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# Primary school learners with characteristics of dyslexia: auto-ethnographic approach to the effectiveness of the screening, identification, assessment, and support policy in South Africa

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**Introduction:** The implementation of the Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy has been ongoing for almost a decade to provide care and support to all learners, including those with neurodevelopmental challenges such as dyslexia. Despite these efforts, many primary school learners continue to experience barriers to learning associated with dyslexia. This phenomenon is of great concern in rural communities where dyslexia is generally ignored and misunderstood. On the other hand, there is a lack of research investigating the effectiveness of the SIAS policy in supporting learners with dyslexia. Existing studies often focus on dyslexia and the SIAS policy in isolation.

**Methods:** The 'qualitative research' approach was adopted. Autoethnography was employed as the study's design, positioned within the interpretivism paradigm to investigate the effectiveness of the SIAS policy in supporting learners with dyslexia characteristics in Tlokweg village. The sample consists of (5) participants and Critical reflection and auto-interviewing methods were used to generate data, which was thematically analysed. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was used to understand the interaction between learners, their environment, and the SIAS policy.

**Results and discussion:** The findings suggest that the SIAS policy is ineffective in its screening process. Also, learners' perceptions indicate a gap in teachers' readiness to address learning barriers associated with the characteristics of dyslexia. Lastly, there is a need for continuous monitoring of the SIAS implementation.

## KEYWORDS

dyslexia, neurodiversity, SIAs, primary school, learners, care and support

## Introduction

Basic literacy skills are crucial for academic learning and development (Govender and Hugo, 2020; Karimupfumbi and Dwarika, 2022; Ayanwale et al., 2023). However, South African primary school learners continue to demonstrate low basic literacy skills competencies (Govender and Hugo, 2020). Findings by the International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)

reveals that majority of these learners cannot read well enough to learn successfully, across the curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2023). While factors like early language gaps, insufficient teaching, and prior knowledge gaps can contribute to low basic literacy skills competencies, for some learners, dyslexia, the most common learning disorder, is the underlying cause (Kennedy and Ryan, 2021; Karimupfumbi and Dwarika, 2022). According to Geertsema et al. (2022), 15–20% of the world population and 1 in 10 people in South Africa are experiencing one or more characteristics of dyslexia. *Dyslexia* is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological, characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and poor spelling and decoding abilities (Kennedy and Ryan, 2021).

Further, in its commitment to providing care and support to all learners, including those with dyslexia characteristics, the South African (SA) Department of Basic Education introduced the Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy in 2014. The SIAS policy provides standardized procedures to identify, assess, and support learners experiencing barriers to learning such characteristics of dyslexia (Department of Basic Education, 2014). However, despite being in existence for almost a decade, many learners continue to experience learning barriers, especially in basic literacy. Research indicates that the implementation of the SIAS policy remains modest (Matolo and Rambuda, 2022), especially in rural communities where dyslexia is often ignored (Larco et al., 2021). Moreover, there is limited research on its effectiveness of the SIAS policy in supporting learners with characteristics of dyslexia. Existing studies often focus on dyslexia or the SIAS policy independently. For instance, Matolo and Rambuda (2022) evaluated the application of the SIAS policy in schools; Olivier (2017) explored teachers' experiences in teaching and supporting learners with dyslexia and Karimupfumbi and Dwarika (2022) explored teachers' experiences using the SIAS policy to support learners who present characteristics of dyslexia. Moreover, research indicates that the SIAS implementation remains modest (Matolo and Rambuda, 2022).

## Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What SIAS interventions are implemented by teachers to support primary school learners with dyslexia characteristics in Tlokwenq?
- How does the SIAS policy intervention affect the care and support experiences of primary school learners with dyslexia characteristics in Tlokwenq?
- How do the SIAS policy interventions affect the care and support perceptions of primary school learners with characteristics of dyslexia in Tlokwenq?

