

## Critically analysing the policy discourse on exclusionary practices in the South African education system

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### Abstract

This article explores the intersection of educational policies and exclusionary practices in the South African education system, advocating for social justice and educational equity. While education is often viewed as a catalyst for societal advancement, systemic barriers continue to marginalise historically excluded groups. This research addresses critical questions about how current educational policies reflect and perpetuate systemic inequalities and the discursive strategies that position marginalised groups. Employing a qualitative document analysis framed by Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), this article utilizes Constellation Analysis to uncover the organizing principles and predominant dispositions embedded within inclusive education policies. A comprehensive review of key policy documents reveals how historical legacies of race, socioeconomic status, and disability persistently shape educational access. The findings indicate that despite policies aimed at promoting inclusivity, many fail to enact tangible change, thereby continuing to reinforce exclusionary practices. The analysis highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions that genuinely foster inclusivity and equity in educational opportunities.

**Keywords:** Exclusionary practices; marginalised; constellation; policy; discourse social justice; equity

### Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that education holds the inherent ability to advance society forward. This is based on the premise that the educational domain holds an all-encompassing point of view through a system that is responsive to the diverse needs of learners (Winter, 2020). However, in this discourse, adequate representation of previously marginalised groups is relatively limited (Maghuve, Maapola-Thobejane & Malahlele, 2021). It is therefore imperative to zoom into the educational landscape with a critical lens, to unpack and address inherent challenges that perpetuate an unjust system. This seemingly evident need for an overhaul leads to the broader focus of this article, which is righting previous wrongs through social justice. This theoretical paper synthesises the existing South African policies on inclusive education. The paper begins with a brief understanding of the problem, delves into the approach taken to explore the

problem, and then gives an overview of the Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), which offers the theoretical dimension of our analysis. It will then go on to the discussion of the current literature on inclusive education. The literature provides insights into the prevalent positions on inclusive education for social justice. In this section, the body of knowledge revisits the concept of inclusivity as a fundamental component of Human Rights. Further, this provides a foundation for inclusive education in context. Additionally, educational practices to date are reviewed, and potential possibilities are presented. The preceding sections offer a comprehensive overview of the policies related to inclusive education and efforts to eliminate exclusionary practices. The final section draws upon the theoretical and some substantive literature claims to analyse the South African inclusive education policy positions and establish aspects that are emphasised, forming a comprehensive outlook on the policy advances by highlighting national imperatives seeking to

address inclusivity issues and the axiological as well as the epistemological issues in government policies.

### Literature review

The South African education system, while seemingly inclusive in its policy frameworks, continues to exhibit significant exclusionary practices that disproportionately affect marginalised groups. Despite the post-apartheid government's commitment to social justice and educational equity, historical legacies of racial, economic, and social disparities persist within the educational landscape. With policies intended to promote inclusion often failing to translate into meaningful practice, it is crucial to critically analyse how these policies not only shape educational access but also perpetuate systemic barriers faced by vulnerable populations.

This research seeks to address the following critical questions: How do current educational policies discursively reflect and reinforce exclusionary practices in the South African education system? What discursive strategies are employed within policy texts to position marginalised groups, and what underlying assumptions inform these policies? By employing LCT to unpack the dynamics of policy language and structure, this study aims to explain the mechanisms through which exclusion is sustained and to highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions that genuinely foster inclusivity and equity in educational opportunities. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between policy discourse and the lived experiences of excluded groups, thereby advocating for a transformative approach to policy formulation and implementation within South African education.

### Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design focused on document analysis to investigate the policy discourse surrounding exclusionary practices in the South African education system. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of educational policies' narratives and their impact on marginalised groups.

Data is mainly from national and provincial education policy documents. A comprehensive review will be conducted on key national and provincial education policy documents related to inclusive education from post-apartheid South Africa, such as: National Education Policy (1996), White Papers on Education, the South African Schools Act (1996), the South African Constitution, and other relevant reports. Documents included are based on the following criteria: Policies addressing issues of inclusivity and exclusion; Documentation that highlights historical contexts or frameworks impacting marginalised groups. Integrating these multiple data sources (e.g., policy documents, scholarly articles, and public reports) to cross-verify findings, allows for triangulation.

