The implementation of learner integration and its challenges in a selected former Model C school: Learners' perspectives

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The purpose of the study reported on here was to explore the implementation of learner integration and its challenges in a selected former Model C school. This is an expansion of the findings of a larger study, "Understanding and enhancing of learner integration in a selected ex-model C school" by Theresia Joakim Kanyopa. Based on South Africa's history, the term "former Model C" (also ex Model C) is still commonly used to describe those schools that were formerly Whites-only but are now multiracial schools. Learner integration is a major issue in global contemporary education practice. Contemporary literature on learner integration in former Model C schools reveals complex impediments. Some of the impediments are essentially beyond the capabilities and competencies of learners, teachers and principals. In this article we argue that the lack of an effectively designed practice is central to the impediments to learner integration. This was a qualitative case study grounded within the critical research paradigm, hence the critical emancipatory research (CER) theoretical framework was adopted. We used purposive and convenience sampling to select the research site and participants. Four Grade 11 learners (2 boys and 2 girls) were purposively selected because of their availability and willingness to participate in the study. Their ages were between 16 and 19 years. Data were generated through interviews and reflective writing. Importantly, to achieve successful learner integration in former Model C schools, we affirm that these schools must revise their practices, programmes and policies to create an integrative learning environment that ensures learner safety and an environment that supports, develops end enhances their academic goals. The findings from the study indicate that learner integration in former Model C schools can be successfully done by valuing the learners' diversities regardless of their backgrounds, ethnic groups, status or races.

Keywords: former Model C school; learner; learner integration

Introduction
Globally, the phenomenon of learner integration is not viewed as simply one more option for educational practices at schools but as an educational strategy that can contribute to a more democratic and just society (Day, 2020; Kanyopa, 2022). In South Africa, the post-apartheid democratic government committed itself to the transformation of the education system by introducing key policy documents and legislation that promote integration and inclusion in schools. Integration and inclusion in schools are informed and protected by the country's constitution under Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (hereafter, the Constitution) which includes the Bill of Rights, and recognises the basic human rights of all South African citizens. The Bill of Rights provides a framework for the legislation on the transformation of the education system that emanates from the Constitution, and it affirms the value of each learner's dignity (Gamoran & An, 2016; Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996b). Furthermore, s. 9(3) of Chapter 2 stipulates that "the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds including gender, race, sex, age, religion, culture, language, ethnic or social origin" (RSA, 1996b). Additionally, in s. 9(4), "no person may unfairly discriminate directly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection 3" (RSA, 1996b). Thus, the integration and inclusion principles are embraced in the Constitution by ensuring equal access to quality education for all learners without any form of discrimination or segregation.

Fundamentally, the sequential review of the literature regarding the schools in South Africa revealed a historical milestone in the evolution of schools and other educational institutions. Kanyopa (2022) and Zoch (2017) mention that different types of schools were established by the apartheid government in the 1980s and early 1990s and that education was compulsory for all racial groups. However, the schools' structures were maintained differently (Coetzee, 2014; Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2023; Zoch, 2017). Kotzé, Van der Westhuizen and Barnard (2017) argue that White schools and education were under continuous reconstruction, as a result, in 1991, White schools were divided into four models, namely, A, B, C and D. Of these models, only Model C was a semi-private structure, with decreased funding from the state, and greatly increased autonomy for schools.

In essence, Model C schools were derived from a defunct semi-private structured school system or Whites-only government schools introduced by the apartheid government in 1991–1993 (Grobler, Moloi & Ayres,

2017; Hill, 2016; Kanyopa, 2018). Research conducted in 2017 show that the South African government in 2012 took the decisive step of declaring that all White schools would be classified as Model C schools (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Kwet, 2017). This meant that Model A and B schools were re-classified as Model C schools. This was one of the moves towards the integration and inclusion in schools as the former president, Nelson Mandela, made it clear that "diversity may be the hardest thing for the society to live with and perhaps the most dangerous thing for our society to be without" (Mandela, 1994). Therefore, the term "former Model C" is commonly used to describe those schools that were formerly Whites-only but are now multiracial schools.

