EDUCATION FOR ALL LEARNERS: ELIMINATING ‘DEFICIT-THINIKING’ IN FAVOUR OF INCLUSIVE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOLING IN MALTA

SEAN ZAMMIT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Lincoln for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, at the College of Social Science, School of Education.

November 2020

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Education for All: Deficit-Thinking vs. Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling

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ABSTRACT

The research study presents an in-depth investigation of the interplay and effects of (a) *'neoliberal approaches to education'* (particularly the market-based ideology); and (b) *'deficit-thinking'* (practice of holding lower expectations for minority students whose demographics do not fit the traditional context of the educational system) on the 're-structuring' process of the Maltese educational system into an inclusive and culturally responsive one. Hence, this thesis delved into national policy documents and explored the perceptions of diverse educational stakeholders to examine how educators make sense of 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education' to shine a light on system-wide dynamics, processes and practices in favour of quality education for all learners.

For this purpose, eight State schools (4 Primary and 4 Secondary) from four different colleges, in the Northern, Central and Southern regions of Malta, took part in the study upon acceptance. Research participants included: (a) policymakers (Education Minister; Director Generals; Directors; Church Schools Secretariat Representative and President of the Malta Union of Teachers); (b) College Principals of the four randomly selected colleges; (c) members of Senior Management Teams in schools; (d) middle leaders; (e) teachers, support specialists and/or educational practitioners; (f) learning support educators; and (g) Primary, Middle and Secondary students. The utilized 'mixed-method' approach (questionnaires, interviews, job-shadowing sessions, class observations, socio-metric tests, focus groups and document analysis) facilitated data collection, which helped to identify different cohorts of minority learners in local schools as well as to reveal system-wide weaknesses to inclusive education (lack of conceptual clarity on inclusion; resistance to high-leverage change due to lack of strategic leadership for inclusive education; one-size-fits-all teaching practices; and unsustainable support services).

Research findings highlighted also the predominant presence of the 'deficit ideology', which seemed to intensify in conjunction with neoliberal approaches. Moreover, results helped to propose the *'repositioning-of-the-self'* model, based on inclusive leadership, to unleash the power of 'deliberative dialogue' to encourage 'collective thinking' on how to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' practices from all hierarchical system levels and to transform schools into inclusive settings that validate and create 'space' for all students (including minority ones) to learn.

SIGNATORIES

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I, the undersigned, declare the authenticity and ownership of this thesis, which was conducted under the supervision and guidance of Dr. C. Callinan, Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader, in the School of Education within the University of Lincoln (UK). I also declare that this research study abided to the University's *Intellectual Property (IP) Policy*, the *Research Ethics Policy (Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Humans and Other Animals)* and the *Regulations Governing Academic Offences (Part A)*.

I acknowledge the intellectual ownership of the thesis and strongly declare that I never resorted to any form of copying techniques to complete the study, except for supportive extracts (from books, journals and/or internet sources), which I clearly identified, referenced and properly cited.

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SEAN ZAMMIT

____

Date

SPECIAL DEDICATION

To all my family members, especially my parents, my wife, *Rodianne*, my son, *Wayne*, and my daughter, *Elodie*, who with great love and patience, always sustained and supported me throughout this educational journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and deep respect to my principal supervisor, Dr. Carol Callinan, whose expertise, helpful criticism, unstinting support, and invaluable patience has kept my morale high and made the completion of this research possible. I also extend my thanks to my secondary supervisor, Dr. Rachael Sharpe, for her timely hints and advise.

Special thanks also go to the following persons who were instrumental in pursuing this degree:

- My parents, who unconditionally supported me throughout my educational journey. Their grounding was imperative. Without their encouragement and support, I would never have made it.
- Professor Christopher Bezzina (B.Ed. (Hons), M.Ed. Admin. (Hons), Ph.D. (Brunel), FCCEAM), Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta, for accepting the invitation to serve as my external examiner during the final PhD viva.
- Dr. Helen Childerhouse for accepting to serve as examiner during the viva.
- The Ministry for Education and Employment, more precisely the ENDEAVOUR Scholarships Scheme. **The research work disclosed in this publication is fully funded by the ENDEAVOUR Scholarships Scheme**. Without the latter support, it would not have been possible to make my dream a reality.
- The Minister for Education and Employment, Hon. E. Bartolo, Director Generals, Directors, policymakers and College Principals, who accepted to enrich this study with their precious contributions.
- The Heads of School, teachers and learning support educators who took part in the research study.
- All parents who consented their children to participate in the research study's focus groups. Likewise, all the learners for their valuable thoughts and insights.
- All the people who helped me to finish this piece of work.

Finally, I would like to thank again my wife, Rodianne, and my two children, Wayne and Elodie, for putting up with my academic exigencies. My gratitude also extends to my immediate family, colleagues and friends for their perseverant backing.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACTU	*Access to Communication & Technology Unit*
ALP	*Alternative Learning Programme*
B.Ed (Hons)	*Bachelor of Education (Honours)*
BMP	*Behaviour Modification Plan*
CE	*Council of Europe*
CEC	*Complementary Education Classrooms*
CEO	*Chief Executive Officer*
CP	*College Principal*
CCP	*Core Competence Program*
CDP	*College Development Plan*
COH	*Council of Heads*
CPD	*Continuous Professional Development*
CPE	*Community of Professional Educators*
CRP	*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*
CSIE	*Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education*
DES	*Directorate for Educational Services*
DQSE	*Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education*
EADSNE	*European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education*
EASNIE	*European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education*
EC	*European Commission*
EFA	*Education for All*
ELC	*Education Leaders Council*

EO	*Education Officers*
ESL	*Early School Leavers*
ESS	*Educational Support Services*
FT 1-1	*Full Time One-to-One Support*
GEQAF	*General Education Quality Analysis/Diagnosis Framework*
GDP	*Gross Domestic Product*
HMIE	*Her Majesty Inspectorate of Education*
HoD	*Head of Department*
HoS	*Head of School*
IATSE	*Irish Association for Teachers in Special Education*
IEN	*Individual Educational Needs*
IEP	*Individual Educational Plans*
INCO	*Inclusion Coordinators*
ISA	*Independent Schools Association*
ITT	*Initial Teacher Training*
KE	*Kindergarten Educators*
LOF	*Learning Outcomes Framework*
LSE	*Learning Support Educators*
MATSEC	*Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate*
MCAST	*Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology*
MEDE	*Ministry for Education and Employment*
MUT	*Malta Union of Teachers*
NCCA	*National Council for Curriculum and Assessment*
NMC	*National Minimum Curriculum*

NCF *National Curriculum Framework*

NCSE *National Council for Special Education*

NGO *Non-Governmental Organisation*

NQT *Newly Qualified Teachers*

NLA *National Literacy Agency*

NSO *National Statistics Office*

NSSS *National School Support Services Department*

OECD *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*

OFSTED *Office for Standards in Education*

PAR *Participatory Action Research*

PD *Professional Development*

PE *Physical Education*

PGDEL *Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership*

PIRLS *Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study*

PISA *Program for International Student Assessment*

PLC *Professional Learning Communities*

PMP *Performance Management Program*

PS *Permanent Secretary*

QA *Quality Assurance*

QAD *Quality Assurance Department*

SDP *School Development Plan*

SEBD *Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*

SEG *Strategic Educational Governance*

SEN *Special Educational Needs*

SENCO *Special Educational Needs Coordinator*

SMART *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-Bound*

SMP *Statementing Moderating Panel*

SMT *Senior Management Teams*

SNE *Special Needs Education*

SPS *School Psychological Services*

SSC *Shared in the Same Class Support*

TALIS *Teaching and Learning International Survey*

TNA *Training Needs Analysis*

TIMSS *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*

UN *United Nations*

UNCRC *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*

UNCRPD *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

UDL *Universal Design for Learning*

UoM *University of Malta*

VET *Vocational Education and Training*

WHO *World Health Organization*

WSA *Whole School Approach*

GLOSSARY

The glossary's aim is to assist readers in better understanding commonly used terms throughout this thesis.

Alternative Learning Programs
The provision of an alternative route to Form 5 (Year 11) learners, who choose not to sit for MATSEC, to encourage them to continue their studies in various subject areas such as Information Technology, Mathematics, Life Skills and Languages. The level of training (depending on the programme) is equivalent to *"a full School Leaving Certificate or a full VET level 1/2 certificate with a minimum of 40 credits"* (www.ncfhe.gov.mt).

Benchmark Examinations
These examinations (at the end of the Primary Education cycle in Year 6) serve as a necessary regulative feature to maintain high quality teaching standards. Benchmark results are not used for 'selection/streaming' purposes but for accountability motives to help colleges/schools *make* informed planning and *take* evidence-based decisions (Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, 2007).

Collaboration
Educators' ability and *"commitment to work, help and share expertise with colleagues to solve ongoing challenges of professional practice, rather than simply engaging in joint work as a motivational device to implement external mandates…"* (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996, 20).

College System
In the Maltese educational system, a college consists of a cluster of Primary, Middle and Secondary State schools, in which learners begin and complete their compulsory educational journey. A 'College Principal' or 'Head College Network' manages and leads the college. The purpose is twofold: (a) enable school networking; and (b) ensure continuity, stability and accountability.

College Development Planning
An ongoing process that helps colleges (as complex communities) to respond effectively to the dual challenge of enhancing quality and managing change. The process results in a 'working document' (developed by the CP in consultation with all HoS), which sets the college's vision and initiatives as well as facilitates monitoring and self-evaluation practices.

Classroom Participation
The way teachers exert control by regulating different forms of interactions, i.e. class discussions and exchanges between teachers and students. Hollander (2002) presents participation as a collective rather than just an individual responsibility.

Complimentary Education
A support service offered in all Primary schools in Malta, from Year 1 to Year 4/5, to help struggling learners develop literacy and numeracy skills.

Core Competence Programs
Specifically designed programs targeting low ability secondary school learners in need of support to attain basic skills in Maltese, English and Mathematics by the end of compulsory schooling.

Continuous Professional Development
All learning experiences (conscious, planned and unplanned) that are of direct or indirect benefit to educators, which contribute to the quality of education (Day, 1999).

Cultural Responsiveness
A pedagogy that acknowledges and celebrates all cultural diversity to offer equitable access to education to all learners. Hence, a teaching practice which utilizes cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance styles to make teaching more effective and appropriate for all learners (Gay, 2000).

Curriculum
Principle-driven actions, processes and procedures that guide and foster significant and meaningful learning experiences in all learners. It includes the creation, development, and organization of learning opportunities aimed at meeting learning outcomes.

Deficit-Thinking
The practice of holding lower expectations for students with demographics that do not fit the traditional context of the school system. Deficit-thinking attributes minority learners' failure to factors outside the control of educators and schools.

Difference Theory
The process of 'labelling' misunderstood behaviours and actions as "deficient" to the detriment of students' learning.

Directorate for Educational Services
A main directorate within MEDE, which mission statement is to ensure the effective and efficient operation and delivery of services in State schools within an established framework of decentralisation and autonomy.

Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
The directorate within MEDE, which mission is to regulate, establish, monitor and assure standards and quality in educational programs.

Discourse
"A system of statements which constructs an object" (Parker, 1992, 5) or *"a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories and statements that in some way together produce a particular version of events"* (Burr, 1995, 48). In this research

study, discourse is understood as the set of ideas (often influenced by historical events) that influence educators' practices, actions, interactions and the way they understand and explain experiences (Bishop et. al., 2007).

Discrimination
The attitude or behaviour of holding a minority group in low estimation, treating them badly, rewarding them less than others, boycotting and excluding them because of skin colour, gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity, disability or religion.

Diversity
The value of accepting and respecting each individual as unique, whilst recognizing and responding effectively to differences, such as age, race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, physical abilities, religion and political ideology.

Education for All
A framework that tries to improve: (a) educational quality and learning outcomes; (b) school access and equity; (c) the dropout and retention rates of students; and (d) early childhood development (http://www.worldbank.org/). Throughout the study, the terms 'education for all' and 'inclusive education' are used interchangeably.

Equality
The state of being equal, i.e. no person counts more than another. Hence, having same rights and offering same chances in education, housing, social security and civil rights.

Equity
The quality of being fair, unbiased and just by ensuring that everyone has access to the resources, opportunities and power they need to reach their full potential.

Human Rights
Basic rights and freedom to which all humans are entitled such as civil and political rights; the right for liberty and freedom of expression; equality before law; social, cultural and economic rights; and the right to work and to receive quality education.

Inclusion
The *"action or state of including or being included within a group or structure"* (The Oxford English Dictionary). Inclusion is a universal human rights issue, which values and gives equal opportunity to all citizens by removing all barriers to involvement.

Integration
Placing SEN labelled learners in mainstream educational settings with adaptations and resources, on condition that they 'fit in' with pre-existing structures, attitudes and an unaltered environment (http://www.allfie.org.uk/).

Leader
A *"person who influences a group of people towards the achievement of a goal or a set of objectives"* (http://www.vtaide.com/gleanings/leader.htm).

Leadership
The *"art of leading others to deliberately create a result that wouldn't have happened otherwise"* (https://siyli.org/).

Learner-Centred Teaching
A pedagogy, which recognizes students' diversity and places the learner at the heart of the learning process. Learner-centred learning *"is based on the premise that student passivity does not support or enhance learning and that it is precisely 'active learning' which helps students to learn independently"* (MacHemer & Crawford, 2007, 11). This approach promotes higher-order thinking (Tsui, 2002, 740) and changes the role of the teacher – from being entrusted with the *"transmission of knowledge to supporting and guiding self-regulated student learning"* (Van Eekelen et. al., 2005, 447).

Learning Outcomes Framework
A framework, which aims to free schools and learners from centrally imposed syllabi and knowledge. The LOF intends to provide more curricular autonomy to colleges and schools (http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/).

Learning Centres and Learning Support Zones
Support services provided to learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Both services emphasize the provision of separate but targeted short-termed programs to facilitate the re-integration of students into mainstream classes.

Mainstreaming
The placement of students in one or more general education classes (Wisconsin Education Association Council, 1996).

Marketisation
The introduction of market-based ideas and practices into the organisation and delivery of government services, namely the introduction of payment fees for citizens to access State services; and the adoption of market-like and competitive practices (borrowed from the corporate sector) in the public sector.

Minority Group
A group of persons having less privilege than the biggest grouping in the population. Often a minority group has lower social and/or economic position/power.

Mission Statement
Written declaration of an organization's core purpose that normally remains unchanged over time. These statements (a) distinguish what is important from what is not; (b) state what shall be achieved and how; and (c) communicate a sense of shared direction to the entire organization. Mission statements are different from 'vision'.

National Minimum Curriculum (2000)
The first national document, applicable to all Maltese State, Church and Independent schools. The NMC is a framework establishing parameters within which every school

is empowered to design and propose an educational provision that meets its particular curricular needs to cater for the needs of all student.

National Curriculum Framework (2012)
The current Maltese educational and policy framework, which allows for adjustments to new developments during its implementation by responding to learners and societal demands, driven by globalisation and new neoliberal paradigms.

National School Support Services
A MEDE department that hosts a number of educational support services, namely the Psychosocial, Special and Inclusive education support services.

Oppression
"The social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, group or institution" (Barker, 2003, 23), from which *"a dominant group benefits from the systematic abuse, exploitation, and injustice directed toward a subordinate group"* (Johnson, 2000, 67).

Pathologize
The act of viewing or characterizing individuals as medically or psychologically abnormal, giving rise to 'deficit-thinking'.

Prejudice
The act of forming different ideas based on a mixture of emotions and insufficient facts, leading to hostile behaviour and discrimination.

Privatisation
The selling of and/or the transfer of responsibilities of government services to private companies of aspects of public services, such as health and education. It includes shifts towards minimal regulation of markets; cuts in government spending (including reducing the size of some government departments and agencies); tax cuts (particularly to the highest earners); strategies promoting de-unionisation; re-modelling of the public sector to mirror the private sector; and new managerial approaches of governance based on accountability.

Resilience
The processes that result in positive individual, community and system educational outcomes in spite of negative events, serious threats and hazards.

Resource Centres
Educational settings (five in all), which provide support services to students with severe and multiple physical, intellectual, psychological and communication needs. Services include hydrotherapy, multi-sensory activities and pool facilities among others.

School Development Plan
An ongoing process that helps schools to meet the dual challenge of enhancing quality and managing change. The school plan is a 'working-reference' document that guides all activities and facilitates monitoring, reviewing and self-evaluation. The outcome is

the provision of an enhanced educational service, relevant to learners' needs, through the promotion of high quality teaching, the professional empowerment of teachers and the effective management of innovation and change (http://www.sdpi.ie/).

Senior Management Team
A group of persons (HoS and Assistant HoS) responsible for the running and management of schools.

Significant Learning
What learners should be able to do in terms of skills, knowledge and attitudes. Hence enabling holistic learning experiences, based on: foundational knowledge; application; integration; human dimension; learning how to learn; and caring.

Social Justice
It is the fair and proper administration of laws conforming to the natural law by treating all persons equally and without prejudice. In education, social justice aims to enable underprivileged groups to realise their potential by re-invigorating education to 'raise aspirations' and diversify the education market.

Special Education
Services that meet SEN learners' needs beyond what is provided for students without such needs (Wisconsin Education Association Council, 1996).

Statementing Moderating Panel
A board of educational professionals responsible for issuing 'an official statement of needs'. The education Minister appoints this panel, which is accountable to DG ES.

Streaming
The act of splitting learners into several different hierarchical groups according to their academic achievement. Streaming is also referred to as 'selection'. Partial streaming can also occur in schools through *Banding*, *Setting* and/or *Tracking*.

Teaching Competences
The 'craft of teaching', focusing on the role of the teacher in the class (Caena, 2011).

Teacher Competences
A wider and systemic view of teacher professionalism on multiple levels – the school, the individual, the local community and the professional networks.

Transformative Capacity
The educational system's ability to transform its structures to better address change and uncertainty by developing [new] systems that are more suited to new conditions.

Withdrawal System Approach
The approach of withdrawing students on a one-to-one or small group basis from the mainstream classroom to provide learners with additional support.

Inclusive education is an unabashed announcement, a public and political declaration and celebration of difference… [However,] it would appear that the development of educational systems has been predicated by the denial of the existence and value of difference…Turning this around is not a project for osmosis. It requires continual proactive responsiveness to foster an inclusive educational culture. Further, it means that we become cultural vigilantes. Exclusion must be exposed in all its forms, the language we use, the teaching methods we adopt, the curriculum we transmit, the relations we establish within our schools.

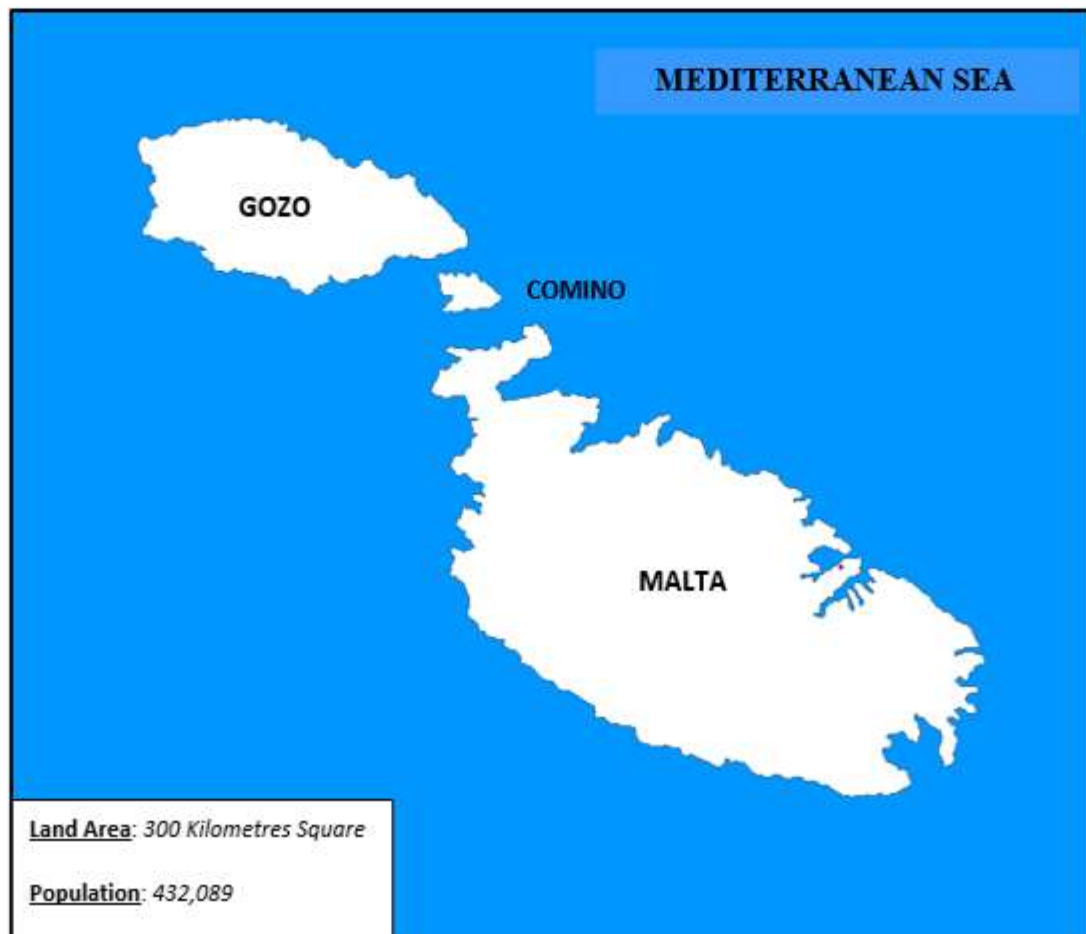
Corbett and Slee, 2000, 134

Chapter 1: Introduction: Background & Context

1.1 Malta and its Educational Development

This section portrays the main educational developments that have affected the evolution of inclusive education in Malta, an independent Republic State consisting of three small islands in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea. The Maltese archipelago has a total land area of 317 square kilometres, a population of less than half a million, and lies 93 kilometres south of Sicily and 288 kilometres to the north of Africa (http://www.visitmalta.com).

Figure 1.1: The Republic State of Malta



The island of Malta is the largest (216 km²) and is the main cultural, commercial and administrative centre of the archipelago. It is followed by its sister-island, Gozo (67 km²), which is mostly known for its open spaces, and Comino (7 km²), which is the smallest and largely uninhabited island (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malta). Several imperial powers governed the Maltese islands, from the Phoenicians to the Muslims; from the Normans to the Knights of St. John, and lastly, the British, whose legacy lasted for 150 years. The latter colonisers left an indelible mark on the islands'

historical journey and the inhabitants' beliefs. Frendo (1991) argued that the Maltese people always had an immeasurable ability to adapt to different cultures and attitudes. Having gained full Independence in 1964, Malta is also a relatively young nation. Finally, the Maltese islands became a Republic in 1974 and a full member of the European Union in 2004.

Malta possesses no natural resources but its only richness lies in its human resources. Much emphasis is placed on the notion that no Maltese citizen is left behind. Within this context, education plays a crucial role. Hence, the provision of quality education has always been a top priority for different and successive Maltese Governments. The NMC (1999) pointed out that "the educational system should equip all individuals with a balanced mix of wisdom, knowledge, skills and attitudes for them to operate effectively in today's and, in particularly, tomorrow's world of work" (28).

Educational development in Malta has always been constant, starting from the late 1592 with the 'Collegium Melitense', set up by the Jesuits, up until present time. The table below illustrates some of the major educational landmarks in Maltese history (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Major Educational Landmarks in Malta

• **1976**: First proposal for basic education for all students.
• **1850**: Beginning of the education system.
• **1946**: Compulsory education: School attendance obligatory until age 14.
• **1970**: Secondary education for all students.
• **1972**: Opening of trade schools.
• **1974**: School leaving age reviewed to 16 years.
• **1989**: Introduction of the first National Curriculum (Wain, 1991).
• **1999**: Second National Minimum Curriculum (NMC, 1999).
• **2005**: The setting up of 'School Networks: The College System'.
• **2012**: Third National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2012).
• **2015**: Launch of the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF, 2015).

Entrenched in the Maltese constitution is the duty of the State to promote and provide quality education and instruction to "every citizen of the Republic of Malta…without any distinction of age, sex, disability, belief or economic means" (*Education Act* 1988, Ch. 327, para. 3-7). Hence, the obligation to "ensure the existence of a system of

schools and institutions that are accessible to all citizens and that cater for the full development of the whole personality…" (*Education Act* 1988, Ch. 327, para 4). These commitments highlight the State's deep desire to uphold inclusivity since "education is a journey towards personal empowerment and enrichment, as a mechanism that supports social justice and an important tool for inclusion and employability" (NCF, 2012, vii).

The *Education Act* (1988) and the *Equal Opportunities: Persons with Disability Act* (2000) embed in the constitution, the legal framework for the provision of inclusive and special education. Malta is also a signatory of several conventions and declarations in favour of human rights and inclusive education (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Conventions, Statements and Declarations

A. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).
B. UN General Assembly on Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disability (1993).
C. Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on SNE (1994).
D. Madrid Declaration in the European Congress of People with Disabilities (2002).
E. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

Since 1989, different Maltese Governments embarked on an intensive mission to increase the general understanding of 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education', including the introduction of more respectful and dignifying terminology. These efforts led to a substantial increase in SEN learners in mainstream schools together with an infinite number of additional support services.

All reforms aimed to make education more Available, Accessible, Acceptable and Adaptable. Tomasevski (2004) argued that:

> "What we accomplished in human rights – and it is a huge accomplishment – is a complete conceptual switch, stating that no child should be forced to adapt to education. The principle requires complete reversal. Education should adapt to the best interests of each child" (3).

Hence a conceptual shift, whereby emphasis is no longer placed on 'fixing' deficits (Sharma, 2009) but on creating equitable educational systems that respond to learners' diversity. However, the 'Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta – External Audit Report' (2014) indicated that the Maltese educational system was still encountering difficulties to internalize and adopt a fully inclusive approach.

Tomasevski stressed that, “the challenge is immense, [since] education is required to adapt to each learner, against the historical heritage of excluding learners who were deemed not able to adapt to the education system” (CSIE, 2004, 3). The latter belief gave rise to the current research study.

1.2 Background and Context of the Thesis Topic

Malta spends approximately 6.8% of its GDP on education. Through this expenditure, which is above the average spent in other EU countries, the Maltese Government aims to:

a) Foster economic growth;

b) Enhance productivity;

c) Contribute to citizens’ personal and social development; and

d) Reduce social inequalities (EASNIE, 2014).

The NMC (1999) regards education as a “womb in which our society re-produces and re-creates itself for the future” to preserve “what is valuable in our character” and to prepare future generations for “the world of tomorrow” (MEDE, 2000, 5). On the same wavelength, the NCF (2012) aims to:

> “achieve an assurance that by the end of compulsory education, learners will have acquired the knowledge, competences, attitudes and values that stimulate them to view lifelong learning as part of their development as individuals and as Maltese citizens” (vii).

The key question is how to translate these beliefs into reality. The essence is no longer on the ‘Why’ (identification process) but on the ‘How’ (implementation process).

Education has always been a controversial topic, which necessitates an urgent reform (Giroux, 2002; Lewis & Macedo, 1996) to guarantee quality education and to continue the eternal fight against poverty, unemployment, prejudice and social hatred. Kofi Annan (2001) stated that “for everyone everywhere, education in general is a basic human right…the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential”. He also asserted that,

> “Knowledge is power since education is the premise of progress, in every society and family, given that on its foundations rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development” (Kofi Annan, 2001, 45).

The Maltese government upholds Kofi Annan’s vision and is committed to providing quality education by replacing ‘deficit processes’ with socially just practices. ‘Inclusion’

always topped the priority educational agenda and influenced system-reforms, which aimed to (a) ameliorate academic achievement; (b) provide quality and responsive education; and (c) offer different learning routes to learners. Hence, the importance of the development of several national framework documents to improve the effectiveness of the local educational system (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3: National Framework Documents in Malta

National Framework Documents
• 'Creating the Future Together – The National Minimum Curriculum' (1999).
• 'Knowing our Schools' (2004).
• 'For all Children to Succeed' (2005).
• 'Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools' (2008).
• 'Special Schools Reform' (2011).
• 'The National Curriculum Framework' (2012).
• 'Respect for All Framework' (2014).
• 'The Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy' (2014).
• 'Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024' (2014).
• 'A National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo' (2014).
• 'The National Employment Policy' (2014).
• 'The National Youth Policy towards 2020' (2015).
• 'The National Children's Policy' (2017).
• 'The Framework for Inclusive Education for Malta' (2017).

To facilitate the transformation of the local educational system, MEDE also developed several policy documents (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4: National Policy Documents in Malta

National Policy Documents
• 'Creating Inclusive Schools' (2002).
• 'The Inclusive Curriculum' (2007).
• 'Read with Me' (2012).
• 'Addressing Attendance in Schools' (2014);
• 'Addressing Bullying Behaviour in Schools' (2014).
• 'Managing Behaviour in Schools' (2015).
• 'Whole School Approach to Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Policy' (2015).
• 'Trans, Gender Variant and Intersex Students in Schools Policy' (2015).
• 'The National Policy for Inclusive Education for Malta' (2017).

Despite the consistent investment, the Maltese educational system, in certain aspects, still trails behind that of its European counterparts. Negative traits include:

- High percentage turnout of ESL, which in 2013 stood at 20.9%;
- Elevated number of students who do not pursue postsecondary or tertiary education;
- High percentage (36%) of 15-year-old learners with 'below-basic competence' in reading and maths (World Bank Group, 2018); and
- Below average OECD results in PISA (2015), TIMSS (2015) and PIRLS (2016).

Moreover, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2018) posited that in Malta "…many students leave [compulsory] education with poor cognitive skills" (World Bank Group, 2018, 96). All this raises the notion that something within the system is not functioning well. Hence, in 2013, MEDE commissioned an audit of the local educational system to analyse,

> "…five critical issues:
> 1. How are schools enabled to implement inclusive education?
> 2. How adequately are school staff enabled to meet learners' diverse needs?
> 3. Do needs identification and statementing procedures promote children's rights and an approach to meeting individual learning needs?
> 4. How do systems of support enable all stakeholders in education?
> 5. How effective are quality assurance processes?" (EASNIE, 2014, 11).