The data was coded to identify recurrent themes related to exclusionary practices in the selected documents. These codes capture various aspects, such as language used, targeted demographics, policy' objectives, and outcomes. We then applied LCT's Constellation Analysis to categorise and analyse the structural arrangements within policies. Here, attention is focused on the principles governing the organisation of knowledge and practice inherent in inclusive education policies.

### *Legitimation Code Theory*

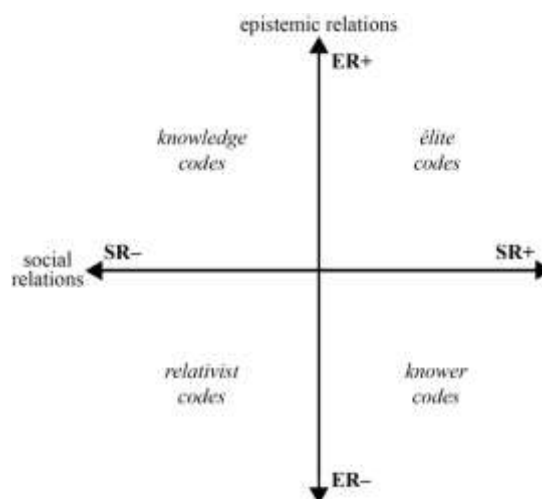
The quest for inclusivity within the South African education system is a critical and ongoing challenge, mirroring similar struggles around the world. Exclusionary practices, often rooted in socio-economic disparities and epistemological biases, hinder many students, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, from accessing quality education. This paper leverages LCT as a theoretical framework to critically analyse educational policies and their impact on the realisation of inclusive practices. According to Maton (2014), LCT provides valuable insights into the sociological dynamics of knowledge and practice in various social fields. By focusing on how resources and status interplay within the educational landscape, this study seeks to explain the structures that perpetuate exclusion and advocate for changes that uphold social justice. The struggle for inclusivity and eradicating

exclusionary practices both in the South African education system and globally is an ongoing undertaking that has been defined by resources and status, but more so by the epistemological pursuits.

LCT is a “sociological framework for researching and changing practice.” (Maton, 2014, p. 36). Maton and Chen (2017, p. 2) argued that “In each social field, actors cooperate and struggle over the resources and status that are constitutive of that field”. LCT enables the revelation of knowledge practices and establishes an understanding of the organising principles of that practice (Maton, 2014).

The first idea utilised from LCT is the Specialisation Plane. The Specialisation Plane, a foundational dimension of LCT, examines the relational dynamics between knowledge and knowers (Maton, 2014). In employing this foundational dimension, this paper investigates the relational dynamics between knowledge and knowers within the South African education inclusivity policies.

The Specialisation Plane comprises of epistemic relations (ER) and social relations (SR), which intersect to form four quadrants: ER+SR+ (Elite code), ER+SR- (Knowledge code), ER-SR+ (Knower code), and ER-SR- (Relativist code) (Maton, 2016). See Figure 1, below:



**Figure 1:** The Specialisation Plane (source: Maton, 2014, p. 30)

Epistemic relations (ER) denote the relationship between knowledge and its object, while social relations (SR) represent the relationship between knowledge and its possessors (Maton, 2014).

The strengths (+) or weaknesses (-) of these relations influence specialisation, shaping disciplines, fields, and institutions (Chen & Maton, 2019). For instance, stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and weaker social relations (SR-) characterise specialised fields like physics, whereas stronger social relations (SR+) and weaker epistemic relations (ER-) typify fields like sociology (Maton, 2016). Understanding specialisation patterns facilitates the analysis of knowledge structures, pedagogic practices, and institutional hierarchies (Chen and Maton, 2019). LCT’s Specialisation Plane offers a nuanced

framework for exploring how specialisation shapes knowledge, identity, and social mobility, enabling researchers to critique and transform educational inequalities (Maton, 2014). In this paper, epistemic relations (ER) are linked to policy positions that prioritise the goal of fostering learning among marginalised learner groups. Social relations (SR), on the other hand, focuses on promoting an inclusive educational system that ensures equal access to schooling, facilities, and resources.