Kanyopa (2022) and Kanyopa and Mokhele Makgalwa (2024) indicate that learner integration is inevitable in an education system that has discrimination and exclusion. Learner integration creates equal opportunities and equal access to schools. At the heart of the South African education system, inclusion and integration seem to be preferred by the legislations and documents presented by the government, because, it is through effective integration that South Africa can redress previous inequalities in the education system. Drawing from the current situation on learner integration in most of the former Model C schools, we affirm that there is a need for critical reconstruction in the process of developing content in the school curriculum. This is because of an assertive process to the teaching and learning process. As indicated by Machaba (2016), integration in schools is critical when the curriculum contents mirror the real-life experiences and expectations of each learner in the classroom. Chisholm (2015), Luneta (2015) and LA Naidoo (2015) state that the school environment is a very powerful ground for both the growth and development of learners.

Similarly, we contend that former Model C schools must create a learning environment that improves learners' education, health and their lived experiences. Themane and Thobejane (2019) posit that former Model C schools need a new framework and approach to the issue of learner integration, but the process should first recognise the diversity of learners in their environment. This is because these schools are characterised with culture, norms and ethnic pluralism in their learning environment (Themane & Thobejane, 2019). Doyi (2023) mentions that the implementation of learner integration faces challenges in some former Model C schools as some teachers become resistant because they lack skills and training.

Literature Review
Definition of operational concepts
Learner
The concept "learner" is defined as a person who receives skills, training and general education at school or in any organisation that deals with learning (Kanyopa, 2018; Marwan, 2007). The South African Schools Act number 84 of 1996 (hereinafter, the SASA) describes a learner as any person who is between the ages of 5 and 18 who also is obliged to receive an education by attending any school of their choice (RSA, 1996a).

Learner integration
The term "integration" is described as the act of combining, unifying, consolidating and intermixing people who previously were segregated or discriminated against (Altun, 2015; Kanyopa, 2022; Tabane, 2009). It can also be defined as a tool for inclusive education in which all learners can fit-in and to learn regardless of their backgrounds, ability levels or needs (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2023).

Former Model C school(s)
Former Model C schools are described as former Whites-only schools in White areas (Masino & Niño-Zarazúa, 2016). These schools were and still are well equipped with educational resources such as libraries, laboratories, big sports fields and open-space classrooms (Hill, 2016; Kanyopa, 2018; Radebe, 2015). In practice, former Model C schools are characterised by high academic performance due to the availability of resources and greater parental involvement (Kanyopa, 2018, 2022). In the following section we present the related literature review.

The understanding of learner integration in schools
The understanding of the phenomenon of learner integration varies from context to context. Context plays a significant role in the understanding of this phenomenon. This means that it has no universal definition. Scholars like Dei (2016) and Kwet (2017) affirm that learner integration can be regarded and understood differently and defined differently by people with different historical backgrounds. Radebe (2015) describes the phenomenon as how learners of different backgrounds and different ethnic groupings as well as people of different skin colours build a simultaneous bridge to bind them together. Scholarly works assert that the understanding of learner integration in African countries differs as the concept tends to serve different purposes (Mangope, Kuyini, Musaruwa, Major, Bramwell & Tiny, 2018). This is because the challenges faced by each country's education system are not the same. Therefore, for countries that have not

experienced racial segregation and other forms of discrimination in the history of their education systems like Tanzania, Namibia, Kenya, Botswana, Zambia and Uganda, learner integration means simply bringing together everyone in a school to form a whole (Kanyopa, 2022). In the South African context, this phenomenon is described as the means to build up a bridge to bind learners together respectively (Mahlo, 2017). It is also viewed as the process of schools to open their doors to all learners regardless of their racial diversity, culture or ethnic grouping (Kanyopa, 2022).

