranking questions using Bloom's taxonomy. T1S1 in School 1 stated that during the formal assessment, Bloom's taxonomy ensures that at least half of the questions are answerable by all learners to enable them to attain the pass mark. Learners achieving the pass mark should not be the primary aim of formal assessment. Rather, teachers should use formal assessment to make informed decisions about the progress the learners have made through the curriculum and to ascertain the effectiveness of the instruction utilised and the support needed by the learner to progress to the next possible level in the curriculum (Tomlinson, 2015, DBE, 2011).

The findings also revealed that the teachers provide their learners with support during formal assessment. T2S1 in School 1 explained during the semi-structured interview that to support her learners during assessment, she takes a question from their assessment task, changes some of the words or numbers and uses it as an example for the learners to see how to get to the answer. I observed this type of support in T2S2's class in School 2. During mathematics formal assessment, the teacher (T2S2) provided the learners with examples very similar to the question in their assessment task and demonstrated the step-by-step process of solving the mathematics questions on the chalkboard. This practice is

supported by Wilson (2013), who affirmed in his book "*What every teacher needs to know about assessment*" that practising similar assessment questions with learners helps to prepare them for the assessment task as the learners become acquainted with questions and the technique needed to answer them. However, Wilson (2013) encouraged this practice before the formal assessment to prepare the learners for the assessment task and not only during the assessment. The author also warned against the teacher providing the learners with similar examples of only the questions in the assessment task, but they should practice various questions with the learners to develop their problem-solving skills (Wilson, 2013). Thus, T2S2, providing the learners with similar examples of each question in their assessment task during the assessment, could tamper with the validity of the assessment results. This is because the teacher might not know what the learners can do independently and the areas for which they need support as she has shown them how to solve each question on the chalkboard. Additionally, this type of support suggests that the learners are spoon-fed during assessment with little or no room to engage independently with the assessment task. T1S2 affirmed during the semi-structured interview that during formal assessment, her Grade 1 learners depend on her to provide them with the answers.

The findings of this sub-theme further revealed that the teachers supported their learners during informal and formal assessments by providing them with questions and prompts to help them get to the correct answers. In T2S2's class, in School 2, the teacher read out each question on the assessment paper with the learners and explained what they were supposed to do. After demonstrating on the board how the learners were expected to solve the maths questions, T2S2 went around the class to check what the learners were writing, and she provided them with cues to correct their mistakes. In addition, the teachers (T2S1, T2S2) in both schools provide their learners with a second chance to rewrite an assessment when they perform poorly. In an individual interview with T2S1 in School 1 she affirmed that after the learners have been assessed and it is discovered that they did not comprehend what was taught, they were given another opportunity to write the assessment. During my observation in T1S1's class, she also told some learners to stay back after school to reread the alphabet in their classwork books.

4.7.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Teachers experiences assessing learners with diverse learning needs.

In both schools, the findings revealed that the teachers experienced assessing learners with diverse learning needs as frustrating due to the language barrier. Although the LoLT in both schools is English or Afrikaans, the learners come from different backgrounds and communities with different home languages such as isiZulu, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, and IsiNdebele. T1S1, in School 1 and T1S2 in School 2, affirmed that most learners learn in a second or third language, making it challenging for them to engage with the content taught and demonstrate what they know. T2S1, who it HOD in school 1 does not view language as a major barrier. However, she confirmed that the learners struggle to write sentences in the language of learning and teaching. Reviewed literature affirmed that teachers experience language as a major barrier in the Foundation Phase as learners are not taught in their home language, particularly at English medium schools (Maseko & Mkhize, 2021; Subramoney, 2017). Daniels (2008) affirms that language is a fundamental tool for children as it aids them to plan activities and solve problems in daily life. Vygotsky (1962) reiterates that language is very important to young learners' cognitive development as learners employ language as a tool to comprehend, interact, guide, and monitor their daily activities (Khalid, 2015). In a multilingual South African context, code-switching and translanguaging could be used as strategies to differentiate curriculum and assessments, thus enhancing successes for learners in Foundation Phase classes (Charamba, 2020; Maseko & Mkhize, 2021). Code-switching and translanguaging fosters the use of more than one language in a multilingual classroom (Charamba, 2020; Maseko & Mkhize, 2021).

T2S2 highlighted her experience assessing a learner with a speech impediment. According to her, the "*child is very intelligent*", and she knows how to "*assess him*". She added that if the learner does not want to work, she knows what to do. This finding suggest that T2S2 is catering for the learner with speech impediment alone without professional support. The Department of Education (2001; 2005) states that teachers that cater for learners with learning barriers and special needs should be supported by experts. The learner with speech impediment could have been better supported to access the curriculum if the teacher collaborated with a specialist.

T3S2 remarked that although assessment is differentiated using Bloom's taxonomy, there are learners that need to be assessed differently. According to her, to assess a learner differently, permission needs to be sought from the Department of Basic Education. T3S2 stated that even though there are learners who need to be assessed differently, she has never applied for permission due to time constraints. She opined that the Department of Basic Education "*takes a long time to respond to anything*" (T3S2). This finding suggest that some teachers do not take advantage of the provisions made by the Department of Basic Education to differentiate assessment for learners with learning barriers and special needs. Consequently, learners in mainstream schools are denied from the benefits of differentiated assessment by their teachers who are considered gate keepers and key implementers of assessment policies.

4.7.2.3   *Sub-theme 2.3: Differentiated assessment strategies used in the Foundation Phase.*

The findings of this sub-theme revealed that creativity and practicality is an important strategy used to differentiate classroom assessment in the Foundation Phase. T1S2 who is a Grade 1 teacher stated that she provides her learners with concrete objects to assist them to count. T1S2 also remarked that she finds engaging ways to assess her learners. For example, she provides her learners with flowers "*and you've got words or letters there and then you ask them let's put them together and make a sentence*" (T1S2). Tomlinson (1999), Tomlinson and Imbeau (2011), and Tomlinson and Moon (2013) argued that assessment benefits all learners, not only learners with barriers when it is differentiated based on the learners' readiness, interest, and learning profile. It is therefore important that Foundation Phase teachers take cognisance of their learners' interest during assessment to design classroom assessments that are stimulating and engaging. In this regard, Piaget's theory of cognitive development advocates the use of concrete objects for learners within the concrete operational stage (7-11 years) (Astuti, 2018).

The findings of this sub-theme further revealed that teachers differentiate assessment by allowing their learners, especially those that experience learning barriers to use different strategies that work best for them during assessment.

T3S2 stated that her learners have different methods that they employ during assessment to answer the questions. Some learners prefer to draw; some prefer to use counters, while other learners prefer to use rulers. The learners are encouraged to apply whichever method suits them best during assessment. In this regard, the Department of Basic Education highlighted that assessment should "make provision for multiple abilities, learning styles and levels" (DBE 2011, p. 12).

The teachers (T1S1, T1S2) in both schools generally use an intervention book to assess learners that experience barriers to learning. The intervention is often done twice a week after school with learners struggling with their schoolwork. During the intervention, the learners are given an extra lesson and activities to do. Early intervention is important for learners who struggle to perform as expected in a specific grade. "Such intervention will prevent the learner from falling significantly behind before individual support is sought" (DBE, 2017, p. 168).

4.7.2.4 Sub-theme 2.4: Impact of COVID-19 on differentiated assessment.

Concerning the impact of COVID-19 on differentiated assessment, the findings revealed that it reduced the number of learners in the class and increased the teachers' workload. The corona virus disease brought about new regulations and measures such as wearing a facemask, social distancing, which reduces the number of learners allowed in the classroom at a time. The participants (T1S2, T3S2) expressed their excitement with laughter having to teach and assess fewer learners in their classroom. T3S2 affirmed that COVID-19 has made the implementation of assessment policies and guidelines easier as she can concentrate on learners individually and provide them with the needed support so that no learner is left behind. Diverse studies have shown that the large class size in South Africa is a longstanding challenge that makes the implementation of inclusive policies almost impossible (Engelbrecht, 2020; Matsepe et al., 2019).

The findings of this sub-theme further revealed that although the participants expressed their joy of having fewer learners in class, the COVID-19 pandemic has also increased their workload. The increase in the teachers' workload is due to the grouping system employed at schools to reduce the number of learners in a class.

At both schools, each grade is divided into smaller groups. T2S1, who is the HOD in School 1 remarked that due to the coronavirus pandemic, *"it is very, very, very difficult now"* as the teachers have about 6-8 weeks to cover their assessment activities and task. T3S2, the HOD at School 2 affirmed that due to the grouping system, teachers have a shorter time to teach and assess the groups in each grade as the teachers now have to cover "*a week's work in one day*" (T3S2). T3S2 also remarked that the situation was not any better prior to COVID-19. According to her, the teachers are expected by the Department of Education to work "*exactly according to what is stated in the ATP*" (T3S2). Consequently, in a bid to meet up with the number of activities that she is expected to cover, she must move at a fast pace which pose as a barrier to learners that cannot cope with the required speed. Prior to COVID-19, studies such as du Plessis and Marais (2015) suggested that teachers view CAPS as ambitious regarding the content the teachers have to cover each term and the workload on the learners in the FP. The finding further revealed that the teachers believe that CAPS is designed to benefit the fast learners as the slow learners cannot cope with the workload (du Plessis & Marais 2015). Increased workload may put teachers under undue pressure to complete the task for the week and, as a result, focus more on covering the topics for the week rather than ensuring that the learners are gaining mastery of the content taught. Differentiating classroom assessment in such a situation might be tedious due to the limited time available for the teachers to cover their topics.