The combinations of the various relations result in a code (knowledge, knower, elite or relativist) as shown in Figure 1. Winberg, McKenna, and Wilmot (2020, p.4) outline these as “*Knowledge codes* (ER+, SR+), where possession of specialised knowledges, principles or procedures concerning specific objects of study is

emphasised as the basis of achievement; *Knower codes* (ER-, SR+), where specialisation knowledge and objects are downplayed and the attributes of actors are emphasised as measures of achievement; *Elite codes* (ER +, SR +), where legitimacy is based on both possessing specialist knowledge and being the right kind of knower; *Relativist codes* (ER-, SR-), where legitimacy is determined by neither specialist knowledge nor knower attributes.” In the context of this article, the different codes can reveal the policy dispositions and the aspects that are valorised, whether actors’ attributes or the specialised knowledges and the extent to which these are valorised. This paper aims to conceptualise a framework for the efforts foregrounded in inclusive practices and dialogue, to better inform us on the gaps and opportunities that can be used to improve this area.

In the paper, we adopt another component of LCT, the Constellation Analysis, wherein constellations are ‘ideas, practices, beliefs and attributes’ (Maton, 2014a, p. 152) which shows how ideas are related in a practice. Constellation Analysis, a pivotal methodological tool within LCT, systematically examines relationships between concepts, ideas, or practices within complex social fields (Maton, 2014). This approach employs visual representations, or constellations, to illustrate connections between nodes (individual concepts) and clusters (related nodes), revealing intricate patterns, themes, and power dynamics (Maton, 2016). Implementation involves data collection (in the case of this study, the policy documents), node identification, cluster formation, connection mapping, constellation visualisation, and interpretation (Maton, 2016). Through this process, Constellation Analysis exposes power dynamics, knowledge structures, discursive fields, legitimation processes, and epistemic relations (Maton, 2014). Despite limitations, including subjectivity in node selection (Maton, 2016) and complexity evidence, Constellation Analysis offers transformative insights into social inequalities (Maton, 2014). By revealing complex relationships, Constellation Analysis enables researchers to critique and refine knowledge structures, ultimately promoting equitable education and social justice (Maton, 2014; 2016). In the case of this article,

constellations can be classified as axiological or epistemological, and these can be charged positively, neutrally, or negatively. Constellations will be the classification of specific discourse statements about inclusivity in policy and literature. The constellations in the discourses about inclusive practices will reveal that which is valorised in the approach to mitigate exclusionary practices.

This analysis holds the potential to reveal power dynamics and highlight discrepancies between stated policies and actual practices. As Maton (2016) posits, these constellations can be charged both positively and negatively, with the resulting visualisations serving as tools for critique and reform. By classifying specific discourse statements concerning inclusion, we aim to determine what values are privileged in policy constructions and how they affect the experiences and opportunities available to marginalised learners.

Ultimately, this paper highlights the importance of combining theoretical frameworks like LCT with concrete policy analysis to reveal and address educational inequities in South Africa. By engaging with concepts of specialisation and constellation analysis, we can not only understand how knowledge is constructed and valued in the education system but also how these structures shape the lived experiences of marginalised learners. Through focused critique and recommendations derived from our study, we aim to contribute to the broader agenda of advocating for educational reforms that promote inclusivity, social justice, and equitable opportunities for all students.

### ***Prevalent Positions on Inclusive Education for Social Justice***

The discussion surrounding inclusivity within the educational system is complex and multifaceted, particularly in the context of South Africa. This section acknowledges the significance of integrating inclusivity as a core component of education, underscoring that effective policymaking is critical to this endeavour.

It is highlighted that policies serve as vehicles for enacting inclusivity in education.

Within South Africa, inclusive education is not merely an ideal; it is fundamentally embedded within national policies (Adigun & Li, 2021). This underscores the importance of having frameworks that affirm the right to education for all, thereby making equity not just a goal but a systemic obligation.