## Literature review

The authors reviewed the literature on rurality, neurodiversity, and learners with dyslexia characteristics, including their perceptions and experiences. They also discussed the relevant theory guiding the study.

## Understanding rurality

Researchers generally agree that there is no single best definition of rurality. They define rural areas based on distinguishing features, especially the unavailability of amenities and facilities. Hence, Nelson et al. (2021) argue that definitions of rurality are subjective and influenced by personal perspectives and mindsets. Rural areas are characterized by traditional, communal, and pre-urban, marked by dense settlements born from historical land policies under colonialism and apartheid (Hlalele, 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2017). According to researchers (Hlalele, 2014; Hawley et al., 2016; Abdulwakeel, 2017; Khanare and De Lange, 2017; Olanrewaju and Omoponle, 2017; Du Plessis and Mestry, 2019), rural areas are isolated from major economic activities; thus, they are underdeveloped and lacking fundamental infrastructure such as proper sanitation, roads, water, electricity, and communication technologies, with limited financial support. While this perspective focuses on what rural areas and schools do not possess, Department of Basic Education (2017) provides an opposing, viewing rural areas as conducive environments with opportunities and cultural, agricultural, and natural resources supporting education. Tlokwenq is therefore defined against this background as an underdeveloped traditional settlement with primary schools lacking fundamental infrastructure and resources with Tswana cultural identity and local support.

## Neurodiversity and learners with dyslexia characteristics

*Neurodiversity* is a broad concept encompassing various disorders, including dyslexia (Fung and Doyle, 2021). It primarily focuses on the unique differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits (Clouder et al., 2020). Neurodiversity can be defined as the existence of diverse minds and brains, indicating that every individual's cognitive makeup is different (Dwyer, 2022). It promotes inclusivity, as it recognizes and respects differences among individuals. Notably the concept of neurodiversity shifts from a medical model to a social model, emphasizing that "disability" arises from the interaction between individuals' "impairments" and their environment (Shields and Beversdorf, 2020; Fung and Doyle, 2021). Therefore, according to the social model perspective, characteristics of dyslexia may arise from the interaction between learners, the curriculum, and the teachers rather than solely from the learners' inherent characteristics.

*Dyslexia* is a specific learning disorder of neurobiological origin, typically diagnosed in young school-aged children, characterized by difficulties in accurately recognizing and fluently reading words, decoding struggles, and poor spelling skills (Kennedy and Ryan, 2021; Bloch et al., 2022). Learners with dyslexia often incorrectly identify word boundaries, misrepresent syllables, confuse words, and have difficulty connecting spoken language and printed words (Lesevane et al., 2018; Roitsch and Watson, 2019). These difficulties can manifest as inaccurate or slow word reading, frequent word guessing, difficulty comprehending the meaning and relationships of words, challenges with spelling, such as omitting vowels, and difficulties in expressing thoughts clearly in written form (Bloch et al., 2022). Challenges in reading accurately and fluently can impact reading comprehension and vocabulary development, while spelling difficulties can influence the production of written composition (Lesevane et al., 2018; Roitsch and Watson, 2019).

## Challenges experienced by learners with characteristics of dyslexia

Dyslexia is associated with various negative impacts on learners' learning and development, such as poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and lack of motivation (Roitsch and Watson, 2019). In addition, these learners, as found by Leseyane et al. (2018), often have negative experiences due to inadequate support from peers and teachers, further impacting their self-efficacy. Negative school experiences can lead to lifelong consequences for learners, including dropout rates, social isolation, and low self-esteem (Hoskins, 2021). On the contrary, Rybas (2023) states that learners with dyslexia can still succeed in their learning, as some demonstrate high self-efficacy in subjects like science and art. Although dyslexia may negatively affect academic development, it is not limited to learners with low or average intellectual abilities; it can also affect learners identified as intellectually gifted (Bloch et al., 2022; Onyemah and Omoponle, 2022). The severity of dyslexia can vary, which, in turn, impacts the level of intervention required for each individual. For instance, learners with mild severity experience some difficulties that require low levels of support. On the other hand, moderate severity entails considerable difficulties, requiring moderate levels of support. Lastly, severe severity indicates profound challenges affecting multiple learning skills, demanding continuous intensive individualized and specialized high levels of support (Bloch et al., 2022). Similarly, the SIAS policy ranks the required support level as either low, moderate, or high based on the frequency and scope of the identified learning barrier(s) (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