In most European countries, learner integration refers to the process of revision of educational policies, schools' cultures and practices so that they respond to learner diversity. Academic research done in European education systems reveals that the one aspect of most concern to educational policy in Europe is learner integration because it requires a nascent source of tackling new educational needs in schools (Munteanu, 2019).

Post-apartheid educational transformation in South Africa

The movement for desegregation of the previously racially conceived education system in South Africa has been documented in several scholarly works since the early 1990s. Most of these scholarly studies reveal that the previous education system classified learners into racial groups, as they were recognised as African, Coloured, Indian and White (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Padayachee, 2018). Thus, not only the South African society but also learners, teachers and other staff in schools were disrupted, ethnically based and racially biased (Muzata & Mahlo, 2019). In essence, learner integration in South Africa is a call for pioneering ways of teaching and learning which will take into account every learner in the school environment regardless of his or her race, status or ethnic group as being important (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2023). Philosophically, the learner integration phenomenon in the South African context embraces the democratic values of equity, equality and recognition of diversity in schools (Kanyopa, 2022; Kotzé et al., 2017). Additionally, literature has shown that post-apartheid educational reforms encompass transformation in educational practices that include changes in the management of diversity in schools (Motala, 2020; Olivier, 2017).

Implementation of learner integration and its challenges in former Model C schools

Research also reveals that since 1994 former Model C schools are still enduring the tension between changing their school management structure and changing the whole education system in the country (Mahlo, 2017; Muzata & Mahlo, 2019). In essence, research by Makalela (2022) questions the assumptions about multilingualism in

the post-apartheid South Africa. The author outlines the challenges and implications of inclusion in schools that are caused by 11 official languages within the education system. The author argues that the issue of multilingualism in South Africa provides a unique sociolinguistic space that symbolises the apartheid regime (Makalela, 2022).

A strand of literature emphasises the issue of learner integration in South African schools and asserts that, since the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa has developed several acts, policies and legislation to ensure that learners are culturally, ethnically, physically and mentally integrated into the schools (Dei, 2016; Grobler et al., 2017).

With the struggle against the apartheid legacy in the education system, the calls for desegregation and integration in educational contexts are widely framed in the SASA. The SASA specifically revoked and replaced all discriminatory forms and socially unjust practices in the education system that were established during the apartheid era (Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht & Nel, 2016; Seehawer, 2018). Additionally, the SASA provides guidelines for the gradual democratic transformation of schools in South Africa by completely opposing and eliminating all forms of unfair treatment and disintegration of learners while promoting high-quality education and equal opportunity to all learners in the school environment.

Notwithstanding the changes in the school curriculum and several educational system movements in South Africa, Perumalsamy, Perumal, Naidoo and Taliep (2023) reveal that the country's education system is still experiencing challenges inherited from the apartheid education system. Some research outlines that the major challenge that schools face in the post-apartheid era is learner integration (Muzata & Mahlo, 2019; Padayachee, 2018). Conversely, McGinnity, Grotti, Groarke and Coughlan (2018) and Omodan (2019) argue that the successful implementation of learner integration requires great efforts over many years with prerequisites for policy and professional preparation in South African schools. In this regard, the issue of integration in former Model C schools is seen as a reform effort that needs school management teams (SMTs) and school governing bodies (SGBs) to integrate not only learners in schools but also the teachers and other staff to improve all practices and programmes to integrate and accommodate everyone involved in the school environment (Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 2019; Pearson, 2017; Soupen, 2017). This implies that these bodies need to give enough attention to the integration of diverse stakeholders to enhance the purpose of equal educational opportunities (Kanyopa, 2022; Kwet, 2017).

Despite the key elements highlighted in legislation and documents to support learner integration in schools, scholars further divulge that

some of the former Model C schools are facing challenges with the implementation of learner integration in their schools because these schools were and still are operating under strict monoculture measures (Higgs, 2016; Hill, 2016; Ngcoza, 2019). Furthermore, one dominant cultural practice in former Model C schools resulted in unfavourable pedagogies, as learners, parents, some teachers and other educational practitioners are struggling with creating an integrative school environment with equal treatment for all learners and staff regardless of racial and social status, or ethnic group origins (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021; Perumalsamy et al., 2023). This is supported by Makalela (2022) who affirms that inclusion and integration are crucial since the two notions are linked to grandiose hope that affirms all the cultural, linguistic and social capitals of the learners in South Africa.