Historically, global conventions on inclusive education can trace their origins back to pivotal documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This declaration was instrumental in promoting education as a universal right, establishing a benchmark to which countries could aspire (Eloff & Swart, 2019). Following this, the “Education for All” framework adopted at UNESCO’s conference represents a collective global commitment to ensuring that all individuals have access to quality education, which resonates strongly with the South African ethos of inclusivity.

Particularly relevant in the South African context is the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), which mandates that the education system be responsible for providing equitable access (Basic Education, 2021). This constitutional reference serves as both a guide and a measure against which progress and policies can be assessed. It encompasses a broader understanding that education must cater to diverse populations, addressing historical inequities tied to race, gender, and socio-economic status.

Furthering this discourse, the mention of Sustainable Development Goal 4 aligns international aspirations with local realities. This goal emphasises the need to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education. It reinforces that academic advancement is not solely about academic performance, but also about creating an environment where every learner feels valued and integrated (Saini, Sengupta, Singh, Singh & Singh, 2023).

Despite the recognition of these principles, significant barriers persist, especially for traditionally marginalised groups facing challenges such as disabilities, socio-economic hardships, and systemic inequalities related to culture and race (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2022). Although there have been improvements in

educational access, the implementation of policies that support inclusivity remains inconsistent. This disconnect between policy intentions and practical realities shows the complexities of achieving true inclusivity in practice.

Moreover, the Strategic Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (SSFASNE) aims to reinforce social justice for marginalised groups (UNESCO, 1994). However, despite its noble intentions, the realisation of these aims has proven limited. An integrated approach to education that genuinely supports the development of all students is essential. The current absence of such a comprehensive approach reflects a broader tendency towards educational exclusion rather than inclusion.

The assertion that all students should have access to education lacks clarity regarding its implementation. This leaves the educational system in a precarious position—ensuring access without concrete strategies raises questions about the feasibility of these claims (du Plessis, 2013). The analysis shows that while policies establish frameworks for inclusion, without clear actionable pathways, these efforts risk becoming hollow proclamations.

### ***Turning the tide: An eagle view of efforts and possibilities in the South African context***

The discussion concerning the implementation of inclusive education policies in South Africa highlights significant disparities and inadequacies within the educational system. This segment articulates not only the delays associated with the 20-year plan for inclusivity in education but also critically examines the factors that hinder its realisation.

The observation that various aspects of the 20-year plan remain behind schedule, underscores a systemic failure to uphold commitments made towards achieving inclusive education. Such delays might suggest a structural unwillingness where institutional practices have not kept pace with progressive policy aspirations (Pather, 2019). Furthermore, these challenges are exacerbated by existing social and economic disparities in South Africa, which manifest as barriers to access equitable education. This

reinforces the notion that without addressing broader inequalities, initiatives aimed at creating social justice within education may remain superficial or ineffectual.

The notion that merely adopting policies on inclusive education does not guarantee their implementation, is critical to understanding the current landscape (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). While policies provide a framework, the real-world execution often reveals multifaceted challenges—structurally, culturally, and institutionally—that obstruct genuine progress. This suggests a need for nuanced engagement with both policy formulation and grassroots practice. The discord between policy intent and practical application potentially raises questions about accountability and the mechanisms in place for effective oversight.

Moreover, the analysis affirms that contemporary education in South Africa tends to recognise inclusion on a surface level, failing to engage deeply with essential dimensions such as school leadership, cultural dynamics, government support, and community involvement (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2022). These elements are crucial for cultivating an environment conducive to true inclusivity; however, mere acknowledgment is insufficient. Successful implementation requires a cohesive approach that integrates these factors within a unified operational framework.

The underlying assumption that stakeholders have the capacity to fulfill their respective roles as outlined in White Paper 6 warrants examination. This presumption can lead to unrealistic expectations, thereby impeding the effectiveness of interventions aimed at enhancing inclusive education (du Plessis, 2013). If the actual capacity of school leaders or communities does not align with policy assumptions, gaps in implementation will likely persist, perpetuating cycles of exclusion rather than alleviating them.