4.7.3 Theme 3: Assessment policies in mainstream schools

According to the Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga, CAPS aims to clarify what is to be taught and assessed in schools (DoE, 2011). Assessment guidelines emphasise the importance of differentiated assessment within an inclusive framework as assessment of learners is fundamental to the teaching and learning process. The details are provided in the following sub-themes to understand this theme. Sub-theme 3.1, participants' views about CAPS and assessment policies; and sub-theme 3.2, the challenges participants face in implementing assessment policies.

4.7.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Participants' views about CAPS and assessment policies.

The participants provided their views on the Curriculum and Policy Statements (CAPS) and assessment guidelines. In both schools, all the teachers except T2S2 view CAPS and assessment policies as clear and instructive. T3S2, the HOD in School 2, stated that CAPS guides the teachers on what to assess, the weighting for the questions, and how to construct their assessment task to accommodate different learners in their classroom. In agreement, T2S1, the HOD in School 1, emphasised the importance of working closely with CAPS and assessment policies. Diverse studies affirm that teachers generally state that CAPS is comprehensive and instructive compared with previous curriculums (du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Magagula, 2015). Studies also highlight that teachers view CAPS as a viable policy that guides all assessment forms, including the number of assessment tasks to be conducted (Maharajh et al., 2016). Teachers further commended the annual teaching plan to be specific on what teachers must teach and assess (du Plessis & Marais, 2015).

However, T2S2 in School 2 stated that she could not affirm that assessment policies are clear but is guided more by her instincts and interaction with the learners. T2S2 explained that as she teaches her learners, she realises their needs and strategies to differentiate assessment. Studies affirm that the more a teacher interacts with her learners, the better the teacher can differentiate assessment (Wahl, 2017). The reason for this finding is that the teacher would be able to determine through constant interaction with the learner what they can achieve independently and the assistance they require to move to the next possible level. Thus, as much as assessment policies and guidelines guide mainstream schoolteachers, they should also pay close attention to the differences that exist among learners in their classrooms.

4.7.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Challenges participants face in implementing assessment policies.

This study revealed that limited resources, large classes, time constraints and administrative work are the challenges that teachers face in implementing assessment policies. South Africa has made commendable efforts to formulate inclusive laws, policies, frameworks, and legislation to provide quality mainstream schooling for all learners. However, the literature has highlighted that the

formulation of inclusive laws and policies does not translate to effective implementation, particularly at the classroom level (Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Smit et al., 2020; Thuketana, 2018). T1S2 emphasised that her school is an under-resourced school with limited resources needed to implement assessment policies. Literature findings affirm that although the majority of South African teachers favour inclusion of all learners in principle, they also believe that the South African educational system is not adequately equipped with the resources needed to implement inclusive policies effectively (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). To adequately accommodate the diverse learning needs of all learners, teachers need to be equipped with resources such as "a video/DVD recorder, webcam, and digital player", as stated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2017, p. 171). As demonstrated by T1S2, Foundation Phase teachers particularly those in quintile four and five schools must be creative and utilise available resources within their reach to mitigate the effect of their limited access to sophisticated technologies.

The study's findings further revealed that large classes are a major challenge teachers face in implementing assessment policies. The teachers lamented that they could not cater for all the learners in their classrooms due to the class size and as a result some learners are at a disadvantage. Hence, they were happy with the rotation strategy during the COVID-19 rotations. T2S2, who had 53 learners before the COVID-19 regulations, referred to the size of her class as an "abnormal situation". She further stated some learners in her classroom are left behind because they are too many. Additionally, T1S1 remarked that "*by the time you get to assessment, you haven't reached everybody, but you have to assess them in any case*". To assess learners that have not been sufficiently taught the content of the curriculum can be seen as a form of unfairness and inequality. This is because the learners were not given equal opportunities to engage with the content taught. Hence, assessment results based on the curriculum content that was not sufficiently taught cannot be said to be a true reflection of the learner's ability. This finding therefore suggests that some learners in mainstream schools are failed during assessment because they did not have the opportunity to engage with the content that was assessed.

Notwithstanding that the Department of Education specifies that the maximum class size in South African primary schools is 40 learners to one educator (Marias, 2016; Motshekga, 2012), reviewed literature affirms that most schools in South Africa are overcrowded. Many classrooms accommodate over 50 learners and in some cases 130 learners (Guardian Africa Network, 2013; Matsepe et al., 2019). Findings from literature further revealed that three to four learners use a desk meant for two people in some schools, which leads to congestion and poor academic performance (John, 2013). Therefore, large class sizes and overcrowded classrooms pose a barrier to learning and effective assessment strategies in mainstream schools. In addition, learners are deprived of their right to quality education, which is a form of social injustice according to the capability approach.

T2S2 stated that the administrative work she must do is *"a challenge on its own"* as the teachers already have a lot of work to do. As noted earlier, T3S2 remarked that CAPS is not flexible enough to accommodate learners that require more time to gain mastery of the content taught as the teachers are obliged to cover the curriculum within a stipulated time. T1S1 affirmed that Foundation Phase teachers do not have enough time "*to reinforce"* what they have taught as their learners need repetition to gain mastery of the content taught. Thus, CAPS needs to be more flexible to accommodate learners who may not have the ability to learn at fast pace.

4.7.4 Theme 4: Knowledge of cognitive theories

The findings of this theme suggest that most of the teachers are not conversant with cognitive developmental theories. The details of this theme is discussed under two sub-themes: sub-theme 4.1, participants' understanding of cognitive theories and; sub-theme 4.2, the impact of cognitive theories on assessment in the Foundation Phase. The data source for this theme were the semi-structured interviews.

4.7.4.1   Sub-theme 4.1: Participants understanding of cognitive development theories.

In general, the teachers in both schools revealed that they were not familiar with the theories of cognitive development except for T1S2, who stated that she was

familiar with Piaget's theory of cognitive development because she used a bit of his work in her research.

T3S2 stated that she learnt about the theories a long time ago but could not remember them. Similarly, T2S2 was unable to recall the cognitive development theories, but as I began to explain what they were, she remembered the stages of development. T1S1 remarked that she was not conversant with the theories of cognitive development because she did not study Foundation Phase. Cognitive theories explore the mental process and competences of children (Meadows, 2017). The National Protocol for Assessment states that teachers' various forms of classroom assessment should be age-appropriate and aligned with the learners' developmental level (DBE, 2012). This is in line with Piaget theory of cognitive development and Vygotsky's ZPD, which highlights that teachers take cognizance of the mental processes of learners in the teaching and learning process. Teachers in mainstream schools must be equipped through constant training and workshops with the knowledge of cognitive development theories. The trainings and workshops will enable the teachers to identify the state of readiness in learners and to create appropriate learning outcomes and assessment strategies that is within the ZPD of the learners.

4.7.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Impact of cognitive theories on assessment in the Foundation Phase.

T1S2 remarked that Piaget's theory of cognitive development is more applicable to the smarter learners. According to her, the theory "*encourages them with their thinking levels and creativeness and also to use their imagination*" (T1S2). Literature has criticised Piaget's theory of cognitive development for assuming that all learners within a particular age range develop at the same pace (Alahmad, 2020; Sanghvi, 2020). Notwithstanding, Piaget's theory has provided useful insights into the cognitive processes of children. Additionally, the conceptual framework developed to guide this study argues that Vygosky's ZPD should be used to complement the loopholes in Piaget's theory of cognitive development.

T3S2, who is the HOD in School 2, stated that she believes in the cognitive developmental theories because they guide teachers on where to start and stop with their learners. T3S2 further explained that learners are on different levels of development. They should be guided to progress as much as possible on their

level as learners could be negatively impacted if they taught and assessed beyond their ability. For differentiation to be effective, teachers need to know each learner's ability and where they are in the journey towards meeting the intended goals (Hattie, 2012). Vygotsky argues that different learners have a different state of readiness, which expands the teaching-learning process to accommodate their individual differences (Shabani et al., 2010).

4.7.5 Theme 5: Teachers support requirements from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment.

The findings of this theme suggest that the support the teachers receive from the DBST is limited, and they require more to differentiate assessment. The DBSTs are multidisciplinary teams of experts with varying knowledge, skills and experiences (DoE, 2005; Mfuthwana, 2016). According to the Department of Education, the primary role of the DBST is to evaluate and, through supportive and continuous interaction, enhance the capability of education institutions to identify and address learning barriers and to accommodate and cater for a range of learning needs (DoE, 2001; DoE, 2005). The findings of this theme were drawn from the semi-structured interviews and document data. This theme is discussed further under sub-theme 5.1, and sub-theme 5.2 below.

4.7.5.1   Sub-theme 5.1: Support participants receive from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment

The findings revealed that in both schools, the support the teachers receive from the DBSTs is insufficient. This finding has been reported in diverse studies where the teachers stated that the support they received from the DBSTs was very limited without proper monitoring and guidance (Geldenhuys, 2013; Nel et al., 2016). In some cases, the teachers could not remark on the support they received from the DBSTs as the teachers lamented that they were left alone to work almost in isolation (Ngubane, 2019; Subramoney, 2017). According to the Department of Education (DoE, 2005), the DBSTs are required to support teachers in their classrooms to adapt the curriculum which includes assessment to the diverse learning needs of the learners. Additionally, the DBSTs are required to provide learners with special needs with the support that they require to access the curriculum. The finding of this sub-theme suggests that the limited support the teachers receive from the DBSTs could result from the DBSTs being more

accessible and active in certain communities and schools than others as stated by T1S1, T2S1, and T1S2.