The audit's major conclusion was that the Maltese educational system focused entirely on 'fixing' minority learners' deficits to help them 'fit' in mainstream classrooms. The latter approach, entitled the 'deficit-medical-integrative' model, perpetuated "a blame culture" and facilitated the process of 'shifting teaching responsibility' on SNE experts (EASNIE, 2014, 55). It also transpired that local educators hold misconceptions on the concept of 'inclusion', which is generally confused with 'integration'. Concerning the implementation of system-wide reforms, EASNIE (2014) stressed that,

> "a participatory approach, moving from 'crisis-management' to collaborative planning, based on realistic timescales, is needed. This should be coupled with transparent approaches to monitoring and evaluation" (86).

Audit findings also highlighted the lack of autonomy, flexibility, ownership and trust across all system levels, which favoured a 'rigid top-down' approach (EASNIE, 2014). Hence, this research study adopts a perspective that is attentive and critical of both:

a) neoliberal approaches to education, particularly the 'market-based' audit culture logics and practices that control and limit educators' work (Apple, 2005); and
b) the pervasiveness of the 'deficit-thinking' framework that blames minority learners for school problems because of factors outside the educators' control such as home-

life, linguistic differences, and socio-economic and cultural difficulties that limit the potential of minority learners.

In so doing, this thesis not only asks *why* ‘deficit-thinking’, in conjunction with neoliberalism, effects negatively minority learners’ educational experiences, but also questions *how* educators struggle with and against neoliberal ‘deficit-thinking’ forces.

In an era of neoliberalism, educators are under increasing pressure to submit to accountability measures, which isolate teachers and students from one another and evaluate individual impact and outcomes, atomized from the inherently social nature of teaching and learning. Neoliberal discourse puts economic concerns paramount and insists that privatization, competition and an ‘individual-as-entrepreneur subjectivity’ are needed in all realms of social life (Davies et. al., 2007). Hence, individualisation not only prevails over collective power and socially just welfare services, but also gives rise to ‘deficit-thinking’ processes and practices. Valencia (2010) described ‘deficit-thinking’ as the practice of holding lower expectations for minority learners in schools, who experience chronic absenteeism and poor academic attainment (Sharma, 2009). As a result, compensatory approaches become vital to help minority learners ‘fit’ the context of the dominant school culture (Portelli et. al., 2014); even though research (Sharma, 2009; Valencia, 2010) shows that compensatory strategies further perpetuate ‘deficit-thinking’ and alienate learners from schooling. Conversely, Minister Bartolo believes that “education needs to be relevant to all learners” and stressed that,

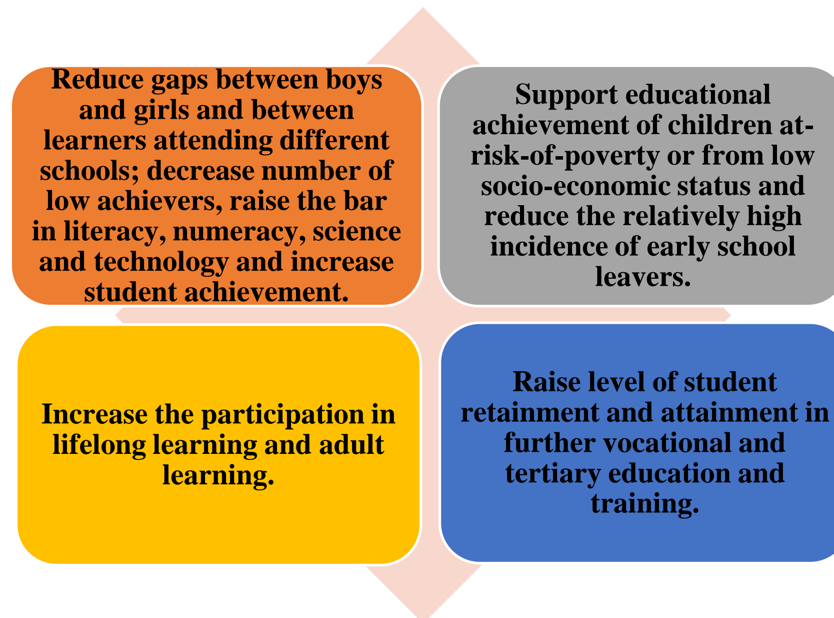
> “schools as organizations must look beyond their perimeters and re-think themselves as teaching and learning organizations within and for the community. A learner who quits schooling without a basic level of education is not just a number feeding into an ESL percentage, but a human being whose fulfilment is curtailed and future prejudiced” (MEDE, 2014, 2).

Hence, it becomes the responsibility of educational leaders to address and eliminate the roots of ‘deficit-thinking’ by providing educators with strategies that help them to move beyond medical-integrative practices, and aim towards more equitable education. In this regard, the research study proposes the ‘re-positioning of the self’ technique (based on inclusive leadership) to enable a ‘conceptual shift’ in favour of inclusive, democratic and culturally-responsive education. This is because ‘deficit-thinking’ cannot be fixed, and therefore it must be addressed, eliminated and replaced with practices that equally and effectively help all Maltese learners to develop holistically as individuals in inclusive, socially just and equitable colleges and schools.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The 'Framework for the Education Strategy for Mata 2014-2024' (2014) points out the need to enable and enhance "the development of thinking and skill attainment" for all learners to address Malta's four broad educational goals (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2: Malta's 4 Broad Educational Goals



(Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024, 2014, 3)

In order to achieve the above goals, MEDE promotes UNESCO's (1996) four pillars of learning (*Learning to Know*; *Learning to Do*; *Learning to Be* and *Learning to Live Together*) in all national policy framework documents. Hence, the NCF (2012) "looks at both learning to know and learning to do"; the Respect for All Framework (2014) "addresses the learning to be and learning to live together" (MEDE, 2014, 3), while the 'Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024' brings the latter two frameworks together and develops a strategic plan to,

> "improve quality in our country and to develop a society that is competent, resourceful, critically conscious and competitive in a global economy driven by information, knowledge and innovation" (5).

Moreover, in 2017, MEDE launched the 'My Journey: Achieving through different paths' reform to 'replace the current one-size-fits-all secondary school model' with a significantly more adaptable and comprehensive schooling system, which includes "the provision of general academic education, vocational educational and training as well as applied learning" to better meet the educational needs of learners with different learning styles and aspirations (http://www.myjourney.edu.mt).

'Education for all' implies the *will* to 'recognize and celebrate' difference and the *ability* to 'respond and cater' effectively to diversity, which is no longer viewed as a problem that needs to be fixed. Instead, this study views diversity as an opportunity to change the way the educational system works, by bringing together different ideas and perspectives through constructive dialogue. Hence, the debate revolves around how one is to achieve inclusive education, i.e. *how* to implement the right policy measures to create a safe space where all stakeholders can converse, learn and grow; *how* educators can best cope with diversity; and *how* national curricula can be truly responsive. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) pointed out that, "…if a country wants to achieve higher levels of educational attainment…it must address the underlying socially-constructed baggage of inequalities which create a steeper social-gradient in educational achievement" (30). Hon. Bartolo also posited that,

> "the work of the educator is to promote equity and respect through diverse educational activities to develop relationships and promote positive human values. Whilst the demands may appear to be challenging, they have a tremendous return in terms of improved ethos, relationships, pupil behaviour, quality of work and general achievement" (MEDE, 2014, 3).

The elimination of 'deficit-thinking' in favour of 'inclusive education' cannot occur in a vacuum. It requires genuine commitment, constant nurturing and continuous support to help stakeholders (learners, parents and educators) to better understand the 'self' and be prepared to assume responsibility for the future (Ainscow, 1999). In this regard, 'inclusive leadership' and 'good governance' are considered as essential requisites to enable the 're-positioning of the self' concept to help educators navigate successfully neoliberal and 'deficit-thinking' pressures, so as to eliminate inequalities and guarantee success for all learners (Haraway, 2008). Hence, system-wide educational leaders play a fundamental role in order to challenge the 'deficit' ideology and sustain a profound educational re-culturing and re-structuring process of the system's (a) organisation and culture; (b) policies and practices; and (c) community commitment (Ainscow, 1999).

This thesis fits perfectly within this framework since it tries to develop an understanding of the processes and practices educators employ to challenge and change 'deficit' attitudes. The research study sheds light on how educators negotiate with the powerful and interrelated 'neoliberal-deficit-rooted' forces in their teaching so as to provide an equitable educational service. It also proposes the 're-positioning of the self' technique to unleash inclusive education.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

EASNIE (2014) posited that one of Malta's biggest problems is the persistent presence of 'deficit-thinking', which "blends easily in with educators' common sense thinking, knowledge and discourse" (Portelli, 2010, 32). Valencia (1997) posited that the pervasiveness of the 'deficit paradigm' among educators is highly dangerous, since minority learners end up experiencing negative and inequitable treatments in schools due to lowered expectations, individual attention and allocation of resources (Ladson-Billings, 2007). The latter is likely to occur because educators view minority learners as "a laundry-list of problems", who lack the skills and ability to reach the preconceived norms of the majority (Katsarou et. al., 2010, 139). As a result, minority leaners fall consistently behind their 'other' peers in all aspects of schooling (Alexander et. al. 2001). Gorski (2008) viewed 'deficit-thinking' as an institutionalized ideology, woven in the fabric of society, which shaped individual assumptions and dispositions, as well as encouraged compliance with an oppressive social order (Valencia, 1997).

Portelli, Shields and Vibert (2007) (cited by Sharma and Portelli, 2014), argued that the ever-increasing neoliberal demands put on educators are too overwhelming to develop inclusive and equitable learning environments. Such demands have a negative impact on minority learners' future possibilities, such as: limited school attendance; lower school progression rates; limited job-market and social mobility opportunities; and low-collar jobs (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ayers et. al. (1996) also stressed that "savage inequalities in education systems reflect growing social and economic polarization, which squander the potential of our youths" (145). Over the years, a lot of statements, like 'every student is gifted and able to learn' and 'focus on strengths' emerged to counterbalance 'deficit-thinking'. However, this discourse mostly occurs outside the socio-political context of schooling or "the unexamined myths that shape commonly accepted values in society" (Nieto et. al., 2008, 7). While this discourse targets individual biases, it rarely addresses conditions that sustain the construct on minority groups as *problems* or *others* (Gorski, 2008).

Although 'deficit-thinking' is evident in Maltese schools, there is little research examining the challenges faced by educators to eliminate 'deficit' practices in favour of inclusive education. As such, the study indicates 'leadership' as the most important factor to re-culture processes for responsive education (Wagstaff and Fusarelli, 1999).

1.5 Purpose Statement and the Need for Research

Neoliberal approaches (market-driven management systems; results/outcome-based performance appraisals; re-imaging of curricula/syllabi with economic demands; greater emphasis on employability; and stronger competition among State, Church and Private educational sectors) in the Maltese hierarchical educational system facilitated a broad-scale rehabilitation of schooling from an economic point of view (Lingard and Rivzi, 2010). Education is now framed and justified in policy as a means for building human capital and as a contribution to economic productivity (Savage, 2011). Similarly, Matthews and Crow (2010) posited that current accountability trends in education place an emphasis on "levels of academic achievement while ignoring social, emotional and civic engagement" of students (119-120). The latter intensified the presence of 'deficit-thinking' and posed severe challenges to Maltese educators so as to pragmatically and strategically address this ideology, which perpetuates a 'culture of blame' and promotes an over-reliance "on a model that attributes learning and behavioural problems to deficits residing in minority learners" (Trent et. al., 1988, 478).

It is particularly this transformation that has given rise to the present enquiry, which tries to examine how Maltese educators (at all system levels) work to eliminate 'deficit-thinking'. Specifically, it builds an understanding of the practices employed by educators to challenge the 'deficit paradigm' (Valencia, 1997). Cummins (2001) argued that it is easier to focus on preconceived deficits rather than to highlight economic and educational inequalities as being the main factors in minority learners' under attainment. My original contribution is to discover whether the present educational system has adapted to societal changes, and if so, what strategies it has adopted to address the needs created by neoliberalism and 'deficit-thinking'. In addition, the study delves into 'leadership' and examines how educational leaders can enable the 're-positioning-of-the-self' in favour of inclusive education.

Griffiths (2013) stressed that "…inclusion cannot happen without the principal being its fiercest and most persistent advocate" (xxi). Likewise, Bishop (2002) portrays educational leaders as catalysts of social change and improvement through the rejection of 'deficit-thinking' in favour of equity and social justice. Other contribuitions include the identification of minority cohorts, the challenges the latter bring to the system and an analysis of how key educational stakeholders try to create inclusive school settings.

1.5.1 Research Questions

The primary research question asks *why educational leaders at all system levels (Directorate, College, School and Classrooms) try to eliminate the 'deficit-thinking' ideology.* This overarching question supported the development of the following sub-questions, which guide the whole research study:

1. How do 'neoliberal approaches to education' and 'deficit-thinking' constrict the re-structuring and re-culturing processes at Directorate, College and School levels in favour of equitable, inclusive, responsive and socially just education?
2. Why does 'deficit-thinking' constitute a major challenge to the implementation of inclusive education in the Maltese educational system?
3. What are the major effects of neoliberalism and 'deficit-thinking' on educators (i.e. Directors, CPs, School SMT members, Teachers and LSEs), learners and parents?
4. How does 'inclusive leadership' enable the 're-positioning of the self' technique to ensure that educators and students form an active part 'of' school organizations?
5. Why is the 're-positioning of the self' technique fundamental to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' processes and practices?

The above illustrated research questions highlight the intricacies of both neoliberalism and 'deficit-thinking' on the Maltese educational system, while also taking the negative effects of the 'deficit ideology' on minority learners and educators seriously. While most of this thesis will be devoted to the 'HOW' of inclusion (i.e. practices and strategies), the vital building blocks depend on the 'WHY', which propels the research study to 're-position' schools as inclusive learning communities for educators, learners and parents. By answering the 'WHY' questions, the researcher manages to expose and challenge social inequalities present in local colleges and schools. Hence, the 'WHY' questions give this thesis purpose and fuel for action to move 'inclusion' beyond commonly held notions of teaching and learning to encompass the issues of acceptance, responsiveness, belonging, community, social justice, democracy and equity to be able to understand more comprehensively what lays at the root of marginalization, exclusion and oppression of minority learners. Ferguson (1996) also described inclusion as a full-scale reform that "incorporates all learners as active and fully participating members of the school community, that views diversity as the norm" (17).

1.5.2 Investigations

The proposed primary and secondary research questions helped the researcher to thoroughly investigate the following issues within the Maltese educational system:

a) The views of educational stakeholders (including learners) on 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education';
b) The identification of diverse cohorts of minority learners in local colleges together with the major challenges they bring with them;
c) The processes, practices and procedures employed by educators at different system levels (Ministry, Directorate, College, School and Class) to navigate neoliberal and 'deficit-thinking' logics;
d) The effects of both neoliberalism and 'deficit-thinking' on the teaching and learning process and on social relationships among educators and between learners; and
e) The characteristics of the 'inclusive leadership' style and the main features of the 're-positioning of the self' technique to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' in favour of inclusive and culturally responsive education.

The investigations allowed the researcher to uncover 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about teaching and learning; to consider how educators' work might be constituted otherwise; and to examine how individual teachers take up or actually resist external neoliberal pressures and 'deficit-thinking' discourse. The main interest was on the 'of' aspect of inclusion, by extending this notion into a new dimension whereby all school participants have inputs and ongoing opportunities to create, shape and determine how the school (as a 'professional learning organization') operates. By drawing on different data sources, the thesis examines thoroughly how educators negotiate neoliberal and 'deficit-thinking' pressures to make meaning of their work, learners and identities as teachers. All this helped the researcher to propose the 'repositioning-of-the-self' model to create a culture of democracy that fosters equitable education. 0

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The EASNIE audit report (2014) influenced both the general thinking and the theoretical framework of this research study, since it identified 'deficit-thinking' as a crude reality that invaded the Maltese educational system. Weiner (2006) argued that,

> "school practices and assumptions emerging from the 'deficit-paradigm' often hide student and teacher abilities. These assumptions are especially

> powerful because they are unspoken. We overlook our taken-for-granted ideas and practices to an extraordinary degree" (42).

Valencia (1997) contended that 'deficit-thinking' is not always easy to recognize and understand, as it is utilized unconsciously by educators in "the well-intentioned interest of students" (Valenzuela, 1999, 58). Moreover, Griffiths (2013) argued that neoliberal approaches to education not only increased pressure on schools and school systems, but indirectly, it also led educators to succumb to 'deficit' practices as a means for survival. Hence, 'neoliberal-deficit' approaches resulted in an institutionalized 'culture of blame' and in lack of relational trust, which impeded educators from recognizing the often-invisible forms of marginalization and exclusion practices (Griffiths, 2013) based on 'deficit discourse' that serves to maintain the construct of 'minority learners' as 'problems' or 'other'. The latter developed the case for examining the negative and detrimental impact of 'deficit-thinking' in schools so that all educational stakeholders embrace their moral responsibility to change colleges and schools into democratic and equitable settings. Deal and Peterson (2009) stressed that, "if schools do not stand for something more profound than raising achievement levels, they probably do not make a memorable difference to teachers, students and parents. Put on a spiritual plane, a school needs a deeper soul" (62).

The thesis conceptual framework is based on Valencia's (1997) analysis of *'deficit-thinking'* in education; Shields et. al. (2004) notion of the *'re-positioning of the self'* to promote inclusive education; Graham's (2008) work on *'a critical lens for participatory democracy'*; and Noddings' (2005) *'ethic of care'* approach in education. Together, these build the case for examining the negative impacts of 'deficit-thinking' on the local educational system, construct an understanding of the nature of inclusive education, and provide advice on how 'education for all' can be promoted, nurtured, and sustained. In so doing, the study identifies potential cohorts of minority groups in Maltese colleges/schools and examines ways how to create inclusive learning settings. More specifically, how educational leaders and teachers challenge the 'status quo' by being catalysts of change to create responsive learning settings, through the rejection of 'deficit-thinking' and the acceptance and tolerance of minority learners' voice.

Hare (2005) stresses the need for educators to possess 'a critical lens' to be able to unpack the hidden socio-economic and political agendas (Anyon 1980, Reid 2005) that promulgate systemic inequities that lie in the heart of public education. Sharma

(2009) remarked that the identification of 'systematic inequities' is crucial to awaken the dormant 'social consciousness' and 'moral responsibility' of community members to address society's agency (i.e. the actions and decisions individuals choose to make) (Skrla et. al., 2004). This research study utilizes both 'accountability' and 'agency' to encourage educational stakeholders (policymakers, CPs, SMT, teachers, parents and students) to uphold 'participatory democracy' to increase 'active participation' through dialogue and collective action" (Graham, 2008, 160). Finally, the study's theoretical framework builds on Kincheloe's (1999) belief that, "critical teachers, operating in this democratic and introspective confrontation with power, understand that self-directed education undertaken by self-organized community groups is the most powerful form of pedagogy" (10).

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

This section provides an overview of the critical, political and methodological structure of this thesis. Whereas the current chapter provides a general overview of the study, Chapter *Two* serves as a backdrop as it provides a detailed account of the Maltese educational system by:

a) reviewing its major framework policy documents in education; and
b) analyzing its teaching and learning process and support structures or services.

On the otherhand, Chapter *Three*, while reiterating the research questions, includes a detailed review of the literature on 'neoliberalism' and 'deficit-thinking' in education. Notably, the chapter discusses the harmful effects of 'deficit-thinking' on both minority learners and teachers, as well as considers how educators can navigate neoliberal and 'deficit-thinking' logics. Moreover, this chapter portrays the importance of 'effective leadership' to enable the 're-positioning of the self' technique in favour of inclusive education.

Chapter *Four* engages with the methodology debate, which provides a detailed discussion on the research design, the research 'sites', and the methods used to collect and analyse data. This chapter also introduces the study's participants, examines ethical considerations, describes the researcher's positionality, self-awareness and reflexivity, and illustrates the major strengths and limitations of the methodology used. Chapter *Five*, is also the central chapter of this thesis since it presents and analytically describes all of the data gathered in relation to the research questions. In order to facilitate the

chapter's readability and understanding, the researcher split this chapter into three main sections. Whereas the first and final sections of this chapter present a general introduction and conclusion respectively; the central section (the main part of the chapter) deals with the presentation and analysis of both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews; sociometric tests; focus groups; observations; job-shadowing sessions) data.

Chapter *Six* reinstates the values that encircled this study while presenting the 're-positioning of the self' technique and 'inclusive leadership' as meaningful ways to address 'deficit-thinking' processes and practices. In so doing, this chapter identifies a number of 'frameworks for action' that promote and support the conceptual shift from 'deficit-thinking' towards inclusive and equitable education. The final Chapter *Seven* summarizes the study's findings and concludes with a discussion on the potential 'next steps' in this line of research.

1.8 Conclusion

The realities highlighted by EASNIE's audit report place several challenges on the Maltese educational system, to provide quality education for all learners. Respect, tolerance, equity, democracy and social justice are often the panacea needed to deal with societal changes. However, knowledge on the latter concepts does not necessarily mean that they are being implemented. Hence, this thesis seeks to discover what is happening in the Maltese educational system to propose alternative ways with which minority groups can receive meaningful, conducive and relevant education.

Chapter 2: Setting the Scene

The Maltese Educational System

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of Malta's education system, namely: its structure, objectives, and teaching and learning processes. A clear understanding of the Maltese context helps readers to shape an opinion of national expectations and to grasp how educators negotiate 'neoliberal approaches to education, while attempting to prevent the negative effects of 'deficit-thinking' through inclusive education.

2.2 Education in Malta

The Education Act (1988) regulates the provision of compulsory education in Malta. Throughout the years, various legal notices amended the aforementioned act to make it more relevant and responsive to the continual societal changes. The Act:

1. Regulates the entitlement of Maltese students for compulsory education;
2. Defines the educational rights and obligations of the state, NGOs (including the Church), students and parents;
3. Establishes the minimum standards required of hygiene and safety in schools, class dimensions and amenities;
4. Secures compliance with the National Curriculum Framework and the national minimum conditions for general educational provision; and
5. States the constitutional functions of Directorates, Colleges and the teaching profession.

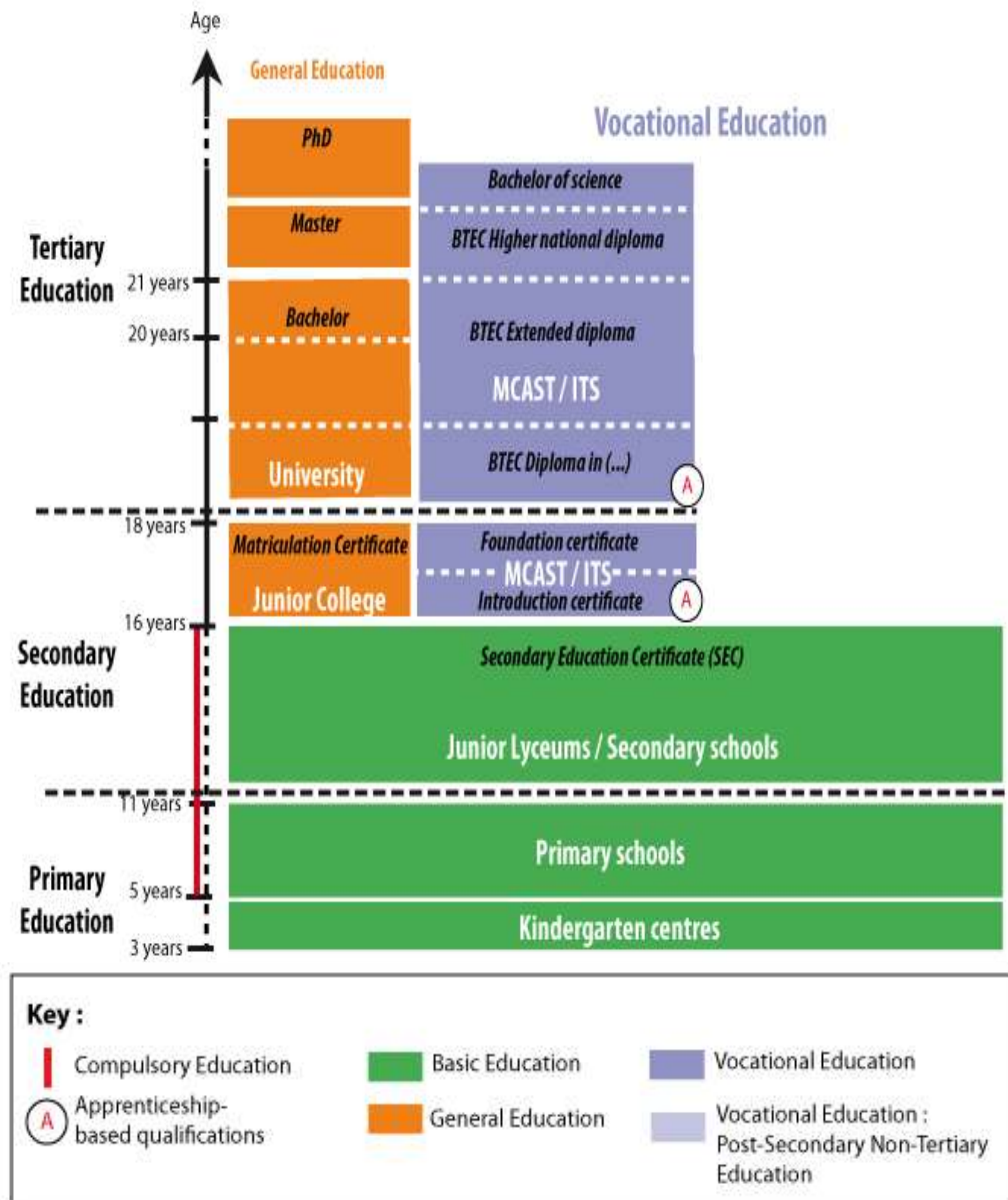
Because of Malta's colonial past, the education system follows the British model very clearly (Sultana, 1997). A tripartite system of State, Church and Independent schools provide compulsory education to all learners, from the age of 5 to 16. Compulsory education consists of three main branches:

1) A 6-year *Primary Education* cycle (age 5 to 11), at the end of which all learners undertake the National Benchmarking Examinations;
2) A 2-year *Middle Education* phase (age 11 to 13); and
3) A 3-year *Secondary Education* cycle (age 13 to 16), leading to a 2-year Post-Secondary Education experience, upon successful completion of the Secondary Education Certificate.

At age 18, following the Matriculation Certificate, learners proceed to *Tertiary Education* at the UoM. The Vocational Education route, which is offered at MCAST or ITS, is very similar to the General Education one (Figure: 2.1). Learners attending State and Church schools receive free education, though the Church sector may ask

parents for annual contributions to fund educational projects (Sultana, 1997). On the contrary, the private sector charges annual tuition-fees. A recent report, commissioned by ISA, noted that the "identified cost on tuition fees amounts to approximately €3,500 per annum" (www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national).

Figure 2.1: The Maltese Education System



(Taken from: http://mavoieproeurope.onisep.fr)

The State sector absorbs the highest intake of students (58%), followed by the Church (29%) and the Independent sectors (13%). All State and Independent schools are co-educational, whereas Secondary schools in the Church sector are single-sexed.

The three sectors cover the whole spectrum of education provision – from pre-primary (Kindergarten Years) to primary and middle, to secondary and post-secondary education. Table 2.1 below illustrates the distribution of students in the three educational sectors (MEDE, 2018).

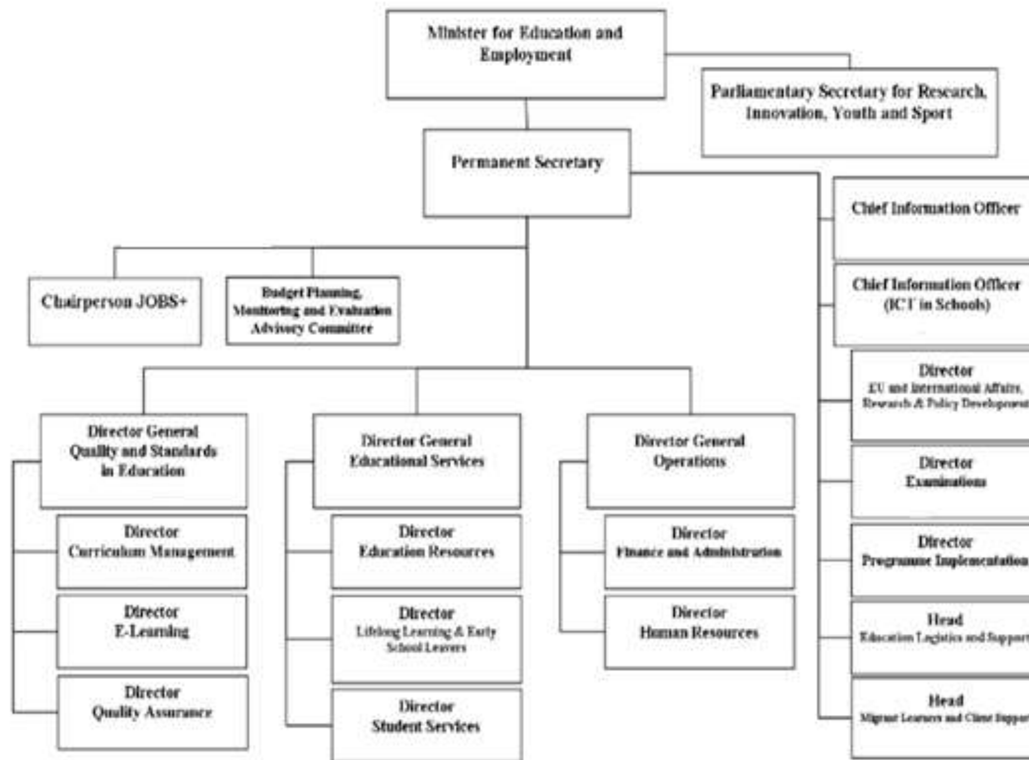
Table 2.1: Student Population among Sectors

	State Sector	Church Sector	Independent Sector
Kindergarten	**6516**	**1033**	**1782**
Primary Schools	**13795**	**7839**	**3374**
Secondary Schools	**11529**	**7537**	**2342**
Post Secondary	**2650**	**804**	**273**
Total	**34,490**	**17,213**	**7,771**

MEDE (Figure 2.2) is responsible for the provision of efficient and effective schooling to provide quality education and training in areas relevant to the needs and aspirations of the Maltese society (Farrugia, 1992; Wain, 1991). Over the past years, MEDE undertook various reforms to guarantee quality education provision, through increased school-based autonomy and decentralization of power. This regeneration process commenced with the publication of the policy document: 'Tomorrow Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures' (Wain et. al., 1995). This document proposed the transformation of schools into 'learning communities' to better cater for the well-being, cognitive, operative and emotional potential of all learners. The participative and democratic vision laid down in the latter document led to the publication and the enactment as law of the NMC (1999). Apart from illustrating the academic areas needed to develop competent future citizens, the NMC (1999) presented a holistic vision for equity and inclusive education. The main characteristic,

> "is that it places the needs of the learner before everything else. It is the child, who is at the centre of all the vision, planning and provision. Equally interwoven in its aims is the celebration of diversity. This document not only includes every aspect of human development but also embraces the diversity of learning styles as well as the whole range of abilities, backgrounds, specific learning difficulties, and special needs that are bound to exist among the community of learners. Therefore, the document spares no effort to make clear its vision of inclusion" (NMC, 1999, 9).