Theoretical Framework

The critical emancipation research (hereafter, CER) theory was employed as the theoretical framework for the study. CER as theoretical framework is derived from the critical theory of Emmanuel Kant (1804), a German philosopher (1724–1871), and Hermann Weil (1900), a social theorist (1876–1949). The advancement of CER can be traced from the theoretical difficulties that occurred in the examination of paradigmatic efforts of Marx's *Das Kapital* (published between 1867 and 1883) which was followed by the Frankfurt school movement between 1920 and 1950 and finally, with Habermas' theory of communicative action of 1982 (Kanyopa, 2022).

The CER is a theoretical framework that emphasises the emancipation, promotion of social justice and empowerment of the research participants (Alvarez-Blanco & Torres, 2018). CER was adopted as the research perspective to ameliorate social exclusion, disintegration, alienation and injustice by allowing, respecting and listening to the co-researchers' views, voices and perceptions (Xolisile & Bekithemba, 2021). Therefore, in this study we drew on the CER theory principles whereby the data were generated from the participants' voices, perspectives, subjective experiences, views and knowledge concerning the implementation of learner integration and its challenges in their schools.

The positional of the study into this framework aligns to deal with the psychosocial and emotional challenges towards the lack of effective ways of implementing learner integration in a former Model C school. The participants revealed some of these challenges including their diverse learning styles, low self-esteem, poor self-concept and learners' poor perception of their ability to perform well in their learning environment (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021). This theory also

inclines to minimise the possibilities of these challenges to contribute to the academic performance of the learners at school (Brown, 2020). Additionally, the pluralist characteristic of CER theory guided us to focus mainly on the critical comprehension of the participants to prompt systematic changes that should lead to the transformation of structures, practices and programmes in a former Model C school learning environment through active participation, collaboration and empowerment of the learners through learner integration (Hoggan, Mälkki & Finnegan, 2017).

Essentially, the CER theory is framed using four elements, namely, social justice, emancipation, transformation, and enhancing human lives (Xolisile & Bekithemba, 2021). Hence, the promotion of social justice drawing from the CER theory requires the cooperation and involvement of every person involved in the research process to limit the issue of discrimination and oppression (Dube & Hlalele, 2018). Regarding emancipation, the CER theory enables people from different backgrounds and statuses to work together in an atmosphere of freedom and empowerment (Xolisile & Bekithemba, 2021), while the element of transformation in CER helps to raise awareness and consciousness of people on issues such as power, oppression, discrimination and social injustices that need to be addressed in their society (Fujino, Gomez, Lezra, Lipsitz, Mitchell & Fonseca, 2018). Lastly, CER aims to ensure that the living conditions of people in the research context are improved (Alvarez-Blanco & Torres, 2018). Meanwhile, Dube and Hlalele (2018) assert that the process of improving human lives under the CER theory is stressed on the negotiation, empowerment and reciprocity.

Thus, the CER theory resonates with the purpose of this study due to the theory's aim to create a space and empowerment for the oppressed (Kanyopa, 2022). Furthermore, during the research process, we created space for participants by empowering them during the data generation process and other social interactions. As a result, the theory provided us with a critical stance towards the issue of learner integration in a former Model C school – that it is a crucial aspect in teaching and learning because learner integration is linked to the psycho-social elements of learners' well-being in their learning environment.

We further maintain that learner integration has a transformative agenda as it is now based on democracy, social justice and the emancipation of educational practices that were negatively affected by the apartheid policies inherent to the previous education system in South Africa. This implies that learner integration is essential in ensuring that democracy, equity and equality are entrenched in

South African schools, specifically in former Model C schools.