## SIAS policy on learners with dyslexia

Supporting learners encompasses a solution-focused process that aims to identify and address the individual needs of those requiring additional teaching care and support (Karimupfumbi and Dwarika, 2022; as cited in Matolo and Rambuda, 2022). The teacher and relevant stakeholders may collaborate to provide care and support by targeting the various systems in which learners exist, such as the family, school, and community. For instance, the School-Based Support Team (SBST), in collaboration with the teacher, can complete the SNA 2 form to request the implementation of accommodations or concessions for a learner experiencing reading difficulties. One possible accommodation is assigning a reader to the learner, who will read each section of the exam question paper in a separate venue. This collaborative effort ensures that learners receive adequate support (Ntseto et al., 2021).

The SBST comprises teachers directly and indirectly involved in the daily teaching of the specific learner experiencing barriers to learning. This team includes the classroom teacher, teachers from the School-Management Team (SMT), and educators with specialized skills and knowledge in areas like learning support and counseling (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The SBST, in collaboration with parents, acts as a liaison between the school and the District-Based Support Team (DBST). Their primary objective is to provide evidence-based support, ensuring that learners with characteristics of dyslexia receive the necessary

assistance and accommodations they require. For instance, the SBT may complete the SNA 2 form requesting specialist services such as educational psychology services from the District-Based Support Team (DBST).

## Theoretical framework

The SIAS policy recognizes that learners' barriers to learning are influenced by various subsystems that encompass their existence rather than attributing these barriers solely to the learners themselves (Matolo and Rambuda, 2022). By considering these multiple systems and their interconnectedness, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the SIAS policy effectively supports learners with dyslexia characteristics. In this regard, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (BEST) is most suitable for this study. BEST postulates that learners exist within a complex system that is made up of various interconnected subsystems, namely, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystems, and chronosystem, which set the context for human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, as cited in Shields and Beversdorf, 2020).

The microsystem encompasses the learner's immediate environment, such as home, classroom, and school. The mesosystem focuses on the interaction and collaboration between these microsystems, such as the relationship between the parents or caregivers and teachers. The exosystem consists of subsystems that learners are not directly involved in but impact the learner's support, such as the SGB and the DBST policies to promote support for all learners. The macrosystem comprises the cultural context surrounding the learner, including the belief systems that may influence support for learners. For instance, if the community values neurodiversity or support for learners, they may be more involved in assisting the school in supporting learners. Lastly, the chronosystem refers to the changes that occur over time in any of these systems. The chronosystem in the context of the SIAS policy examines its development over time, considering the influence of South Africa's socio-economic history and the global agenda of inclusive education. In the past, particularly during the apartheid, the South African education system was racially divided and categorized learners according to the medical model, which located learners' impairment within them instead of their environment (Donohue and Bornman, 2014; Busari and Adewuyi, 2018). By employing BEST, we can better understand how these learners' environment influences the SIAS policy and how it aims to support learners with barriers to learning (Geldenhuis and Wevers, 2013; Department of Basic Education, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2020; Adewuyi, 2021; Matolo and Rambuda, 2021; Matolo and Rambuda, 2022).

## Methodology

This session discusses the study's design and methodology, including the use of qualitative research approach, interpretivism research design, sampling, data generation, and analysis methods. It also addresses relevant ethical and trustworthiness issues related to the study.