Figure 2.2: Ministry for Education and Employment: Organisational Structure

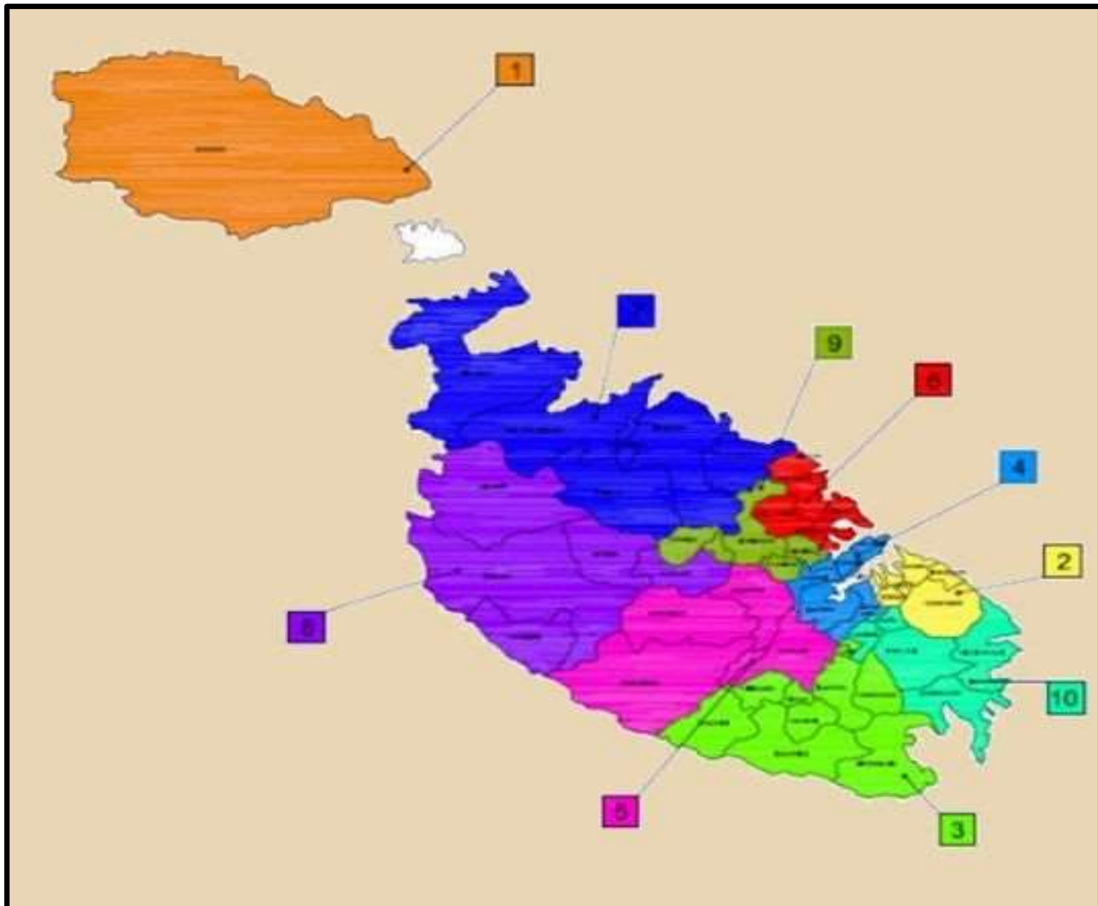


(Taken from: http://education.gov.mt/en/Ministry/Pages/Organisational-Structure.aspx)

The NMC (1999) as well as the 'Strategic Plan: National Curriculum on its way' (2001) also highlight the need for a decentralized College-Based Governance to enable schools to network, collaborate and share good practices together. In this regard, the 'Strategic Plan' (2001) posits that "…the whole decentralisation process must be underscored by the values of authenticity, collegiality, leadership, interest, belonging, empowerment, trust, participation, risk taking, pride, sharing and respect" through "real delegation" to "ensure ownership of decision-making and enhance levels of staff motivation" (114). Both documents considered schools as 'laboratories of knowledge', in which teaching and learning takes place after constant dialogue or cooperation among all stakeholders to ensure "effective top-down and bottom-up lines of communication" (Strategic Plan, 2001, 115). Hence, the need for effective and meaningful School Development Plans to allow educators enough "space for autonomous initiatives" to give "learners quality entitlement by facilitating school-based curriculum development" (NMC, 1999, 7). The latter vision materialized in the policy document 'For All Children to Succeed' (2005), which led to the decentralisation of State schools into ten colleges (Figure 2.3), with secondary schools and their own feeder primary schools (Figure 2.4). The aim was to

increase administrative and curricular autonomy within a consolidated framework of quality assurance. Colleges have a functioning COH (a council that includes all Heads of Primary, Middle and Secondary schools in the college) tasked with "developing a common ethos" and "nurturing a spirit of collegiality" (Education Act, 1988, 31). The CP is the primary leader of the college, and chairs the COH.

Figure 2.3: The 10 State Colleges

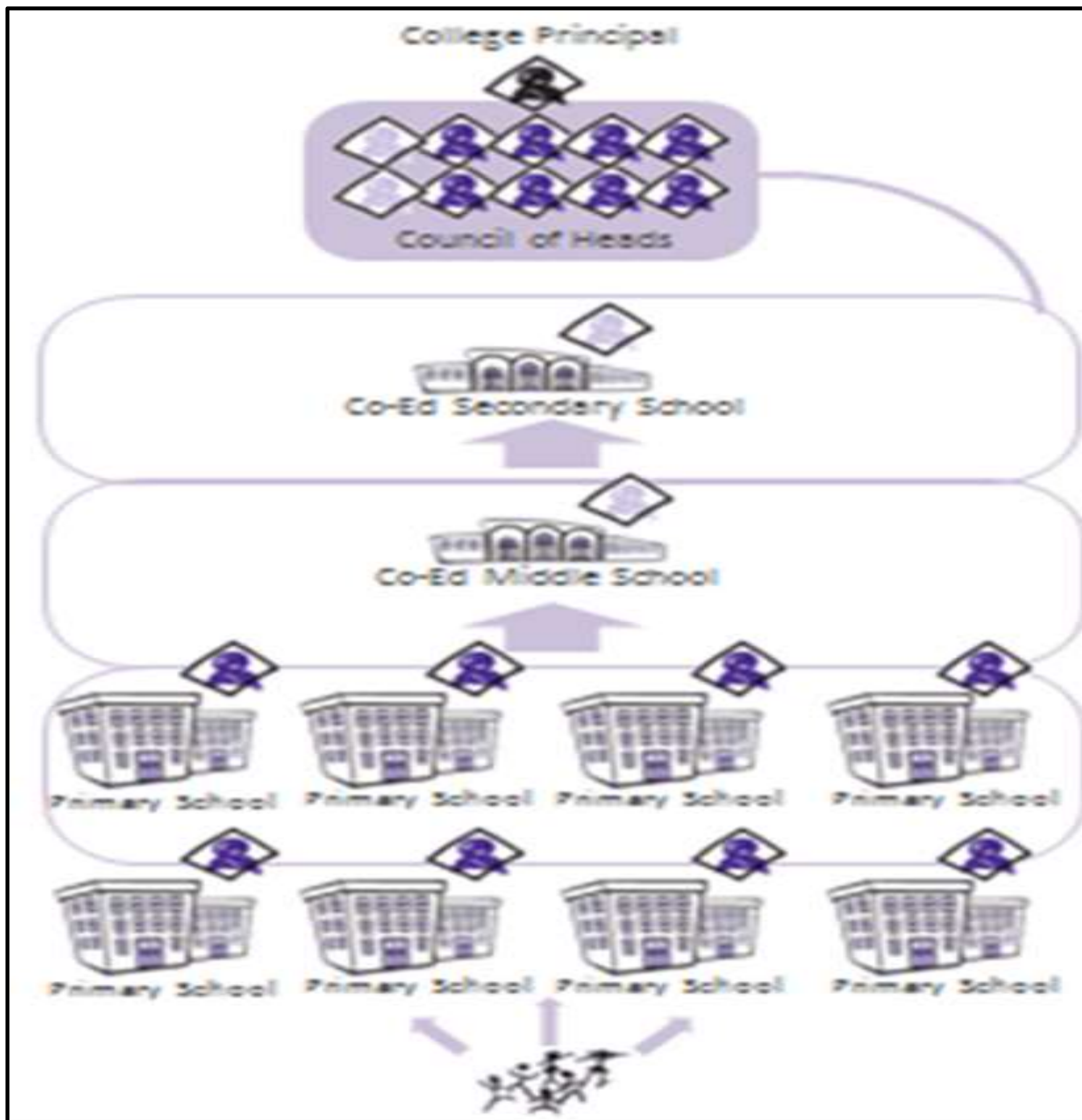


(Taken from: http://www.youthinfo.gov.mt/default.asp?m=cat&id=14)

The 10 Educational Colleges

Area 1: ***Gozo College***	Area 2: ***St. Margaret's College***
Area 3: ***St. Benedict College***	Area 4: ***St. Gorg Preca College***
Area 5: ***St. Ignatius College***	Area 6: ***St. Clare's College***
Area 7: ***Maria Regina College***	Area 8: ***St. Nicholas College***
Area 9: ***St. Theresa College***	Area 10: ***St. Thomas More College***

Figure 2.4: The College System



(Taken from: For All Children to Succeed, 2005, 55)

The reform included also the re-organisation of the Education Division into two distinct directorates – *DES* and *DQSE*. Whereas, the former is responsible for the management and provision of quality services in the ten State colleges, the DQSE deals with policy development and implementation as well as the maintenance of quality standards. In 2013, MEDE also set up the Operations Directorate (human resourcing, financing and general administration) to ensure better synergy and work distribution.

The NMC (1999) also resumed the national debate on the effectiveness of 'the 11+ national assessment system' and 'streaming' due to their incompatibility with the curriculum's vision and spirit. This debate resulted in the publication of the document, 'Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta' (2008). The latter led to:

a) The introduction of the 'End of Primary Benchmarking System' instead of the Junior Lyceum (Common Entrance) examinations; and
b) The elimination of 'streaming' in favour of 'mixed ability teaching' to provide more responsive teaching.

The above two changes were also in synch with the NMC's (1999) major principles on inclusive education (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: The NMC's Major Principles on Inclusive Education

NMC Principles	Brief Description
Principle 1: **Quality Education for All**	The creation of *"an educational ethos that stimulates the development of the students' potential without undermining the principles of solidarity and co-operation"* (NMC, 1999, 30).
Principle 2: **Respect for Diversity**	Recognizes that *"each school is endowed with a vast repertoire of experiences, skills, and needs and that this diversity enables and requires a pedagogy based on respect for and the celebration of diversity*" (NMC, 1999, 30). It advocates the promotion of social cohesion through systems that *"provide support to learners who are denied a support system outside school"* and other students *"who need more time and support for their personal development"* (NMC, 1999, 31).
Principle 8: **An Inclusive Education**	Emphasizes the *"commitment, on the part of the learning community, to acknowledge individual difference and to professing and implementing inclusive policies"*, which *"recognize students' diverse interests, potential and needs"* (NMC, 1999, 36).

Both reforms ('End of Primary Benchmarking' and 'mixed ability teaching') also helped learners "…to demonstrate what they know and can do in the various curriculum areas" whilst "avoiding to infect learners with a sense of failure, discouragement and/or alienation" (MEDE, 2008, 154). Finally, these changes endorsed a sense of "evolution rather than revolution", which helped educators "become familiar with and adjust to the several changes required by the new paradigm" (MEDE, 2008, 154).

Along with these educational reforms, in 2009, MEDE launched a general review of the NMC. The latter led to a new national curriculum framework - the NCF (2012). This framework reiterated and further developed the aspirations in the NMC

(1999) to constructively address the lacunas in the Maltese educational system. It set out to:

> "…provide more flexible pathways for all learners; increase engagement in education; address the gaps leading to absenteeism and high ESL rates; and create a learning outcomes framework that moves away from stand-alone subjects to learning areas that form the entitlement for all learners" (EASNIE, 2014, 27).

Hence, the NCF (2012) emphasises the provision of 'inclusive education'; encourages decentralization by giving both colleges and schools more flexibility and autonomy in decision-making; and urges the replacement of selective educational arrangements with comprehensive ones. Also, the proposed 'learning outcomes framework' aims to "free schools from centrally imposed knowledge-centric syllabi" by "giving colleges/schools freedom to develop learning programs focusing on skills attainment across the diverse year groups" (http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt).

2.3 More Recent Developments

The development of the 'Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024' (2014) aimed to synergize all educational cycles and to unify diverse national framework documents, namely:

- NCF (2012);
- National Literacy Strategy for All (2014);
- Respect for All Framework (2014);
- Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leavers in Malta (2014); and
- The Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy (2014).

Hence, the framework targets all socio-economic sectors, including different cultural, religious, ethnic, gender and sexual statuses, and "seeks to improve learners' learning expectations through entrepreneurship, creativity, critical literacy and innovation…" (Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024, 2014, 3).

In line with the national education strategy, MEDE launched another equally important framework – the 'Respect for All' Framework (2014), which revolves around UNESCO's four pillars of learning (*Learning to Know*; *Learning to Do*; *Learning to Be*; *Learning to Live Together*) by encouraging educators to "promote a value-based education through different activities that promote positive human value and that help develop relationships" (Respect for All Framework, 2014, 3). Another high priority strategy is

the 'National Literacy Strategy' (2014), which led to the setting up of the NLA and the deployment of Literacy Teams in State colleges. These teams bring together college-based literacy staff members to plan and implement specific literacy interventions and assessment practices with classroom teachers. The high ESL rate (19.7% in 2017), also led MEDE to launch a strategic plan for the prevention of ESL; to set up an ESL monitoring unit; and to establish an inter-ministerial committee to coordinate all ESL policy work. The latter initiatives aim to further reduce ESL through several preventive and compensatory educational measures. Furthermore, in 2013, MEDE also set up the 'Migrant Learners and Client Support Unit' to help colleges with the inclusion of third country learners and parents in Maltese schools.

2.4 The Teaching and Learning Process in Malta

Formal structures (selection, competition and banding/streaming), traditional teaching methods, strict discipline and rigid assessments characterised the Maltese educational system (Borg, 1998). At primary level, learners study English, Maltese, Mathematics, Social Studies and Religion. Apart from the latter core subjects, which are assessed twice yearly in Years 4, 5 and 6, learners also receive lessons in Physical Education, Science, Music, Art and Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD). All lessons last 40 minutes. Year 6 primary students also sit for the 'End of Primary Benchmark' assessment in Maltese, English and Mathematics. Languages are assessed on the four skills (Oral and Listening: 20% each, Reading and Writing: 30% each), while Mathematics is divided into mental (20%) and written (80%). During exams, SEN learners can also avail themselves of exam access arrangements on presentation of a psychological report.

At secondary level, learners are set for Maltese, English and Mathematics, in line with their achievement in the end of primary benchmark exam. Due to the educators' general dissatisfaction with 'mixed ability teaching', MEDE introduced the 'banding' system (at secondary level). Moreover, learners exempted from the benchmark exam, who are expatriates or who score below a set cut off point, are set in CCP classes. The CCP classes aim to provide additional support to learners in core subjects with the aim of further improving their attainment levels. Here, the assessment is continuous (60-70%) rather than summative (40-30%). The secondary schooling system includes the provision of *General Academic Education*; *Vocational Education and Training*; and

Applied Learning. More specifically, secondary school students receive compulsory lessons in key competences, including the option for functional subjects, and have the opportunity of selecting optional academic, vocational and applied subjects, which all have parity of esteem or lead to qualifications at EQF/MQF Level 3. The proposed learning programmes provide flexibility for students in either enrolling in one of the three learning domains (academic, vocational or applied), or choosing option subjects from more than one domain.

Finally, within the *Applied Learning* route, secondary schools can also develop ALPs, during which the pedagogy used is hands on, experiential and authentic, whilst assessment is mainly continuous and portfolio based. In the other two routes (General Academic and Vocational Education), learners undergo examinations twice a year per subject, until they reach the final year of the secondary education cycle, where they sit for SEC. At the end of the compulsory cycle (age 16), MEDE awards all learners with the Secondary School Certificate and Profile (SSC&P). The latter certificate considers all formal, informal and non-formal learning and exhibits students' personal qualities.

2.5 Support Structures in Malta

Among the EU member states, Malta has one of the highest proportions of SEN learners attending mainstream schools. Official statistics (EASNIE, 2014) show that Malta has "a mainstream placement rate of 5.4%" and a "segregated placement rate of just over 0.1%, which is also one of the lowest scores across EU countries" (EASNIE, 2014, 28). This shows that 'inclusive education' always topped the national educational agenda. The NMC (1999) posited that,

> "in a democratic society all voices are heard and respected. The educational community must ensure equality of access to the educational system without discrimination on the grounds of ability, gender, religion, race or socio-cultural-economic backgrounds. This process should cultivate within students a sense of social justice, solidarity...and actively oppose all forms of discrimination by promoting the corresponding attitudes and readiness to act" (24).

The NCF (2012) also regards inclusion, social justice and solidarity as key values in the development of the Maltese society, which,

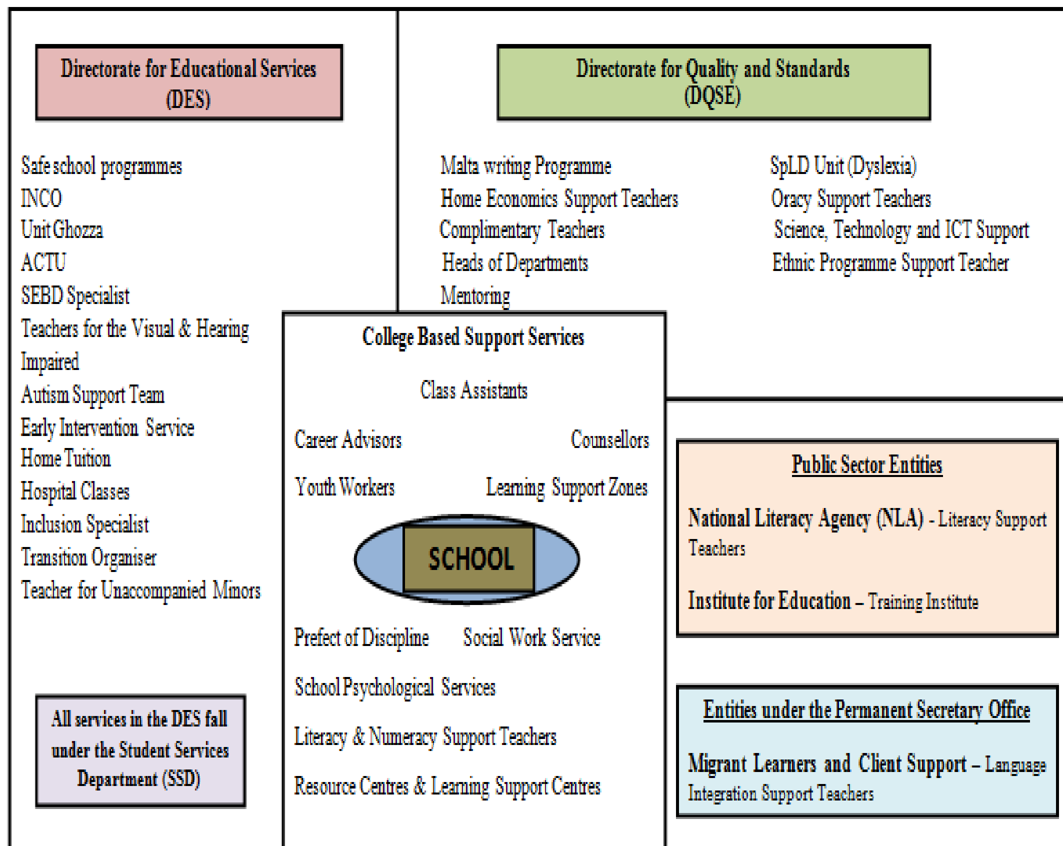
> "has a moral responsibility to affirm diversity, if it believes in broadening democratic boundaries, in fostering a participatory culture, in defending the basic rights of children, in the constant struggle against all those factors that prevent students' different abilities from being brought to fruition…" (NCF, 2012, 36).

The objective is to,

> "give every child the opportunity to grow in a conducive environment that fits all learners' abilities. The school will become a centre of learning where young students find the opportunity to acquire skills necessary to assume an active role in society" (NCF, 2012, vii).

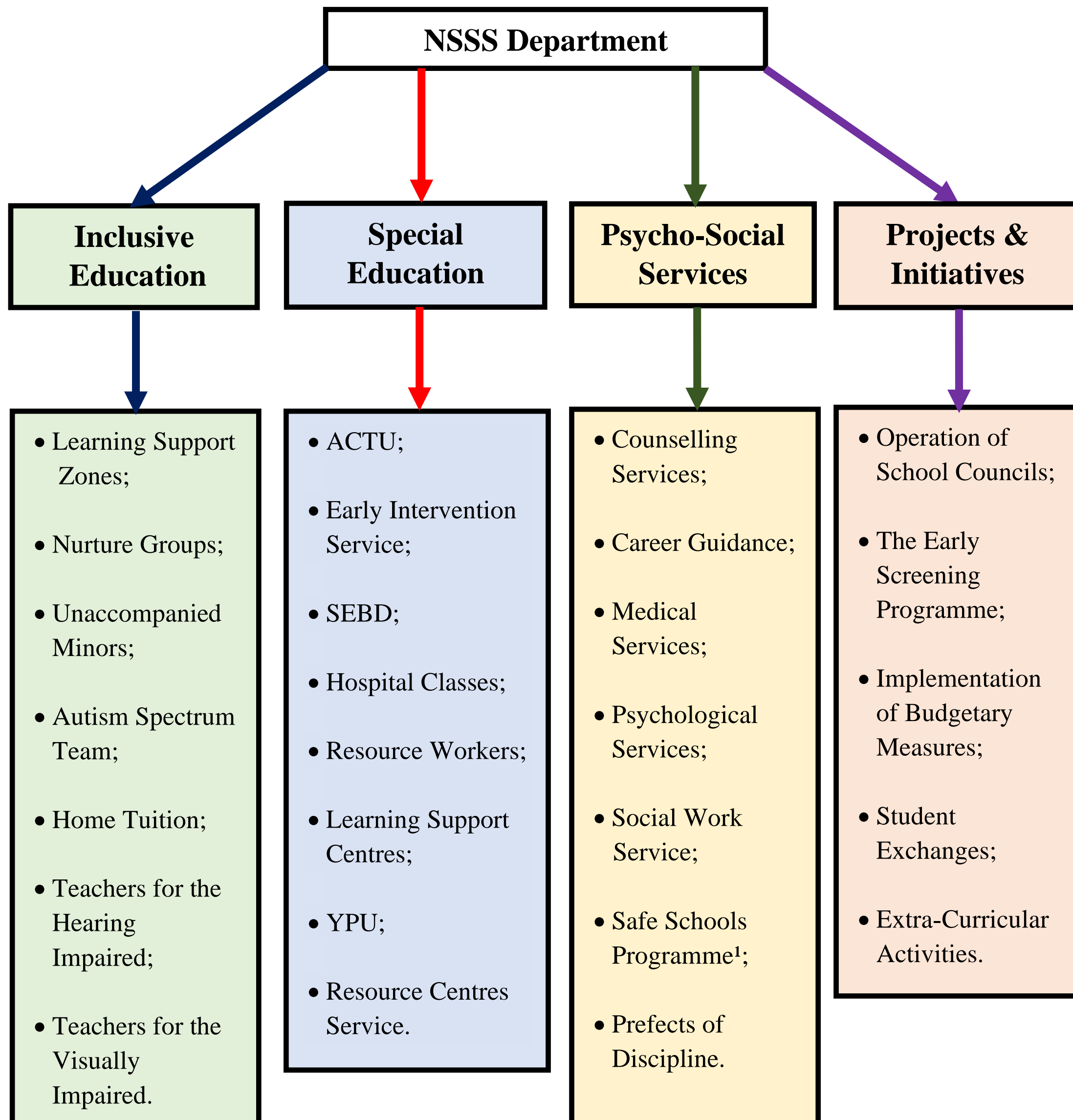
Over the years, the Maltese educational system introduced numerous support services to aid the personal development of diverse learners, who "develop at different rates" (NMC, 1999, 29) (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Support Services in Malta



Support services within the DES fall under the remit of NSSS department (Figure 2.6), which is composed of four sections: *The Inclusive Education*; *The Special Education and Resource Centres*; *The Psychosocial*; and *The Projects and Initiatives* units. The ultimate aim of this department is to ensure "an effective and efficient operation and delivery of support services to college and schools in a framework of decentralisation and autonomy" (https://education.gov.mt). NSSS is the owner of several 'Budgetary Measures', which aim to reduce absenteeism, and to facilitate the inclusion of learners from diverse socio-economical or cultural backgrounds in mainstream schools.

Figure 2.6: The NSSS Department



[1] This incorporates the Child Safety Service, Anti-Bullying Service and Anti-Substance Abuse

To facilitate the full inclusion of learners with diverse disabilities in mainstream schools, MEDE also provides a personalized support service, through the provision of LSEs on ‘FT 1-1’; ‘SSC’ or ‘Shared’ basis. The SMP “develops Statutory Assessments for learners with impairment, which lead to the formulation of an Official Statement of Needs” that determines the type of support required (Inclusive Education Policy, 2000, 7). Schools and parents can also contest the SMP’s initial decision at the Statementing Review Board, a year after the issuance of the initial statement, or the Appeals Board.

Although LSEs support all learners in class, they must pay extra attention to the needs of the ‘statemented’ learners. Over the past seven years, MEDE experienced an

increase in the number of referred learners for statementing, mainly due to the greater awareness and the over-reliance on paraprofessionals (Table 2.3). Furthermore, schools benefit from the services of INCOs, who provide “expertise, commitment and support for whole school development and initiatives for more inclusive education as well as regular support for individuals with educational needs” (MEDE, 2007, 18).

Table 2.3: Number of Referrals by year

Year	Total
2008	434
2009	430
2010	590
2011	613
2012	1181
2013	750
2014	890
2015	970

Support services also include the provision of four Resource Centres or Special Schools, incorporated within a school network, to “offer quality education provision to students with a disability…and to provide select services to students with a disability but who are in the mainstream” (For All Children to Succeed, 2005, 60). As ‘service-providers’, Resource Centres aim to:

> “…provide quality education to all students; offer specialised services to students in mainstream schools; offer support and training to staff in an inclusive mainstream setting; and to act as catalysts in the introduction of innovative approaches to the education of students with IEN” (Special Schools Reform, 2009, 8).

Each centre offers specialized services to mainstream schools and provides full-time education for a small number of learners with severe complex needs. These regulatory objectives are in line with principles outlined in the Salamanca Statement (1994), which considers Special Schools as a,

> “valuable resource for the development of inclusive schools by serving as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools…special schools or units within inclusive schools may continue to provide the most suitable education for the relatively small number of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools.” (12).

MEDE also provides a range of psychosocial support services in all State Colleges to safeguard all learners’ emotional, psychological and social well-being (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Psychosocial Support Services

Services
• Social Work services.
• Career Guidance Teachers.
• Psychological services
• Counselling and Career Advisory services
• Psychotherapy services
• Prefects of Discipline
• Youth workers
• Safe Schools Services: Anti-bullying, Anti-substance & Child Safety

2.6 Strengthening 'Education for All' in Malta

Over the last 25 years, the Maltese educational system experienced a complete transformation process. There has been an evolution from no education provision for 'minority learners' to segregated systems of support, to systems of integration towards full inclusion. Despite these changes, the educational system still encounters several challenges to provide quality education to all learners in an inclusive, equitable and socially just manner. This is because current structures and systems of support promote an 'integrative-individualistic approach' based on compensatory measures rather than on a 'holistic-collectivist attitude' towards education. The current system remained stuck in a 'medical-integrative' mentality, which tries to 'fix' and 'fit' learners in the system (EASNIE, 2014). The latter analysis contradicts the NMC's (1999) and the NCF's (2012) mission statements, which place learners "at the centre of the system" and "curriculum at the service of students and not the other way round" (MEDE, 1999, 26). This implies that system deficiencies may not necessarily derive from policies, but from educators' attitudes and culture; general practices and procedures; and inability to fully implement the necessary changes.