The research sites of this study are quintile four schools located in Eersterust, a coloured township in Tshwane South District. Most of the schools in the township are under-resourced schools, with many of the learners on food schemes. Makhalemele (2011) affirmed that rural schools are often neglected and hardly supported by the DBSTs. Ngubane (2019) echoed that there is an evident shortage of district officials in rural schools at KwaZulu-Natal. The unequal and insufficient distribution of support services may further disadvantage learners in need of support. The Department of Education acknowledges that "creating a pool of resource people to serve local sites of learning" is a challenge faced by the DBSTs (DoE, 2005, p. 15).

The teachers stated that the DBSTs provided them with workshops and training. However, T3S2, the HOD in School 2, remarked that the training and workshops provided by the DBSTs focus more on reading. As the HOD, T3S2 stated that she is obliged to attend the workshops, but for the other teachers, it is usually not convenient for them to attend the workshops as they are mostly during weekends and during holidays. It appears that the teachers do not have the same level of access to the DBSTs as the HODs have. Hence, by adopting the principles of CoP, the HODs can impart the knowledge and skills that they receive from the DBSTs to the FP teachers. Policy states that the DBSTs should provide teachers with "training and ongoing support" to cater to the learning needs of their learners (DoE, 2005, p. 9).

4.7.5.2   Sub-theme 5.2: Support required from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment.

After the participants revealed the type of support they received from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment, I then asked them to comment on the type of support they wanted to obtain from the DBSTs. The responses from the teachers regarding the support they required from the DBSTs in differentiated assessment include hands-on support, regular visits, practical workshops and teacher assistant.

In both schools, the teachers remarked that they expect the DBSTs to provide them with hands-on support. T1S1 in School 1 and T1S2 in School 2 explained that the DBSTs do not seem to comprehend the struggles the teachers face in the classroom. T1S1 further explained that the DBSTs need to be physically present in the classroom with the teacher to understand the teachers' needs and provide them with the needed support because they are currently battling on their own. T3S2 in School 2 echoed the need for the DBSTs to be present and provide the teachers with hands-on support instead of giving them instruction from a distance which, according to her, "*does not work*". Previous studies such as Mfuthwana (2016) affirm that in addition to being trained by the DBST, the participants in the study stated that they needed hands-on support in their classroom. They do not only want to be told what to do but also to be shown how to do it.

The findings of this sub-theme further revealed a cry for more district officials. The teachers (T1S1, T1S2) at both schools revealed that there is an acute shortage of DBST personnel at the schools in Eersterust. T1S2 in School 2 stated that there is only one psychologist and therapist that visits schools in the community. Similar findings such as Smit et al. (2020) and Tebid (2019) revealed that the DBSTs seemed to lack human resources such as psychologists, and language therapists, which are needed in mainstream schools. Consequently, teachers are left alone with large classes to cater for the special needs of learners without the required skill and expertise needed. The Department of Education (DoE, 2005, p. 17) states that "psychologists, therapists, remedial/learning support teachers, special needs specialists" are essential "support service providers". However, these essential support specialists are scarce in districts supporting mainstream schools.

Although the teachers at both schools generally stated that they receive training and workshops from the DBSTs, they further stated the need for practical and useful workshops. T3S2 commented that she could not cater for a physically disabled learner because she is not trained and equipped to do so, even though it is expected of her to accommodate such learners. As a result of her inadequacy, T3S2 believes that it is better to send learners with special needs to special schools. Previous studies such as Mfuthwana (2016) and Subramoney (2017) affirmed that teachers are dissatisfied with the training and workshops they

received from the DBSTs as the teachers found them to be insufficient and unproductive in catering for the learning needs of the learners in their classrooms. The finding suggests that the teachers need workshops applicable and relevant in addressing the struggles they face in the class. Without the due support and collaboration amongst teachers and the DBSTs, mainstream schools will not be a safe haven for learners with learning barriers and special needs.

T1S2 stated that she requires an assistant in her classroom to assist her keep the learners engaged while she is *"busy with children that are weak".* She remarked that the learners do not achieve good results because they are not given the attention that they require. T1S2 believes that with an assistant she will be able to cope better with her large class. Although it is not stated that the DBSTs are saddled with the responsibility of providing FP teachers with teacher assistant, it has become an essential support system due to the contextual factors the teachers face (Marias, 2016; Wahl, 2017).

4.8   CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, the empirical data, analysis, and interpretation were presented in a bid to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1. The themes and sub-themes, which were drawn from the empirical data, presented the findings of the study. The findings revealed how teachers conceptualise differentiated assessment, their assessment practices, and the support they require from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment in their classrooms. The next chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations for this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the data that have been collected through observations, semi-structured interviews and document data have been analysed and interpreted. This chapter presents the summary of the literature and empirical findings, followed by the research conclusions that answer the research questions, as presented in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.3). Thereafter, the recommendations for the study, recommendations for future research and the conclusions are presented.

5.2 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The section below presents the summary of both the literature and empirical findings in this study. The literature findings are derived from Chapter 2, while the empirical findings are drawn from the data presented, analysed and interpreted in Chapter 4.

5.2.1 Summary of literature findings

The reviewed literature in Chapter 2 involved literature findings on the emergence of mainstream schools (see Section 2.2), differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase (see Section 2.3), teachers' perceptions of differentiated assessment (see Section 2.4) and the support teachers require from the District Based Support Teams (DBSTs) in differentiating assessment (see Section 2.5).

5.2.1.1   Findings relating to mainstream schools in South Africa

The research literature consulted in this study defines mainstream schools as inclusive schools that accommodate all learners irrespective of their differences and diverse learning needs in the same learning environment. An inclusive school aims to provide the learners with the quality education needed for them to function effectively as members of society (see Sections 2.2, 2.2.1.2). Therefore, mainstream schools promote human rights, equality, equitability, fairness, and social justice in schools and society (see section 2.5.3).

The emergence of mainstream schools from an international perspective was explored using diverse legal frameworks, legislation, and policies such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Salamanca Statement, and Education for All (EFA) (see Sections, 2.2.1.1, 2.2.1.2, 2.2.1.3). The exploration was done to disclose the origin of inclusive schools and highlight all learners' right to quality education irrespective of their race, background, ability, or learning barriers. In the South African context, the emergence of mainstream schools was discussed using the Constitution of South Africa (RSA, 1996), The South African Schools Act (SASA), The National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS), Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), and Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Strategy (DBE, 2014) (see Sections 2.2.2.1, 2.2.2.2, 2.2.2.3, 2.2.2.4, and 2.2.2.5). Internationally and nationally, the research literature revealed that teachers are the key implementers of inclusive policies. As gatekeepers, the teachers determine if the learners who are the ultimate beneficiaries of inclusive policies will benefit from the policies or not. Therefore, it is important that mainstream schoolteachers are equipped with the right perception about differentiated assessment and are supported to implement it in their classrooms.

Commendable efforts have been made to formulate inclusive laws, policies, and legislation in South Africa to provide quality mainstream schooling for all learners. However, the research literature suggests that teachers do not have confidence in their ability to cater to learners' diverse needs due to the insufficient training and workshops they have received (see Section 2.2.3). Nonetheless, when the teachers receive training, they do not find them relevant and applicable in their classrooms.

In addition, literature findings revealed that overcrowded classrooms have become a prevalent issue in South African mainstream schools, with some classrooms accommodating twice the number of learners suggested by the Department of Basic Education (see Section 2.2.3). Teachers are often overwhelmed and exhausted teaching in overcrowded classrooms as they lament their inability to implement inclusive policy in such classes. Consequently, learners are disadvantaged and unable to benefit from inclusive policies in

mainstream schools. Implementing inclusive policies in mainstream schools is further complicated with the insufficient support from district offices (see Section 2.2.3).

The primary aim of inclusive policies in mainstream schools is to enable all learners to access the curriculum. However, research literature reveals that an inflexible curriculum, instructional methods, and assessment practices that do not take due cognisance of learner differences have limited learners from accessing the general curriculum (see Section 2.2.3). Differentiation has been found to be beneficial in enabling learners to access the curriculum (see Section 2.3). However, research literature has focused on differentiated curriculum and differentiated instruction, while assessment has been scarcely considered, particularly in the Foundation Phase.

5.2.1.2 Findings in relation to differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase

The Foundation Phase is structured to develop learners' basic foundational skills, knowledge and competencies needed for further learning (see Section 2.3). It is also a phase where the learners develop their self-concept and perception of their abilities and competencies (see Section 2.3). The literature shows that failure to differentiate assessment in the Foundation Phase may negatively impact the learners. As reported in the reviewed literature, the primary purpose of differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase is to acknowledge and accommodate the range of physical, psychological, cognitive, and environmental differences among learners in the classroom (see Section 2.3.2). In addition, the purpose of differentiated assessment in the FP is to promote curriculum accessibility for all learners, particularly those that experience barriers to learning as differentiated assessment informs instructional practices and promotes effective teaching and learning (see Section 2.3.2).

The research literature further revealed that differentiated assessment motivates learners to engage with content taught and assessment tasks. This is because differentiated assessment aligns with the learners' state of readiness, profile, and interest (see Section 2.3.3). In addition, differentiated assessment produces a more accurate analysis of the learners' abilities and mastery of the content taught.

The learners are provided with diverse pathways to demonstrate their knowledge and skills (see Section 2.3.3). In a similar vein, information gathered with differentiated assessment produces valid information which can be used to make effective decisions regarding the learner progress and further learning.