A fundamental challenge identified is the inadequate knowledge surrounding inclusive education itself, which shapes the educational landscape (Parveen & Qounsar, 2018). This reflects a broader issue wherein insufficient training and resources limit educators' ability to

effectively implement inclusive practices. Ambiguity in understanding what constitutes inclusive education further compounds this problem, suggesting that a lack of clarity could mystify initiatives designed to promote accessibility (Mpu & Adu, 2021). The recognition of this deficit emphasises the need for comprehensive professional development initiatives that equip educators with necessary insights and skills.

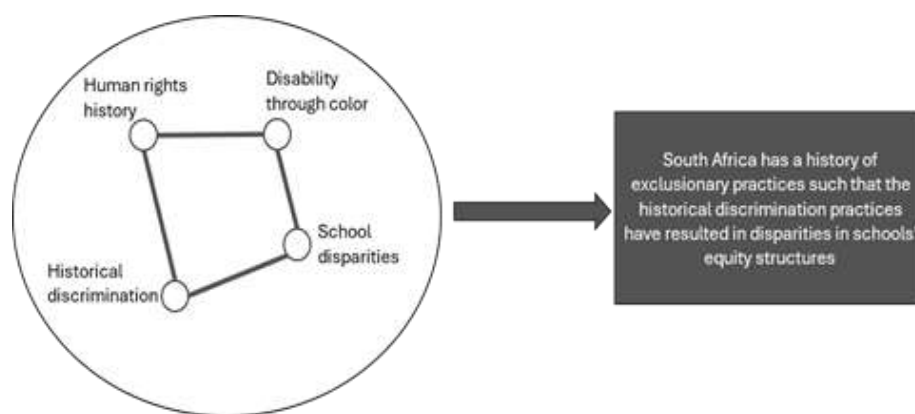
The inequalities stemming from historical injustices continue to present formidable barriers to learning for marginalised groups (Ewulley, Samuel, Alluake & Newman, 2023). These deep-rooted inequities necessitate a transformative approach to education, one that actively addresses root causes and dismantles systemic barriers rather than applying superficial solutions.

Therefore, it becomes important for practitioners to focus on building robust educational support systems capable of catering to diverse learner needs (Finkelstein, Sharma & Furlonger, 2019).

Finally, acknowledging the multiple contextual, societal, and systemic factors contributing to the challenges surrounding inclusive education and social justice highlights the complexity of the issue. These interrelated factors necessitate multidimensional strategies, ensuring that efforts toward inclusivity are not executed in isolation but rather as part of a collective effort. As authors of this analysis, we interpret these stances as a call to action for stakeholders, such as the policymakers, educators, and communities alike, to collaborate more effectively and invest in dismantling barriers to foster a truly inclusive educational environment.

### Findings and Discussion

In the ongoing effort to address exclusionary practices in education, a constellation analysis of policy documents and literature reveals two primary clusters: the epistemological access agenda and the material access agenda. These two perspectives reflect the central goals of various educational interventions—either broadening access to education or improving learning opportunities for students.



**Figure 2:** Historical factors in exclusionary practices

Figure 2 illustrates, at a meta-level, the complex issues that have arisen from historical discriminatory practices. These past injustices have necessitated the establishment of national policies aimed at redressing inequities through constitutional frameworks. The overview of South African inclusive education policies presented here emphasises their commitment to eliminating exclusionary practices rooted in the nation's history of discrimination.

The South African education sector is pivotal in shaping the nation's future. To achieve its transformative goals, educational policies must be congruent with constitutional mandates. This analysis delves into key legislative frameworks such as the South African Constitution, the South African Schools Act (1996), and the National Education Policy Act (1996). It explores how these documents reflect underlying values, social relations, and knowledge structures necessary for promoting inclusive education.

As the implementation of education aligns with national imperatives, it becomes evident that these declarations primarily emphasise axiological aspects—focusing on values and social relations (SR+) rather than essentially epistemic concerns (ER-). The enactment of the Knower code (SR+, ER-) signifies a prioritisation of individual attributes over specialised knowledge forms. Collectively, these policies reflect a strong commitment to eradicating disciplinary practices and fostering inclusive access to education.

Figure 3 highlights the interconnected priorities within these three foundational

documents, revealing core nodes that underscore shared objectives. Notably, each node addresses critical issues such as “no unfair discrimination” and the “right to basic education.”