Research Design and Methodology
We employed a qualitative research approach in this study, thus a case study design was adopted within a critical research paradigm. Qualitative research is in depth and relies on direct quotations reflecting people's perspectives and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2016) describe a case study as a research design in which the researcher explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system of the issue researched (case) over time, through detailed perceptions, with in-depth data generation methods that involve multiple sources of information.

Sampling Method
In this study the purposive and convenience sampling methods were employed to guide us in the selection of the participants and the research context. Therefore, the research context was a former Model C high school in Durban, in the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. The selection of the research site (school) was based on the following criteria: a multicultural and multiracial quintile 1 school; a well-resourced school and one that was easily accessible to where we were working.

Only four Grade 11 learners were purposively selected because of their availability and willingness to volunteer for the study. Their ages ranged between 16 and 19 years. Grade 11 learners were selected based on their knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon as they studied at the selected school for 4 years, were actively involved in the school's extracurricular activities and some were members of the representative council of learners (hereafter, RCL). Table 1 shows the participants' profiles.

Table 1 Participants' profile

Participant	Race	Gender
Learner (L)1	White	Boy
L2	Black	Girl
L3	Coloured	Boy
L4	Indian	Girl

Furthermore, we chose Grade 11 learners because they were mature enough to contribute meaningfully to the study. Consequently, they critically examined the current situation of their integration in school. Also, they critically articulated their learning environment. As a result, through their active participation in the semi-structured interviews and reflective writing, these learners were able to produce relevant information and knowledge regarding the issue of implementing learner integration and its challenges in their school. The purposive and convenience sampling methods allowed us to save time and money during

the data generation phase (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Thus, this sampling method assisted us in targeting the research context and participants who could give dense information regarding the issue of learner integration.

Data Generation
The participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. According to Ahlin (2019), the use of semi-structured interviews is a qualitative approach to generating data. The data generation method normally begins with a set of standardised research questions which are asked of multiple respondents (Ahlin, 2019; Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2023). This method could also be defined as an organised conversation guided by new information obtained as an interactive discussion between the researcher and the interviewee. This data generation method allowed us to generate direct information about the implementation of learner integration and its challenges in a former Model C school by asking the following research questions:
1) What are the key factors influencing the successful implementation of learner integration in a selected former Model C school?
2) How do cultural and linguistic diversity impact learner integration efforts in a selected former Model C school?
3) What are the main challenges faced by schools in implementing learner integration initiatives?

To answer these questions, we employed semi-structured interviews to offer a chance for the participants to explain in detail their responses to the issue under research. We also employed reflective writing activities to generate data. Reflective writing is a data generation method that seeks participant's perceptions about what has been researched. Kanyopa and Mokhele Makgalwa (2024) and Nwokedi (2019) note that a reflective writing activity allows participants to reflect on the actual events and things within the research context. Hence, by participating and engaging in the reflective activity, the participants were able to evaluate the research context and write down their experiences, thoughts, beliefs and views regarding the issue of learner integration in their schools.

Data Analysis
Qualitative data analysis for this case study is grounded in critical philosophy. It is known that semi-structured interviews prompt a discussion for thick information on the researched issue (Ahlin, 2019). Thus, the data analysis procedure mainly focused on the learners' experiences of learner integration in their school (a former Model C school). We used the data generated from the interviews and reflective writing activities to generate initial codes that helped us formulate themes and patterns that emerged from the data. From the reflective writing activities we managed

to find some challenges towards effective learner integration that were common among the learners.

Trustworthiness of the Study

In every qualitative research, the issue of trustworthiness is verified through proper data generation methods. In this study, we enhanced the credibility and appropriateness of the study findings and ensured their validity by employing methodological triangulation within two qualitative data generation methods, namely, semi-structured interviews and reflective writing. Additionally, the trustworthiness of the study was ensured by us and participants by applying a meticulous recording of both written and spoken data. This was done by sharing all the data summaries and transcriptions with the participants to re-read and correct where any misinterpretations and data omissions occurred. All the transcribed data, including the emerging findings, were presented to the participants for checking and to ensure that the interpretations and analyses of their perceptions, understandings, opinions and experiences were consistent and transparent (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Taylor, 2019). In this article we present the participants' approved contributions on the issue of implementation of learner integration and its challenges in a former Model C school.