Considering the benefits associated with an inclusive assessment policy, South Africa has undergone major changes in its education system that move away from standardised practices towards inclusive assessment policies (see Sections 2.3.1.1, 2.3.1.2, 2.3.1.3, 2.3.1.4). With CAPS as the latest assessment policy, the literature revealed that Foundation Phase teachers are struggling with its implementation. Although teachers view CAPS as a well thought out policy, literature findings suggest that unfavourable conditions such as inadequate resources and lack of support negatively impact its implementation (see Section 2.3.1.4). In addition, the teachers in the reviewed literature lamented that CAPS is structured to favour the fast learners in the Foundation Phase due to the amount of content to be taught each term (see Section 2.3.1.4). Teachers also experienced language as a barrier in implementing CAPS. This is due to the situation whereby the learners' home language differs from the language of teaching and learning (see Section 2.3.1.4).

It emerged from the reviewed literature that there are diverse strategies for differentiating assessment for learners with special needs and barriers to learning as postulated by the Department of Basic Education (see Section 2.3.3). However, the literature reveals that assessment benefits all learners not only those who experience barriers to learning when it is differentiated based on the learners' readiness, interest, and learning profile (see Section 2.3.3). In this way, all learners are motivated and stimulated with assessment tasks. The support strategies teachers employ in the Foundation Phase to cater to learners with learning barriers include one-on-one teaching, after school intervention, remedial classes, and Bloom's taxonomy.

It emerged from the literature reviewed that there are misconceptions teachers hold regarding differentiated assessment (see Section 2.3.4). Some teachers have misinterpreted differentiated assessment to mean designing and

administering different assessment papers for each learner in the classroom, which differentiated assessment scholars have debunked as untrue (see Section 2.3.4). Another misconception highlighted in the literature about differentiated assessment is that it is designed specifically for learners with special needs and learning barriers (see Sections 2.3.4). The literature clarified that differentiated assessment aims to benefit all learners, not only learners with special needs and learning barriers. In addition, differentiated assessment has been misunderstood to mean teachers allocating bonus scores and unearned marks to assist struggling learners attain the pass mark (Section 2.3.4). Literature has clarified this practice as unethical and unprofessional. There is a failure in the literature to provide evidence regarding differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase mainstream schools particularly in the South African context.

5.2.1.3 Teachers' perception regarding differentiated assessment

The research literature consulted suggest that how teachers perceive and understand differentiated assessment may be due to diverse reasons (see Section 2.4.1). A teacher's perception regarding differentiated assessment may be informed by how the teacher was assessed as a learner at school. Assessment policies and guidelines are moving away from traditional approaches of assessment based on uniformity to more inclusive assessment approaches. However, some teachers have found comfort over the years in standardised assessment and are unwilling to modify their assessment practices (see Section 2.4.1). In addition, teachers' perception of differentiated assessment may be informed by the contextualised culture of assessment for external accountability purposes (see Section 2.4.1). It was also revealed in the literature reviewed that some teachers have negative perceptions of assessment as they view it as insignificant in the teaching-learning process (see Section 2.4.1). Furthermore, some teachers have an inadequate understanding of the purpose of assessment and assessment terminologies. Therefore, it is important that teacher training focuses on differentiated assessment as there is a failure in the reviewed literature to produce evidence of training in differentiated assessment (see Section 2.4.1).

It was discovered in the reviewed literature that the perceptions of teachers regarding assessment are positively associated with their classroom assessment practices (see Section 2.4.2). The findings revealed that teachers seldom utilise assessment approaches and strategies in their classrooms with which they are not familiar. In the Foundation Phase, research literature discovered that teachers' knowledge of assessment and their classroom assessment practices are deficient regarding identifying learning gaps and catering for learners' learning needs (see Section 2.4.2). It was further pointed out that teachers often use inappropriate assessment tools to evaluate learners progress in their classrooms. Consequently, the assessment results may not be a true reflection of the learners' ability and mastery of the content taught (see Section 2.4.2).

There are many benefits identified in the literature associated with teachers utilising adequate classroom assessment strategies (see section 2.4.3). Adequate assessment practices can help to boost learners' motivation and interest as assessment constructively builds on learners' prior knowledge, leading to academic achievement (see Section 2.4.3). In addition, effective assessment practices promote further learning, monitor learners' progress, and adjust their instruction, resulting in academic achievement (see Section 2.4.3). Literature findings emphasise the need for teacher training and development programmes to equip teachers with the right knowledge, beliefs and skills regarding assessment as a change in their perception will most likely result in a change in their assessment practices (see Section 2.4.3).

5.2.1.4 Support required by teachers from the DBST in differentiating assessment

Inclusive assessment policies depend on adequate support structures such as the DBST for effective implementation (see Section 2.5). The DBSTs are multidisciplinary teams of experts aiming to bring together available resources to provide mainstream schoolteachers and learners with the needed support to implement inclusive education (see Section 2.5.1). Literature findings highlight the need for partnership and collaboration between mainstream schools and the DBSTs as failure to collaborate, amongst other things, has led to demotivation and frustration among teachers (see Section 2.5.2).

There is a failure in the research literature consulted in the study to report the support teachers require specifically to differentiate assessment in their classrooms. However, to implement inclusive policies, the literature revealed that teachers require practical hands-on support from the DBST (see Section 2.5.3). The teachers further highlighted their need for continuous contextual training from the DBSTs that are applicable in their classrooms (see Section 2.5.3). It also emerged from the reviewed literature that teachers, particularly in rural schools, require more district officials as they are often neglected by the DBSTs (see Section 2.5.3).

5.3 SCIENTIFIC AND EMERGENT FINDINGS RELATING TO THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework used in this study is drawn from the Psychometric Theory, which serves as the lens for examining traditional one-size-fits-all assessment. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and Piaget's (1953) theory of cognitive development was used as the lens to provide insights into the cognition of learners in mainstream schools and the implications of one-size-fits-all assessments (see Sections 2.6.1, 2.6.2). Furthermore, Sen (1992) and Nussbaum's (2000) capability approach served as the lens for understanding equality and fairness of assessment policies in mainstream schools (see Section 2.6.3). Finally, Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice was used as the lens to understand the support and partnership teachers require from the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their sociocultural context (see Section 2.6.4). This theory-based conceptual framework guided this study to investigate the perception of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding the use of differentiated assessment.

5.3.1 Psychometric theory (PT)

Psychometric theory guided this study in investigating traditional approaches to assessment and how teachers in mainstream schools assess learners in their classrooms (see Section 2.6.1). Psychometric theory is based on uniformity, where assessment is designed and administered to all learners uniformly and under the same conditions to ensure standardisation and fairness (see Section 2.6.1). Fairness in assessment is defined under this theory to mean sameness, whereby no learner has any advantage, such as extra time, over their peers. The

research literature revealed that this definition of fairness is due to the assumption that all learners in the same classroom have the same abilities and capabilities (see Section 2.3.2). However, scholars in the literature's findings have argued that fairness in assessment does not always mean uniformity but an assessment that acknowledges and caters to learners' different learning needs in the classroom (see Section 2.6.1).

The literature findings revealed that the majority of learners in mainstream schools are denied access to the curriculum, with teachers still utilising assessment tools and strategies that neither take cognisance of learner differences nor accommodate their diverse learning needs (Section 1.1). Consequently, learners in mainstream schools are excluded from the benefits associated with inclusive assessment policies when assessment is based on the traditional "one-size-fits-all" approach (Section 1.2)

In addition, psychometric theory uses assessment scores to rank learners from the best performing to the worst-performing learner by comparing their scores with their peers (see Section 2.6.1). The research literature revealed that it is an unfair technique to grade and categorise learners based on the performance of their peers rather, learners should be measured against a predetermined criterion. The finding of this study revealed that the HOD of School 1 (T2S1) favoured standardised assessment as it enables her to distinguish the clever learners by comparing their assessment scores with their peers (see Section 4.3, 4.7). This finding affirms that although assessment policies in South Africa have transformed over the years to become more inclusive, teachers still cherish and practice traditional methods due to various reasons (Section 2.4.1). The psychometric approach to assessment was criticised by Vygotsky as it was deficient in furthering effective teaching and learning (see Section 2.6.2).

5.3.2 Piaget Theory of Cognitive Development and Vygotsky's ZPD

Cognitive development theories are widely accepted as beneficial in exploring the mental developmental process and capabilities of children. Literature findings identified the need for teachers to be conversant with Piaget's (1953) theory of cognitive development. It provides insight into how learners acquire, process, and

understand information at different grades (see Section 2.6.2). Teachers understanding of the cognitive developmental stages learners go through may guide their assessment practices as they are better informed on what to expect from the learners. T3S2 stated that the theories of cognitive development guide teachers' assessment practices with their learners (see Section 4.2). The literature revealed that when the difficulty level of an assessment task is too high or too low for the cognitive ability of learners, they will become passive and demotivated to engage with the task (Section 2.6.2). According to Piaget's theory, Foundation Phase learners fall under the concrete operational stage where the learners begin to reason logically about tangible things. Studies in the literature propose that learners in the Foundation Phase can better comprehend and engage with concrete information, that is, what the learners can see, hear, and touch (see Section 2.6.2). T1S2, who affirmed that she was familiar with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, stated that she uses concrete objects to differentiate assessment in her classroom. It also enables the learners to remember the content taught (see Section 4.3). The literature and empirical findings affirm the need for teachers to understand cognitive development theories as they will be able to differentiate assessment and provide learners with the right support they need.

Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD in the context of this study provides insight to teachers on how to locate the ZPD of learners in mainstream schools to differentiate assessment (see Section 2.6.2). The literature proposes that the varying ZPD among learners in mainstream schools is due to the range of learning needs among learners in the classroom. In addition, learners have diverse abilities and skills that may have a bearing on how learners comprehend new content and demonstrate their learning. Hence an understanding of ZPD enables teachers to differentiate classroom assessment, bearing in mind the learners state of readiness, abilities and interest to enable the learners to access the curriculum and achieve their full potential irrespective of their current attainment (See Sections 1.1 and 2.3).

Studies in the literature identified that it is important that teachers are accustomed to a range of assessment tools that can provide different pathways for learners to reveal their potential and understanding of the content taught. In addition,

accommodations and adaptations are needed to differentiate assessment for learners that experience barriers to learning. The EWP6 acknowledges that each learner is different and can learn with the right support (Section 2.2.2.4). For effective differentiation, teachers should provide assessment based on the learner's current point of development with the same essential understandings but at different levels of difficulty (Section 2.4.2).

5.3.3 Capability approach (CA)

The capability approach within this study's context provides insight into understanding equality and fairness of assessment policies in mainstream schools (see Section 2.6.3). It has emerged from the literature that mainstream schools aim to foster human rights, fairness, equitability, and social justice (see Section 2.2). In this regard, it is argued that assessment policies and guidelines should acknowledge and accommodate the diversity in mainstream schools (see Section 2.2). Differentiated assessment is based on the need for assessment to respond to the wide range of differences among learners to provide quality education for all.

Although South Africa has formulated inclusive assessment policies and guidelines to foster inclusion in classroom assessment, studies consulted revealed that implementation has not been successful. Amongst other things, inadequate training and support, lack of resources, large class sizes and increased workload emerged both in the literature and empirical findings as key factors that hamper the smooth implementation of inclusive assessment policies (see Sections 2.2.3, 3.2). In addition, perused studies revealed that some mainstream schoolteachers' perceptions and practice of assessment remains fixated on the traditional methods of assessment which does not take cognisance of learner differences. Of note from the empirical findings of this study is that the learners who ought to be the primary beneficiaries of assessment policies are excluded from accessing the curriculum due to the number of learners in a class (see Section 3.2). Consequently, unfairness and inequality in assessment continue to prevail in mainstream schools.

5.3.4 Community of practice (CoP)

Community of Practice was used as the lens to understand the support and partnership teachers require from the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their

classrooms (see Sections 2.6.4). This study has discussed the functions and roles of the DBSTs in mainstream schools to highlight their importance in implementing inclusive policies (Section 2.5). Despite the fundamental roles assigned to the DBSTs, it has emerged in the literature and the empirical findings of this study that there is still a gap between policy and implementation as the DBSTs are not providing adequate support to teachers and learners experiencing barriers to learning (see Sections 2.5.3, 4.3, 4.7).

A community of practice is developed through collaboration and synergy. The teachers in this study lamented that the support they received from the DBSTs is very limited as they have been left alone to cater to the learners' needs in their classroom (see Sections 2.5.3, 4.3, 4.7). It is also evident from the perused literature and empirical findings that there is an unsatisfactory level of collaboration and partnership among mainstream schoolteachers and the DBSTs (see Sections 2.5.3, 4.3, 4.7). It is evident that the HODs have more opportunities to access the DBSTs, however, the HODs have not effectively bridged the gap between the teachers and DBSTs (see Section 5.1).

A community of practice is further developed through sharing information and discussing development about the practice. In this regard, there is a cry from teachers in the examined literature and empirical study for useful and applicable training from the DBSTs on how to implement inclusive assessment policies in their classrooms (see Sections 2.5.3, 4.3, 4.7). The teachers in literature and empirical study further remarked that the information shared by the DBSTs have proven to be irrelevant and ineffective in catering for the needs of the learners in the classroom (see Sections 2.5.3, 4.3, 4.7). In addition, the teachers in this study identified the need for the DBSTs to be present at the schools to assist the teachers with their expertise and skills to support learners with barriers to learning (see Sections 2.5.3, 4.3, 4.7). The teachers' need for frequent visitations and hands-on support is a reoccurring finding in the research literature examined and the empirical findings of this study (see Sections 2.5.3, 4.3, 4.7). The teachers perceive the DBST's to be distant.

5.4 SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This section summarises the empirical findings presented in the methodology section in Chapter 5. The findings reveal the perceptions of Foundation Phase Mainstream Schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment and the support they require and get from the DBSTs in differentiating assessment in their classroom. The headings below are derived from the summative overview of the themes in this study.

5.4.1 Conceptualisation of differentiated assessment

The empirical findings revealed that the teachers fairly conceptualise differentiated assessment as the ranking of questions from simple to complex using Bloom's taxonomy (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The teachers' description of differentiated assessment was based on how written assessment tasks are constructed and the difficulty level of assessment questions (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The literature provides a broader description of the differentiated assessment, which is beyond ranking questions on an assessment task using Bloom's taxonomy. In literature, differentiated assessment is not limited to written assessment tasks as classroom assessment can be differentiated through role playing, individual projects, visual, oral and written presentations, and group activities (see Section 1.6.3).

It emerged from the empirical findings that how teachers conceptualise differentiated assessment may impact how they perceive their learners and their assessment practices (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). In this study, the teachers understanding of differentiated assessment was based on the appropriate distribution of lower, middle and higher-order questions in an assessment task. Consequently, the teachers mainly sought to cater for the cognitive difference that exist among learners with little evidence of accommodating their physical differences, interest and state of readiness (see Sections 4.3, 4.7).

The findings also revealed that although all the teachers support differentiating classroom assessment to accommodate the range of differences among learners, the teachers in School 1 view standardised assessment as beneficial to both the learners and teachers (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). This confirms the research literature's findings that teachers still treasure the traditional approach to

assessment even when the learners in their classrooms are different. Having summarised the conceptualisation of differentiated assessment by the teachers, it is now necessary to understand the teachers' assessment practices.

5.4.2 Assessment practices in the Foundation Phase

The findings from both schools revealed that the teachers' assessment practices revolved around informal assessment, formal assessment, extra support, and extended opportunity (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The teachers generally employed informal assessment to receive immediate feedback from the learners regarding the effectiveness of the instruction employed and the learners' understanding of the content taught, which is consistent with literature findings. Another assessment practice used in the research site was the use of written assessment tasks with questions ranked from easy to difficult for the learners to answer (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). This finding affirms that teachers understanding of differentiated assessment has a bearing on their assessment practices. The findings further revealed that the teachers provided support to their learners during written formal assessment (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). Such support included providing clear instructions to the learners on what they were expected to do for each question and providing a step-by-step guide with examples similar to the ones in their assessment task for them to follow of which literature frowned at (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The teachers also provided the learners with cues and prompts to assist them in correcting their mistakes. It was also found that the teachers provided the learners with a second chance to rewrite an assessment in which they performed poorly (see Sections 4.3, 4.7).

Although the teachers in this study assessed their learners informally and formally and gathered evidence of learning and mastery of the content taught, it emerged from the empirical findings that the assessment language frustrated teachers (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). This is because the learners' home language differs from the LoLT used in the classroom, which is a common finding in the research literature examined. Learners struggle to comprehend content taught and to demonstrate what they know when they are not proficient in the language of teaching and learning. Assessment should therefore seek to accommodate linguistically different learners to enable them to access the curriculum.

The findings further revealed that to differentiate assessment in the Foundation Phase, teachers employed strategies such as being creative during assessment, permitting learners to use tools such as counters and techniques such as drawing that work best for them (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The teachers also employed an after-school intervention programme to provide learners that experience barriers to learning with extra assessment activities (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The findings of this theme further revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the workload on the teachers and learners. It also impacted on the teachers' assessment practices as the peer buddy system could no longer be utilised (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). However, the teachers applauded the rotation system because the number of learners were reduced due to the COVID-19 regulations.

5.4.3 Teachers views about assessment policies and cognitive development theories

CAPS has brought about notable changes in the teaching methods and assessments, which necessitated that teachers are clear about the assessment policies and guidelines to implement them in their classrooms. The findings revealed that most teachers viewed the assessment policies and guidelines as clear and instructive which is (see Sections 4.3, 4.7), consistent with literature findings. Although most of the teachers affirmed that CAPS is a viable policy, their large class size, limited available resources and administrative work are the key challenges they face in implementing assessment policies consistent with reviewed literature (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). In this regard, the unfair circumstances the teachers face at the schools broaden the gap between policy and practice which ultimately leads to learners being excluded from accessing the curriculum in mainstream schools (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). Teachers, therefore, need to be adequately supported to mitigate the gaps that exist between policy and practice.

The empirical findings revealed that most teachers were not familiar with cognitive theories (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The literature has shown the need for teachers' assessment practices to be guided by the theories of cognitive development. Therefore, teachers must be continuously trained with cognitive development theories to provide them with the understanding needed to better differentiate assessment for learners in their classrooms in engaging and stimulating ways.

5.4.4 Support required by the DBST in differentiating assessment

The need for teachers in the mainstream schools to be supported by the DBSTs is documented in policy statements and research findings as the inclusion of diverse learners in the same learning environment is a challenging yet rewarding decision by the South African government to show their commitment to human rights and social justice (see Sections 2.5, 4.3, 4.7). The literature and the empirical findings have revealed that an inclusive community cannot stand without the needful support structures (see Sections 2.5, 4.3, 4.7).

The teachers remarked that the DBSTs are too short-staffed to cater to the community's schools, and the available staff are overburdened by the workload (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). Consequently, little attention is paid to schools and learners who need support, particularly in townships and rural areas, as revealed by the literature and empirical findings (see Sections 2.5.3, 4.3, 4.7). Effective training and workshops, hands-on guidance and monitoring emerged as the support the teachers require from the DBSTs to differentiate assessment in their classrooms. This finding is not unusual as it has been reported in previous studies that teachers require these types of support from the DBSTs to implement inclusive policies as teachers are often left alone to cater for the need of learners (see Sections 2.5, 4.3, 4.7).