The node representing “no unfair discrimination” (ER+) in the Constitution connects seamlessly with the SASA's focus on “unfair discrimination against a learner” (SR+) and NEPA's stipulation for “protection against unfair discrimination” (ER+). These connections echo the broader historical context in which certain populations were unjustly denied educational opportunities. It is for this reason that the world agenda seeks to address all forms of exclusion, marginalisation, disparities, and inequalities in access (UNESCO, 2015)

Furthermore, additional nodes like “right to basic education” (ER+) and “No person may be denied the opportunity to receive education” (SR+) establish vital links around protection and legal benefits enshrined in NEPA. These collective nodes serve as protective mechanisms for individuals, grounded in constitutional guarantees.

The pronounced emphasis on individual rights reflects an axiological leaning, prioritizing social relations (SR+) over pure knowledge transfer (ER-). This suggests that the objectives articulated in these documents do not fully address the specific knowledge required to navigate and rectify exclusionary practices (Walton, 2018). Other connecting principles include respect for dignity, equal treatment under the law, and equitable access to educational institutions.

The cluster analysis distinctly identifies both a knower code (SR+, ER-) and a knowledge

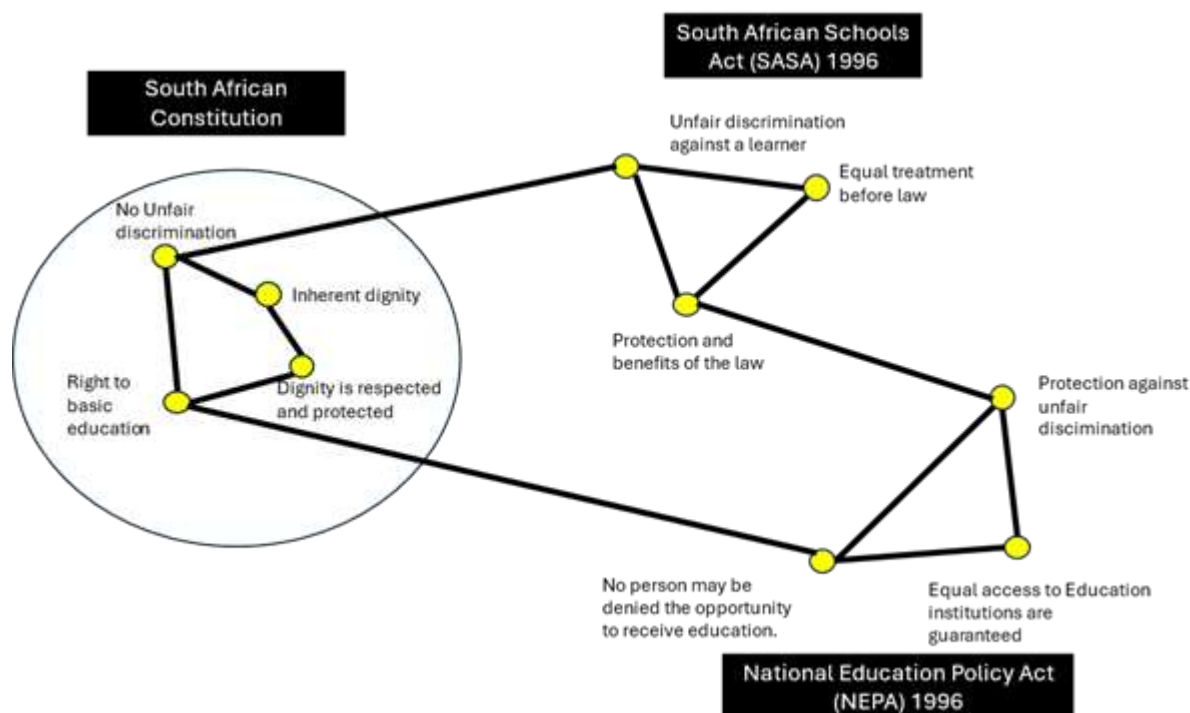
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code (ER+, SR-) throughout these essential documents, indicating a dual approach to understanding the challenges of inclusivity in South Africa's educational landscape.