To identify system-wide challenges and have "a comprehensive picture of the current state of play of special needs and inclusive education", MEDE commissioned an extensive-system audit (EASNIE, 2014, 7). The latter adopted a 'standards-based approach' and focused on: "legislation and policy; building schools' internal capacity; specialist provision as a resource for mainstream schools; training and professional development of educators; teaching, learning, and assessment; identification of needs; allocation of support; monitoring and evaluation" (EASNIE, 2014, 10). Audit findings

indicated that "for the majority of learners, the right to access mainstream education is being met, but is not sustainable in the long term" (EASNIE, 2014, 24). This is because the current system "does not provide equity and full participation for all learners" due to "lack of clarity around the concept of inclusion" (EASNIE, 2014, 63), which is considered as "just another initiative or some sort of charitable imperative, rather than seeing it as a learners' right issue" (EASNIE, 2014, 44). Finally, the audit concluded that the system is "rooted in a medical-deficit model with little attention paid to inclusive pedagogical practice" (EASNIE, 2014, 50). Recommendations included:

1. Embedding inclusion in all legislation and making the latter consistent with UNCRC and UNCRPD;
2. Developing a long-term strategy for policy development and implementation to minimize fragmentation, increase understanding and provide support at all levels;
3. Developing strong and inclusive leaders to reduce barriers to learning;
4. Developing a 'continuum of support' focused on enabling all educators;
5. Providing meaningful training on 'inclusive education' to all educators;
6. Developing flexible and responsive syllabi, teaching pedagogies and assessment;
7. Encouraging preventive rather than compensatory approaches; and
8. Developing a strong and effective quality assurance system.

These recommendations encourage "in-depth discussions and reflection" to enable and enhance change in the system's philosophy and services (EASNIE, 2014, 7), since the "current practices are neither natural, inevitable nor unchangeable" (Armstrong et al., 2000, 3).

2.7 Conclusion

The detailed analysis of the Maltese educational system served as a backdrop for the upcoming study. The next chapter (Chapter 3) presents a detailed account of the review of literature on 'neoliberalism' and 'deficit-thinking'. In so doing, the chapter highlights the negative effects of 'deficit-thinking' on educators and minority learners. Moreover, Chapter 3 delves into 'leadership' issues, which are aimed at promoting and enhancing a culture whereby learners "develop their personal and social potential and acquire the appropriate knowledge, key skills, competences and attitudes through a value-oriented formation including equity, social justice, diversity and inclusivity" (MEDE, 2014, 2).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Section 3A: General Introduction

3A.1 Introductory Overview

The aim of the research study is to investigate how educators within the diverse hierarchical structures of the Maltese educational system (i.e. Ministerial, Directorate, Departmental, College, School and Class Levels), try to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' to provide quality education to all learners, irrespective of their age; gender; religion and faith; sexual orientation; socio-economic status; educational ability; talents; ethnicity and cultural backgrounds; and physical and psychological conditions. In so doing, this thesis delves into the concept of 'leadership' and examines diverse 'leadership styles' to build an understanding of the practices employed by educators to challenge attitudes "based on an integrative 'deficit-thinking' mentality" (EASNIE, 2014, 58).

Chapter 3 presents a detailed review of both local and international literature to inform and sustain the thesis' theoretical framework, which:

a) <u>Defines</u> 'neoliberalism' and <u>discusses</u> its impact on education (Section 3B);
b) <u>Examines</u> the notions of 'difference' and 'normality' in a neoliberal social context that give rise to marginalization and exclusion processes (Section 3C);
c) <u>Analyses</u> 'deficit-thinking' and its effects on education (Section 3D); and
d) <u>Scrutinizes</u> diverse 'leadership approaches' that help educators to eliminate 'deficit-thinking', in favour of inclusive and culturally responsive education (Section 3E).

Although the chapter presents the above theoretical fields separately, it also strives to find common ground where these forces intersect to shape understanding on minority learners' capabilities and to better interpret educators' work. A commonly used term within the literature review is '*discourse*', which is understood as a kind of 'power' that circulates to produce knowledge and seeming 'truths' (Manokha, 2009). Namely, 'discourse',

> "defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way a topic can be meaningfully talked and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others" (Hall, 2003, 44).

Hence, 'discourse' constructs, reinforces and challenges social beliefs and attitudes on what constitutes *normality* and *difference*. In turn, 'socially-constructed' assumptions, convictions and behaviours help to instigate or prevent 'defict-thinking', stereotyping and prejudice on 'minority' groups (Akrami et.al., 2006). Throughout this thesis the such groups are referred to as '*minority learners*' (i.e.: learners, who unlike the 'dominant majority', do not fit in the traditional context of school systems and who

systematically experience 'negative labelling or blame', marginalization and exclusion). Sharma (2009) posited that 'minority learners' are very often the victims of chronic absenteeism, early school leaving and poor educational attainment. Finally, other constantly used terms include: *'achievement gap'*; *'dropouts or ESL'*; *'inclusion in education'*, *'equity'* and *'success'*. This research views the latter as follows:

1. 'Achievement Gap' in education refers to the "disparity in academic performance between groups of diverse students, which shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, drop-out rates, and post-secondary and tertiary-completion rates" (http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/achievement-gap/). It is also used to describe the troubling underperformance of minority learners in schools.

2. 'Dropouts or ESL' refers to "people aged 18-24 who only have lower secondary education (or less) and are no longer in education or training". Early school leaving can take several forms, namely "learners who dropped out of school before the end of compulsory education; those who completed compulsory schooling but did not gain an upper-secondary qualification; and those who followed pre-vocational or vocational courses but did not obtain a qualification equivalent to upper-secondary" (http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-52_en.htm).

3. 'Inclusion in education' (also referred to as 'Inclusive Education' or 'Education for All') is understood as a *philosophy*, *a developmental process* and a *product* dealing with the way educators develop and design their colleges, schools and classrooms so that ALL learners are provided with equal access and opportunities to learn and to participate in all aspects of school life. Inclusive education challenges the 'status quo' by encouraging all educators to change their teaching processes, practices and procedures to respond effectively to all learners' diversities rather than pretending that learners should easily fit into the educational system.

4. 'Equity' refers to the principle of fairness and requires putting systems in place to ensure that every child has an equal chance for success. It requires understanding the unique challenges faced by individual learners; encompassing a wide variety of fair educational programs and strategies; and providing additional support to help learners overcome identified barriers" (http://edglossary.org/equity/). Finally, two crucial dimensions of 'equity' are: (A) *Fairness* to ensure that personal and social

circumstances do not prevent learners from achieving their academic potential; and (B) *Inclusion* by setting a minimum standard for education which is shared and owned by all learners (OECD, 2017).

5. '<u>Success</u>' means having the knowledge, skills and resilience to maximise choices and to "be all you can be" (HMIE, 2002, 11). 'Student success' does not necessarily mean scoring high in standardized tests but includes the ability to: "understand the responsibilities that allow learners to fully function as contributing members of a democratic society"; "cooperate with others in work, social and family settings"; "make independent and evidence-based decisions"; "relate constructively with both family and community members"; and "take responsibility for one's own actions and act supportively toward others" (http://www.edutopia.org/definition-student-success).

3A.2 Research Questions and Investigations

The study aims to explore why Maltese policymakers and educational leaders strive to eliminate 'deficit-thinking'. The proposed research questions, in Chapter 1, can be grouped into the following key enquiries:

1. Why do 'neoliberal approaches to education' and 'deficit-thinking' pose a major challenge/barrier to inclusive and culturally responsive education?
2. Who are the 'minority learners/groups' in the Maltese educational system? What challenges do they bring to the system? How do schools and educators cater for the diverse needs of 'minority learners'?
3. Why is the 're-positioning of the self' technique fundamental to eliminate 'deficit-thinking'? What role does 'inclusive leadership' play to enable the 're-positioning-of-the-self' technique?

The above enquiries helped the researcher to:

1. <u>Identify</u> the effects of 'neoliberalism' and 'deficit-thinking' on the local educational system;
2. <u>Identify</u> minority cohorts of learners in the Maltese educational system and <u>present</u> the challenges they bring with them;
3. <u>Determine</u> how learners are included in the teaching and learning process, as well as, <u>highlight</u> practices, which are not in line with the 'education for all' philosophy;

4. Indicate the main characteristics of the 'inclusive leadership' style; and
5. Propose the 're-positioning of the self' based on 'inclusive leadership' as the most effective technique to enable inclusive, responsive and equitable education.

3A.3 Literature Review Methods

The researcher developed keywords to assist in the electronic search of the literature. These 'keywords' are illustrated in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Keywords for Literature Review

'Inclusive Education' and; **'Inclusion'** and:	**'Neoliberalism'**, **'Deficit Thinking'** and:	**'Leadership'** and; **'Educational Leadership'** and:	**'Models of disability'** and:
Integration	*Capitalism*	*Styles*	*Education*
Attitudinal Barriers and Challenges	*Neoliberal approaches to education*	*Instructional, Constructivist and Transformative*	*Medical, Social and Capability Models*
Culturally responsive teaching and learning	*Effects of 'neoliberal-deficit' approaches*	*Authentic, Distributed and Shared*	*'Normalcy' and 'concept of the norm'*
Disability discourse	*Shifting Responsibilities*	*Standards and Profiles*	*Additional Support Services*
Advantages	*Disadvantages*	*Inclusive*	*Support Practices*
Parents	*Heterodoxic views*	*Effective*	*Attitudes*
Teachers	*Temporal Period*	*Professionalism*	*Values*
Principals	*Blaming Culture*	*Deficit-thinking*	*Prevalence*
Heads of School	*Diagnosis*	*Vision*	*Understanding*
Learners	*Social Justice*	*Governance*	*Functioning*
Social Justice	*Educators*	*Transparency*	*Human rights*
Values	*Policymakers*	*Ownership*	*Impairment*
Philosophy	*Pseudo-scientific framework*	*Social justice*	*Support Procedures*
Policy and Procedures	*Socio-cultural framework*	*Roles & responsibilities*	*Integration and Exclusion*
Practice	*Socio-economic framework*	*Rights-based approach*	*Impact*
Process	*Oppression*	*Accountability*	*Inclusion*
Exclusion	*Labelling*	*Democratic*	*Social Justice*
Segregation & Marginalization	*Marginalization and Exclusion*	*'Top-down' vs 'bottom-up'*	*Policy making*

Books, journals, articles, theses, national and international conference papers, official government policies together with WHO and UNESCO position papers, also helped in the development of the literature review. The selection criteria included:

1. Material containing the above primary keywords (Table 3.1);
2. Material linking primary with secondary keywords ('neoliberalism' and 'deficit-thinking' with 'social justice');
3. Publications not older than 20 years, except for influential and critical philosophical and/or sociological work; and
4. Articles and research studies by key researches within the 'keywords' areas.

ERIC, EBSCOhost, Academia and Google Scholar facilitated web-based electronic searches. Key journals in the field included:

Key journals
• The Australian Education Review
• The British Journal of Special Education
• Disability, Culture and Education
• Education, Citizenship and Social Justice
• International Journal of Inclusive Education
• Journal of Education for Teaching
• The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
• International Journal of Educational Psychology
• International Journal of Sociology in Education
• International Journal of Disability, Development and Education
• Educational leadership: Leading for Equity
• Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership
• Journal of Research on Educational Leadership
• International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice
• Journal of Educational Leadership in Action
• The Free Online Educational Leadership Journal

Finally, the thematic approach helped the researcher to categorize the voluminous literature collected from the extensive desk research. These themes (sections or sub-sections headings) provided the backbone of this literature review.

Section 3B: Neoliberalism & the ‘Concept of the Norm’

3B.1 Defining Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, which is also referred to as ‘neo-conservativism’ or ‘market-based policies’ (Ong, 2006), literally means ‘new liberalism’ and alludes to ways of governing society that emphasise the fundamental role of ‘markets’ and advocate for minimal state involvement and/or intervention in market processes. The neo-liberal concept helped to restructure society in line with ‘economic ways of thinking’, through actions and practices that make the ‘market’ paramount, namely: *free-market trade*; *privatisation practices*; *deregulation of financial markets*; *the marketisation of public services* (the shift away from state welfare provision); and *individualisation*. In this regard, Harvey (2005) also stressed the importance of introducing forms of ‘market-thinking’ into “domains that are considered to be non-economic, such as health and education, to make them operate like the private sector” (2). Foucault (2008) referred to the latter process as “the economization of the entire social field”, which considers individuals as inherently economic beings and 'markets’ as the most effective means for guiding governments, public services and populations. In this regard, Rose (2009) argued that neoliberalism involved “a new relation between expertise and politics”, which replaced modes of governance that were based on “truth claims”, deriving from the social and human sciences with “truth claims” from the “grey sciences of management and economics” (54).

Throughout the years, neoliberal reforms, buoyed by the global expansion of capitalism and the transnational integration of markets, became widely accepted and emerged into a kind of new world order, “embraced by all parties across the political spectrum, from right to left” (Ross and Gibson, 2007, 2). Similarly, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) indicated “a conceptual shift in policy-thinking around the world towards a new political rationality based on ‘truths’ associated with the economy, the market, human capital and an entrepreneurial vision of the individual” that reshaped the way policies are “forged, implemented and evaluated” (215). The latter ‘modes of reason’ (i.e. ideas and ways of thinking) rest upon the vision of the individual as ‘Homo Economicus’, i.e. the individual as a self-interested ‘entrepreneur of himself’, who perpetually strives towards ‘self-maximisation and self-capitalisation’ (personal improvement and gain) in competitive markets and social arrangements (Foucault, 2008, 226). This belief corroborated the assumption that individuals are ‘competitive beings’, who try to gain advantage not only through participation in the economy, but also through all aspects

of life. Hence, the State becomes an 'agent of the market' (i.e. the State helps to make an appropriate market to generate new 'conditions of possibility' for how individuals imagine and govern themselves) rather than a sole granter of sovereignty (Apple, 2005; Ong, 2006; Compton & Weiner, 2008). Robertson (2008), stressed that neoliberalism "opposes collectivism and favours personal freedom or possessive individualism" (13), which encourages individuals to 'self-invest' (especially through education); to market themselves and contract out their skills and knowledge; and to compete with others in pursuit of maximising their human capital and potential. The latter form of "self-governance responsabilisation" (Foucault, 2008, 56) shows that neoliberalism is not just about loosening government regulations on the economy, but involves also the reformulation of society in the image of the 'market' to advance "citizens' well-being by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, 2).

Over the past decade, neoliberalism was not immune to criticism, despite its dominance in societal policies. A major critique is that despite neoliberalism promises choice, self-determination and freedom under the rules of the market, the result seems to be "less freedom", "fewer rights", "deficit mentality", "antagonism", "oppression", "marginalization", and "exclusion" (Robertson, 2008, 13). Harvey (2005) argued that neoliberalism augmented 'social division or disparity' as it restored the concentration of wealth to a restricted capitalist class, by giving "special rights and freedoms to those 'whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing', and leaving a pittance for the rest of the population" (37). Similarly, Compton and Weiner (2008) pointed out that neoliberalism's "hijacking of ideals and terms" distorted and narrowed the concept of 'freedom' (to mean only "free enterprise" in the market), it affected 'societal thinking' about 'subordinate groups', and increased stereotyping, antagonism and competition for resources between diverse social groups (27). Such ramifications, together with "the perceived possibility of slothful indolence" created "necessities for new forms of vigilance, surveillance, 'performance appraisal' and other types of control" to ensure "the constant production of evidence that individuals are doing things 'efficiently' and in the 'correct' way" (Apple, 2005, 14). Under this "rigorous and unforgiving ideology of individual accountability" (Giroux, 2008, 1),

> "success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings (such as not investing significantly in one's own human capital) rather than being attributed to systemic property (such as class exclusion usually attributed to capitalism)" (Harvey, 2005, 65-66).

Neoliberalism must also be understood for its political effects. In this regard, Giroux (2008) indicated that neoliberalism is "a political project of governing and persuasion to produce self-regulating forms of subjectivity and modes of conduct" (Giroux, 2008, 12). Similarly, Ong (2006) argued, that neoliberal approaches led to a redefining of citizenship or a way of re-organizing space and population:

> "things that used to be fused together (identity, entitlement, territoriality, and nationality) are being taken apart and re-aligned in innovative relationships and spaces by neoliberal technologies and sovereign exceptions" (27).

Hence, the need for diverse levels of discipline and care, and the granting of social rights to minority groups is envisaged in a framework of how valuable these groups are to the economy rather than as a function of traditional citizenship based on equity and social justice (Ong, 2006). All of this shows that neoliberal approaches favoured 'normalness' over 'diversity', it increased the gap between society's diverse strata; and sustained the belief that 'diversity' hinders the achievement of economic good.

3B.2 Understanding 'Normality': The 'Concept of the Norm'

Savage (2011) remarked that the rise of neoliberalism, reinforced the different "institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures that maintain the exercise of power in the social body" (http://www.michel-foucault.com). Foucault (1998) argued that power is neither an agency nor a structure, but a kind of 'meta-power' or 'regime of truth', that pervades society in constant negotiable flux. Hence, 'power' results from accepted forms of knowledge and scientific understanding or 'truth', which Rabinow (1991) considered as "a thing of this world produced from multiple forms of constraint...that induce regular effects of power" (72). As a matter of fact, Rabinow (1991) posited that,

> "each society has its regime of truth ('general politics' of truth), i.e. the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms which enable one to distinguish true from false statements…the techniques and procedures that are accorded value in the acquisition of truth; and the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (73).

In turn, societal 'regimes of truth' produce and reinforce different 'norms' or 'types of knowledge' on diverse social activities and behavioural practices that collectively give

rise to 'culture'. Foucault (2008) described this as the "hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, but also the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion" (13).

However, Gaventa (2003) argued that power is not only "a negative, coercive or repressive capacity that forces humans to do things against their will, but also a necessary, productive and positive force" (2). Foucault (1991) posited that,

> "we must cease to describe 'power' negatively: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. Power produces reality, domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (194).

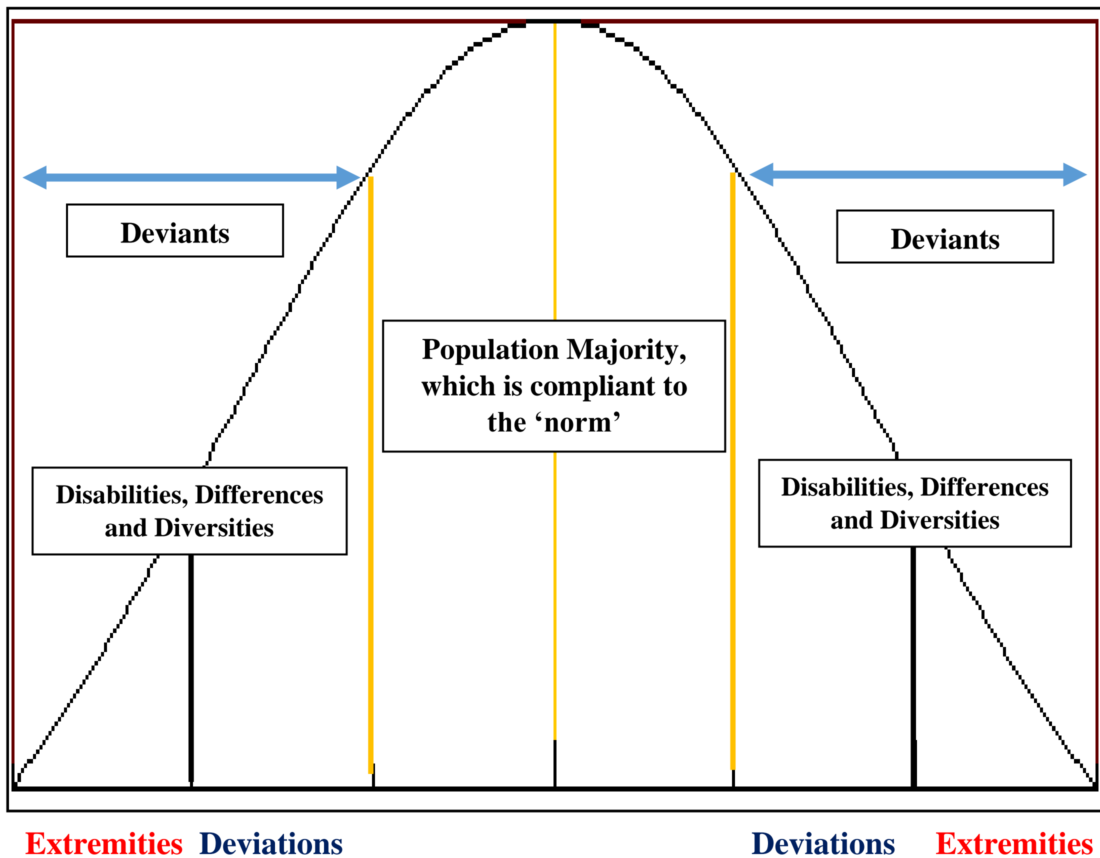
Hence, power is a major social-disciplinary or conformity force, through which humans develop an array of 'reflective and voluntary practices', 'techniques of the self' or 'arts of existence' (Gaventa, 2003). The latter helps citizens "not only to set themselves rules of conduct, but also to change themselves in their singular being…to make of their life an oeuvre that carries aesthetic values and meets stylistic criteria" (Foucault, 1991, 11).

Within this framework, Foucault (2008) emphasised a new kind of 'disciplinary power' ('bio-power'), which moves away from the traditional use of force or violence. Rather, people self-discipline themselves in expected normative ways, by regulating activity or behaviour (drills), time (timetables) and space organization (architecture), which together with complex systems of surveillance (to ensure order and discipline), help to enforce and sustain accepted and expected patterns of social behaviour. Hence, 'bio-power' creates a 'discursive practice', which defines what is normal, acceptable and deviant in society. Foucault (1991) remarked that,

> "the judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the social worker-judge. It is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and everyone, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements" (134).

All the described practices revolve around the notion of the 'concept of the norm', which posits that individuals who are in line with society's general norms (standards) fall under the arch of the bell-shaped curve (Figure: 3.1), whereas others who deviate stand at the extremities of the curve (peripheral ends of society) and are referred to as 'deviations' or 'extremes'. The latter's ramifications or beliefs on societal processes and attitudes are essential to deconstruct conceptions on 'disability' and 'minority' as well as to comprehend the widespread utilisation of 'deficit-thinking'.

Figure 3.1: The Standard Bell-Shaped Curve



3B.3 'Normality' and the Notion of Difference

Debates on 'normality' or 'difference' present the intricate interaction between the endowments of all children and the shaping role of living environments. Callanan and Waxman (2013) posited that the dynamic balance between nature and nurture influences both political and educational policies, since it affects the understanding and treatment of 'others' whose behaviour, values or capacities differ from the perceived norm. Specifically, the challenge is to decipher whether "a difference is a difference of any consequence, and if it is, whether that difference is in fact a deficit" (Callanan et. al., 2013, 80).

Ainscow (1998) described 'difference' as a social and political phenomenon. Minnow (1990) sees difference as a function of comparison and not as some individual pathology of the 'diverse' person. Minnow (1990) also argued that, "if we look closely at the context that defines people as different, that difference will no longer seem empirically discoverable" (Minnow, 1990, 22), but rather ideas about difference will become clues to problems associated with responsibilities of people within a society.

Hence, 'diversity' does not only include individuals with physical and/or psychological disabilities, but it includes other categories of people, who for some reason or another find themselves at the peripheral sides of society. These include individuals with gender diversity, people in or at risk of poverty, migrants, individuals with different ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural backgrounds, people with diverse sexual orientations like gays, lesbians, bisexuals or transgender, and highly talented and intelligent people. Danforth and Rhodes (1997) argued that, "the various forms of 'disability' are not physical absolutes, but social designations that are made by people in interaction and relationship" (59).

DESA document 'Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies for Social Integration' (2009) pointed out that,

> "power imbalances between groups with different social identities, lead to the use of labels to categorize others, often with the use of stereotypes, and based on characteristics such as appearance, age, physical status, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious, political/cultural affiliations" (21).

Guimond and Dambrun (2002) pointed out that social hierarchies, stereotypes and prejudice have various shapes and effects in different cultures, but psychologically they share the same underlying mechanisms and they shape our every-day reality. Tajfel et. al., (1986) also indicated that the constant process of labelling and social categorization leads to "people concealing a social identity, in anticipation that they may experience discrimination or may not be accepted in society" (79). DESA (2009) also argued that,

> "the value of these labels and categories may appear to reflect essential or inherent qualities, but, their meaning is a product of interaction and a social construction of a particular society. They should be viewed as the result of the interaction between the person and the environment and not something that resides in the individual. So, whether a specific characteristic leads to inclusion or exclusion of the individual depends on the society's values and culture, as well as the particular circumstances" (22).

Bussey and Bandura (1999) also contended that stereotypes on diverse social groups affect the way citizens develop behaviour and skills.

In Malta, like in many other countries, 'normalness' is highly valued. Sarason (1982) argued that 'the concept of the norm' is evident in schools since it is difficult to segregate school culture from the culture of the wider society. The notions of 'other', 'difference' and 'disability' infiltrated the educational system with beliefs based on value judgements and medical-model perspectives. Rieser (2003) argued that,

> "the 'edical odel' regards the disabled person as the problem. We are to be adapted to fit into the world as it is. The emphasis is on dependence, backed up by the stereotypes of disability that call for patronizing attitudes. Such thinking predominates in schools where special educational needs are thought of as emanating from the individual who is seen as different, faulty and needing to be assessed and made as normal as possible" (119).

Moreover, Davis and Watson (2001) argued that since 'difference' is not something valued, 'minority groups' are forced to act 'normal' by educators since many schools' function as an authority to teach learners certain norms to be able to "compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation" (Rieser, 2006, 4).

HMIE (2009) in Scotland argues that many learners "face circumstances which create learning and achievement barriers, which may arise from family circumstances, social and emotional factors, and health or disability. Factors such as age, race, gender and sexuality, and interruptions to learning, can also give rise to barriers" (HMI, 2009, 5). This belief supports the notion that 'difference' is culturally, socially and politically constructed (Corbett & Slee, 2000; Slee, 2001). Carrignton (1999) belives that it is vital to recognise the part played by culture in including and excluding students to overcome social exclusion. Slee (2001) also stressed that "the point of embarkation for the journey towards more inclusive societies, is at the point of recognising the nature and legitimacy of difference and the relations of domination between different groups" (389).

3B.4 'Normality' leading to Exclusion and Marginalisation Practices

Individuals exhibiting different forms of diversity have constantly struggled to live active, independent and productive lives because of societies' environmental and attitudinal barriers, which often result in discrimination and stigmatization processes and practices. Read (2000) stressed that, "sometimes it seemed that being 'different' automatically made you public property and gave you a public persona that was not always welcome" (33). Because of these negative attitudes, many individuals in diverse minority groups develop the Marxian notion of 'false consciousness', whereby they come to believe that they are less capable and worthy than others. Cameron (2008) posited,

> "disabled people find themselves faced with choices involving either an acceptance of devalued status as 'disabled'; or a rejection of 'self', an unwillingness to identify or to be identified as 'disabled', regarding impairment as something to be despised and triumphed over, not to be

> referred to or drawn attention to, certainly not to be made the foundation for a positive identity" (17).

The latter 'medical-deficit' attitude permeates also in societies' neoliberal legislations, policies, practices and procedures, which tend to portray 'different minority groups' as 'sick', 'unfit', 'unable to work', 'functionally limited' or 'not economically productive' (Brzuzy, 1997), hence, the need for specialist organisations and charitable support practices to address 'deficiencies'. Amongst these, there are rehabilitation centres, mental hospitals, special schools, elderly homes, disability hubs, and many expert specialists in different fields. Barton (1993) described the latter structures as,

> "a means of control, a means of legitimating the dominant forms of interests and discourse of a given society, a world of marketisation, competitiveness and selection. It makes sure the system continues as smoothly as possible by removing those difficult, objectionable and unwanted people to other spheres" (55).

The conceptualisation of the above philosophy gave rise to exclusionary processes and practices. Consequently, 'social exclusion', in the field of social sciences, found favour in political discourse and gained widespread acceptance and recognition in different disciplines. Pierson (2002) described 'social exclusion' as a process that deprived individuals or groups of people from the resources that they need to participate in the social, economic and political activities of society due to poverty, low educational attainment, physical disability, culture, psychological condition/s, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, race, religion and faith. The Combat Poverty Action Plan (2008) portrayed social exclusion as:

> "the process whereby certain groups are pushed to the margins of society and are prevented from participating fully because of their poverty, low education, disability or inadequate life skills. This distances them from job, income and educational opportunities as well as social and community networks. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and little chance of influencing decisions or policies that affect them, and little chance of bettering their standard of living".
> (http://www.combatpoverty.ie/povertyinireland/glossary.htm#S)

The notion of 'exclusion' is closely linked to the concept of 'marginalisation'. Hall (1997) described the latter concept as a socio-political process that deals with the peripheralisation of certain individuals from a dominant majority. It originated from the political struggle of people of colour, women, the poor, immigrants, the mentally ill and disabled individuals (Hall, 1999). Messiou (2006) stressed that marginalisation is intrinsically tied to the notion of normality, whereby minority groups are moved,

forced or simply end up on the edges of society away from the locus of control. Ferguson (1998) argued that,

> "in our society, dominant discourse never tries to speak its own name. Its authority is based on absence. The absence is not just that of the various groups classified as 'other' although members of these groups are routinely denied power. It is also the lack of any overt acknowledgement of the specificity of the dominant culture...This is the basis of its power" (Ferguson, 1998, 11).

This strengthens McIntosh's (2006) argument that marginalisation is both a "process and an experience" (48), deriving from neoliberal beliefs, that ultimately results in inequality and disadvantage due to lack of access to social justice, power, participation, voice and value (Tucker, 1990).

Conventionally, 'normalcy' also effected the development and provision of education. Underlying selective structures, based on ability and class membership (Ball 2002), created and perpetuated inequalities (Archer, 2000) founded on the assumption that educational failure resides in the minds, bodies, culture and communities of individual learners. The latter perceptions reinforced the belief that 'education' was a privilege of the 'elite', intellectually able and motivated students (McDonald, 1996). Hence, strengthening the idea that schools are not a place for 'socially disadvantaged', 'disabled' or 'educationally incompetent' learners (Riddell, 2005, 11). Unfortunately,

> "…the structures of contemporary schooling tend to reinforce the status quo by privileging the cultural and linguistic experiences of children of the already privileged. Absent a 'level playing field', this current system of competitive schooling can never be fair" (Dubley-Marling, 2007, 1).

Wolfendale (1996) also remarked that current 'deficit-rooted' school structures tend to locate problems, failures and learning difficulties in minority students to assimilate and discipline them into 'normality', otherwise, they are either segregated or excluded. All this gave rise to 'special education', which incorporated separate educational facilities ('special schools') and services (complementary service).