## Design

This study employed auto-ethnography as the relevant research design. Auto-ethnography is a self-study in that the researcher becomes the subject of the study (Hughes and Pennington, 2017; Ayanwale et al., 2023). By employing auto-ethnography, the researcher aims to provide specific knowledge rather than general information on the phenomenon under study, thus, articulating insider knowledge of cultural experience to fill gaps in existing research (Adams et al., 2017).

## Sampling method

This study employs purposive sampling, in which the researcher deliberately selects individuals with specific characteristics of interest (Johnson and Christensen, 2020). To achieve this, the study adopts a homogeneous sampling strategy to select individuals belonging to the same subculture and sharing similar characteristics (Creswell et al., 2019). Therefore, only learners with dyslexia characteristics in the primary schools of Tlokweg were considered for this study.

## Data generation

The study employed critical auto-interviewing and critical reflection as data generation methods. Critical auto-interviewing is a data generation method wherein the researcher purposefully collects internal data to identify gaps in their self-awareness by asking thought-provoking questions that encourage critical reflexivity. To complement auto-interviewing, the study employed critical reflection, which involves recalling memories and transforming them into written narratives to evoke vicarious experiences (Hughes and Pennington, 2017). Employing two data generation methods enhances triangulation. According to Flick (2014) triangulation allows for multiple interpretations and meanings during data analysis.

## Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the generated data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method for discovering and understanding core patterns (themes) within complex data sets, primarily through analyzing narratives in documents like transcripts. It involves researchers repeatedly and carefully reading and analyzing the data to identify these themes, ultimately leading to reliable and insightful findings (Dawadi, 2020). To achieve this, the researcher employed deductive and inductive approaches to identify the emerging themes against the literature review, research questions, and theoretical framework and considered any unexpected themes that rose during data analysis.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are essential when conducting research (Johnson and Christensen, 2020). The University of Johannesburg Ethical Committee in the Faculty of Education approved the study.

The researchers obtained informed consent, maintained confidentiality, and protected participants from any harm, and participation was voluntary.

## Results and discussion of findings

The results and findings of the study are discussed in three themes, namely (1) understanding of the SIAS policy, (2) the SIAS intervention strategies, and (3) amplifying the voices of learners with characteristics of dyslexia.

### Theme 1: understanding of the SIAS policy

Theme 1—understanding of the SIAS policy—is based on its sub-themes which are discussed below.

#### Sub-theme 1: SIAS policy addresses the injustices experienced by learners

*Reflection 1: "The SIAS policy seeks to heal the past injustices and ensure equal access to quality education for all learners. In the past, particularly during apartheid, the South African education system was segregated along racial lines. Learners were also categorised according to the medical model, which attributed their learning barriers to their inherent characteristics rather than to their environment. The medical model resulted in "normal" learners attending "normal" schools while "disabled" learners attended special schools."*

The South African education system was, for a very long time, plagued by inequalities, with learners categorized according to race, abilities and disabilities. However, these forms of segregation were eradicated following the 1994 political transfer and the adoption of a new constitution to ensure equality for all, regardless of background and abilities. Later, in 2014, the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced the SIAS policy based on the principles of the constitution and previous inclusive education frameworks, especially Education White Paper 6 of 2001. Hence, the SIAS policy was established to promote principles of social justice, participation, equal access to curriculum, equity, and community responsiveness for all learners.

#### Sub-theme 2: SIAS policy's provision of care and support

The SIAS policy is strategically aligned with the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) program, seeking to promote the care and support of all learners. Thus, "the SIAS policy is inseparable from care and support" (auto-interview). "As a Learner Support Agent in a primary and secondary school, [the first corresponding author] received training on both the CSTL program and the SIAS policy, with the SIAS being the main policy guiding [his] interventions" (critical reflection).