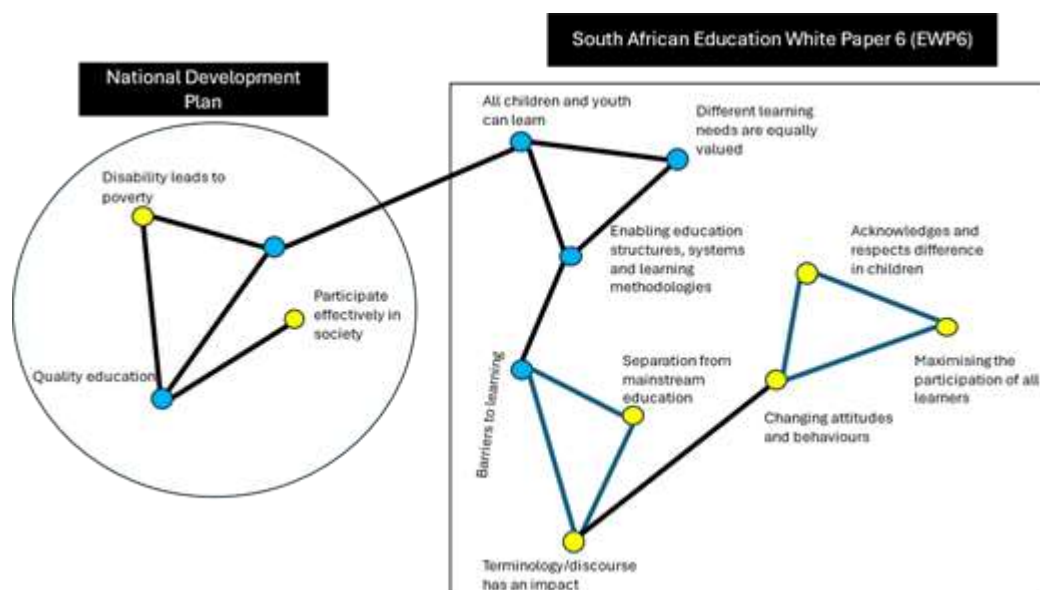
The efforts to set up long-term legislative mechanisms and actionable plans to achieve inclusivity are stipulated in other policies such as the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6). In these

policies, we can deduce the commitment to various aspects of inclusivity in education, that is, the axiological and/or the epistemological.

Figure 4 below shows the yellow highlighted nodes that meet the axiological objectives, which often include aspects of material access. The blue highlighted nodes signify the foregrounding of the epistemological access agenda.



**Figure 3:** National imperatives seeking to address inclusivity issues



**Figure 4:** Axiological and epistemological issues in government policies

As shown in Figure 4, key nodes such as “disability leads to poverty” and “participate effectively in society” underscore stronger social relations (SR+). These nodes emphasise the need for recognising the identities and barriers faced by excluded individuals within society. By addressing the social dimensions of exclusion, we can begin to understand how societal perceptions shape access to opportunities for marginalised groups.

Simultaneously, the node “changing attitudes and behaviours” also foregrounds stronger social relations (SR+), highlighting the critical role that societal attitudes play in creating an inclusive environment (Rutland & Killen, 2015). Analysing the language used in inclusivity policy discourse reveals underlying assumptions and biases that can either hinder or promote effective inclusion. This analysis becomes vital as it shows that what we say matters; the terminology we adopt must reflect a commitment to inclusivity rather than inadvertently perpetuating stereotypes (Dovidio, Gaertner, Ufkes, Saguy & Pearson, 2016).

In parallel, the epistemological access agenda focuses on knowledge and skills essential for educational success, particularly concerning students with disabilities. Important policy documents like the Education White Paper 6 tackle various challenges related to this agenda. However, a central theme that emerges from both literature and policy statements is the axiological focus, which prioritises individual needs and values over the more technical aspects of knowledge acquisition. This highlights a crucial dilemma: while we strive to enhance individual capabilities, research indicates significant gaps remain at the axiological material access level—ranging from disparities in school resources to insufficient access to specialist support services, all contributing to high dropout rates. As argued by Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019), poor backgrounds inhibit the progression of children, and the lack of resources in schools contributes significantly.