5.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

The final conclusion of this study is drawn by answering the three sub-questions followed by the main research questions posed in Section 1.3

5.5.1 Research Sub-question 1: How do teachers in mainstream classrooms conceptualise differentiated assessment?

Foundation Phase teachers in mainstream schools conceptualise differentiated assessment in diverse ways, demonstrating a fair understanding of the term (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). Most of the teachers understand differentiated assessment basically as accommodating the cognitive ability of learners, and most are not familiar with the theories of cognitive development (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). Of note is that some of the teachers in this study are oblivious to ways classroom assessment can be differentiated besides using Bloom's taxonomy, which is

designed to differentiate the cognitive ability of learners (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). However, it was thought-provoking to discover that the HOD in School 2 was aware of other ways assessment could be differentiated which involved modifications of the way the learner demonstrated mastery of the content taught. Yet, the HOD did not utilize the opportunity as it involved obtaining permission from the Department of Basic Education which she believes is time consuming. This finding could suggest that some teachers are not taking advantage of strategies provided by the DBE due to the processes involved. Therefore, teachers perception of the DBE and process involved to obtain support for their learners with learning barriers and special needs could have a negative bearing on how they apply for such support.

Although all the teachers support the need for differentiated assessment due to the differences among learners, some of the teachers in the explored context still cherish the traditional assessment approach based on uniformity. This approach to assessment compares learners with their peers to distinguish the clever learners (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The teachers' fair understanding of differentiated assessment could be attributed to their inadequate training and support from the DBSTs on differentiated assessment. The teachers have been left alone to comprehend differentiated assessment and implement it in their classrooms (see sections 4.3, 4.7).

In addition, the teachers' conceptualisation of differentiated assessment influence how they view the learners in their classroom and the diversity that the learners present (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). A limited understanding of differentiated assessment leads to a similarly incomplete understanding of learner differences and learning needs to be accommodated during the assessment. Although most of the teachers remarked that language is a major barrier that the learners face in demonstrating mastery of the content taught, they did not seem to have a strategy to accommodate the linguistic diversity of the learners (see Sections 4.3. 4.7). In this regard, how teachers conceptualise differentiated assessment has implications for their learners' access to and progress within the curriculum (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The neglect of the DBSTs to provide Foundation Phase teachers in mainstream schools with relevant training, workshops and resources

have been attributed to the fair understanding of differentiated assessment revealed in this study (see Sections 4.3, 4.7).

5.5.2 How do teachers in mainstream schools assess learners in their classrooms?

The answer to this question was retrieved from the data analysis and interpretation presented in Chapter 4, where the Foundation Phase teachers were interviewed and observed. The teachers' assessment practices are closely knit to how they conceptualise differentiated assessment (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The written assessment tasks used during formal assessment were designed using Bloom's taxonomy to include lower, middle, and higher-order questions to accommodate the cognitive ability of the learners (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The support provided by the teachers during formal assessment whereby the teachers showed the learners how to get to each answer suggests that the teachers are spoon-feeding the learners to attain the pass mark. This type of support makes learning demotivating for the learners as they become dependent on the teachers to supply them with answers rather than being stimulated to engage with the assessment tasks. It can also give learners an undue advantage over their peers (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). It was evident that the teachers are struggling to differentiate assessment to cater for learners that experience language barriers and barriers to learning during formal assessment (see Sections 4.3, 4.7).

The teachers in this study revealed that limited resources, large class size, the administrative workload, and the amount of content to be covered each term hinder them from implementing assessment policies and guidelines (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). These limitations have further widened the gap between policy and implementation of assessment policies in mainstream schools. Of note is that the teachers suggested that many learners are excluded from the provisions of assessment policies because they cannot accommodate and cater to their needs as stipulated by CAPS and other assessment guidelines (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). If these limitations are not addressed, many more learners will be excluded from the benefit of assessment policies to promote curriculum assessment for all learners (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The teachers also expressed their frustration assessing learning with diverse learning needs due to the language barrier as the learners' home language often differs from the LoLT used at the schools. Hence, the

teachers feel handicapped teaching and assessing learners in a language in which the learners are not proficient (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). It is evident that the teachers desperately need support to accommodate the range of differences among learners in their classrooms.

5.5.3 What support do teachers in mainstream schools require from the DBST regarding differentiated assessment in their classes?

The support teachers in mainstream schools require from the DBST to differentiate assessment is consistent throughout the literature (see Sections 1.7.4, 2.5.3). This study revealed that the teachers are struggling in their classrooms to implement assessment policies as the DBST has not sufficiently supported them (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The teachers seek closer collaboration with the DBSTs to allow the DBSTs to understand their needs and struggles clearly. The findings suggested that the DBSTs cannot provide effective support because they do not understand what the teachers expect (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). Additionally, the DBSTs are not fully equipped with the number of professionals required. The teachers need to be understood and shown that they have not been left alone to cater to the learners' diverse learning needs in their classrooms (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). In this regard, the teachers stated that they need the DBSTs to emerge themselves in their real-life context to understand what the teachers are facing and tailor their support to meet their needs (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). The findings further revealed that the demand for the DBSTs resources is greater than the supply due to the shortage of district officials. Therefore, the South African government should seek ways to increase the number of district officials allocated to schools, particularly township schools.

Of note is that the HODs seem to have closer contact with the DBSTs than the teachers as they are expected to attend the trainings which the teachers might not be opportune to attend. It is therefore important that the HODs guide the teachers and impact the knowledge and skills that they have acquired to the teachers. For instance, the HOD in School 1 stated that she did not have challenges implementing CAPS in her classroom and she did not consider language as a major barrier. This remark contrast with the reality of the Grade 1 teacher in the school as she stated that she was frustrated as a result of the language barrier. It is also worth noting that the HODs in both schools have more years of experience teaching than the other teacher participants (see table 4.2). I believe that their

years of experience has contributed to their ability to manage the difficulties that they face during assessment. The HOD in School 1 affirmed that with her years of experience "*anything can come your way … you are prepared*". The HODs should therefore be encouraged to work closely with the Foundation Phase teachers.

5.5.4 Main research question: What are the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment?

The perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment are presented broadly in this study. The findings presented in Chapter 4 suggest that the majority of the teachers provided a limited understanding of differentiated assessment, which rested on the use of Bloom's taxonomy to differentiate the cognitive abilities of the learners (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). Notwithstanding that the teachers have been teaching the Foundation Phase for several years, the majority of the teachers still possessed a limited understanding of differentiated assessment. This suggests that teachers' years of experience may not be sufficient to equip them with sufficient knowledge and understanding of differentiated assessment if it is not accompanied by the needed training and support (see Sections 4.3, 4.7).

Mainstream schoolteachers need to be trained on the meaning of differentiated assessment, which is broader than just ranking questions from a lower to a higher order (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). In addition, mainstream teachers must be trained on the cognitive developmental theories to provide the teachers with a general overview of how children reason and engage with content at different grades. It has consistently been proven that teachers' perceptions often inform their practice. Therefore, teachers must be trained and supported to implement differentiated assessment in their classrooms in ways that stimulate, engage and challenge the learners. Locating learners' state of readiness (ZPD) and identifying their needs through special accommodations and adaptation during assessment should be included in the training.

Teachers should also be encouraged to utilize the accommodations and adaptations provided by the DBE to differentiate assessment for learners with learning barriers and special needs. Teachers can be discouraged from seeking

support from the DBE when they perceive the process to be cumbersome and time consuming. Training is also required to differentiate classroom assessment to foster curriculum accessibility for all learners and practical strategies to accommodate learners who experience barriers to learning.

The finding revealed that mainstream schoolteachers need help implementing assessment policies in their classrooms (see Sections 4.3, 4.7). Failure to cater to all learners' learning needs through differentiated assessment in mainstream schools implies that the key principles of inclusive education, such as fairness and equitability, are compromised. Teachers that felt incompetent to support learners with learning barriers and special needs suggested that the learners be sent to special schools. As key implementers of inclusive policies, teachers' perceptions of differentiated assessment need to be broadened to cater for all learners.

5.6   RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aimed to investigate the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment. Based on the findings of this study and the conceptual framework used, I present my recommendations in this section.

5.6.1 Training.

The findings of this study suggest that some teachers still cherish the standardised approach to assessment in mainstream schools, which does not accommodate or cater for learners' differences and learning needs. Differentiated assessment seeks to make assessment inclusive while acknowledging that learners have different learning needs and demonstrate what they know differently with the right support. Therefore, I recommend that mainstream schoolteachers be trained on the meaning and purpose of differentiated assessment in mainstream schools and be shown practical ways to differentiate assessment in their classrooms to cater to learners' diverse needs.

Furthermore, I recommend that Foundation Phase teachers be trained on learners' cognitive-developmental processes, as most of the teachers in this study are not familiar with the cognitive processes of learners. The teachers should be

aware of how learners in their classrooms generally reason and engage with content. This understanding will enable the teachers to have a general knowledge of what the learners can do. It will also allow teachers to align their teaching methods and instructions with the cognitive ability of their learners. Drawing from the knowledge of Piaget's theory of cognitive development will enable Foundation Phase teachers to utilise the senses of learners, principally the auditory and visual senses, during the assessment. This can be achieved by utilising concrete materials such as pictures, counters, charts, flashcards and CD players. In this regard, mainstream schools should be adequate resourced with learning materials.