In 2008, SA established the CSTL program to identify and address learners' learning barriers. The CSTL program aims to realize the education rights of all children through schools being inclusive centers of learning by prioritizing nine areas of learners' well-being and

environment: nutrition, health, infrastructure, water and sanitation, safety and protection, social welfare services, psychosocial well-being, material needs, curriculum, and co-curricular. Although the SIAS policy does not explicitly state how each priority of the CSTL program should be addressed, it still provides a standardized procedure for addressing these priority areas, thus ensuring that all learners are provided with the necessary care and support as proposed in the CSTL program. The SIAS and CSTL operate from the same theoretical framework, namely the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. CSTL manual states that that children's environment, community, and circumstances make them vulnerable (MIET Africa, 2021). Similarly, the SIAS policy locate learners' barriers at their social contextual levels (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

## Theme 2: the SIAS interventions strategies

The SIAS policy is carried out in four intervention stages: Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support.

### Screening

Screening is administratively "filtering" all learners to recognize who may be at risk of learning barriers and need additional support (Matolo and Rambuda, 2022). Screening interventions involve gathering learners' information about learners' learning and development through screening tools such as admission forms, stakeholder reports, health cards, year-end reports, and observations or interviews. In the context of dyslexia, teachers may use Dyslexia Screening Tests (DSTs) to help screen learners for possible dyslexia characteristics and to inform them of the needed care and support interventions. However,

*"...in my experience as a Learner Support Agent (LSA), I have never seen a teacher use DSTs to screen for dyslexia, nor have I heard them talk about doing so. Teachers mainly relied on learners' academic performance and ability to complete reading and writing tasks. None of the learners who showed persistent struggle with reading and writing were screened as being at risk of dyslexia, as this term was rarely used in this context." (Auto interview)*

*"[learners] persistent challenges with reading and writing were not seen as characteristics of dyslexia but simply as challenges with reading and writing. Additionally, students' documents, such as academic reports and admission forms, rarely include any information on their reading and writing skills, making it challenging for the teacher to screen learners effectively." (Critical reflection)"*

This suggests that there is a delay in recognizing learners with dyslexia characteristics, as they are not adequately screened. This lack of screening can lead to negative experiences associated with dyslexia, including low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Cunningham, 2021). If these learners are not screened, they may not receive the necessary interventions required to succeed in their learning, unlike their peers. The lack of screening practice goes against the principles of social justice and equal education that the SIAS policy upholds.

According to Cunningham (2021), learners with dyslexia often feel inferior to their peers.

### Identification

Identification interventions involve teachers reviewing data from various screening sources to confirm any learning barrier(s) a learner might experience. While screening is conducted for all learners, identification only focuses on learners for whom screening tools have indicated risk or possible challenges. The teacher may use the DST score and other important reports to assess if the learner is at risk of dyslexia or has any dyslexia characteristics in the study context. The teacher uses the Special Needs Assessment 1 (SNA 1) form to identify areas of concern, strengths, weaknesses, and support needs for each student. Based on this assessment, an individual support plan is created for each learner, outlining the necessary interventions. These plans are reviewed monthly to ensure the student receives the necessary support. "...identification is not only limited to teachers...parents and caregivers are equally important." (critical reflection). Parents and caregivers play an essential role in identifying any barriers their children may face in their learning process (Matolo and Rambuda, 2022). Durisic and Bunijevec (2017) support this view by arguing that parental involvement is most effective when viewed as a partnership between teachers and parents. Through this partnership, learners' dyslexia characteristics can be identified for assessment. It is through this partnership that learners' characteristics of dyslexia can be identified for assessment.

*"During my teaching practicum, I, together with a teacher, identified learners' learning barriers but there was no SNA involved in the process. During my LSA tenure, I had also worked with teachers to identify learners' learning barriers, but no SNA was used" (critical reflection)*

This critical reflection reveals that the researcher and teachers could reasonably identify the learners' learning barriers obstacles and intervene. However, the effectiveness of their intervention may have been limited due to the inadequate implementation of the SIAS policy. For example, the SNA1 form, which plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective identification of learners' learning barriers and appropriate interventions, was not completed. As a result of poor identification of learners' learning barriers, there was a lack of reviewing of interventions against the SNA1 form and a lack of individual support plans. Therefore, some learners' learning barriers may not have been identified. Consequently, they may not have received the care and support they needed. This may have been due to a lack of SIAS implementation knowledge by the researcher (LSA at the time) and, as Solms (2020) reported, a heavy workload for teachers. The failure to identify learners with learning barriers hinders inclusive education.