Skrtic (1991) defined 'special education' as "the profession that emerged in the 20th century in America, to contain the failure of public education to educate all its youths for full political, economic and cultural participation in democracy" (24). Similarly, Ballard (2003) described 'special education' as a medium to protect regular schooling from difficult and troublesome learners. Furthermore, Corbett (2001) emphasized that "the term 'needs' can send out signals of dependency, inadequacy and

unworthiness" (159). These definitions show that 'special education', perpetuated both marginalisation and exclusion, which Booth (1996) described as "the process of decreasing the participation of pupils in cultures and curricula of mainstream schools" (34-35). Likewise, Kearney (2009) stated that, "exclusion occurs when learners are denied full access to curriculum, friendship groups and teacher time…due to a 'deficit pathology' based on ideas of what is normal and abnormal" (45). Hence, the need for expert or specialist teachers to address the needs of 'disabled' diverse learners (Ballard, 1999). Booth and Ainscow (1998) considered the latter ideology as 'flawed', since it viewed minority learners as 'deficient' and as 'lacking critical attribute, ability or potential'. Similarly, Corbett and Slee (2000) posited,

> "…a great deal of theory and practice which forms the special educational tradition is essentially deficient and disablist, compounding the patterns of educational and social exclusion that is witnessed in schools and communities…" (143).

Hence, public schools need to create new 'spaces' for SEN learners to socialize and learn with 'other' students in regular classrooms rather, than focusing on 'withdrawal or pull-out special education support interventions' (Wolfendale, 1996).

Deficit-laden support services and interventions are also very common in the Maltese educational system. EASNIE (2014) highlighted that national, college and school-based support services "are seen by a range of stakeholders as integrative approaches, essentially geared towards meeting the needs of learners with disabilities or special educational needs", and contributed to the reinforcement of 'deficit-integrative-medical' approaches (40).

Section 3C: The 'Deficit-Thinking' Paradigm

3C.1 Defining Deficit-Thinking in Education

In education, exclusion and/or marginalisation can be both obvious and hidden. The former is usually associated with the physical presence or absence of learners from schools and classrooms while the latter refers to the school's culture and the educators' mentalities. Hidden exclusionary practices or marginalisation processes can be well ingrained in schools' culture, structures and procedures and pass on as either unnoticed or unquestioned, mainly due to lack of awareness. Slee and Allan (2001) indicated that the ultimate beneficiaries of such a system are both minority learners and their families. Freire and Macedo (1995) also contended that many school structures legitimise the lack of success of minority learners to factors like home-life, linguistic differences and socio-economic indicators, which are completely outside the educators' control.

According to Barber (1992), public education is not only about serving the public efficiently, but also about creating the public effectively. This means that apart from being a service, education also conveys the social mission of "developing future generations who hold the key to our quality of life" (NCF, 2012, viii). To carry out this social mission, schools must transcend life by providing learners with equitable learning opportunities. Houston (2003) argued that very often schools manage to provide equal opportunities but then fail to grant equitable access to such prospects because of 'deficit thinking' practices, which are based on the belief that educators are unable to teach minority, marginalized learners. Giangreco and Cravedi-Cheng (1998) posited that because of these attitudes, minority learners spend much of their time in special education programs where expectations are lowered, interactions with 'other' peers diminish, instructional activities are limited, and curriculum is questionable. Valencia (1997) shared the same beliefs and pointed out that educational systems support low standards, negative labels, high-stake standardized tests and low expectations for minority learners due to the pervasion of 'deficit-thinking' practices. Skrla et al. (2001) argued that,

> "…the result of this pervasive deficit approach is that learners...are routinely and overwhelmingly: tracked into low-level classes, identified for special education, segregated because of their home languages, labelled as dropouts, under identified as 'gifted/talented', immersed in negative and "subtractive" school climates, and sorted into a plethora of 'special' programs" (236).

According to Lipman (1998), this deficit perspective 'disarms' minority students from the competitive workforce. Ford and Grantham (2003) argued that 'deficit-thinking'

deteriorated expectations for minority learners and weakened educators' abilities to identify diverse forms of giftedness. In addition, Anyon (1980) asserted that when minority learners receive a weak and narrow set of educational skills, (no critical thinking skills, open-mindedness, creative capacity and comparison), they end up reinstating the status quo. As a result, oppression occurs, and schooling becomes a negative experience to such minority learners. Public education, despite being advertised as 'free' or 'equal' for all, becomes inaccessible to many students including marginalized learners due to their race, culture and socio-economic status (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 1995).

The ideology underlying the deficit perspective has been described as "deficit theory" (Collins, 1988; Dudley-Marling, 2007; Gorski, 2008), "deficit ideology" (Sleeter, 2004) and "deficit thinking" (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Pearl, 1997; Valencia, 1997; Yosso, 2005). Despite the diverse terminology, 'deficit-thinking' is an ideology based on assumed 'truths' about the world and socio-political relationships. Gorski (2010) argued that 'deficit-thinking' is "something deeper than individual assumptions and dispositions" (3), while Valencia (1997) stressed that it is an institutionalized worldview woven into the fabric of society and its socializing institutions, including schools. It is an ideology shaping individual assumptions-dispositions to encourage compliance with an oppressive educational and social order. To this effect, Sleeter (2004) explains that, "the long-standing deficit ideology still runs rampant in many schools…despite the abstraction that 'all' children can learn" (133).

Portelli et. al. (2007) pointed out the ability of 'deficit-thinking' to blend with "normal" or "common sense" judgment. It implies that minority learners do not have the ability to learn and acquire preconceived norms rooted in neoliberal values and beliefs. Katsarou et. al. (2010) also claimed that educators holding deficit views on marginalized learners only,

> "... [see] their students as a laundry list of problems. These educators are unable to look past students' challenging behaviour, [thus] making meaningful and reciprocal relationships impossible. Unable to connect to their students, their efforts at classroom management and instruction fail, and they in turn blame their students for what has ultimately stemmed from their negative and stereotyped views for their students" (139).

Reid (2005) posited that neoliberal practices supported and ensured the 'success' of only a segment of learners by giving them the opportunity to think independently and

to develop managerial and business skills. Often curriculum design, its development and its implementation hinders the holistic development of minority learners. They are then ascribed as educational 'failure' due to the deficits and problems of people from minority communities rather than to inequalities in access and opportunities (Rank, 2004; Tozer, 2000). All of this suggests that, whereas neoliberal policies may be well intentioned, their 'outcomes' are negatively experienced and embodied by 'minority' learners (Darder, 2012).

Concretely, 'deficit-thinking' results in educational practices that deter learners from receiving equitable education, by continuously privileging learners in dominant groups. Lewis and Macedo (1996) described the process of excluding minority groups as a 'privilege of domination'. As a result, marginalized learners suffer from micro-aggressions that ensue disparity of treatment and gross educational mismatch between majority and marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings, 2007). The latter results from:

a) Unresponsive curricula – learners' culture, identity or history not accounted for;
b) Unresponsive pedagogy – students' basic needs not responded to;
c) Lack of family engagement – students' home upbringing is not congruent with the general beliefs, practices and attitudes of educators, who also lack parental support due to difficult working conditions; and
d) Lack of student engagement – learners are discouraged to take an active role in the teaching and learning process.

'Deficit-thinking' also posits that educational failure is the result of internal deficits, including limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of intrinsic motivation, immoral behaviour and cultural differences (Valencia, 1997), resulting in ongoing educational crisis (Cummins, 2001), namely:

a) 'Shifting of responsibility' across all system levels, leading to lack of accountability to examine the links between school practices and student outcomes (Berman et al., 1999; Cummins, 2001); and
b) 'Blaming the victim' techniques whereby teachers blame learners and their families (vice-versa) while policymakers blame schools (vice-versa) for lack of educational success.

These systemic shortcomings also led to the development of different compensatory support services, which hindered academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2007) and

further alienated minority learners from contemporary school settings (Nieto, 2010). Perry and Francis (2010) posited that deficit-rooted-inequalities "are not only evident during compulsory schooling but persist in relation to participation rates in higher education" (7), since deficit practices generate inequality of outcome and disparity of resources and opportunities (Farkas 2003; Ferguson, 1998; Oakes, 1995). As a result, many learners end marginalized, the quality of public education decreases and the possibility of having truly democratic schools diminishes. Valencia (1997) pointed out that, "the existing [educational] situation reinforces 'deficit-thinking' and militates against changes that provide more opportunities to marginalized learners" (247).

Literature (Valencia, 1997; Nieto, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999) shows that 'deficit-thinking' invaded school environments and has become part of school processes and practices (Katsarou et al., 2010). In fact,

> "...school practices and assumptions emerging from the deficit paradigm often hide student and teacher abilities. These assumptions are essentially powerful because they are unspoken. We over-look our taken for granted ideas and practices to an extraordinary degree" (Weiner, 2006, 42).

Hence, 'deficit-thinking' refers to,

> "a common way of thinking which affects our general way of being in and constructing the world. It never questions the legitimacy of what is deemed normal nor does it consider that differences may go beyond the expected norms. It discourages educators from recognizing the positive values of certain abilities, which lead to stereotyping or prejudging. It marginalizes people because of misinformation or misconstructions" (Portelli, 2010, 39).

Essentially, 'deficit-thinking' influences one's practices and actions, how one relates and interacts with others, and how one understands and explains experiences.

3C.2 Discourse and Language Sustaining Deficit-Thinking

Purdue (2004) argued that discourse is a way of speaking, which helps to construct and sustain knowledge and meaning on social phenomenon (Ballard, 2004). To this effect, Johnson (2008) posited that both language and discourse, provide the words and symbols that allow people to develop and communicate a reality. Hence, Pitzer (2014) defined discourse as "a kind of power that circulates to produce knowledge and seeming 'truths'...referring to a set of practices and ways of thinking and talking about a particular object that actually defines or constitute the object" (6). Hall (2003) also argued that,

> "discourse constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way [individuals] talk and/or reason about topics. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others" (44).

Hence, discourse has the power to determine what is important and what is not. Moreover, Nielson (2009) pointed out that discourse develops when there is acceptance and common understanding of conceptual issues. Barnes et. al. (1999) stressed that discourse has the power to shape ideas, values, beliefs and norms, whilst Lipman (1998) emphasised the importance of using socially correct language (neutral) to overcome stereotyping and inequalities in educational institutions. Educators "need to resist and reject language that carries deficit-thinking connotations" (Valencia, 1997, 103).

Mittler (2000) stressed that around 'deficit-thinking' exists already a well-defined and established language. Valencia (2010) pointed out that deficit discourse "offers a description of behaviour in pathological/dysfunctional ways…referring specially to deficits, deficiencies, limitations or shortcomings in individuals, families, and cultures" (14). It renders an 'explanation' of negative behaviour by locating deficits ('limited intelligence') in learners and offers the 'prediction' that negative behaviour, will continue unless it is fixed. Swadener and Lubeck (1995) also argued that the 'deficit' construct places the locus of dysfunction in individuals of colour, single-parent families, low-income communities and people with disabilities. Hence, risk-focused discourse ignored institutionalized inequalities and hindered the systemic analysis needed to evaluate what places minority learners at risk. Nieto (2010) argued that this negative cycle fosters despair and creates hopelessness in both learners and educators. Traditionally, the 'medical-model-of-disability' influenced the evolution of deficit discourse (Yosso, 2005), which focuses on learners' disabilities and/or weaknesses rather than on how cultural, social and political contexts affect minority learners. Deficit discourse portrays 'diversity' as a "deficit", "an illness", "problem that needs fixing, rehabilitation or curing" or as a "major barrier to success" (Weiner, 2003, 65), resulting in labelling minority learners as 'others', 'needy' and 'pitiful' (Purdue, 2004). The latter discourse champions the belief that certain families devalue education and schooling (Delpit, 1995; García et al., 2004; Payne, 2008; Shields et al., 2005; Valencia, 2010). Payne (2008) argued that "…the in-educability of certain children and the apathy of their parents" led teachers off the hook since "…by the time students start

school, the great majority have already been so damaged that only a handful could be saved…no matter what teachers do" (73).

The terms 'special need', 'disabled', 'disorder', 'at risk' and 'deficient' are constantly used to convey messages of deficit and difference. Similarly, the phrase 'needs' can also emanate signs of "dependency, inadequacy and unworthiness" (Corbett, 1999, 124). Biklen (1995) pointed out that the latter terms target individuals with "derisive humour and patronising solicitude" (13); have a 'devaluing' effect on learners and create mind-sets that perpetuate marginalisation (Ainscow et al., 2000). McDermott et. al. (2009), purported that,

> "the diagnosis of risk is embedded in cultural preoccupations and circumstances that, because rarely specified, invite a general bias: White, middle-class lives offer children the best of all worlds. The message to educators: Fix the children…race and class barriers can be overcome one person at a time" (101).

In schools, many educators refer to low-achieving learners as "at-risk" (Shields et al., 2005; Valencia, 1997) and Theoharis (2007) described "difference - meaning, not white, not middle class or affluent, and not without disability - as deficiency" (11). Hence, Shields et. al. (2005) used a "pathologizing metaphor (with its root meaning in disease) that suggests, as a cure for the malady, 'quarantining the victim' as in the establishment of separate schools, classes, programs, or special curriculum, often compensatory, to 'make up' for students' deficiencies" (17). Dei and Kempf (2006) argued that, discourse leaves an indelible mark on minority learners' identities and learning possibilities, since "language is also central when it comes to notions of exclusion, othering and stigmatization…" (16). Moreover, language also includes the "unsaid discourse" or "what is left unsaid" (Mittler, 2000), which "alienates learners and leaves them with a daunting uphill battle" (Dei and Kempf, 2006, 87) that results in 'self-fulfilling' prophecies whereby expectations are lowered results. Hence, Valenzuela (1999) concluded that "…unless educators offer other voices, perspectives and alternatives to explore the true meaning of 'at risk', 'normality', 'success' and 'respect'…education runs the danger of perpetuating a master-script that legitimize dominant discourse" (41).

Apart from blaming students and families for school failure, deficit discourse can also harm teachers. Weiner (2003) posited that, "…blaming learners' techniques have frequently been challenged with other explanations that shift attention away from

student deficiencies and instead scrutinize deficits of individual class teachers" (305). Darder (2011) posited that "it is significant to note that through the hegemonic process of standardized testing, teachers, as workers, have become the new scapegoats of the system" (214). Moreover, Weiner (2003) indicated two deficit discourse models:

a) The 'student-deficit paradigm' – discourse which blames students; and
b) The 'teacher-deficit paradigm' – discourse that blames teachers for school failure.

Research (Miller, 1993) shows that the 'teacher-deficit paradigm' negatively affected teachers' relationships among each other. Weiner (2003) stressed that unless teachers feel a 'collective-sense-of-efficacy', learners will continue to experience failure and to underachieve (Fine, 1992). Payne (2008) posited,

> "Whatever other people do is interpreted in the most negative way possible. If parents do not show up at school, what does it mean? That they do not care. If a colleague fails to make hall duty, what does it mean? That she is blowing off her responsibility…. But, if parents do show up? They are just coming to stick their noses in our business. If the colleague shows up for hall duty? Sucking up to the principal" (25).

Deficit discourse can also make teachers feel helpless or discouraged in terms of their practice. Fine (1992) argued that "correlational evidence suggests that teachers who feel disempowered in their institutions are most likely to believe that their kids cannot be helped" (121). The latter discourse lowered the public's opinion on teachers and the teaching profession, by sustaining a 'discourse of derision' to blame inferior academic achievement on poor teaching and school leadership (Ball, 2002). Connel (2009) also refers to the neoliberal distrust in teacher professionalism as "anti-competitive monopolies", which means that "specifically, neoliberalism distrusts teachers" (219).

Throughout the years, 'critical discourse' challenging the deficit perspective emerged to promote the idea that 'every learner is unique and talented', to encourage educators to 'find the gift in every learner', and to urge educational stakeholders to 'focus on learners' strengths'. Miller (1993) stated that,

> "the philosophy of abundance, in contrast to the philosophy of deficiency, is based on capability and competence. It presumes an optimistic explanation for human thinking, learning and ability. This abundance perspective assumes that each person, regardless of age, gender, economic circumstance or geographic location, is constantly in the process of constructing meanings based on her or his own life experiences" (57).

Most of this educational discourse occurs in the 'socio-political context of schooling' or "the unexamined ideologies and myths that shape commonly accepted ideas and

values in a society" (Nieto et. al., 2008, 7). According to Gorski (2010), "while this discourse focuses on individual attitudes and biases, it rarely addresses the ideologies or conditions which underlie the deficit perspective" (2). However, educators do have the power to challenge 'deficit-thinking'. Cummins (2001) stressed that,

> "individual educators are never powerless, although they frequently work in conditions that are oppressive for them and their students. While they operate under many constraints with respect to curriculum and working conditions, educators do have choices in the way they structure classroom interactions, and, in the messages, they communicate to students" (653).

Cummins (2001) further posited that,

> "educators are capable of determining the social and educational goals they want to achieve with their students because they are responsible for the role definitions they adopt in relation to culturally diverse students and communities. Even in the context of English-only instruction, educators have options in the orientation they adapt to students' languages and cultures, in the ways they implement pedagogy and assessment" (653).

Finally, Nieto (2010) stressed the need for learners and teachers to identify alternative discourse in order to acquire constructive skills and competencies. Gee, (2004) asked,

> "what is it about schools that manage to transform children who are good at learning, [regardless of economic or cultural differences], into children who are not good at learning, if they are members of minority groups?" (10).

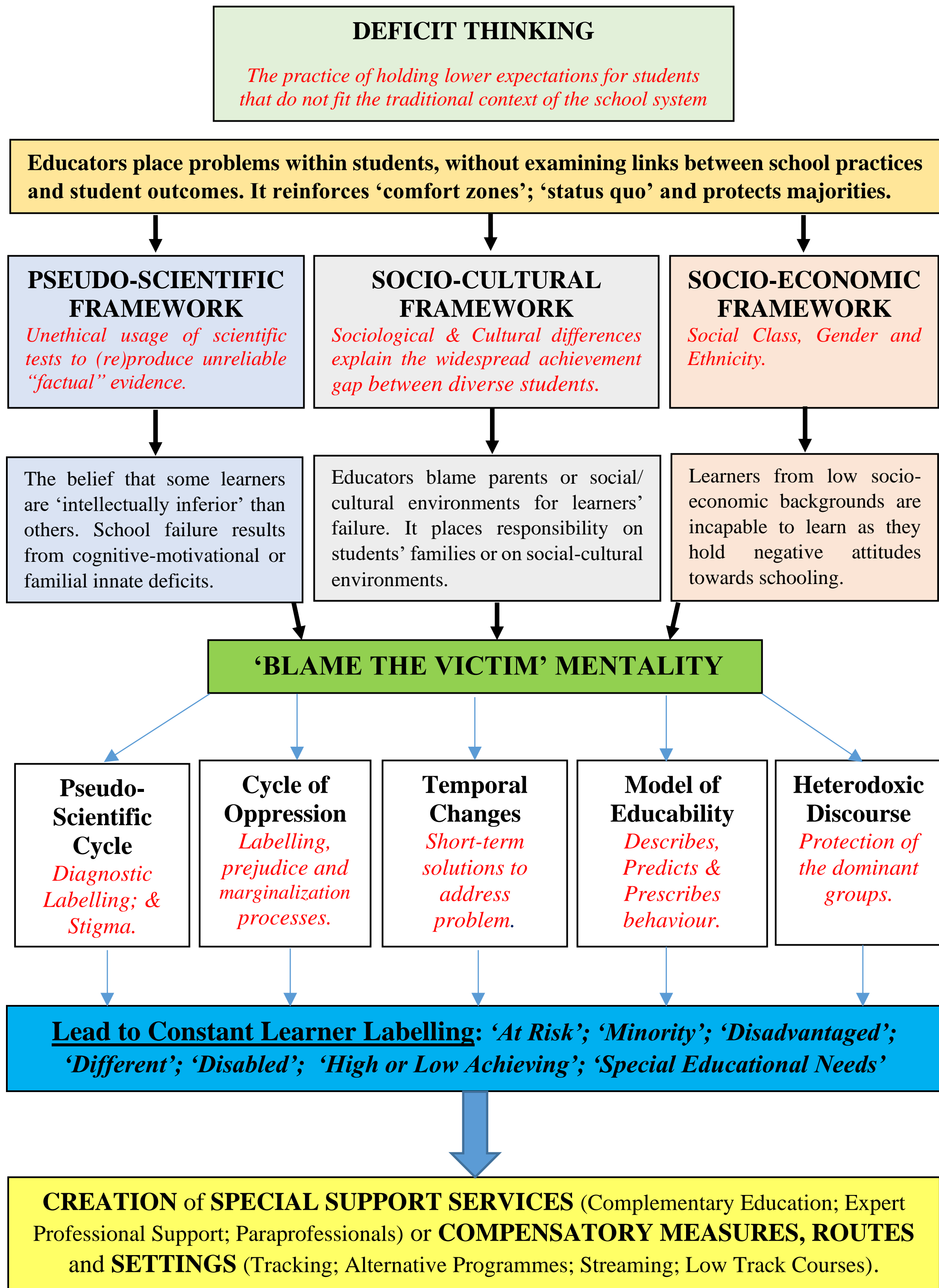
Hence, understanding that "the problem is the problem" (Freedam et. al., 1996, 47) helps educators to focus more on expanding learners' affordances for learning.

3C.3 The Three Frameworks of Deficit-Thinking

Valencia (1997) argued that educators attribute educational failure to learners' racial 'inferiority', language, low socio-economic status, and/or difficult socio-cultural backgrounds, including parents' low education and lack of interest in schooling. Such thinking gives rise to a 'pathologizing process', which locates responsibility for school success in the lived experiences of learners, rather than in the educational system itself (Shields, 2004). In turn, the latter process creates a 'culture of silence and blame' that results in constant 'stereotyping' (Freire, 1998) and 'labelling' of learners as either 'at-risk' (Valencia, 1997) or in danger of 'school drop out' (Ornstein and Levine, 2003). Research (Valencia, 2010) also shows that 'deficit-thinking' sustains itself through:

- A *Pseudo-Scientific* Framework;
- A *Socio-Cultural* Framework; and
- A *Socio-Economical* Framework (Figure: 3.2).

Figure 3.2: The 'Deficit-Thinking' Paradigm



All this shows that deficit-thinking has its roots in eugenicist views on race and genetics, as well as in the "culture of poverty" studies or research on the "culturally deprived child" (Alonso, Anderson, Su, and Theoharis, 2009; Reese, 2005; Shields et. al., 2005; Valencia, 1997; 2010; Weiner, 1993).

3C.3.1 Deficit-Thinking created by a PseudoScientific Framework

The pseudoscientific framework for 'deficit-thinking' stems from the unethical usage of scientific methodology aimed at (re)producing unreliable 'factual' evidence about minority learners' abilities (Sharma, 2009). According to Hyslop-Margison et. al. (2008), at the heart of pseudo-scientism lies 'convergent thinking', which upholds normality theories (Bell Curve theory) and sustains existing testing practices (IQ tests) to set standards/benchmarks, against which different learners are compared. The latter contrasts with Durkheim's belief on structural functionalism to "eschew reductionism (i.e. the study of individuals) and instead consider social phenomena as appropriate units of analysis" (Hyslop-Margison et al., 2008, 41).

In education, the pseudoscientific framework affects educators' judgments on the level and type of learning possible for minority groups. This entails that,

> "in studying mental processes sociological and/or anthropological studies must chronologically precede (in terms of methodological importance) psychological studies, because it is impossible to examine the mind prior to understanding it first and foremost as a cultural product" (Cazeneuve, 1972, cited in Hyslop-Margison et al., 2008, 43).

Such reasoning implies that researchers "cannot objectively define or test 'intelligence' because any definition of the normative concept emerges from what is [deemed] consistent with a specific social context" (Hyslop-Margison et al., 2008, 43). Pseudo-scientism helped to generate beliefs that some learners (especially minority learners) are 'intellectually inferior' when compared to 'other' peers. Similar assumptions that are sustained by one-sided standardized tests (IQ tests), enforced the notion that scientific methodology was 'pseudo' in nature and provided 'facts' that reinforced deficit assumptions on minority learners, which become incorporated as given truths into 'deficit-teaching' practices (Valencia, 1997).

The systematic way in which scientific research has been misconceived, shows that "as teachers…we are agents who influence and are influenced by the context and outcomes of our social, economic and cultural circumstances" (Hyslop-Margison et al., 2008, 58). Valencia (1997) linked 'deficit-thinking' to the evolutionary theory, which supports pseudoscientific reasoning that rationalizes why minority learners fail at school. Hence, failure resulted from alleged cognitive, motivational or familial deficits that were biologically innate in learners. Valencia (1997) argued that pseudoscientific thinking was "tantamount to the process of 'blaming the victim' since

it is a model based on imputation, not documentation" (xi). This practice is very common in Malta, especially when allocating special support to learners lagging behind their 'other' peers. Local educators use IQ and standardized test results for either referral purposes or to justify a minority learner's academic failure. Reiser (2004) argued that "other people's assessments of us are used to determine where we go to school; what support we get and what type of education we receive" (119).

The pseudoscientific framework leaves an indelible effect on minority learners' lives. Valencia (1997) stated that the 'pseudo' methodology to "diagnose, describe, explain, predict and prescribe" learners' behaviour created stigma against "minority students" since

> "…the effect of these interventions were primarily felt by several minority students as they were misjudged, labelled and under-went all kinds of discrimination…the long-term effects of this discrimination have shaped and influenced educational thought and practice" (7).

According to Shields et al. (2005), the 'scientific' labelling process is an 'authoritative' voice to truth, which triggers 'pathologizing' processes. Trent, Artiles and Englert (1998) also stressed that 'pseudoscientific labelling processes' created and sustained discriminatory beliefs on SEN learners. They posited that,

> "…many educators who focused on the etiology of learning problems from a deficit perspective did so with the hope of developing interventions to ameliorate or minimize these problems…disability is still linked to deficits that reside within children, their families, and their communities" (Trent et. al., 2008, 297).

Portelli et. al. (2007) stressed that pseudoscientific practices result in increased ESL, absenteeism and truancy. In Malta, the ESL rate stands at 20% (as opposed to the EU's 11%), while the "total number of absences for students in primary and secondary schools…amounted to 542,447 days, equivalent to an average of 11.9% absent days per student" (NSO, 2017, 1).

3C.3.2 Deficit-Thinking created by a Sociological-Cultural Framework

This framework places learners squarely in their social context, one that involves their cultural and political realities (Giroux, 1992). Hence, it emanates subtle but hidden messages that 'social diversity' is 'alien' and 'of no value' to the school (Valencia, 2010). All of this creates 'disparity of treatment', disengagement, 'disparity in academic achievement' and systemic school 'drop-out' (Ford and Thomas, 1997).

Riojas-Cortez (2000) argued that the 'sociological-cultural deficit framework' places responsibility on the students themselves, their families and their cultural environments through 'labelling' and 'stereotyping' practices resulting from pseudoscientific results (Cooper, 2006). In so doing, schools abdicate from their 'collective responsibility for all students' learning' (Gorski, 2006). Similarly, Valencia (2010) remarked that "low-grade genes, inferior culture and class, or inadequate familial socialization processes" are all satisfactory ways that explain the "transmit [of] alleged deficits" (18).

Historically, deficit-rooted beliefs and attitudes led, educators to reserve a presumptuous and often disrespectful treatment towards minority learners. Aragon et. al. (2014) posited that,

> "...because teachers do not want to see Brown and Black children as being impacted by institutional forces and individual choices, they commit the fallacy of interpreting the collective low achievement of these children as being due to their individual lack of tenacity, hard work or merit…" (548).

Pica-Smith et. al. (2012) argued that the counterbalance to the 'sociological-cultural' framework "is to fix learners and families according to dominant and widely accepted standards" (41). This approach undermines teacher-student relationships and endorses low-level-basic skills curricula to 'fix' learners'. Dudley-Marling (2015) argued that,

> "…this is the most serious consequence of sociological-cultural deficit thinking: it leads to instructional practices that diminish student learning by limiting students' access to the rich learning opportunities routinely afforded to students in affluent, high-achieving classrooms. Students targeted by these practices learn less and learn more slowly because of the scope and pace of the remedial curricula to which they are subjected" (7).

Proponents of the socio-cultural framework contend that 'student-school' discontinuity results from a mismatch between the 'home' and the 'school' culture, which creates difficulties for culturally diverse students (Hale-Benson, 1986). Research (Archer et. al., 2013; Reay, 2004 and Avramidis et. al. 2007) also connects low participation in education to a complex combination of personal, social, economic and cultural factors. Perry and Francis (2010) noted that,

> "the achievement of 'manhood' for many learners has traditionally been linked to skilled work with financial rewards, as opposed to participating in academic work, which is positioned as soft or feminine" (8).

Brown (1999) indicated that diverse minorities develop unique 'social identities' and beliefs in relation to physical and symbolic capital, authority, and the process of work, which also shape their social class identity.

The 'socio-cultural framework' asserts that learners, from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, experience school failure because of perceived "cultural deprivation" or lack of exposure to dominant cultural models and norms. Hence, this results in the belief that minority learners' families do not value education and that their children do not enter school ready to learn (Alonso et. al., 2009; Burke and Burke, 2005; Delpit, 1995; García and Guerra, 2004; Payne, 2008; Shields et. al., 2005; Valencia, 1997; 2010). In addition, Bourdieu (1997) asserted that minority learners lack "social-cultural capital", that minority learners enter school without valuable cultural assets shared by the school community. The latter assumption promotes "subtractive assimilation" (Gibson, 1993, 45), which in turn generates "subtractive schooling" practices (Valenzuela, 1999, 57). In this regard, Payne (2008) pointed out that "the modal teacher belief is that by the time students start school, the great majority of them have already been so damaged that only a handful can be saved; thus, it doesn't matter much what teachers do" (73). Perry et. al. (2010) also claimed that minority learners "are constructed by education systems in terms of what they 'lack', which often leaves them feeling worthless and educationally inadequate" and hence. "need to 'lose themselves' and assimilate a more overtly 'middle class' identity" (10). 'Creative maladjustment' also occurs (Kohl, 1994), whereby, "schools force vulnerable learners to choose between educational success and rootedness in a community that stimulates school resistance" (Valencia, 2010, 98). Valenzuela (1999) posited that "when teaching effectiveness gets reduced to methodological considerations and when no explicit culture of care is in place, teachers lose the capacity to respond to students as human beings and schools become uncaring places" (74). Valencia (1997) also stressed that "schools not only fail to validate students' culture but they also subtract resources from them, by impeding the development of authentic care and by obliging students to participate in non-neutral power-draining aesthetic caring" (109). Similarly, Smith (2004) argued that,

> "...the institutionalized process of organizing the school's curriculum and tracking system, take away the linguistic, cultural, ethnic and political/historical identities and resources of those students whose language, culture, ethnicity and history are different from the dominant culture. It also necessarily involves a clash between students and teachers, counsellors and administrators over the definition of 'caring'…" (244).