Ethical Procedures

We observed all the ethical procedures before, during and after the study. Ethical clearance was received from the institution where we were employed. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education allowed us access to the school and permission to interview the participants. Gatekeepers' permission was obtained from the principal of the school to gain access to the research site and the participants. Moreover, the selected participants were assured that the information generated was for research only. In addition, learners were provided with letters to seek permission from their parents or guardians as they were minor co-researchers at the time. The letters were written in simple English to explain the aim and objectives of the study to the parents and guardians. We adhered to the issues of privacy and confidentiality. The participants are referred to by pseudonyms only (L1, L2, L3 and L4, and the school is called School X.

Findings

In this section we present the study findings as well as verbatim quotes of the participants' responses and explanations to ensure that the participants' voices remain essential to this study. Using an open-ended question during the interviews we were able to identify several programmes, policies and processes indicating learner integration in the former Model C school. Through their reflective writing the participants could identify some barriers or impediments to learner integration that they were experiencing in their school.

The Implementation of Learner Integration in a Selected Former Model C School

During the interviews, the participants were asked to elaborate on some of the programmes, policies or processes that influenced the successful implementation of learner integration in their school. Their contributions revealed some of the school programmes, policies, plans, structures, sports programmes, facilities and physical environment as the main conceptions for the implementation and interpretation of learner integration in their school.

Implementation Influenced by the South African Schools Act (SASA)

The South African government introduced the South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996 which stipulates a set of norms and ethics for learner integration into the South African school environment. The SASA "mandates the formation of a multicultural school governance structure which constitutes the elected members" (RSA, 1996a:s. 23) which comprises teachers, learners, parents and other staff members in the school. Therefore, the process of implementing learner integration is influenced by the consideration of diverse perceptions from people's lived experiences as well as their opinions in the research context. Some of the participants' responses are presented below.

> … learner integration can be shown by the freedom of expression because in our school, learners and their parents are allowed to participate in decision-making on vital aspects of education matters and other related issues in our school (L1).
> (Oh ya!) because in our school, we have 15 learners who are serving in the Representatives Council of Learners (RCL) and I am one of them. (Eeh) the RCL consists of three learners from each grade … Also, we have 10 parents, meaning two from each grade who volunteered to serve in our School Governing Body (SGB). (L2)

The above comments from the learners on the conception of learner integration within a former Model C school are inclined with the SASA mandate which stipulates the guidance on the formation of a multicultural and integrative school governance body (RSA, 1996a). The policy states that the governing body should comprise teachers, learners, parents and other staff in the school. In addition, the SASA states that "regardless of the school size, parents and learners in the SGB should always hold a majority by having 50% of the school governance in a decision making" (Tsotetsi, Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2008:386). Some learners related their views on the implementation of learner

integration in their school to the teaching and learning context.

Implementation Influenced by Teaching and Learning Practices

Dewey (2019) argues that teaching and learning aspects are determined by the learners' ability to interact with others, which, in turn, shapes their cognition, attitudes, beliefs and perception of the realities in their lives. This suggests that learner integration is shaped by co-construction of knowledge and is mediated by the academic, socio-cultural and physical functioning of the learner.