In addition, teachers must be trained to locate the ZPD of learners in their classrooms. Teachers can locate the ZPD of their learners through pre-assessment to determine the learner's prior knowledge and state of readiness. This will enable the teachers to incorporate and build on the learner's prior knowledge during the assessment. It is also important that teachers know their learner's interest, abilities and skills to design classroom assessments that are engaging and stimulating.

I also recommend that teachers be trained to understand the role of language in learners' cognitive development. This is essential because many learners in South Africa are taught in a language that divers from their home language. The linguistic differences that exist in mainstream schools should be accommodated during the assessment to enable learners to better engage with content and demonstrate what they know. In a multilingual South African context, code-switching and translanguaging could be used as strategies to differentiate curriculum and assessments, thus enhancing successes for learners in the Foundation Phase classes.

5.6.2 Teacher assistant

Although the teachers in this study view CAPS as clear and important, the findings suggest that implementation has not been successful due to the contextual factors that the teachers experience. The implication of not implementing inclusive assessment policies is that learners are excluded from accessing and progressing within the curriculum. The primary inhibitor of the

successful implementation of assessment policies is the large class size in mainstream schools. I, therefore, recommend that teacher assistants be provided in the Foundation Phase to enable the classroom teachers to assist learners in need of extra support and attention. Furthermore, the provision of teacher assistants will provide the teachers with more time to cover the required topics in the curriculum and differentiate assessment.

5.6.3 Support.

The perception of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment may be improved through collaboration and support from the DBSTs as outlined in policy documents. The findings of this study suggested very limited support and collaboration between the teachers and the DBSTs. The findings further suggested that the limited support provided by the DBSTs were not useful and applicable in the classrooms. In this regard, I recommend that the training and workshops provided by the DBSTs include a forum where the teachers can voice the struggles that they face implementing assessment policies and the support they require from the DBSTs. This arrangement will ensure that the training provided is tailored to meet the needs of the teachers and learners, particularly the learners who experience barriers to learning. In addition, I recommend that the training and workshops provided by the DBSTs be accompanied by constant structured hands-on follow-up support. The findings of this study suggest that the teachers require the DBST to be present with them in their classrooms to enable the DBSTs to provide practical contextual support that is applicable in their classrooms. The findings also suggested that the HODs should support the teachers by bridging the gap between the DBSTs and the teachers.

I also recommended that teachers who are the key implementers of assessment policies be included in the formulation of assessment policies. The views of classroom teachers are essential as they have first-hand experience and interaction with learners, particularly those learners that experience barriers to learning. They are therefore able to give relevant and practical views that relate to their classroom context and experiences. For instance, the reviewed literature and the empirical findings of this study revealed that the teachers perceive CAPS to be more suitable for learners that can learn at a fast pace leaving out the learners

that need more time and support. Foundation Phase teachers could therefore provide valuable inputs on how CAPS can be more flexible to accommodate all learners in a fair manner.

Furthermore, the process involved for teachers to obtain permission to differentiate assessment for their learners with learning barriers and special needs could be reviewed to be less cumbersome and time consuming. Teachers should be encouraged to seek and utilize all available channels to support their learners during assessment.

5.7   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Considering the findings in this study, this section discusses the recommendations for future research in investigating the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment. The following recommendations are made for future research:

1. This study focused on the Foundation Phase teachers, and the schools participating in this study were limited to a coloured township. I therefore recommend that this study is replicated in more urban areas with intermediate phase teachers.

2. I recommend further research that will focus on how teachers differentiate classroom assessment to accommodate learners with special needs and barriers to learning with a larger sample size.

3. This study examined the support mainstream schoolteachers require from the DBST to differentiate assessment. For further research, I recommend that the perception of the DBST be examined regarding its role in implementing differentiated assessment in mainstream schools.

4. Additionally, I recommend that studies be conducted to further investigate how linguistically diverse learners are accommodate during assessment in English medium schools.

5.8 LIMITATIONS

The following limitations were identified in this study.

1. The limitations of this study include the small sample size utilized as the findings cannot be generalized. The sample included two mainstream schools and five Foundation Phase teachers.

2. The delimitation for this study was limited to Grade 1-3 teachers and the selected schools were limited to a township. Thus, the contextual realities that teachers face differentiating assessment in urban areas may not be presented in this study.

3. This study could be seen as a pioneering research conducted on the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment. Consequently, the findings from the reviewed literature could be limiting as there is a dearth of studies conducted on the topic.

5.9 CONCLUSION.

South Africa has undergone remarkable transformations through the formulations of policies and frameworks to make the educational system inclusive with the emergence of mainstream schools. A remarkable transformation in mainstream schools is the adoption of inclusive assessment policies that acknowledge and accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. Hence, this study investigated the perceptions of Foundation Phase teachers regarding differentiated assessment and the support they require to differentiate assessment in their classrooms. The findings revealed that the teachers had a limited understanding of differentiated assessment. It was also revealed that the teachers are struggling to differentiate their assessment practices, thus, affecting learner progress with typical peers. In addition to the limited understanding that the teachers possess about differentiated assessment, they are also faced with challenges such as large class size and limited support from the DBSTs. If these challenges continue to persist in mainstream schools, learners with learning barriers and special needs will be

denied their rights to quality education. The main purpose of differentiated assessment is not the accumulation of marks, rather, to promote curriculum access through effective teaching and learning.

Exams and grades are temporary,

but education is permanent.

-Professor Chika Sehoole-

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13 August 2020

The Head of Department,

Gauteng Department of Education,

PO BOX 7710,

Johannesburg,

2001.

Dear Sir,

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT TWO SCHOOLS IN GAUTENG

Your permission is hereby requested to conduct a research study titled, **Perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment** in two schools in Gauteng. The reason for conducting the study is based on the realisation that despite that South Africa has made provisions through CAPS and other policy documents, such as the Education White Paper 6 and National Protocol for Assessment for Grade R-12, there is still a gap between policy and execution. In practice, the majority of learners in mainstream schools are still denied access to the curriculum with the predominance of the traditional one-size-fits-all assessment strategies. Thus, for learners in mainstream schools to be able to access the curriculum and benefit

from the provisions made by the Department of Basic Education, teachers have to be equipped with the right perceptions regarding differentiated assessment.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of teachers in mainstream schools regarding differentiated assessment in order to recommend the strategies to the Department of Basic Education. The strategies may serve to amend/contribute to the differentiated assessment policy and enhance curriculum access for learners in mainstream schools/classrooms. Three teachers from two schools will be interviewed using semi-structured questions. Interviews with teachers will take place at the identified schools and will last for approximately 45 minutes each. Due to the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), social distancing will be maintained and mask will be worn during the interviews, observations and throughout my stay at the school. All safety measures identified by the South African government and the school to prevent the spread of the virus will strictly be adhered to.

I will visit the schools three times after obtaining permission from the school principal in order;

- To interview identified teachers regarding differentiated assessment. The interviews will be tape recorded.
- To observe how the identified teachers assess learners in their classrooms.
- To clarify issues that emerged during the interviews with the identified teachers.

Data from the teachers will only be collected after school in order to avoid interfering with the daily running of the schools program. Teachers will be expected to sign consent forms if they agree/not agree to grant permission for the researcher to interview them. The study will comply with the following ethical principles:

- Participation will be voluntary and the participants may withdraw at any time.
- Participants will be asked for their informed consent.
- The participants will not be harmed or put at risk in any way.
- The confidentiality and anonymity of participants and the name of participating schools will be protected.
- The participants will not be subjected to any acts of deception or betrayal.

I also would like to request your permission to use the data collected from different schools for academic purposes at the University of Pretoria. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will also be binding on future research studies. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes.

To this end, please sign the attached form that you give permission, are aware and support the use of the identified research sites for the purpose of data collection. Should you have any queries in this regard, please contact me or my supervisor at:

Researcher: Etinosa Izevbigie   Supervisor: Dr. N.S Thuketana

0813684811   Department of Early Childhood
Education

etizevbigie@gmail.com   susan.thuketana@up.ac.za

PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH

I, _____, hereby grant/do not grant permission to Etinosa Izevbigie for two schools to be used as research sites to collect data for the purpose of her Masters' research study on ***Perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment.***

The Head of the Department,

Gauteng Province

Signature: _____

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION OF RESEARCH FROM SCHOOL

13 August 2020

The Principal

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Etinosa Izevbigie. I am a Masters student in the department of Early Childhood Education (ECE) at the University of Pretoria. In order to complete my degree, I am required to interview Foundation Phase teachers on a study titled: **Perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment**. I therefore, hereby ask for permission to interview three teachers at the school under your jurisdiction.

Foundation phase teachers participating in this study will benefit from the opportunity to learn more about their own beliefs and practices which in itself is a professional development strategy. With greater comprehension of the strategy, teachers can work towards improving their assessment strategies and enhance learners' academic success. The study will contribute to both my Master's Dissertation and academic article on differentiated assessment.

Data will be collected by means of interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the teachers. The interview with each teacher will last for approximately 45 minutes. The name of the school and participating teachers will not be revealed at all. I also request that I may be allowed to sit in teacher's classes for 45 minutes to observe the strategies that they use to assess

learners during the teaching and learning process while taking field notes. Due to the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), social distancing will be maintained and mask will be worn during the interviews, observations and throughout my stay at the school. All safety measures identified by the South African government and the school to prevent the spread of the virus will strictly be adhered to.

I want to assure you that all data and information collected will be managed confidentially. The name of your school will not be disclosed, and participating teachers will remain anonymous. I will use numbers, abbreviations and pseudonyms for data collection and collation.