### Assessment

The assessment interventions aim to determine the nature of the learner's learning barrier and the level of their functioning and

participation, but not the curriculum content. The teachers' is not to diagnose the learner, but to gain a comprehensive understanding of their identified learning barrier. The SIAS policy requires such assessment to be multi-dimensional or systemic, focusing on the individual (learner and teacher) curriculum, school, family, the community (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The teacher or school may request specialist assessments such as educational, medical, or psycho-social to effectively assess learners' specific learning barrier(s) and inform their teaching and learning. This assessment should be ongoing, clearly documented, and communicated to all stakeholders. While it is clear that assessment is based on the learners' systems and not themselves, the researcher "at some point, [the researcher] spent a considerable amount of time trying to figure out what is wrong with the learner rather than what could be "wrong" in their environment" (critical reflection). Similarly, "...[researcher's] assessment of the learners' learning barriers were mostly concentrated on [learners] rather than their surroundings" (auto-interview). This approach followed the medical model rather than the social model advocated by the SIAS policy, meaning learners' dyslexia characteristics and the environment in which they operate were not effectively assessed as per the SIAS policy. According to Matolo and Rambuda (2022), effective implementation of the SIAS policy involves regularly assessing the learner's learning barriers to ensure that learners acquire quality education.

## Support

"... everything boils down to support of learners with characteristics of dyslexia ... " (auto interviewing)

"Learners with characteristics of dyslexia needed to be provided from the support they need for the SIAS policy to be fully implemented." (critical reflection)

Once learners' learning barriers have been screened, identified, and assessed, efforts should be directed toward supporting them. Support is a critical component of the SIAS policy, as it focuses on the solution(s) for overcoming learners' learning barriers and ensuring access to quality education (Solms, 2020; Matolo and Rambuda, 2022). The SIAS policy suggests that support interventions must take a holistic approach and consider possible barriers the learner may experience in their environment, such as home, school or community. It further, suggest that the nature and extent of the support needed to support learners with characteristics of dyslexia is determined by evaluating the existing resources or support, additional support still required, and available district and national-level support strategies and resources (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The SIAS policy expects teachers to be case managers, collaborate with stakeholders such as parents, and support learners in the classroom to ensure adequate care and support. However, research shows that care and support are affected by various factors, including demands of the curriculum - as teachers need to ensure that the curriculum is covered—lack of transport, learners' poor socio-economic environment, lack of parental involvement, and teacher qualification levels (Bojuwoye et al., 2014; Hess, 2020).

## Theme 3: amplifying the voices of learners with characteristics of dyslexia

Learners are active participants in constructing meanings from their learning experiences (Blaauw, 2016). Therefore, any comprehensive study of social support must consider the sources of support and evaluate learners' perceptions regarding the support they receive (Guess and McCane-Bowling, 2016). Hence, it is crucial for teachers and policymakers to consider learners' voices to comprehend the impact of the SIAS policy on them. In this context, two subthemes emerged: "learners," "experiences," and "learners" perceptions.