Hence, minority learners from difficult socio-cultural backgrounds experience low academic achievement and higher probability to drop out of school (Devine et al., 2009;

Ornstein et. al., 2003). Furthermore, these learners are less motivated to learn and often display "disengaged and disruptive" behaviours (Garcia et. al., 2004, 24). Garza and Crawford (2005) stressed, that notions based on 'equity' and 'inclusion' are only "used to mask the assimilative practices employed to subtract differences or remedy the deficits that are thought to be endemic to the minority" (601). Over time hegemonic multiculturalism developed as,

> "…the result of dissonance between a school's desire to promote an inclusive learning environment for their culturally and linguistically diverse students and at the same time, maintain a persuasive, assimilation agenda that underlies instructional practices and programs designed to educate them" (Garza and Crawford, 2005, 601).

The sociological-cultural framework for deficit-thinking is also present in the Maltese educational system due to the presence of an increasing number of migrant students in Maltese schools, who are posing significant challenges to local educators. Valenzuela (1999) claimed that educators tend to label migrant learners as disengaged, disrespectful, and unappreciative. As a result, a "...clash between students and school over the definition of caring and education is created and inevitably leads to disaffection and alienation on both sides" (Valenzuela, 1999, 246). Pizarro (2001) posited that very often, migrants are victims of violent behaviour and discrimination concerning their rights, since they are "targeted as the scapegoats for all manner of domestic problems facing societies, particularly unemployment, crime, drugs, lack of schooling, school disturbance or terrorism" (IOM, 2001). In Malta, this tension is also present in mainstream schools. Brighouse (2003) contended that "learners whose talents develop at different rates need experiences which boost their confidence and give them a taste of success – rather than seeing themselves labelled as comparative failures in the 'three R's" (87).

3C.3.3 Deficit-Thinking Created by a Socio-Economic Framework

Social class and economic status are the two major components of the socio-economic deficit-thinking framework. Meier (2002) indicated the inter-connectedness between social class stereotyping and "educational underachievement and the problematic of this relationship for notions of meritocracy and fairness" (Perry et. al., 2010, 5). Research (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; National Equality Panel, 2010; Sodha and Margo, 2010) also shows that "social class is the strongest predictor of educational attainment in Britain" (Perry et. al., 2010, 5). Sodha and Margo (2010) highlighted that

parental occupation, income and qualifications have a direct effect on educational achievement. This framework regards learners from low socio-economic background, in poverty or from working class families, as not capable of learning since they hold negative attitudes towards education and schooling.

Payne (2005) argued that families 'at risk of' or in poverty "valued and revered education as abstract but not as reality" (42) while middle-class families consider "it as crucial for climbing the success ladder" (43). Furthermore, Payne (2005) refers to poverty as a stable "mind-set" ('culture' or 'cyle of poverty') and as "a deficient, flawed way of thinking within the poor themselves" (57). In so doing, Payne manges to "shift the meaning of poverty from a material reality towards a self-defeating attitude that needs only to be changed" (Valencia, 2010, 78-79). The document 'The Extra Mile: How Schools Succeed in Raising Aspirations in Deprived Communities' also posited:

> "children living in deprived communities face a cultural barrier, which is a bigger barrier than material poverty, i.e. low aspirations and scepticism on education…the feeling that education is for other people, and likely to let one down" (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009, 2).

Proponents of this framework (Ehlig et. al., 1999; Payne et. al., 2010) position the 'poor' as the problem and constantly 'blame them' for academic failure (Garza and Crawford, 2005; Garcia and Guerra, 2004; Valencia, 2012; Pearl, 1997; Irvine and York, 1995). Dubley-Marling (2015) argued that,

> "…poor children and their families are immersed in a pathological 'culture of poverty' – a situation largely of their own making. To escape [this] culture the poor need to learn the 'hidden rules' of the middle class (they need to learn to be more like us). Escaping the 'culture of poverty' requires also the support of mentors/teachers from the middle class – learning the rules of the middle class helps the poor escape poverty; but some will not choose to learn the rules necessary to escape poverty, therefore, poverty is, at some level, a personal choice" (4).

Hence, these learners lack verbal skills to solve problems, do not possess the basic skills and competences to cope in society; enjoy engaging in inappropriate behaviour and intentionally avoid experiencing success at school since they share the belief "that their status is relatively fixed" (DCSF, 2009, 25). Perry et. al. (2010) also asserted that,

> "…in a neo-liberal society, individuals are positioned within economic frameworks of active, entrepreneurial citizenship. Through the discourses of the 'work ethic' and meritocracy, learners are encouraged to believe that hard work combined with talent will naturally lead to social and economic rewards. Those who do not advance in this manner are portrayed as 'failed consumers', who are responsible for their own failure" (10).

Francis and Hey (2009) remarked that 'deficit discourse' exonerated social structures and institutions, which perpetuated economic inequalities. Payne (2005, as cited by Dudley-Marling, 2015) stressed that if minority learners,

> "…want to move into the mainstream of society, it is up to them to learn the rules needed for living and succeeding in society. By presenting 'poverty' in terms of deficits in mind, body language or culture of the poor implicates the poor for their circumstances and not the rest of us" (4).

Berman et. al. (1999) also argued that efforts to raise educational achievement are:

> "hindered by tendencies to place problems in students or schools, without examining links between school practices and student outcomes [due to] insufficient exploration of the institutional and individual practices, assumptions and processes that contribute to weaken these patterns" (151).

The way students learn and the conditions under which teaching takes place, form the backbone of this framework. Worldwide, the instructional (teacher-centred) approach is the most common teaching technique (Nieto and Bode 2008). The latter is rooted in the 'deficit' assumption that 'working class' learners are unable to learn any applied knowledge or critical skills (Meier, 2002). Hence, this framework views minority learners as empty receptacles, who are ready to be filled. This framework also regards the educational process as a production line based on convenience, efficiency and mass production. Anyon (1980) stressed that, "many educators control classroom time and space by making unilateral decisions without consulting learners and without explaining the basis for their decisions" (76). As a result, working class learners are denied the opportunity to acquire knowledge and attain positions of social power. Hon. Gordon Brown (2007), British Prime Minister, stated that, "poverty of aspiration and expectation is as damaging as poverty of opportunity, and it is time to replace a culture of far too many low expectations with a culture of high standards for all learners".

Valencia (1997) posited that current educational practices reinforced the 'status quo' and protected 'comfort zones'. Books (2004) supported this argument and claimed that,

> "…inequalities in family wealth are a major cause of inequalities in schooling [e.g. the physical conditions of the school, the unqualified teachers, the bias standardized tests, the streaming of classes], and inequalities in schooling do much to reinforce inequalities of wealth among family…" (Hoschschild & Scovronick, 2000, 106).

Similarly, Gaab (1993) remarked that, "the early seeds of deficit thinking are sown with the common belief that poor students are less innocent" and have "a natural

disposition towards inherent misbehaviour" (178). Hence, the notion f need to 'fix poor learners' by constantly creating special support services (behavioural classes, SEN special classes). Gaab (1993) claimed that, "deficit-thinking…communicated that minority learners are less deserving of high quality learning programs, appropriate school funding and well-equipped schools" (183). Moreover, socio-economic research revealed that,

> "…many working class and poor schools are teaching children in rote and repetitive ways that exclude discussion and higher-level thinking in order to provide students the skills believed to be needed in the blue-collar workforce…" (Gaab, 1993, 183).

Payne (2005) also stressed the need for 'teacher-mentors' to model and teach learners the "hidden rules of the middle class" (6). Cammarota (2011) argued that the 'teacher-as-saviour' narrative is highly problematic, as it viewed minority learners as helpless victims, "…that lack the capacity to seek change" and "…that require beneficences to rescue them from their families, culture and communities" (Michie, 2007, 67). Dyson et. al. (2008) argued that "the solution to the problem of educational inequality will not be found unless interventions continued to be 'grafted' onto a fundamentally unequal education system based on constant labelling, stereotyping and fatalistic beliefs on minority learners' capabilities and aspirations" (98).

Research (Strand, 2010; Francis and Skelton, 2005) shows that poverty and social class issues intersected in many complex ways with gender and ethnicity factors. Deficit discourse on 'boys' and minority ethnic groups essentialised them as academic failures and accepted their aggressive behaviour as 'natural' (Mahony et. al., 1998). In Malta, the latter issues are very common and top the list of the education agenda. In fact, the 'Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024' aims to,

> "…reduce the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools, decrease the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence, and increase student achievement [and to] support educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status, and reduce the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers" (3).

All this highlights the need to reframe current school reform based on students' lack of "readiness" for school towards ways in which schools can be made "student-ready" (Burke and Burker, 2005). Similarly, Garcia et. al. (2004) argued that "expressions of caring often occurred at the expense of academic instruction, which led us to question

how much of the students' low academic performances…was a reflection of limited academic time on task versus their learning abilities" (161).

3C.4 The Six Components of Deficit-Thinking

The three frameworks for 'deficit-thinking' put the blame on minority learners and their families since "these children enter school without the prerequisite knowledge and skills", while the so-called uncaring parents "neither value nor support their children's education" (Garcia et. al., 2004, 151). Finnan and Swanson (2000) argued that deficit beliefs, transmit an 'attitude of complacency' that "the school is doing an adequate job in educating its students or resignation that they can do no more to educate them more effectively" (Garcia et. al., 2004, 151). These assumptions led to the development and imposition of several special educational programs and support services. According to Valencia (1997), six components describe the cycle of 'deficit-thinking', i.e.

> "1) blaming the victim; 2) a form of oppression; 3) pseudoscientific in pursuit of knowledge; 4) dynamic model, changing according to temporal periods; 5) a model of educability; and 6) heterodoxic discourse" (xii).

Garcia and Guerra (2004) also argued that "school reform efforts stall because this cycle of deficit beliefs, blocks educators' abilities to examine their assumptions and to look beyond traditional solutions for real and meaningful change" (152). In addition, Weiner (2003) remarked that "teachers suffer from the blinding power of the deficit paradigm that is reinforced continually by school practices, policies, and organizational arrangements" (311), which continuously support teachers to "label minority learners as, at risk" (Shields et. al., 2005, 18) to secure extra support for disadvantaged students, but the negative designation sticks to the student and makes it hard for teachers to see otherwise.

3C.4.1 Blaming the Victim

The deficit cycle commences with the notion of 'blaming the victim' (Ryan, 1971). The latter notion originated from the credence that poor academic achievement derives from factors outside the schools' control (Valencia, 1997). It shifts the locus of responsibility from schools/educators on to minority learners, which practice results in negative schooling and academic experiences (Garcia and Guerra, 2004). The ideological baseline of this component of 'deficit-thinking' lies in,

> "…programs of 'compensatory education' to build up the skills and attitudes of the ghetto child, rather than structural changes in the schools…As we might expect, the logical outcome of analysing social problems in terms of the deficiencies of the victim is the development of programs aimed at correcting those deficiencies. The formula for action becomes extraordinary simple: *change the victim…"* (Valencia, 1997, 3).

In so doing, schools protect the interests of privileged groups, instead of changing processes and practices to suit the needs of all students. The latter ideology pretends to 'fix' minority learners' deficits to 'fit' the dominant cultural mould – a process that negatively harms and affects minority learners. Reid (2005) argued that curricula are designed and delivered to the benefit of learners in dominant groups rather than those in minority ones. Valencia (1997) argued that deficit practices "occur at such a smooth speed that they become unobservable and pass on unquestioned" (34). Similarly, Fine and Ruglis (2009) referred to the 'blame the victim' process as "tattooing…the label of 'lack' onto minority learners" (20).

3C.4.2 A Form of Oppression

Blaming the victim practices lead to diverse 'forms of oppression' (Valencia, 1997) due to segregated and exclusionary approaches in societies and in educational systems. Freire and Macedo (1995) described oppression as a set of socially, economic and culturally unjust conditions, resulting in loss of dignity, lack of social justice, denial of human citizenship and social exclusion. The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) in the UK defined 'social exclusion' as,

> "…a shorthand term for what can happen when people suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown... The most important characteristic of social exclusion is that these problems are linked and mutually reinforcing to create a complex and fast-moving vicious cycle…" (10).

Pilgram et. al. (2001) linked 'social exclusion' with 'full participation' and described the former as,

> "…continuous and gradual deficits of full participation in the social (including material as well as symbolic) resources produced, supplied and exploited in a society for making a living, organising a life and taking part in the development of a (hopefully better) future…" (5).

Furthermore, Cullen et. al. (2000) contended that, "…social exclusion is a highly disruptive process produced by advanced societies, and consists in the erosion of collective values, social cohesion and bonding" (59). Hence, 'social exclusion' ranges

from "social norms that define status groups as being inferior or legal norms that define the status of minority groups as being excluded (foreigners, illegal immigrants, criminals) to the actual functioning of the welfare system or outright discrimination by state regulations" (Gijsbers et. al., 2007, 19).

In education, 'oppression' perpetuates itself through practices that promote the 'status quo' and advocate 'compensatory approaches'. Brandsma (2000) argued that,

> "…a lack of equality in access to good education (from early childhood onwards) can contribute to or at least increase the chance of becoming oppressed or excluded, since it highly determines (apart from intelligence and aptitude to learn) the further educational career and with that the working career…" (23).

In the absence of equitable educational processes, "families with low socio-economic status or children from low-skilled parents, who are unemployed or have relatively unstable and low-paid work, or students from immigrant families have less opportunities to complete upper secondary education or to enter tertiary education" (Brandsma, 2000, 24). Perry and Francis (2010) also argued that, "inequalities are not only evident throughout the years of compulsory schooling, but persist in relation to rates of participation in further and higher education" (7). Likewise, learners with diverse physical and/or psychological conditions, sexual orientations, religious beliefs and ethnic backgrounds experience the same fate. Sodha and Margo (2010) pointed out that in Britain,

> "…one in seven 16-18 year olds were 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training)…these individuals truanted or were disproportionately excluded from school, had few educational qualifications, misused drugs and alcohol, were teenage parents, had mental health issues and were also more likely to become involved in crime" (as cited in Perry and Francis, 2010, 7).

Ball (2012) remarked that this cycle of oppression ensures that victims and the victim-blamer groups remain separate, thus, allowing for deficit-thinking to be viewed as a rational conclusion. Valencia (2010) noted that deficit-thinking,

> "…offers a description of behaviour in pathological and/or dysfunctional ways…provides an explanation of the behaviour by locating factors in the individual, family or culture, like limited intelligence or linguistic deficiencies…and then offers the prediction that the behaviour will continue unless there is an intervention (14).

Hence, the need to "repair" or "fix" minority learners through the provision of special additional support services and/or alternative learning programmes. Pearl (1997) also

stressed that high-stake tests helped to ‘identify, categorize and diagnose’ learners and perpetuated a deficit-oppressive cycle. In turn, the latter process sustained the “cultural deprivation paradigm”, which “is a view devoid of both critical understanding and awareness; one that emphasizes what learners supposedly lack…it provides an unexamined assumption that impedes reflexivity and systemic analysis” (Pica-Smith et. al., 2012, 38).

3C.4.3 Pseudoscientific in its pursuit of Knowledge

Valencia (1997) contended that ‘marginalization’ and ‘oppression’ perpetuate the ‘pseudoscientific nature of deficit-thinking’, which Hyslop-Margison and Naseem (2008) defined as the process of false persuasion by scientific pretence. Furthermore, Hyslop-Margison and Naseem (2008) contended that, “pseudoscience offers a causal explanation of why humans act in certain ways” (40). Essentially, the pseudoscientific component premises ‘deficit-thinking’ in ‘behavioural problems’, that could be ‘diagnosed’ and then ‘pathologized’ (Shields, 2005), through the ‘selective usage’ of high stake standardized test results to make false claims that are ‘deficit in nature’ on minority learners’ intellectual and academic capacity (Hyslop-Margison et. al., 2008). Moreover, pseudoscientific methodology creates and reinforces ‘illogic generalization practices’ (a blaming process for minority learners’ educational failure), which support ‘compensatory intiatives’ (tracking, setting, streaming and SEN withdrawal learning programmes) that encourage ‘teaching the basics’ pedagogy (strategies focusing on basic skills acquisition) (Ravitch, 2009). Valencia (2010) argued that ‘deficit-thinking’ gains acceptance from the provision of ‘selective evidence’ from “scientific methods”, which are considered as “an authorative and privileged discourse” (58). All this shows that the pseudoscientific condition is based on the values of the dominant class, which then act as ‘norms’ to which all minority learners are compared and required to aspire to (Valencia, 1997).

3C.4.4 A Dynamic Model changing according to Temporal Periods

The fourth component relates to the time-period in which ‘deficit-thinking’ develops itself with scientific arguments (Valencia, 1997). These arguements seek dynamic ways how to ‘fix’ learners with socio-cultural, socio-economic and linguistic diversity. Hence, the way deficit-thinking is ‘transmitted’, changes according to the temporal period, i.e. deficit-thinking becomes adaptable and mutable to its temporal environment and affects how it is diagnosed (Valencia, 2010). Indeed, Valencia (2010)

posited that depending on the time period, "low-grade genes, inferior culture and class or inadequate familial socialization become satisfactory ways to explain the transmission [of] alleged deficits" (18). Similarly, Miller (1993) stressed that,

> "…the concept of self has been challenged by scholars who believe that the 'self' resides not only inside the person, but also in the relationships, actions, artefacts and objects. The notion of a distributed 'self' locates learning and learning failures in the people, procedures, events and structures participating in and constituting the process we call education. Put differently, no one can be a learning failure on her/his own" (62).

Hence, Garcia and Guerra (2004) noted that "expressions of caring often occurred at the expense of academic instruction, which led us to question how much of the students' low academic performances…was a reflection of limited academic time on task versus their learning abilities" (161). All this shows that temporal attitudes about minority learners perpetuate stereotypical and racist beliefs.

3C.4.5 A Model of Educability

Valencia (1997) posited that 'diagnosis' is the fifth component of the deficit cycle and aims to "describe-explain-predict-prescribe" minority learners' behaviour (7). The latter process follows a precise five-staged cycle, namely:

1. Describe – provide an extensive identification of the deficits and shortcomings in learners, especially minority ones;
2. Explain – educational experts/professionals try to find the origins of preconceived deficits in genetic, psychological, social, cultural or economic characteristics;
3. Predict – justifications (based on the 'medical-model of disability') provided by educators to anticipate minority learners' general behaviour and attainment;
4. Prescribe – the provision of educational support services that perpetuate deficit practices and approaches in schools;
5. Modify – interventions focusing entirely on the weaknesses of minority learners that aim to 'fix' or 'normalize' deficits in minority learners.

The above 'diagnosis and intervention' process results in the 'physical or course segregation' of minority learners in learning programmes characterized by "lowered expectations" and "rote and unchallenged verbal stimulation" to help learners "adjust to the curriculum and not the other way round" (Bereiter et. al., 1966, 68). Sharma (2012) also indicated the common practice of segregating minority learners "in special schools or classes" to provide them with "concrete and practical instructions" (91).

The educability theory, which is based on dominant neoliberal values, provides ill-conceived cures to minority learners by providing alternative educational routes for success. Garcia et. al. (2004) found that contemporary educational systems labelled ‘disadvantaged’ learners as ‘at risk’ and systematically placed them in lower ability groups so as to cover less demanding curricula (Farkas, 2003). Oakes (1995) argued that the latter practices created an educational structure that does not provide equity and access to all students.

3C.4.6 A Heterodoxic Discourse

The final component of the ‘deficit-thinking’ cycle involves heterodoxic views on education, which premise that capital and symbolic powers are frameworks of class domination (Valencia, 2010). Hence, heterodoxic discourse challenges dominant norms or ‘orthodoxical’ ideas upheld by society and encourages the public to re-evaluate and re-analyse the conditions that enhance and sustain ‘deficit-thinking’ (Valencia, 1997). Moreover, Cummins (2001) indicated the deep antipathy to acknowledge that schools reflect power structures in society and that these power relations influence educational outcomes. In education, the outcome of a ‘heterodoxy perspective’ is to accept current policies, practices and procedures that perpetuate achievement gaps with the aim to curb and correct minority learners’ behaviour and learning patterns. In turn, the latter culture fostered the pervasive belief that when learners misbehave or achieve poorly, they need to be “fixed” because problems exist within students and not in the social ecology of the college, school, grade or classroom.

Weiner (2006) argued that under the ‘umbrella of heterodoxy’ there is the ‘genetic pathology’ model. The premise of this model is the belief that despite the rigor of education, certain learners are incapable of achieving a level of academic attainment equivalent to that of their ‘other’ dominant peers. Historically, segregation practices made way to ‘medical-integrative’ approaches. Oakes (1995) also argued that “many educators were quick to create separate academic tracks to ensure that marginalized learners are not enrolled in the same classes as their ‘other’ peers” (78).

3D.5 Neoliberalism and Deficit-Thinking in Education

Worldwide, neoliberal modes of governance had wide-reaching impacts on educational structures, which reimagined government schooling systems and curricula with market-based logics. The most significant impact on the ‘neoliberal imaginary in

education' (Revzi, 2017) was the broad-scale reshaping of schooling purposes from an economic point of view (i.e. reframing education as primarily a site for building human capital or a competitive twenty-first-century workforce, with the ability to augment the nation's economic productivity and global competitiveness) (Savage, 2011). Besides, the predominance of the latter 'neo-social' belief (Rose, 2007) helped to sideline or to render secondary 'other' equally important educational concerns, namely: the moral, cultural, social, personal and emotional purposes of schooling. Hence, equity is viewed solely as a 'market-enhancing mechanism' (Savage, 2011), whereas social justice gets constantly pushed to the margins (Lingard, Sellar and Savage, 2014).

Literature (Ball, 2003; Reckhow, 2013; Thompson, Savage and Lingard, 2016) demonstrates that the rise of neoliberal approaches to education boosted competition between schools and diverse learners; it reinforced the 'concept of the norm' and the 'fix and fit' mentality; as well as sustained 'deficit-thinking' on minority learners, who are perceived as 'economic problems' (Rose, 2007). Sharma (2017) also indicated that the subtle and seeping "common sense" of the 'neoliberal-deficit ideology' on minority learners had serious ethical implications of disengagement, internalized deficit beliefs, as well as social and educational inequalities. Shields, Bishop and Mazawi (2004) also argued that deficit-thinking is ingrained in the 'pathologizing' phenomenon whereby,

> "…perceived structural-functional, cultural or epistemological deviation from an assumed normal state is ascribed to another group as a product of power relationships, whereby the less powerful group is deemed to be abnormal in some way" (10).

This phenomenon refers to the ascription of "deficiency" and to "the characteristics of difference", where deficits "locate in the lived experiences of children (i.e. home-life, culture or socio-economic status) rather than in the educational system itself" (Shields et. al., 2004, xx). Hence, 'funds of knowledge[1]' (Moll et. al., 1992) are unrecognized and focus is placed solely on 'fixing' learners to eliminate difference. Books (2004) argued that,

> "…too often, schools and classrooms offer [minority] children not a space in which to encounter new ideas and explore their creative potential in an atmosphere of support and affirmation, but rather 'landscapes of condemnation'. Schools and classrooms become places where too many [minority] children learn that they do not matter much" (13).

[1] 'Funds of Knowledge' (Moll, 1992) refers to the resources that learners bring to school, or any other educational institution, which can be of any form and type (cultural, intellectual, physical).

In turn, this negative thinking has a devastating effect on minority learners' academic achievements, life-course or identity options, families and communities.

3D.5.1 School Climates Immersed in Deficit Thinking Attitudes and Beliefs

Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandro and Guffy (2012) argued that "positive" and "sustained school climate is based on patterns of people's experience in school life and reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and orginazational structure" (27), which shape and reinforce 'culture' within schools. In this regard, Peterson and Deal (1998) defined 'school culture' as,

> "the underground stream of norms, rituals, beliefs, attitudes and traditions that has built up over time as people work, solve problems and confront challenges together. In turn, these informal expectations and values shape how people think, feel and act in schools" (28).

Vasques (2011) also reiterated the fact that 'school culture' is "the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs [that are shared by educators], that operate unconsciously, and that define the school's view of itself" (86). The latter clearly shows that school culture is crucial in the process of transforming schools into professional learning communities since "educational change depends on what teachers do and think" (Fullan, 1991, 117).

Franco (2010) noted that school climate and culture "…affect the feelings and attitudes of students, teachers, staff and parents" and comprise the "physiological and physical aspects of a school, that proved the environment necessary for teaching and learning to take place" (59). Hence, schools immersed in the 'deficit ideology' culture perpetuate 'medical-integrative' approaches, which uphold rigid teaching structures with the intent of 'curing', 'fixing' or 'rehabilitating' minority learners' preconceived defects to help them function like their more affluent peers (Carrington et. al., 2005). Miles et. al. (2007) indicated that school teachers lacked the underlying responsibility and positive attitude to accommodate minority learners, who had to adapt to existing circumstances with the support of expert professionals or support services. In addition, research (Forte, 2011; Duff, 2013; Eray, 2016; Carderas and Cerado, 2016) shows that negative teacher attitudes and beliefs, founded on the credence that not all learners are capable to learn, sustained a 'deficit culture' (based on a sentiment of pity and charity), among educators, who, in turn, 'hand over' to teacher aides or expert paraprofessionals the responsibility of minority learners' teaching. Notably, Henderson (1997) observed that schools with high marginalization or exclusion practices (1) employed rigid and

hierarchical disciplinary systems; (2) had a narrow definition of the educators' role; and (3) owned a constricted understanding of the purpose of education and schooling.

Misconceptions on the concept of inclusion also act as barriers in the provision of quality education. Challenges include the belief that 'inclusive education' (1) requires special skills in teachers which are difficult to develop; (2) is unworkable, costly and a non-practical theoretical concept; and (3) can only materialize if society cultures change. Apart from the latter misconceptions, other factors include:

- Educators' negative experiences with 'challenging' students;
- Teachers' inadequate overall training and professional development;
- Inadequate and disabling support structures in schools;
- Classroom size and teachers' overall workloads; and
- Lack of advocacy and vision in favour of 'education for all' by educational leaders.

3D.5.2 Education Systems based on Market Model Approaches

One of the most compelling reasons for the perpetuation of 'deficit-thinking' in education results from the reshaping of government schools in line with market-based practices – a process also referred to as 'quasi-marketisation of schooling systems' (i.e. reforms that make the public schooling sector operate like the private one) (Reckhow, 2013). Springer (2015) remarked that the shift towards 'quasi-marketisation' has been driven by a view that 'public schooling' is inefficient, overtly unionised, unresponsive to user-demands, lacks accountability, and does not effectively nourish the growth of human capital. Hence, this indicates a need for market practices as 'solutions' to these problems, mainly through competition between schools, driven by new regimes of accountability, measurement and comparison based on standardised testing measures. Wrigley (2003) also argued that, "…in the era of neo-liberalism, an understanding of the connections between underachievement and inequalities has been reframed into the vaguely moral demand to raise expectations" (153). Moreover, accountability has "been articulated in terms of raising levels of attainment, rather than working for the holistic development of each individual learner" (Wrigley, 2003, 153). In the latter model, minority learners are construed as the problem, and superficial attempts are made to accelerate progress. Furthermore, Wrigley (2003) posited that,

> "the market system of accountability positions victims of marginalization and discrimination as an obstacle to its ruthless drive to raise standards. The pursuit of higher and higher targets clearly has no place for human

> suffering, and no time for children whose needs weigh upon the cost side of the balance sheet of efficiency. Children have become units of value for statisticians, rather than schools adapting to meet their needs" (173).

Savage (2013) and Thompson, Savage and Lingard (2016) noted that 'market-based' model systems are particularly problematic, since they overlook socially just issues to manage public impressions and preserve school reputation as well as the community's perception of schools' 'quality' and 'excellence'.

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) emphasized that market-based educational systems encourage schools to compete against each other, to attract students "who add value to their school rather than invite risk" (Slee, 2001, 392). Apart from harsh competition to attract the 'best' learners, market model systems also increase pressure on schools to assure parents that high standards are maintained and that 'problematic' students do not interfere with the learning process of their children (Slee, 2001). Notably, Savage (2011) asserted that new school autonomy models position schools to operate more like businesses, and reposition school leaders as managers, who are increasingly responsible for the good management of schools. According to Slee (2001) and Ballard (2003) the excessive pressure exerted on schools by the parents of the more affluent learners is another major force of marginalization and/or exclusion. Barton and Slee (1999) noted that,

> "…there is an assumed benign quality to the selective precision of the market as it randomly picks and chooses according to natural talent. Market equilibrium defines social good. Competition as the instrument of selection will include and it will exclude" (5).

Similarly, Corbett (1999) remarked that excessive competition was the antithesis of democratic, equitable and inclusive schooling. Searle (2001) also warned that,

> "the hidden hand of the market will not deliver a morally justifiable school system. The market always pushes the system to injustice. It is inevitable that competition between schools will reinforce a division between failing and successful schools. It is crucial that schools do well in school league tables, otherwise they end on a downward spiral of falling rolls" (136).

Finally, Springer (2015) indicated that this market strategy, such as the 'contracting out' of government services, made education subject to competition in the market and turned schools and students in salable commodities that fulfil the market's needs (Giroux, 2014). Hence, Dyson (2008) advocated a shift from market-based models toward collective activities in order to make schooling more relevant and meaningful.