I also would like to request your permission to use the data for academic purposes at the University of Pretoria. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will also be binding on future research studies. Furthermore, research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes.

To this end, please sign the attached form that you give permission, are aware that teachers will be interviewed to collect data for the mentioned research project.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Etinosa Izevbigie   Supervisor: Dr NS Thuketana

0813684811   Department of Early Childhood
Education

etizevbigie@gmail.com   susan.thuketana@up.ac.za

PERMISSION SLIP FOR RESEARCH

I, ……………………………………………………….., hereby give permission to Etinosa Izevbigie to interview Foundation Phase teachers and observe their lessons for a period of 45 minutes, all for the purpose of her masters' research study titled *Perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment.*

Signature: …………………………………………………….

(School Principal)

Date: ……………………………………

APPENDIX C: CONSENT LETTER FROM FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHER

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

13 August 2020

Dear Foundation Phase teacher,

My name is Etinosa Izevbigie. I am a Master's student at the University of Pretoria. The research I wish to conduct for my Master's dissertation is titled: **Perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment**. Your perceptions regarding differentiated assessment will be investigated through observations in class and semi structured interviews.

With your permission, I will conduct an interview for approximately 45 minutes, where you will have an opportunity to describe your perceptions and experiences regarding differentiated assessment as there are no right or wrong answers. The interview will take place at your school between 3pm-4pm during a week day to avoid interference with the school's activities. The interview will also be recorded with your permission and it will be transcribed by me. I also request that I may be allowed to sit in your class for a period of 45 minutes to observe the manner in which you assess learners in your classroom; this after the interviews have been conducted. Due to the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), social distancing will be maintained and mask will be worn during the interviews, observations and throughout my stay at the school. All safety measures identified by the South African government and the school to prevent the spread of the virus will strictly be adhered to.

The principal was informed of this study and has given his/her permission for the study to be conducted at the school. The informed consent letter must be signed

by you before taking part in the research study to show that you understand the conditions stipulated and give permission for the researcher to interview you.

Please be assured that your identity and that of your school will remain anonymous during the course of the study. Pseudonyms or codes will be used when referring to you and your school. You may also withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences.

There are no predictable risks to yourself or learners who will be participating in the study. The professional benefits that the participating teachers will gain from participating in the study includes the opportunity to learn more about their own beliefs and practices through the reflective process and sharing, which in itself is a personal professional development strategy. With greater comprehension surrounding the concept as a vital tool that can enable effective teaching and learning in class, teachers can work towards improving their assessment strategies and enhance learners' academic success. The study will contribute to both my Master's Dissertation and academic article on differentiated assessment.

I also would like to request your permission to use your data for academic purposes at the University of Pretoria. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will also be binding on future research studies. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes.

Please indicate whether you are willing/not willing to participate by filling in the permission slip. I shall collect these slips from your school. You are also welcomed to contact me should you any queries.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Etinosa Izevbigie   Supervisor: Dr NS Thuketana

                                        Department of Early Childhood Education

                                        susan.thuketana@up.ac.za

PERMISSION SLIP FOR RESEARCH

I _____, am willing / not willing to participate in this research study by taking part in an interview, and allowing the researcher to observe my lessons for the period of 45 minutes. In participating, I understand the nature of the study and in doing so, I hereby give permission and ownership to not only record, but also utilise the given information under the term that my identity remains anonymous, and that participation is voluntary.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions

The purpose of the following interview questions is to investigate the perceptions of Foundation Phase mainstream schoolteachers regarding differentiated assessment: how they conceptualise differentiated assessment; how they assess learners in their classroom, and the support they require/get from the DBST in differentiating assessment.

How do teachers in mainstream classrooms conceptualise differentiated assessment?

1a. Have you heard about the term differentiated assessment?

1b. How would you describe differentiated assessment?

2. In your opinion, what is the purpose of differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase?

3a. As a teacher, do you find CAPS and the assessment guidelines on differentiated assessment to be clear?

3b. What challenges do you face implementing the guidelines?

How do teachers in mainstream schools assess learners in their classrooms?

4. How do you assess learners in your classroom?

5. What are your views about standardised assessment and the implication (if any) on learners with diverse learning needs?

6. What are your experiences in assessing learners with diverse learning needs in your classroom?

7. What strategies do you use to assess learners with diverse learning needs in your classroom? Please give examples.

8a. Are you familiar with theories of cognitive development?

8b. How do cognitive development theory of the child impact on your assessment strategy?

What support do teachers in mainstream schools require from the DBST regarding differentiated assessment in their classrooms?

9. What type of support do you receive from the DBST regarding differentiating assessment in your classroom?

10. What type of support do you expect to receive from the DBST in differentiating assessment in your classroom?

Observation Teacher observation schedule

1. What method of assessment is evident in the classroom?

_____

_____

Remark:_____

2. Does the teacher use a range of assessment tools to assess learners during the lesson?

_____

_____

Remark:_____

3. What support does the teacher provide to learners who require additional assistance?

_____

_____

Remark:_____

4. Is the teacher flexible with time allocated for assessment?

_____

_____

Remark:_____

5. Does the teacher provide clear instructions on task to learners?

_____

_____

Remark:_____

6. What are the challenges that the teacher faces while assessing learners with diverse needs?

_____

_____

Remark:_____

7. What are the accommodations made for learners struggling with their work?

_____

_____

Remark:_____

Participant 1 School 1 interview transcription.

1a. Have you heard about the word differentiated assessment?

Teacher: (nods).

1b. How would you describe differentiated assessment?

Teacher: *it is when we accommodate the different learners cause children are divided into categories, the gifted learners and the average learner and those who have learning barriers so err, in other to accommodate them in assessment we have to differentiated assessment according to Bloom's taxonomy because that is the guideline.*

2. In your opinion what do you think is the purpose of differentiated assessment in the Foundation Phase?

Teacher: *so, each learner develops in his own pace and in his own space as well.*

3a. As a teacher, do you find CAPS and the assessment guidelines on differentiated assessment to be clear?

Teacher: *CAPS is great because you assess what you have just done because the children have not forgotten it yet but one the long line there is no time to reinforce what you've taught especially in the Foundation Phase …children need repetition. They do have a rubric and that helps a lot because the child gets a mark for everything even if it is just efforts and then you also get the question and answer kind of assessment where the child just give answers. Sometimes just yes or no.*

3b. What challenges do you face implementing the guidelines?

Teacher: *Because of the large classes and a lot of children that we have in the grade we don't reach all of them because they have different abilities, the class is too big and by the time you get to assessment you haven't reached everybody, but you have to assess them in any case. Large classes is a major issue especially in grade 1. I think a maximum of 35 would be okay. I have 47. I had 56 last year so it is a little bit better this year.*

4. How do you assess learners in your classroom?

Teacher: *What I do with phonics, I give them words every day, if I give them the words on a Monday then on Tuesday, we revise the word and by Friday we write the test. When it comes to formal assessment the recorded assessment that way, we differentiate according to Bloom's taxonomy. We have one question paper; the difference is that there are some questions that there are able to answer, in other words about 50% of the question is answerable at all levels because 50% is like the pass mark and with maths it is 40% questions should be answerable and the other questions are higher order, that is, to accommodate the gifted learners.*

5. What are your views about standardised assessment and the implication (if any) on learners with diverse learning needs?

Teacher: *I actually don't agree with that. I prefer that it doesn't take place although it has its advantages because at the end of the school year when they get to matric, they all answer the same questions, they won't give them different papers. So, it prepares them for the exam. The implication is that most learners fall out …they drop out.*

Question 6. What are your experiences in assessing learners with diverse learning needs in your classroom?

Teacher: *It is frustrating, really frustrating and what is more frustrating is the language barrier. A lot of language problems because the children are being taught in a second language. It is not their mother language…and I think that many of this parents say I want my child in that school but they forget there is a language the school uses and the child does not speak that language every day and he must be able to remember and comprehend and answer questions and write test or assessment on that… battling with the language barrier and I think in the past many children attend schools in their vicinity that spoke that language.*

7. What strategies do you use to assess learners with diverse learning needs in your classroom? Please give examples.

Teacher: *Two days in a week we do intervention. Intervention is all the learners who do not achieve. For example, a math problem. He cannot do minus or plus. We take two days in a week, Tuesday and Thursday to do extra maths lessons with them and we pack activities out with practical work and just going back to see*

what the problem was... those are the catch-up programs. We try the peer buddy system but now with COVID-19 it is a challenge we cannot peer anymore. Because some of the children you could see a replica of yourself in the children.

8a. Are you familiar with cognitive development theory?

Teacher: *Uhm, [pause] not to a great extent. Because in my case I didn't study Foundation Phase I did something else. I did senior primary because I didn't want to battle with little children. Like to open that can that is closed, and I got here, and they needed a Grade 1 teacher and they said go there. So, I try my best to just learn a few things, but it is good to do cognitive development.*

9. What type of support do you receive from the DBST regarding differentiating assessment in your classroom?

Teacher: *Normally the school, they [pause]. I think it is very limited.*

10. What type of support do you expect to receive from the DBST in differentiating assessment in your classroom?

Teacher: *I expect them to be really hands on to come and take a look at the children's work it seems as though when you explain to them what is happening they seem to be distant they don't understand what you are trying to say but if they were there physically at least one class ..we need support, maybe a psychologist ..they are really not hands on we are battling on our own. In the school in Eersterust for example we only have one person assigned to them I mean there are six schools in Eersterust, how do you assign one person to 6 schools?*