### Sub-theme 1: "learners" experiences

BEST emphasizes that learners' experiences of care and support are due to their interaction with their environment (Shey, 2017; Spörer et al., 2020; Fagbule et al., 2021). This environment may be at home with parents, in a community with community members, or mainly in a school with teachers. Some learners report positively about the care and support they receive. Care and support impact learners' functioning, such as self-esteem, academic performance, and social relations (Bojuwoye et al., 2014). According to Bojuwoye et al. (2014), learners from under-resourced communities can experience the teachers and schools as able to support them, enhancing their psychological traits and fostering greater academic engagement. Chireshe (2013) attribute this to teachers' positive attitude toward inclusive education. et al.,

The researcher, when reflecting on learners' learning barriers, recalled the words of the school's Head of Department (HOD) when he was doing his Work Integrated Learning (teaching practicum), "...I spoke to the student, and they are doing fine. They believe you have saved their lives after the intervention" (critical reflection)

Even so some learners still have negative experiences with receiving care and support. The following critical reflection reflects this:

"During my tenure as LSA, I had made observations about how some learners screened for care and support by the teacher would feel as though they are not as smart as some learners, and also how some learners and teachers contribute towards this feeling. Teachers and learners would label them. Teachers would also single them out for support in a way that makes them uncomfortable."

This finding corroborates that of Thompson (2021), who found that learners with dyslexia may experience inclusive education negatively due to stigma, negative attitudes, and lack of awareness about dyslexia (Thompson, 2021). Similarly, Kriel and Livingston (2019) think that learners may be afraid to ask for support, be labeled as weak learners and be teased by their peers.

### Sub-theme 2: "learners" perceptions

Learners with learning barriers, including dyslexia, often feel supported by their schools but not entirely (Chireshe, 2013; Mackenzie and Kwong, 2016). Some learners may feel their

teachers need more training in inclusive education. This is consistent with the researcher's experience as an LSA. The researcher reflects on how learners sometimes shy away from teacher support because such support is often provided on the basis that there is something wrong with them that needs fixing. Consequently, learners may develop negative feelings toward receiving care and support if they feel it is being provided because they are seen as "stupid" or lacking in some way. In addition, the school's failure to effectively respond to barriers to learning may reinforce "learners" negative perceptions. Similarly, [Shey \(2017\)](#) found that learners reported mainly positive experiences regarding their time in special schools and mainly negative experiences in mainstream schools.

## Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, we suggest the following recommendations:

- The SIAS policy is ineffective in the screening process, marked by a lack of use of the screening tools, and care and support interventions do not always align with the SIAS policy. Schools must have screening tools and fill them accordingly to facilitate a smooth screening of learners and monitor the SIAS interventions.
- Learners' perceptions indicate a perceived gap in the teachers' readiness to address their learning needs. Therefore, there is a need for ongoing teacher training in inclusive education to improve teacher efficacy in creating inclusive environments.
- The duality of positive and negative experiences reported by learners suggests the need for continuous monitoring of SIAS intervention strategies. This recommendation addresses the challenge of ensuring that interventions are responsive to emerging issues and are effective in addressing the diverse needs of learners with dyslexia characteristics.

## Limitations of the study

Auto-ethnography is a self-study. It provides a personal account of the researchers' experiences and perceptions of learners with dyslexia characteristics. The findings are derived from these experiences and perceptions; thus, they may not be readily generalizable to the broader population, as they do not entirely represent all primary school learners with characteristics of dyslexia.

## Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the effectiveness of the SIAS policy to support learners with dyslexia characteristics. Learners with dyslexia characteristics experience SIAS interventions both positively and negatively. The SIAS policy expects teachers to be case managers, collaborate with stakeholders such as parents, and support learners in the classroom to ensure adequate care and support. Furthermore, a lack of SIAS implementation knowledge and a heavy workload are identified as significant hindrances. Teachers can interact with parents and caregivers

to understand learners' learning barriers and determine the nature of their learning barriers. Parents and caregivers are essential in this process because they are the learner's immediate support system and operate within the learner's immediate environment.

## Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the University of Johannesburg Ethics Committee. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation was not required from the participants or the participants' legal guardians/next of kin in accordance with the national legislation and institutional requirements.

## Author contributions

KK: Investigation, Writing – original draft. FK: Supervision, Writing – review & editing. HA: Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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