3D.5.3 Mentality based on Protection of the Majority

Research (Fine and Ruglis, 2009; Savage, 2013; Connor, 2011) contended that neoliberalism gave rise to systemic 'power imbalance' in society, which negatively affected 'minority groups'. This because 'majority' groups are in a constant struggle to maintain their 'privileged' status, by partially or fully excluding 'minority groups' from certain aspects of society (Pearl and Knight, 2010). In this regard, Ladson-Billings (2007) observed that education serves as a vehicle to protect the self-interest and power of dominant groups by denying minority learners access to rigorous but democratic and equitable academic credentials. Wrigley (2003) also remarked that the "principle cause of educational disadvantage is not linguistic weakness, but a clash of cultures…" (84). Building on Bourdieu's (1986) theory of 'cultural capital', Wrigley (2003) posited that,

> "…children of professional parents with a university education unconsciously pass extensive cultural knowledge or habits on to children, which are positively received in schools. On the other hand, the different cultural knowledge of children from marginalised communities does not function as capital because its value goes unrecognized by teachers…there is a mismatch with discourse of schools" (84).

Bernstein (1975) also highlighted how contemporary school practices are incongruent with the culture of minority learners. He argued that minority groups "tend to use 'restricted code', which is generally sufficient, in a familiar environment, for talking about things one can feel and see, but which is seriously prejudicial" in school contexts (cited in Wrigley, 2003, 81). Hence, diversity of experience is seen as "an obstacle to overcome rather than a resource to embrace" (Burke and Burke, 2005, 282).

National governments also supported these negative practices by adopting policies that are segregative in nature with the excuse of increasing achievement and providing more help to minority learners. Tomlinson (1999) and Reay (2004) pointed out that the promotion of 'direct teaching' by many government agencies; the setting up of 'special' facilities and streaming and tracking or setting practices are examples of how governments protect the more affluent culture, by enhancing education provision to the 'more able' students. In this regard, Shields et. al. (2005) described 'deficit-thinking' as a,

> "…pathologizing metaphor, with its root meaning in disease, that suggests, as a cure for the malady, 'quarantining the victim' as in the establishment of separate schools, classes, programs, or special curricula, often compensatory, to 'make up' for the deficiencies of the student" (17).

The evidence so far suggests that teachers' pedagogical choices also help to sustain the process of protecting and shielding majority groups (Furlong, 2013). Essentially, Gardner et. al. (1998) referred to 'one-size-fits-all' practices and stressed that,

> "…we now place a great premium on amassing 20 students together in a classroom for 6-8 hours a day. Hence disallowing most kinds of physical activity or contact, discouraging socializing, and saving rewards for those who can pore over books or papers, make small squiggles on lined pieces of paper, repeat back what has been told to them, enforce 'high-stake' tests and provide precise forms of information on demand" (252).

Purdue et. al. (2001) posited that many teachers also tend to shift the responsibility of minority students' learning to paraprofessionals. The latter shows that differentness is not valued as part of the ordinary but as a justification to categorize, label, exclude or marginalize minority learners from regular mainstream classrooms to "fix supposed cultural deficiency by teaching students how to look at the teacher, dress right and act and speak accordingly" (201). Within the latter scenario, Garcia and Guerra (2004) emphasized the importance of "…examining systemic factors that perpetuate deficit-thinking and reproduce educational inequalities for minority groups, from non-dominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds" (154).

3D.5.4 Constant Labelling and Categorisation Processes

The constant quest to 'cure', 'fix' or 'rehabilitate' deviant learners led many educators to believe that diagnosing and labelling are essential to adequately meet all learners' needs (Portelli et. al., 2007). Keogh (1987) opined that labelling procedures serve "as a focus for advocacy and for ensuring attention to the problem, as a category or mechanism for providing services and as a condition or set of conditions that require scientific study" (4-5). According to Hebding et. al. (1987) labelling occurs because,

> "…the dominant group seems to assign to that person, a new identity and a new role, a new set of expectations. The social group then responds to the individual according to those expectations, thus reinforcing the label and affecting all future interactions" (136).

Hence, the "negative mystique of the labelling practice becomes a self-fulling prophecy" for minority learners since they not only receive passively 'negative labels' but also actively manage or live with them (Portelli et. al., 2007, 46). In turn, the latter process "contributes to a culture of hopelessness" (Portelli et. al., 2007, 46), resulting in lack of performance expectations; damaged self-esteem; lowered achievements and de-motivation (McGrew et. al., 2003; Rosenthal, 2002).

In general, diagnostic labelling is attributed to minority learners because of their 'inconsistent' self-esteem and continual stifling of confidence levels (Portelli et. al., 2007). Hudak and Kihn (2001) argued that,

> "…labelling is a complex process of differentiation, identification and separation, both of objects (such as commodities for purchase) and of people. Within modern capitalist societies, labelling practices operate in complex historically-defined relations of power, systems of representation, and sites of identity formation – sites where those in power have the privilege to frame the identity of those unable to name their own world collectively—for Freire, this means the oppressed" (15).

In education, the diagnosis and identification of "at risk or marginalized learners", refers to "all those learners whose schools have not served well historically, including learners who do not belong to dominant social identity categories and learners who learn differently" (Portelli et. al. 2007, 2). Such diagnosis results in systemic processes of isolating minority learners from their 'other' peers – a process that develops long-standing and negative effects on minority students. In this regard, Hudak and Kihn (2001) pointed out that "to label others according to stereotype is, to deny one's own humanity and one's own historical place within the world" (63). Furthermore, research on the development and provision of special education (Trent et. al., 1998; Hudak et. al., 2001; Ford et. al., 2003) reinforced the belief that labelling is rooted in social and cultural 'deficit' assumptions and predispositions. Menchaca (1997) asserted that assumptions "emanating from deficit-thinking…pushed for separate and SEN programs in public schools" (as cited in Trent et. al., 1998, 281). Wrigley (2003) argued that, "a tacit belief that intelligence is fixed for life underlies many of the teachers' actions and of the way schools are organised" (75). The latter resulted in an infinite number of compensatory programs and initiatives, i.e. special curricula, complementary education services, nurture services, behavioural classes, revision courses, core competence programmes, alternative learning programmes and many other expert-based support services.

According to Trent et. al. (1998), "SEN special education programs...emerged from the need for differentiated curricula for an increasingly diverse school-aged population" (278). SEN programs are generally conducted outside 'mainstream' class settings; hence implying that students in such settings are not able to learn like the 'average' learner and, therefore, need to be helped and removed from the regular

classroom, by categorizing them as "special education students" (Trent et. al., 1998). Gardner et. al. (1996) posited that,

> "definitions of intelligence have been based in significant measure on what individuals are expected to do in school. For example, school is the site par excellence for notational work in a decontextualized setting, and if tests of intelligence require the manipulation of symbols in a decontextualized setting, then it is scarcely surprising when individuals who score well on an intelligence test, do well in school or vice-versa" (254).

Such "over-reliance on the deficit model attributes learning and behaviour problems to weaknesses residing in learners" (Fine and Ruglis, 2009, 78), while demonstrating the commitment that although minority learners function in a 'sub-normal' way, they deserve a second chance to be saved and educated (Henke, 2008).

Ford et. al. (2003) pointed out that "diagnostic labelling effectively hindered educators from recognizing the gifts and talents of students who are different from the dominant culture" (141). Wrigley (2003) stressed that,

> "…it is too easy to speak blandly of 'high ability' and 'low ability' children, often based on limited evidence and with a fair dose of cultural prejudice. Too many teachers still speak as if lower intelligence were a normal attribute of working-class children. Barriers to learning have often been confused with a general lack of 'intelligence': children placed in lower ability groups because their mother tongue is not English, and those in wheelchairs sent to special schools with a restricted curriculum" (75).

This arbitrary approach leads to the full and/or partial exclusion of 'minority learners' from attending particular lessons, designed for gifted, high ability or average students because,

> "…educators' perspectives about struggling students in schools have been deficit focused. Eligibility categories for qualification for special services are based on documentation of deficits in cognitive, physical, sensory, language, and/or emotional domains. Students who are seen by school psychologists for assessment or intervention are typically those who experience a challenge that prevents them from being able to profit from typical classroom experiences" (Morrison et al., 2001, 20).

In view of this perpetual deficit cycle, minority learners continue to experience constant de-motivation, resulting in apathy to attend or continue schooling. So much so that, the average rate of ESL in Europe stands at 10.9%, while in Malta this rate is 9% higher and stands at 19.3%. To justify the latter results, educators blamed learners instead of acknowledging that school culture and curricula disengaged minority learners (Portelli et al., 2007). Ford and Grantham (2003) also remarked that "due to

stereotype threats", gifted minority students "may deliberately underachieve, refuse to be assessed for gifted education services, and refuse placement if they meet criteria" (223). Rose (1988) argued, "How can there be such a thing such as social equality with this wide range of mental capacity? As for an equal distribution of the wealth of the world, that is equally absurd" (86).

Apple (2005) stressed that "children are labelled through the hidden curriculum [which echoes a neo-liberal economic agenda], through processes of sifting, sorting, and selecting to meet the demands of the larger economic order" (15). Hence, learners who do not succeed in schooling, end up labelled as 'an economic problem' (Savage, 2011). However, Lipman (1998) argued that "human beings pursue their vocation of becoming more fully human when they engage in authentic praxis, through dialogue, in a critically conscious way" (99). In this regard, Freire (2008) encouraged educators to "consider what kind of world – what social structures, processes, relationships, and so on – would be necessary to enable all learners...to pursue their humanization" (104), which is surely not achievable through diagnostic labelling processes and procedures.

3D.5.5 Inadequate Curricula and Teaching Pedagogies

Curriculum is the subject matter, while pedagogy (including assessment and resources) involves the organisation, delivery and articulation of all educational programmes. Curriculum plays a vital role in providing high quality education to all learners. UNESCO (2005) reports how "accessible and flexible curricula can serve as a key to creating inclusive schools" (25). However, international studies (Lloyd, 2008) show that very often, 'minority learners' have limited access to the general curriculum since they are not designed to successfully meet the needs of all students. Lloyd (2008) pointed out that the curriculum is inherently biased and focused on the needs of the academically able to the detriment of minority learners. Wrigley (2003) also stressed that nowadays, "the concept of a broad and balanced curriculum, albeit distorted by a conservative vision of what constitutes worthwhile knowledge, has been abandoned in favour of curricula, where basic skills and vocational training displaces the humanities and creative arts" – a shift that is creating a "new form of educational apartheid" (96). Moreover, neoliberal reforms in education also included curriculum standardization and a focus on mathematics and science under the guise of practicality and their low cost when compared to other subjects from humanities and art (Giroux, 2014). Apple

(2006) and Ball (2012) also stressed that curriculum responsiveness and diversification subjected schools to a very centralized curriculum and performance criteria based on neoliberal values, learnings and methods. In addition, research (Basu, 2004; Apple, 2006; Crocco and Costigan, 2007; Nichols and Berliner, 2007; Giroux, 2014) shows that 'market-driven' curricula emphasize entrepreneurial subjects and the learning and teaching of basic skills, rather than critical thinking and civic education.

To meet neoliberal accountability standards (measured through tests), national curricula were narrowed in a reductive manner (Hursh, 2008; MacLellan, 2009). The latter stance affected mostly minority learners, who show de-motivation towards tasks that appear meaningless to them. Hence, Burtonwood (1986) embraced,

> "...an education which fosters cognitive change and expansion...a curriculum which gives pupils experience in the untamed margins of the world and the mind...a vision which is more creative and infinitely more optimistic than the cultural apartheid emanating from the relativism which would deny us access to other worlds. The job of schooling has always been to open windows on to wider worlds" (154).

Davis et. al. (2001) also posited how 'minority learners' are denied the possibility of experiencing an empowering curriculum since learners are expected to 'modify and adapt' to the general curriculum. Luke (2002) contended that,

> "…pedagogy re-mediates and rearticulates what will count as knowledge in classrooms. No matter how we theorise or 'fix' the curriculum – either centrally or locally – it won't make much difference if our pedagogy isn't up to scratch" (as cited in Wrigley, 2003, 92).

Effective curriculum implementation depends on the type of teaching pedagogy used by educators. Wrigley (2003) stressed that,

> "those who seek to unravel the mysteries of teaching in terms of amount of time on task, the pace of instruction, or the accuracy of the assessment record, I suggest a different starting point – a sense of future. It is not that good teaching cannot be explained, but rather than that our explanations need to be articulated in more holistic and ethical terms" (111).

Effective teaching pedagogy and holding high expectations are essential components to activate learners' curiosity; to engage students in learning; to develop critical-thinking skills; to keep learners on task; to engender sustained classroom interactions and to enable students' learning process. Teaching strategies vary from one teacher to another and are dependent on a number of teacher-related variables, i.e., "classroom demographics; educators' subject area/s and the mission statement of the school"

(https://www.boundless.com). The choice of a teaching pedagogy also depends on learners' abilities and motivation to learn. Stigler and Hiebert (1999) pointed out that,

> "simple solutions for improving teaching focus on individual features of teaching, such as using concrete materials, asking higher-order questions, or forming cooperative groups. However, teaching is not just a collection of individual features. It is a system composed of tightly connected elements. And the system is rooted in deep-seated beliefs about the nature of the subject, the way students learn, and the role of the teacher" (8).

A common teaching model is the teacher-centred model. In this approach, educators "project a stream of facts and produce learning as replication – pupils copy down information and later demonstrate their knowledge by regurgitating what they have learnt through essays, practice examples and tests" (Wrigley, 2003, 115). This model promotes drilling and rote learning activities (Gaab, 2004). Hopkins (2001) argued that "students spend most of their time acquiring isolated skills through repetition… irrespective of whether students are working individually in rows or are sitting in groups, or whether they are using pencil and paper or have access to latest technology" (79). The teacher is also the main authority figure while learners are simply there to learn and to be 'fixed' through direct-lecture-like lessons. Dewey (1916) argued,

> "Why is it, although teaching by pouring in, learning by a passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still so entrenched in practice? That education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told but an active and constructive process, is a principle almost as generally violated in practice as conceded in theory" (78).

Many educators resort to the transmission model as a form of "busy work", with the hope of keeping learners working independently without making any noise. Gaab (2004) argued that "many schools are teaching children in rote, repetitive ways that exclude discussion and higher-level thinking to provide students the competences believed to be needed in the blue-collar workforce" (183). The choice of this approach derives from pseudo-scientific findings, which help to pre-assume and pre-determine the potential of learners in class. Wrigley (2003) posited that, "…whereas Freire spoke of true dialogue based on hope, classrooms are so often filled with asymmetrical exchanges that they are almost monologic" (118). Freire (1974) noted that,

> "…in this rigid, vertical structure of relationships there is no real room for dialogue...This is the consciousness of the oppressed. With no experience of dialogue, with no experience of participation, the oppressed are often unsure of themselves. They have consistently been denied their right to have their say, having had the duty to only listen and obey" (118).

These unethical assumptions reinforced deficit claims about race and intelligence. Menchaca, as cited in Trent et. al. (1998), argued that,

> "…racial differences in intelligence, it was contended, are most validly explained by racial differences in innate, genetically determined abilities. What emerged from these findings, regarding schooling, were curricular recommendations that the 'intellectually inferior' and the social order would best be served by providing these students concrete, low-level, segregated instruction commensurate with their alleged diminished intellectual abilities (281).

Research (Ford et al., 2003) shows that in teacher-centred classrooms minority learners tend to be demotivated and to act inappropriately. According to Freire (2008),

> "teachers can abuse students without physically hitting them. For example, by a variety of strategies that are prejudicial to the student during the learning process, such as the teacher's resistance to the worldview that the student brings to the classroom; a view conditioned by class and culture, revealed in language, and which becomes an obstacle to learning" (109).

Freire (2008) further contended that if educators,

> "carry on with neoliberal practices they adopt an immobilizing ideology of fatalism…From the standpoint of such an ideology, only one road is open as far as educative practice is concerned: adapt the student to what is inevitable, to what can't be changed. What is essential is technical training, so that the student can adapt and, therefore, survive" (27).

Hence, negative perspectives and a teacher-centred pedagogy deny minority learners essential learning opportunities to grow effectively since their everyday knowledge finds no place in the academic discourse. Wrigley (2003) posited that,

> "the pressure to learn a new code – the passive voice in science, an objective unconcerned tone in history – can be so great that pupils' own voices are smothered – and especially for working class or ethnic minority pupils who are less comfortable with formal academics. Messages are unconsciously given out that pupils' families and communities, their lives out of school, language and experiences are of no account to school" (120).

Finally, MacLellan (2009) noted that neoliberal-centralized curricula increased deficit-thinking; undermined teaching practices as a professional task (deprofessionalization and reprofessionalization of teachers); and established 'schools of teachers' rather than of students (Furlong, 2013).

3D.5.6 Assessment Procedures leading to Academic Tracking Practices

With the rise of neoliberal approaches to education, standardized assessment practices (i.e. IQ tests, half-yearly and annual exams, benchmark tests, PIRLS, TIMSS,

PISA and TALIS), became fundamental components to evaluate the effectiveness of educational systems. The more learners obtain higher grades, the more responsive and accountable the school system is. On the contrary, Portelli (2007) argued that the latter belief is fallacious since exams disseminate a 'one-size-fits-all' mentality. Similarly, Popham (1999) posited that standardized tests lacked fairness and equity as "one size really cannot fit all" (12). The latter affirmation suggests that tests are discriminatory in nature and rooted in the deficit ideology since they do not take into account minority learners' sociocultural and socioeconomic circumstances (Portelli et. al., 2007). Hence, standardized tests provide a fallacious picture of what learners know.

Goodman (1992) argued that examinations consider knowledge "as something existing outside of the human mind" and can only "be understood or measured by tests in a controlled setting" (23). In the latter scenario, the identity of minority learners is denied a place in the classroom, curriculum, pedagogy and evaluative processes. Ford and Grantham (2003) also questioned what standardized tests measure in contrast to what they claim to be measuring (parental involvement, literacy or numeracy abilities):

> "…as school districts face increasing racial diversity, educators resort to increased reliance on standardized testing—biased tests…[because] the tests measure familiarity with American culture and English proficiency, not intelligence. This almost guarantees low test scores for immigrants (and culturally diverse groups) who are unfamiliar with U.S. customs, traditions, values, norms, and language" (218).

Trent et. al. (1998) remarked that tests allowed educators to "legitimize labelling and categorizing efforts to identify eligible learners for special education" programs (281); hence providing an 'alibi' for school educators to 'segregate' minority learners from 'mainstream normal students' (Ford and Grantham, 2003). Moreover, exams,

> "ignore learners who: perform poorly on paper-and-pencil tasks conducted in artificial or lab-like settings; do not perform well on culturally loaded tests; have diverse cognitive styles from dominant learners; are test anxious; or have low achievement motivation" (Ford and Grantham, 2003, 220).

Evidence (Connell, 2009; Furlong, 2013; Giroux, 2014; Lewis and Hardy, 2014) also shows that high-stakes testing regimes deprofessionalized teaching practices and made teachers subject to performance data. In this regard, Martino and Rezi-Rashti (2012) argued that, performativity eliminated the cultural and moral side of education and replaced the 'public agenda' (public needs and interests) with a new mode of surveillance based on accountability criteria driven solely by testing regimes

(i.e. test scores) – a practice that sustained deficit-thinking explanations for poor exam results (Ball, 2012):

> "the fault rests in the test (it is too long); the fault rests with the home and school environment (poor instruction and lack of access to high quality education); and the fault rests in the student (learner is cognitively inferior, genetically inferior, or culturally deprived)" (Ford and Grantham, 2003, 220).

Connell (2009) remarked that testing practices rendered educators into "technicians" or "knowledge workers" (224) to provide "students with generic skills needed to excel in tests" (Lewis and Hardy, 2016, 39).

Finally, research (Lury et. al., 2012) shows that exam results serve as a means to track and categorize minority learners into compensatory programs after "sorting, comparing and calculating" learners' performance (4). Researh (Ford, Grantham and Whiting, 2008; Fargas, 2003) further indicated that academic tracking contributes to achievement gaps between students who are marginalized and their peers. The latter results-based logic "instrumentalized teachers, de-humanized students, and made the classroom a space of performance and efficiency…thereby denying teachers genuine engagement with social problems, political issues, or cultural critiques" (Portelli et. al., 2009, 92). All this undermined teachers' skills and knowledge, it also hindered their capacity for independent thinking (Hursh, 2008).

3D.5.7 Constant Student Disengagement

Strong, Silver and Robinson (1995) argued that "*success* (need for mastery); *curiosity* (need for understanding); *originality* (need for self-expression) and *relationships* (need for involvement with other learners)" (10), triggered and enhanced learners' desire for learning. In doing so students (1) become more attracted to their work; (2) persist in their work despite challenges and obstacles; and (3) take visible delight in accomplishing their work (Schlecty, 1994). Conversely, learners' detachment takes place when educators (either purposely or unknowingly) adopt teaching practices that are rooted in deficit-thinking. Ford and Grantham (2003) argued that teacher-centred pedagogy had a negative impact on the social, emotional and psychological development of minority learners, who "start lacking self-esteem and losing hope in the education system" (223). In turn, education becomes a "joke" and a "boring experience for many minority learners" (Milner et. al., 2003, 89). Valencia (1997) also noted that, educators' preconceived assumptions on normality deprived minority learners from

critically engaging with their learning experiences in schools. Hence, learners start questioning their own abilities; embrace the differences presented to them by society (they embody the public identity created for them) and then sabotage their own achievements because of persistent deficit practices (Ford and Grantham, 2003).

It is suggested that underachievement results also from learners' disengagement in the education system, which "results in inaccurate perceptions of marginalized students that may prevent teachers from developing effective lessons that might better meet the needs of diverse learners" (Milner et. al., 2003, 297). Weiner (2006) posited that educators,

> "…foster a pervasive assumption that when students misbehave or achieve poorly, they must be "fixed" because the problem originates in the students or their families, not in the social ecology of the school, grade, or classroom…school practices and assumptions emerging from the deficit paradigm often hide student and teacher abilities" (42).

Nieto (as cited in Howard, 2003) also claimed that, "the way students are taught and treated by society are fundamental in creating academic success or failure" (199). In this regard, Garcia and Guerra (2004) opined that deficit pedagogy "hinders educator's ability to appreciate the resources or 'funds of knowledge' in every learner and family" (159) and "supports negative, stereotypic and counterproductive views on culturally diverse students" (217). Hence, Ford et. al. (2005) posited that,

> "…perceptions, both negative and positive ones, on racial backgrounds influence the development of definitions, policies, and practices…deficit thinking contributed to past (and current) beliefs about culture, race, and intelligence (218).

In this regard, "difference" or "diversity" becomes a major problem to overcome (Ford and Harmon, 2001).

Research (Ford and Harmon, 2001) shows that the main reasons why students disengage from schools are (1) an irrelevant curriculum; (2) unethical implementation of school policies; (3) bullying; and (4) lack of enabling support structures. Dei (1997) claimed that minority learners find it extremely difficult to connect their educational experiences with their everyday lives because of a non-inclusive, Euro-centric and neoliberal curriculum. In this regard, Gay (2000) posited that, "meaningful learning happens in environments where creativity, awareness, inquiry, and critical thinking are part of instruction" (106). In essence, responsive learning environments adapt to the

individual needs of students and encourage learning by promoting collaboration rather than isolation, i.e. learning settings that promote engaged teaching.

3D.5.8 Lack of Adequate Financing and Resources

Prochnow et. al. (2000) claimed that ‘scarcity of responsive resources’ because of lack of adequate funding, help to sustain deficit-thinking processes and practices in mainstream schools. Research (Peters et. al., 2005) shows that quality educational resources play a critical role in the provision of responsive teaching. The Ministry of Education in Guyana (2017) pointed out that,

> "Teaching materials refer to resources teachers use to deliver instruction. They can support student learning and increase student success. Ideally, teaching materials address the content and context in which teaching takes place; the needs of the students present in class and supports teachers. Teaching materials come in many shapes and sizes, but they all have in common the ability to support student learning” (http://education.gov.gy).

Finally, the absence of physical and human resources sustains deficit-thinking attitudes and beliefs and justified educators in legitimising the marginalization and/or exclusion of minority learners from mainstream educational settings.

3D.5.9 Over-Reliance on Classroom Teacher Aides

The use of teacher aides or paraprofessionals is a growing phenomenon in many educational systems. Giangreco et. al. (2002) posited that although very little evidence is available on the effectiveness and efficacy of teacher aides, this practice is growing exponentially. The Ministry of Education in Guyana remarked that,

> “…teaching aids are an integral component in any classroom. The many benefits of teaching aid-s include helping learners improve reading comprehension skills, illustrating or reinforcing a skill or concept, differentiating instruction and relieving anxiety or boredom by presenting information in a new and exciting way. Teaching aids also engage students’ other senses since there are no limits in what aids can be utilized when supplementing a lesson…” (http://education.gov.gy).

However, literature (Broer et. al., 2005) shows that teacher aides “are not seen as an integral part of the teaching team” (EASNIE, 2014, 53). Hence, “the responsibility for meeting the learning needs of minority learners is handed over to teacher aides”, with “class teachers abdicating their professional responsibility for meeting SEN needs to teacher aides” (EASNIE, 2014, 53). Moreover, Ainscow et. al. (2000) also referred to the surprising levels of responsibilities placed on teacher aides (practices referred to

'systemic-shifting-of-responsibility'), who in many cases are less qualified and less trained than class teachers (Giangreco, 2010).

Giangreco (2010) noted also that in many cases teacher aids serve as a means to segregate minority learners from their 'other' peers. This is most apparent when paraprofessionals work with minority learners in isolated areas, either in or away from the mainstream classroom (Ainscow et. al., 2007). Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) also contended that when a learner is viewed "as the responsibility of teacher aides, they are very likely to be isolated by their 'other normal' peers and teachers" (89).

3D.5.10 Crippling Parents' Voices

Parents play a fundamental role in education (Farrell, 2003). Dei (1997) viewed parental involvement as a cornerstone towards a child's general enjoyment at school and on which helps to sustain academic success. Garcia et. al. (2004) argued that,

> "family engagement improves student achievement, reduces absenteeism, and restores parents' confidence in their children's education. Students with involved parents or other caregivers earn higher grades and test scores, have better social skills and show improved behaviour" (34).

However, over the past years, parents' participation in schools decreased considerably (Dei, 1997) – a fact also experienced in the Maltese educational system. Teachers tend to look at parents as 'intruders' and are afraid of their participation in the teaching and learning process since 'certain parents': (1) do not value education positively; and (2) do not hold the necessary skills, expertise and time to support their children (Cotton et. al., 1999). Fraser (2005) also highlighted the communication difficulties between teachers and parents as a major challenge, which coupled with attitudinal barriers help to cripple parents' voices; de-motivate parents and to increase the achievement gap.

3D.6 Concluding Remarks on Deficit-Thinking

All the reviewed literature about deficit-thinking clearly, shows that the deficit ideology is as much about the preconceived notions of educational stakeholders as it is about the actual practices that stem from neoliberal notions. In the Maltese context, this phenomenon is present at all levels of the education hierarchical structures. The EASNIE (2014) concluded that "deficit-medical-integrative approaches in the Maltese educational system" are hindering "the process towards full inclusion" (67).

Section 3E: A Framework for Eliminating Deficit-Thinking

3E.1 Education for All: Framework for Eliminating Deficit-Thinking

The current research study views 'education for all' or 'inclusive education' as the antithesis of 'deficit-thinking'. However, the process to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' is challenging and requires genuine commitment by all educational stakeholders "to change the way things work" rather than "the way they look" (Ainscow, 2000, 111). Such 'high leverage activity' helps to bring about meaningful and transformational change in thinking modes and practices (Fullan, 1991). The latter shift:

- Starts with a thorough examination of current teaching practices to understand why and how deficit-thinking is so prevalent within the educational system; and
- Ends with deconstruction actions to restructure the whole system through shared understanding, planning and implementation.

The above cycle incorporates also Delpit's (1995) premise that problems lie mainly in educational systems rather than in learners or families, a perspective which instigates a 'repositioning of-the-self-strategy' to enhance a 'paradigm shift' in behaviour patterns.

The framework promotes a human-rights approach based on fairness, equity and respect for diversity. The aim is to develop an inclusive, democratic and socially just system by placing schools at the centre of the analysis since "schools play a leading role in creating inclusive societies" (EASNIE, 2014, 34). This view reinforces the belief that efforts towards full inclusion "should focus on increasing the capacity of local neighbourhood mainstream schools to support the participation and learning of an increasing diverse range of learners" (Ainscow, 2007, 112). UNESCO (2009) also linked 'inclusion' to the development of 'equity' and 'quality' in schools, rather than attempting to integrate minority learners into existing school settings or arrangements. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) contended that the complexity of the re-structuring and re-culturing process is "essentially about attitudes, beliefs and practices in schools that can reach out to the education of all learners" (112).

The 'education for all' framework is based on the principles of social justice and equity, active participatory democracy, and solidarity, tolerance and respect for diversity. Hence, school actions rooted in 'human rights' can be successful if they are negotiated in a staged approach rather than as a pre-packaged program. Furthermore, Pearl and Knight (2010) argued that in the absence of a 'human-rights' advocacy, the implementation of inclusive and socially just education would be difficult to achieve.

3E.2 A Human-Rights-Based Framework

Rights-based approaches play a significant role in educational development. According to UNESCO (2007), "this shift has been the result of growing recognition that needs-based or service-delivery approaches have failed to substantially provide high quality education for all learners" (9). Hence, a rights discourse is present in many international conventions and declarations (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: International Conventions and Declarations

• The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
• Convention & Recommendations against Discrimination in Education (1960)
• The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC, 1989)
• Salamanca Statement & Framework of Action on SNE (1994)
• The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006)
• The Strategic Framework – Education & Training 2020 (EC, 2009)

All of the six-illustrated conventions agreed on the need for a rights-based approach in order to develop greater equity and social justice that support the development of a democratic, fair and a non-discriminatory society.

Mittler (2000) posited that a human rights approach to education has always topped the international agenda, given that the provision of education is a basic human right for all learners. Goodman (1992) further argued that free and open educational systems are necessary for creating future societies, which are inclusive since,

> "education is critical to the development of human potential, to the enjoyment of the full range of human rights and to respect for the rights of others. Education also acts as a protector of children's rights. The right to education straddles civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights" (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2004, 68).