This disparity raises an important question: How can we achieve our epistemological objectives without first addressing these foundational access issues? If material conditions inhibit equitable participation in education, then

any effort to promote knowledge and skills will face substantial obstacles (Spaull, 2015).

To navigate these complexities, it is crucial to explore the recurring themes within existing inclusive education policies, as they can inform strategic implementation efforts. Conducting a constellation analysis can help us pinpoint both emphasised and overlooked components of effective approaches in educational settings. Such an analysis not only sheds light on the strengths of current policies but also identifies critical gaps that require attention.

The analysis reveals that South Africa’s constitutional and legislative frameworks notably prioritise inclusivity and equity in education. The interconnected nodes across the Constitution, the South African Schools Act (SASA), and the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) highlight robust protections against unfair discrimination, ensuring equal access to education while preserving individual dignity. The dominant axiological (*knower code*) emphasis (SR+; ER-) further illustrates this point by showcasing the priority placed on social relationships and individual attributes rather than solely on knowledge transmission.

Despite commitments outlined in documents like the National Development Plan 2030 and the Education White Paper 6, there remains a pressing need for intensified efforts to fully implement both axiological and epistemological goals. It is clear that achieving true inclusivity in education will require continuous refinement of policies, alongside effective implementation strategies that take into account both individual values and knowledge needs.

Ultimately, addressing these interconnected dimensions will facilitate a more inclusive educational landscape, enabling all learners to thrive irrespective of their backgrounds or abilities. Only through concerted action can we bridge the gaps between policy intentions and actual practices in educational settings.

### **Conclusion: Possibilities in Policy and Implementation**

The pursuit of inclusivity in education cannot rely solely on policy frameworks; in fact,

uncertainties inherent in existing policies can intensify the challenges at hand. It is essential to revisit and refine these policies to align them with contemporary understanding and practices in inclusive education, as suggested by Donohue and Bornman (2014). Policies must distinctly articulate both axiological and epistemological goals, placing equal emphasis on social relationships and knowledge acquisition.

While frameworks for inclusive education are well-documented, as noted by du Plessis (2013), there remains a significant gap in evaluating their effectiveness in practice. Although inclusive education is central to educational discourse, a critical question persists: to what extent are schools successfully implementing methods that facilitate effective teaching and learning? As highlighted by Lindner and Schwab (2020), the real measure of success lies in observable practices within school environments.

Effective teaching and learning serve as the foundation for achieving epistemological access within inclusive education. This necessitates that educators learn to adapt their pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse learning needs of all students, as emphasised by Finkelstein, Sharma, and Furlonger (2019). Ongoing professional development is crucial for equipping educators with the skills necessary to fully embrace the principles of inclusive education (Donath et al., 2023).

Moreover, fostering a supportive climate for inclusive education requires strong leadership and a cultural framework that genuinely champions inclusion. The scope of inclusive education must extend beyond policy formulations to encompass legislative measures that drive meaningful change informed by policy. This includes ensuring equal educational opportunities, engaging stakeholders, enhancing infrastructure, providing adequate resources, and developing reflexive curricula along with robust evaluation systems (Jansen van Rensburg et al., 2024). This analysis demonstrates that, with careful scrutiny of South Africa's inclusive education policies and a shift towards a holistic rather than fragmented approach, we can progressively build an inclusive educational system—a goal that is not simply aspirational but actionable. Despite substantial

constitutional commitments to inclusivity, current educational policies fall short of realising this vision.

Thus, it is imperative for key stakeholders to deeply understand the foundational principles of inclusive practices to cultivate a truly integrative educational landscape. This study asserts the great potential of education to propel social justice, equity, and fairness, necessitating ongoing refinement and possibly a redefinition of our educational objectives. Although the vision for inclusive education in South Africa is undeniably clear, achieving practical outcomes demands confronting persistent challenges head-on. This endeavour calls for systematic changes that embody a comprehensive understanding of policy advancements and a sincere commitment to inclusivity at all societal levels.

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