> *Learner integration in our school is conceptualised by the 'flag' teaching strategy which is employed by most of our teachers ... This strategy turns the teaching and learning process to become compromised* (L3).
>
> *I call it a flag teaching strategy because it enhances and creates a space for the learners to interact, exchange and share ideas which I think is very important and highly recommended* (L3).
>
> *Learner integration also is conceptualised by cooperation, negotiation, and compromises as sometimes we meet halfway between what we want and what our teachers want in the classroom ... which also maintains our mutual relationship between the learners and our teachers in school.* (L4)

Implementation Influenced by Dynamism

When answering the second research question which focuses on how cultural and linguistic diversity impacts on learner integration efforts in the former Model C school, learners' responses revealed that the implementation of learner integration in their school could be successful through the recognition and consideration of the dynamism existing within the school environment. The findings also emphasise that a multicultural learning environment should ensure that all the events and programmes that take place in the school are intentionally fostering inclusivity and awareness of the diversity existing within the school itself.

This implies that learner integration could not only benefit learners at school. The consideration of other cultures and the insertion process in school programmes can help teachers and other staff respond well to the learners' diversity. Additionally, the participants mentioned that learner integration could help teachers take culturally responsive approaches while teaching, thus contributing to learners feeling accepted, appreciated and comfortable in their learning environment.

> *Recognition and awareness of others and the society diversity into our school system conceptualise learner integration; it provides us with a great opportunity to learn more from one another and also to be able to learn how to adapt to an evolving world outside the school.* (L3)

> *It's true ... consideration of others and society's diverse awareness in our school system conceptualise the issue of learner integration in such a way that both our classrooms and school curricula are becoming responsive to the increasing cultural diversity, not only in school but also in our society in general.* (L1)

Implementation Influenced by Curricular and Extracurricular Activities

The process of implementing learner integration in a former Model C school was also influenced by the active involvement of the learners in academic, socio-cultural and physical events at school. The following participant responses reveal learners' involvement in academic, socio-cultural and physical activities as the conceptualisation of learner integration issues in their school.

> *Inspirations across the academic, socio-cultural, and physical well-being is a good thing....Because ... our learning environment not only enhances the integration but also promotes our creativity, and critical thinking ... it increases motivation and our problem-solving skills* (L4).
>
> *... these aspects guided our school programmes to foster integration and develop some protective dynamics that promote our mental health and well-being ... which also help us to increase in confidence to develop a sense of belonging and to develop holistically.* (L2)

It emerged from the participants' reflective writing that some of the issues that existed within their school challenged the implementation of a successful learner integration in the school. In the following section we discuss some challenges in developing effective learner integration in a former Model C school.

Challenges in Developing Effective Learner Integration in a Selected Former Model C School

Participant responses to the third research question reveal challenges to effective learner integration such as participants' diverse learning styles, low self-esteem, poor self-concept and alienation. Participants' responses affirm that challenges are influenced by both external and internal factors. Through their reflective writing, participants revealed that, although the former Model C schools stipulate some levels of learner integration, some of the learners in these schools are still facing challenges. The challenges mentioned were categorised as psychosocial challenges and described as a lack of a sense of belonging, feelings of alienation and poor self-confidence (Kanyopa, 2022; Nwokedi, 2019). Moreover, psychosocial challenges were viewed as a major problem for most of the learners in the former Model C school, as most of them had low self-esteem and experienced anxiety within their learning environment. Some of the psychosocial and cultural challenges were evident from participants' comments discussed in the next section.

Psychosocial challenges

Desegregation was mentioned as a major challenge in this former Model C school, as the process seems to have taken longer than expected. As a result, learners in this school were/are still forced to adjust to the school culture rather than being included and integrated. The participants responded as follows:

> *(Mmh) to some extent ... I can say that in this school, we are having the prevalence of one cultural oriented programs, which are mainly influenced by the dominant race's (White) values, traditions, and customs* (L1).
>
> *Oh yes! The prevalence of one cultural program tendency in our school turns the learner integration issue to be invisible enough ... although our teachers do not notice and acknowledge it* (L3).

Cultural challenges

Moreover, through their reflective writing, participants revealed that some of the teachers held negative attitudes towards effective learner integration in their schools.

> *(Mmh) ... the negative attitudes of some teachers and some of the school authority members are the central barriers to developing effective learner integration in this school ... I don't know if they are not equipped with enough knowledge to deal with learners' diversity at school or they just don't like the idea of integration itself.* (L2)

Additionally, L4 complained about some of the parents' attitudes as manifested in their lack of participation in developing an effective learner integration programme in their school.

> *Some parents are not cooperative at all when it comes to the issue of learner integration ... one day, I witnessed one parent warning her child to join the Zulu traditional dance only because the child is not Zulu* (L2).

The findings above show that the implementation of learner integration in a former Model C school was influenced by several aspects and events that took place within the school, but also by external factors.

Discussion

Drawing from the findings, we maintain that the implementation of learner integration in a former Model C is subject to several challenges that need to be addressed. We present some of the challenges that require a shift in the traditional roles of school management into a shared leadership philosophy, as is evidenced in studies by Doyi (2023) and Kwet (2017) who affirm that learner integration is a complex phenomenon that needs multidimensional strategies in its implementation. Moreover, learner integration also requires effective communication and collaboration among people in the SMT, educators, learners and parents or guardians (Perumalsamy et al., 2023). Therefore, former Model C schools need to consider the

diverse inputs of learners, parents, other staff and the local communities on the process of reconstruction of their policies, programmes and procedures to operate in an integrative manner (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021, 2023). Indeed, effective implementation of learner integration is nurtured by the curriculum and rearrangement of the school's programmes (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Dewey, 2019), which focuses on meeting learners' academic, socio-cultural, emotional and physical well-being at school.

Evidently, learner integration is also mentioned to be the strategy for eliminating anxiety, irrational fear and behavioural problems (Hockly, 2018; Kanyopa & Mokhele Makgalwa, 2024). Blignaut (2021) maintains that elements of learner integration normally brings awareness of the psychosocial problems faced by learners in the school context that have a negative impact on learners' academic achievement. Conversely, learner integration also opens communication lines that facilitate the exchange of ideas, perspectives and feedback, and foster a collaborative learning environment (Makalela, 2022). Thus, effective implementation of learner integration in former Model C schools is unavoidable since the phenomenon is fostering the promotion of the consideration of not only the multicultural learning environment but also supporting inclusivity and awareness of the diversity in the school community (Doyi, 2023; Kanyopa, 2022).

Conclusion

The process of implementing effective learner integration in former Model C schools can easily create the exertions that simply present the triumph of new democratic and just educational practices over the inherent apartheid educational practices in these schools (Naidoo, D 2018). Hence, this study contributes that implementation of effective learner integration in a former Model C school will not only foster acceptance but will also enhance the recognition of the diverse learners accommodated in the school. The findings of a study by Kanyopa and Hlalele (2023) acknowledge that learner integration is an attractive strategy for rearrangement of school programmes, particularly regarding issues like inclusion, multicultural learning, intellectual, social and physical integration, and effective implementation of desegregation policies in the education system.

Consequently, we maintain that learner integration is a crucial component in a multicultural learning environment as it involves an acknowledgement of the complexity of the dynamic interaction and collaboration of diverse learners, staff and communities within the school. In conclusion, we highlight that learner integration promotes integrative programmes in former Model

C schools which are vital components for the development and acquiring of essential knowledge.

Recommendations

We recommend that school management should shift and share their responsibilities on the implementation of learner integration to the educators, other staff members, learners, parents and the community. This implies that initiatives for the implementation of learner integration should consider the diverse thoughts from a broad range of educational stakeholders. We maintain that the sharing of responsibilities is an effective strategy that will help former Model C schools to develop effective learner integration. We also advocate that sharing tasks helps schools to understand the power of a collective effort in building a democratic school community. Conversely, the continuous integration and engagement of both learners and all school staff also nurture the trust in each other and enhance everyone's capabilities.

This study was limited by the number of participants' (four Grade 11 learners) perspectives. Therefore, future studies may include perspectives of a larger population, for instance, teachers and principals of other or more former Model C schools. We also recommend that in future research the influence of teachers' professional development and technologies on the implementation of learner integration in former Model C schools should be explored.

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