Hence, education for all is not only a way to guarantee that all learners have their right to a fulfilled education, but it also serves as a vehicle that ensures that all students learn to respect diversity in society. However, the notion that minority learners experience fewer rights to access rigorous mainstream education is also well reported in literature (MacArthur et. al. 2007). Campbell (2008) posited that education provides one of the most powerful tools in breaking down prejudice, stereotyping and negative attitudes towards minority learners. In this regard, Tomasevski (2003) stressed the need for,

> "a complete conceptual switch stating that no child should be forced to adapt to education. The principle requires complete reversal. Education should adapt to the best interest of each child".

Hence, a commitment to,

> "recognizing and respecting the human rights of children while they are at school – including respect for their identity, agency and integrity. This will contribute to increased retention rates and to make education empowering, participatory, transparent and accountable" (UNESCO, 2007, 28).

The proposed conceptual framework highlights the need for a holistic approach to education, which reflects the universality and indivisibility of all human rights. The table below (Table 3.3) illustrates the three dimensions required to develop a rights-based approach to education.

Table 3.3: The Three Rights-Based Dimensions to Education

1) The Right of Access to Education	• *Education throughout all stages of childhood and beyond;* • *Availability and Accessibility of education;* • *Equality of opportunity.*
2) The Right to Quality Education	• *A broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum;* • *Rights-based learning and assessment;* • *Child-friendly and safe environments.*
3) The Right to Respect in the Learning Environment	• *Respect for identity;* • *Respect for participation rights;* • *Respect for integrity.*

(Adapted from: 'A Human Rights Based Approach to Education, UNESCO, 2007, 28)

Tomasevski (2003) also conceptualized educational stakeholders' responsibilities in meeting all learners' rights to education in terms of the "4-As" scheme, i.e.:

- Availability: ensuring that education is available for all learners;
- Accessibility: ensuring access to and provide available education for all learners;
- Acceptability: ensuring education provision conforms to human rights standards;
- Adaptability: ensuring education is responsive to learners' needs and interests.

The EASNIE (2014) stressed that, "inclusion and quality are reciprocal, access and quality are linked and mutually reinforcing, and quality and equity are central to ensuring inclusive education" (11). However, Tomasevski (2003) suggested that "the

challenge is immense – education systems are required to adapt to each individual child, against the historical heritage of excluding all the children who are not able to adapt to the system as it was" (3). The human-rights based approach is also very useful to "provide a conceptual and analytical framework for identifying, planning, designing and monitoring activities based on quality and human rights standards" to examine and understand the real motifs behind the marginalization of minority learners (UNESCO, 2007, 9-10).

However, the 'human-rights approach' is not immune to criticism, mainly because it does not challenge/problematize issues of power and control, which sustain exclusionary processes and practices (Armstrong et. al., 2000). Ogbu (1987) posited that status and power relations between teachers and minority learners are vital components in any comprehensive account of school failure since both stakeholders replicate their experiences in power struggles that result in unfortunate scenarios in the academic setting. Hence, the inclusive framework includes also two other fundamental pillars: a *Democratic Vision*; and a *Socially Just* Approach.

3E.3 Democracy and Social Justice within the Inclusive Framework

The Institute for Democratic Education in America defined democratic education as "learning that equips human beings with skills to participate fully in a healthy democracy" (http://www.democraticeducation.org/) by empowering learners to take decisions about their own learning. Møller (2006) argued that democratic education is a philosophy where all school educators, learners, parents and community members share power and engage in ongoing decision-making dialogues on their learning community. Despite the fact that all official educational policy documents promoted a democratic vision, schools rarely give learners and parents concrete space and opportunities to practise democracy. Weiner (2006) also described education (in its various forms) as authoritarian, since only a few selected people are allowed to take decisions on "what to learn, when to learn, how to learn and assess learning and the nature of the learning environment" (Edwards et. al. 2004). Similarly, Dei and Kempf (2006) posited that 'colonialization' is still present in current schooling regimes and,

> "manifest themselves in variegated ways (the way knowledge gets produced) and receive validation in schools, i.e. the particular experiences of students that get counted as [in]valid and the identities that receive recognition and response from school authorities…" (2).

Hence, Nieto (2005) noted that "democratic education is less about facts and dates...and much more about opening new windows and doors" (54) to provide joyous, equitable, meaningful, engaging and empowering learning environments (Shields et. al., 2005). Goodman (1992) also posited that democratic education "allows students and educators to critically examine the deeply rooted ethical problems that underpin deficit-thinking practices in schools and the greater social inequalities in society" (22).

Schools employing a democratic vision demonstrate that democracy is a way of life that breaks sharply from the past (Bode, 2001). In this regard, Schofield (2010) noted that schools need to consider a more democratic approach "to change the way schools operate and to challenge the assumptions that marginalize minority learners" (43) by providing authentic opportunities for all learners and parents to experience the power of democracy in an inclusive and supportive community. Furthermore, Portelli et. al. (2003) contended that democratic education guides, assists and teaches students relevant real-life politics based on life experiences. Hence, the overall commitment is to think outside the box of standardized 'one-size-fits-all' education by considering democratic schooling as both 'a means and an end', with long and short termed aims. The former focus on developing well-informed citizens, who work towards creating a democratic, vibrant and socially just society, while the short-termed goal is to nurture self-determined and caring individuals who enjoy learning.

The implementation of democratic education is not an easy and straightforward task. The challenge involves moving away from a culture of deficit-thinking towards one that embraces the lived experiences of all learners. Alexander et. al. (2001) referred to the latter process as the 'pedagogy or community of difference' since it promotes:

- Respect for human rights;
- Values freedom;
- Encourages active participation and collaboration; and
- Fosters equity and justice.

Ladson-Billings (2007) argued that in democratic settings, 'at risk' learners perform better and have greater possibilities to experience success, since educators manage to move beyond stereotyping and pathologizing practices to create school environments that recognize and celebrate minority learners' culture, language, traditions and ways of living (Shields et. al., 2004). Valencia (1995) stressed that schools that foster student

engagement experience: higher student attendance, increased attainment rates, rise in intrinsic motivation and determination in students, and greater creativity and sustained conceptual learning. Moreover, Dei and Kempf (2006) noted that democracy and social justice rely on each other. Whereas democratic educational communities embrace conversations that create shared understanding about student diversity, social justice fosters practices that invite all stakeholders to empathize the world through the eyes of minority learners. Hence, democratic and socially just educational systems help to eliminate deficit-thinking in schools – a practice that is often difficult to achieve in a culture entrenched in status quo.

Shield et. al. (2004) observed that to re-culture educational structures, educators need to reframe concepts linked with pathologizing discourse: *agency*, *social justice*, *deep democracy* and *academic excellence*. Furthermore, Shields et. al. (2004) posited that "if education is not just, it cannot be democratic; if it is neither just nor democratic, it cannot be optimistic; [and] if [education] deforms those it is intended to serve, there is no way it can be truly empathetic" (42). Hence, the elimination of deficit-thinking can only occur through 'repositioning-of-the-self' in favour of inclusive education.

3E.4 Understanding the 'Education for All' Framework

A review of international literature reveals an extensive debate on the justification of 'inclusion' from a human right, educational and moral perspective (Florian, 2007; Pearl, 2010; Pearl and Knight, 2010). The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2001) defines 'inclusion' as "the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure" (656).

In education, definitions of 'inclusion' or 'education for all' focus on the valuing and acceptance of diversity and the rights of students to attend mainstream schools as valued and respected members. Bailey (1998) also referred to inclusion as "being in an ordinary school with other students, following the same curriculum at the same time, in the same classrooms, with the full acceptance of all, and in a way, which makes the student feel no different from other students" (173). Inclusion is also the "process of increasing participation of pupils in, and reducing their exclusion from school curricula and cultures" (Booth and Ainscow, 2011, 9). Furthermore, Villa and Thousand (2005) noted that "the underlying assumption, however, is that inclusion is a way of life – a way of living together – that is based on a belief, that each individual

is valued and belongs" (10). Other definitions of inclusive education also move away from benevolent humanitarianism to a discourse of rights – the right to participate in the mainstream school, the right to respect and the right to "individually relevant learning" (Norwich, 2010, 10). Hence, 'education for all' is not only an end-point in itself, but a continuous process,

> "by which schools attempt to respond to the children as individuals by re-structuring its curricula provision and allocating resources to enhance quality of opportunity. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all children from the local community and in so doing, reduces the need to exclude children" (Norwich, 2010, 223).

Hamre et. al. (2005) also posited that,

> "inclusion is not formulaic. Decisions vary from classroom to classroom, school to school, and year to year. Moral dilemmas are often unique to the situation. The 'best practices' for creating inclusive [schools and] classrooms are ones that are personalized for the group of individuals on a given day and time and in any given context" (52).

Booth (1996) also referred to the complex and problematic process of implementing inclusive education in different contexts, since what is valid in one school may not be applicable in other settings. Accordingly, the 'education for all' framework proposes diverse routes and road maps to achieve inclusive education, especially by bringing "students, families, educators and community members together to create schools and future societies based on acceptance, belonging and community" (Salend, 2008, 5).

Schools embracing the 'education for all' philosophy establish supportive, nurturing and collaborative environments based on giving all learners the services and accommodations needed to engage or learn from each other's diversity (Salend, 2008). Hence, the 'education for all' framework embodies the belief, that inclusion focuses on all stakeholders, educational programmes and organisations (Skrtic, 1995). Rather than 'fixing learners' and perpetuating an 'us vs. them' mentality (Garcia and Guerra, 2009), inclusive education "welcomes all students; recognizes their multifaceted identities; and reconfigures an educational space that capitalizes on everyone's unique qualities, and strengths" (Schofield, 2010 51). Karagiannis et. al. (2000) also defined 'inclusive education' as "the practice of including everyone irrespective of talent, disability, socio-economic background, or cultural origin in supportive mainstream schools where all students' needs are met" (1). Similarly, Nieto (1992) described 'inclusion' as,

> "the equal and optimal education of ALL learners within a school system. All learners are recognised as having diverse needs but are valued for their

> shared humanity. It is also a system where all learners can be educated together, where personal diversity is seen to be enriching" (10).

Slee (2011) also argued that,

> "inclusive education is not about special education, it is about all students. It asks direct questions: Who is in? And who is out? The answers find their sharpest definition along lines of class, race, ethnicity, language, disability, gender or sexuality, and geographic location. It is a cultural calculus where we evaluate and question the relative values afforded to different groups of people through the culture of schools and classrooms. Most complex of all is the tension between the rejection of a one-size-fits-all approach to schooling and a potential drift into new segregations" (116-117).

The above explanation supported also UNESCO's (2008) statement, whereas inclusive education,

> "is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies. Inclusion is still thought of in some countries as an approach to serving children with disabilities in general settings. Internationally, however it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners" (5).

In this regard, Ainscow et. al. (2006) argued that schools should "concern themselves with increasing the participation and broad achievements of all groups of learners who have historically been marginalized" (295). Hence, inclusion consists of,

> "three overlapping ways: as reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students; as increasing the capacity of schools to respond to the diversity of students in their local communities in ways that treat them all as of equal value; and the putting of inclusive values into action in education and society" (Ainscow et. al., 2006, 297).

To ensure access to education for all learners, UNESCO (2008) emphasized the need for education to eliminate,

> "current strategies and programmes, which have not been sufficient to meet the needs of children at risk of marginalisation/exclusion…Education must be viewed as a facilitator in everyone's human development and functionality, regardless of barriers of any kind. Disability (physical; social or emotional) cannot be a disqualifier. Inclusion, thus involves adopting a broad vision of education for all by addressing the wide spectrum of needs of all learners" (11-13).

Similarly, Alper et. al. (1995) stressed the importance of providing meaningful,

> "educational experiences for all learners experiencing barriers to learning and development. Such learners would participate in the same classroom situation with learners who are not experiencing barriers to learning and development, at the same mainstream classrooms that their 'other' peers attend" (4).

However, the recycling of deficit beliefs and negative assumptions, the categorization of learners as 'normal' or 'different' together with 'normalization' processes are still a concomitant of today's schools that value uniformity more than diversity. Therefore, inclusion is not just a matter of placement by simply dumping learners into regular classrooms without addressing issues of labelling, prejudice, exclusion, peer support, curriculum modifications and pedagogical differentiation. Mara Sapon-Shevin (2007) argued that, "…very specific principles underlie this approach and if the necessary changes are not affected, 'inclusion' will be doomed to failure" (xv). Hence, 'inclusive education' broadened its scope from one focusing solely on the relocation of learners into mainstream schools to one permeated on providing high-quality education for all learners.

In addition, Van Zyl (2002) remarked that inclusive education is "much more than merely changing curricula...[but] an opportunity for educators to learn, reflect and discover new ways of thinking, planning and acting" (112). Hence, inclusive education "advocates structural and organizational changes to accommodate all students, rather than students having to adapt to existing structures" (Farrel et. al., 2003, 54). In this regard, Ainscow (2010) indicated a range of contextual influences that relate to,

> "the principles that guide policy priority within an education system; the views and actions of others within the local context, including members of the wider community and the criteria or standards that are used to evaluate the performance of schools" (112).

In order to facilitate the full transformation of the Maltese educational system into an inclusive one, EASNIE (2014) proposed a holistic restructuring and re-culturing process at all system levels (i.e. Ministerial; Directorate, College, School, Class levels).

3E.5 Benefits of the 'Education for All' Framework

Within the 'education for all' framework, 'diversity' is recognised as 'natural', while 'inclusive education' is considered as a means of raising 'presence' (access to education); 'participation' (quality of the learning experience) and 'achievement' (learning processes and outcomes) by providing all learners opportunities to discover, model, experience and learn together. The 48th Session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) (2008) stated that "inclusive education is an on-going process aimed at offering quality education by respecting the different needs, abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of all students, whilst eliminating all forms of

discrimination" (UNESCO-IBE 2008, 3). Moreover, UNESCO (2012) also remarked that, "…international consensus is converging towards a view that if there is a phenomenon of exclusion in an education system, then it is not considered to be a quality performing system" (1). The latter clearly shows that 'education for all' is a philosophy, a developmental process and a socially just practice.

International research (Watkins, 2007; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010; EASNIE, 2014) shows that 'inclusion' benefits all learners, educators, families and societies. Wilkinson et. al. (2010) stressed the need to "address the underlying inequality, which creates a steeper social gradient in educational achievement" (29–30). Similarly, Black-Hawkins et. al. (2007) remarked that, "combining inclusion with high levels of achievement is not only possible but essential if learners have the opportunity to participate fully and actively in education" (45). The EASNIE (2014) also argued that "what is good for SEN pupils is good for all learners" (13) irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, culture, race, religion and disability. Hence, inclusive education challenges deficit-thinking assumptions, processes and practices, which include "the knowledge base and professional practice of teachers; the principles and values underpinning school design; the role of learners; the nature of curricula and syllabi; and the criteria for effectiveness" (West-Burnham, 2005, 98).

'Education for all' strives to provide socially just learning environments, i.e. schools that "become conscious of the learner-as-person first and concern for labelling fades" (Wood, 1993, 20). Hence, rather than promoting 'individualism', educators focus on commonalities and strive to foster a 'we' or a 'collectivist' mentality. The Strategic Framework for European Co-operation in Education and Training (2015) pointed out that, "education and training systems need to ensure that all learners – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants – complete their education…[whilst] equipping all young people to interact positively with peers from diverse backgrounds" (7). Moreover, the University of Northern Iowa noted that,

> "inclusion is based on the belief that people work in inclusive communities; work with people of different races, religions, aspirations and disabilities. Hence, children of all ages should learn and grow in environments that resemble the environments that they will eventually work in" (1).

The above clearly indicates ' true democracy' and 'social justice' as two main pillars in inclusive schools, so that all educational stakeholders feel comfortable to partake in

constructivist conversations regarding school operations, in the creation of new policies, and in the writing of responsive curricula/syllabi (Ainscow, 2000). Kincheloe et. al. (1995) also contended that inclusive settings encourage deliberate efforts to transform power structures to facilitate the participation of marginalized learners.

The proposed framework also helps learners to develop important adult-life skills, which include: leadership; cooperative skills – abilities to help and teach others; tutoring and mentoring; self-empowerment skills; self-esteem; and self-respect. Salend (2008) believes that the above skills are important pre-requisites to improve (1) test scores; (2) literacy, numeracy and science and technology competences; (3) attendance and truancy rates; (4) implementation of all educational programs' objectives; and (5) teaching strategies. Willms (2006) argued that,

> "successful schools are those that bolster the performance of students from less advantaged backgrounds. Similarly, countries that have the highest levels of performance tend to be those that are successful in not only raising the learning bar, but also levelling it. These findings provide strong evidence that strong school performance and equity go hand in hand" (67).

Furthermore, the framework helps to crack down prejudice by making education an emphatic process, which is focused on the learners' abilities 'to learn' and 'to retain' information in an active manner. Bartolo (2010) argued that child-centred schools are the training ground for a people-oriented society that respects diversity and the dignity of all human beings. The Salamanca Statement (1994) stressed that,

> "…a child-centred pedagogy is beneficial to all students and to society. Experience has demonstrated that it can substantially reduce the drop-out and repetition rate that are so much of a part of many educational systems while ensuring higher average levels of achievement. A child-centred pedagogy can help to avoid the waste of resources and the shattering of hopes that is all too frequently a consequence of poor quality education and a 'one-size-fits-all' mentality towards education" (7).

Noddings (1992) also focused on the importance of 'emphatic education', as it changes almost "every aspect of schooling, that is, managerial hierarchical structures, the right mode of allocating time, the size of schools/classes, the goals and type of instruction, modes of evaluation, and content selection" (221). Hence, an "ethic of care" in all schools is imperative (Noddings, 1992, 225). The EASNIE (2014) observed that,

> "the positive impact of inclusive education includes improved social relationships and networks, peer role models, increased achievement, higher expectations, increased collaboration among school staff and improved integration of families into the community" (8).

Further benefits of inclusive education include access to a rigorous curriculum, more learning opportunities and higher achievement rates. In this regard, EADSNE (2012) stressed that "due consideration should be given to improving the organisation of 'space' and 'agency' for meaningful learning by providing opportunities for learners to discover talents in a range of areas beyond academic learning" (25). According to Chipman et. al. (2003) the "presence of a diverse student population can, under the right organisational conditions, stimulate collaborative arrangements and encourage creative ways of teaching to reach different groups" (21). The latter because minority learners tend to perform better when they are exposed to learning experiences alongside their higher-achieving and higher-ability peers (Schofield, 2010). Hence, all learners,

> "benefit from co-operative learning: the student who explains to the other retains information better and for longer and the needs of the student who is learning are better addressed by a peer whose level of understanding is only slightly higher than his or her own level" (EADSNE, 2012, 18-19).

Similarly, Garcia and Guerra (2009) opined that as long as 'academic tracking' remains an accepted practice in schools, achievement gaps (between learners in the dominant context and those that are excluded from it) will continue to exist. Shields et. al. (2004) also contended that,

> "taking time to preface material to build a deeper understanding of the difference in cultures and values, perhaps demonstrating the strengths of such an understanding, is at the core of emphatic education. It's empathy that permits educators to respond differentially to students" (79).

The implementation of an inclusive framework depends also on a genuine commitment by all stakeholders to re-structure and re-culture educational settings. Sutherland et. al. (2018) stressed that,

> "a more radical approach is needed: we much demolish the false dividing line between 'normal' and 'different' and attack the whole concept of normality. We must recognise that disablement is not merely the state of a small minority of people. It is the normal condition of humanity" (18).

Despite the benefits of the 'education for all' framework, Garcia and Guerra (2009) noted that in schools there is little willingness to replace segregative practices (such as academic tracking) with more equitable teaching strategies.

3E.6 'Re-Positioning-of-the-Self' in Favour of 'Education for All'

Berman et. al. (2000) argued that the successful implementation of educational reforms depends on the educators' willingness to assume responsibility for learners'

low attainment or failure. This therefore highlights, the need for educators to challenge deficit beliefs and negative attitudes as well as to look beyond traditional solutions to enable meaningful change in favour of 'education for all' learners (Garcia et. al., 2004). The latter allows teachers to theorise from within discourses of agency (agentic positioning) rather than from within discourses of deficiency (deficit theorising). Bishop, Berryman, Powell and Teddy (2006) also noted that,

> "the discursive viewpoint of the majority of teachers suggested that minority learners' educational under-achievement resulted from children themselves or their family circumstances with systemic/structural issues placed second. Many teachers felt powerless (non-agentic) to make positive changes in their classrooms until these major influences were resolved - a position characterised by discourses of deficiency" (98).

Other identified key barriers to effective change implementation include: (1) isolation and vulnerability (Bryk and Schneider, 2002); (2) protection of the 'status quo' due to fear of change (Fullan, 1995); (3) limited time to nurture change practices (Garcia et. al., 2004); (4) underestimation of the complexity to create PLCs (Achinstein, 2002); and (5) organisational fragmentation resulting from lack of policy coherence (Newmann et. al., 2000). Fullan (2007) also remarked that educational reforms create "uncertainty, apprehension, fear and resistance" among educators since the latter "feel very strong about: their concept of what education is all about, how best to organize students and schools, and how best to assess educational outcomes" (90). According to Herold et. al. (2008),

> "…people do not naturally resist change; they resist change they do not understand, the value of which they do not see, or the demands of which they cannot meet. It is a change leader's job to motivate others to follow and to make it possible for them to do so. Change leaders are not born. They come in all shapes and sizes, but they work with what they have and can achieve success using many approaches. People are not unfortunate obstacles to the change plan; they are the key elements in these plans. Cultivating people's commitment to the organization and to the leader may be the most important change tool leaders have" (101).

Hence, educational leaders that work to eliminate deficit-thinking need to 'reposition-the-self' (Figure 3.3) to move educators to value social justice, deep democracy and collegiality in a "community of difference" (Green, 1999). The latter strategy helps to "challenge the 'status quo' by validating every member's needs or position despite the size and/or number of the group to which the individual identifies" (56). In this regard, 'collective responsibility' plays a fundamental role (Freire et. al., 1995) since it creates

"a shared belief that teachers work to advance all students' learning...it also helps to sustain commitment, put peer pressure and accountability on those who do not do their fair share, and eases isolation" (Bolam et. al., 2005, 8). All this shows that 'collective responsibility' in no way implies 'lack of accountability' (Bolam et. al., 2005) but holds all teachers responsible for the success or failure of all learners, as meaningful change depends on the educators' ability to re-define their roles to provide quality education for effective citizenship (Giroux, 2014).

Shields et. al. (2004) argued that "the development of socially just pedagogical practices to facilitate optimistic outcomes for minority learners" relied mainly on the repositioning of teachers within strength-based discourse that promotes constructivist, inclusive and democratic solutions rather than neoliberal-deficit-rooted beliefs and/or blame (256). In this regard, Berman et. al. (2000) considered 'collective responsibility' and the 'repositioning-of-the-self' technique as fundamental for successful systematic change towards a more responsive approach to teaching and learning. Garza and Garza (2010) contended that,

> "The challenge for educators is ever present; we must continue to renew our commitment. We need to find new ways to honor, dignify, and incorporate knowledge of [minority] learners and families in our classrooms. There is a lot to gain by using the strengths of [minority learners] to strengthen ourselves personally and professionally" (205).

All this clearly shows that high leveraged 'change' could only take place if teachers 'reposition' their beliefs and attitudes and 'reconsider' the abilities of minority learners – rather than 'fixing' or 'adapting' them to the system. Berman and Chambliss (2007) also indicated 'self-repositioning' as crucial to enable systemic change for democratic approaches to education (i.e. having all stakeholders debating, planning, implementing and learning constructively together). Essentially, the latter implies having educators taking personal and professional responsibility (rather than abrogating responsibility to change) to seek solutions from within positions of agency (agentic positioning) to set shared goals for all students' learning and to increase all learners' attainment levels (Bishop and Berryman, 2006). Whalan (2012) posited that,

> "results were consistent: achievement gains are significantly higher in schools where teachers take collective responsibility for students' academic success or failure rather than blaming students for their own failure...Moreover, the distribution of achievement gains is more socially equitable in schools with high levels of collective responsibility for learning" (103).

Research (Giroux, 2014) also shows that collegiality and the 'repositioning-of-the-self' concept correlated positively with each other. Leithwood et. al. (2009) pointed out that,

> "when collegial relations are at their strongest, teachers are professionally interdependent and conceive of their work as a joint enterprise. Instruction becomes more than the endeavours of individual teachers in professionally isolated classrooms, emerging as a collective enterprise in which teachers strive together towards common goals for student learning. In instances in which professional interdependence is strong, teachers' pay attention to the overall performance of the school as well as their own efficacy" (764).

Furthermore, Fullan (2007) argued that within 'self-repositioning',

> "planning is essential – planning to incorporate discursive strategies into classrooms that will change teachers' interactions with students, students' interactions with each other, and students' interactions with their learning. In turn, relationships between teachers and students will change. Different relationships will affirm or challenge existing teacher positioning with regards to minority learners' educational achievement, which in turn will lead to changes in minority learners' experiences of the education system, thus leading to the goal of raising minority learners' achievement" (12).

All this clearly shows that 'repositioning-of-the-self' for whole-system change depends on transforming school culture/climate. Hence, one questions the role of governance and leadership to ease 'repositioning-of-the-self', in favour of inclusive education, i.e.: Why are good governance and strong leadership essential to develop inclusive, socially just and democratic schools? How can schools respond to student diversity, while maintaining high educational standards? How can schools ensure meaningful change is taking place in the best interest of all learners?

3E.7 Good Governance & Strong Leadership for 'Self-Repositioning'

Sharma (2016) believes that change cannot be meaningfully implemented until all stakeholders in the dominant discourse engage in the rejection of 'deficit-thinking'. Wagstaff and Fusarelli (2000) also noted that the rejection of 'deficit-thinking' was the single most important initiating factor in reducing achievement gaps. Hence, the need for the educational system to question the positioning of policies within deficit theorizing and to reject deficit-rooted practices. In this regard, Fullan (2008) presented six main actions that enabled purpose-driven change, i.e.: '*love employees*'; '*connect peers with purpose*'; '*capacity-building prevails*'; '*learning is the work*'; '*transparency rules*'; and '*systems learn*'. These actions assert the importance of both 'good governance' and 'strong leadership' for successful tri-level repositioning (State, College, School) (Fullan, 2005).

Research (Shields, Bishop and Mazawi, 2004; Shields, 2009 and 2010; Schmidt and Venet, 2012) shows that the 'repositioning-of-the-self' process to eliminate deficit-thinking practices in schools, depends on good governance and strong leadership for inclusive and democratic education. Brown (2006) purported that good governance and strong leadership in education challenged practices of marginalization, isolation and exclusion, responded to oppression with innovation, tenacity and courage, empowered the powerless, and transformed existing inequalities and injustices with equitable and socially just learning opportunities. Hence, both good governance and strong leadership help to move all educational stakeholders (educators, learners and parents) beyond the 'status quo' by fostering an educational climate that challenges deficit-thinking.

3E.7.1 Good Governance in Education

The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA) defined governance as the sum of procedures and actions that describe,

> "how power is exercised through a country's economic, social and political institutions to use the country's resources for socio-economic development. The process of governance encompasses the political, social and economic aspects of life, which have an impact on each individual, household, village, region or nation" (ANSA-EAP, 2010, as cited in: http://www.ansa-eap.net/).

Similarly, Chowdhury and Skarstedt (2005) referred to governance as "a convenient term that included the entire gamut of political and economic frameworks in a society" to ensure that "…citizens' basic needs are met; caring communities are nurtured; and relationships are anchored on social justice and equality" (11). Hence, the International Bureau of Education (IBE, 2012) described governance as the "processes and structures designed to ensure accountability, rule of law, transparency, stability, responsiveness, equity, inclusiveness, and broad-based participation" (IBE-UNESCO, 2012, cited in: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/geqaf/technical-notes/concept-governance). La Vina (2008) also remarked that 'governance' helps to reinforce four basic human-rights entitlements, i.e.: right to be heard (voice); right to negotiate for change (participation); right to expression (information); and right to association (organization). In this regard, the World Bank Global Monitoring Report (2009) labelled governance as "a process of decision-making"; "a mechanism for holding governments accountable"; "formal and informal processes for formulating policies and allocating resources" and "power relationships" (78). This evidence suggests that 'good governance' is a necessary pre-condition to eliminate 'deficit-rooted-exclusionary' practices in favour of 'social

inclusion' (i.e. an enabling working environment) to support the holistic development of all citizens in a democratic, participatory, transparent, equitable, accountable and effective society (Graham, Amos and Plumtre, 2003). Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2010) defined 'good governance' as the "traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good" (36).

Research (Fazekas and Burns, 2012; Burns and Koster, 2016; Langer, Triprey and Gough, 2016; Mason, 2016) shows that 'good governance' in educational systems is essential to overcome 'deficit-thinking' and to enable 'repositioining-of-the-self' in favour of inclusive and responsive education for all learners. In this regard, Pettersson and Lewis (2009) argued that "good governance in education systems promotes effective delivery of education services" to encourage quality improvement and the enhancement of equity, through responsive, targeted and timely quality interventions. The 'General Education Quality Analysis-Diagnosis Framework' posited that,

> "at system level, governance determines what education policies or priorities will be put in place; how much funding will be available and how resources will be distributed, used, managed and accounted for; how the powers and functions of governing education will be distributed across the different layers and actors in the system and to what extent the rule of law and transparency will be maintained so that those in power are accountable for their actions or performance" (UNESCO, 2012, 42).

Furthermore, GEQAF remarked that,

> "at the institutional level, governance ensures the deployment of qualified and motivated personnel. It ensures that learners are provided with high quality and relevant curriculum material, are engaged in learning, and get adequate support from their teachers" (UNESCO, 2012, 42).

According to Pettersson and Lewis (2009), critical components of good governance in education are "the existence of appropriate *standards*; *information* on performance; *incentives* for good performance; and *accountability*, which induce high performance from public providers to raise the level of educational outputs (school retention) and outcomes (reduced achievement gap)" (3-4) (Table 3.4). Mason (2016) also noted that "good governance increases efficiency of educational services, raises performance and ultimately, improves student learning and teachers' productivity" (4). On the contrary, the "lack of standards, information, incentives and accountability result in inefficiency in service provision" (Ackerman, 2005, 69). Hence, poor educational governance can seriously contribute to poor education quality, deficit-thinking and ineffective learning experiences.

Table 3.4: Four Good Governance Components in Education

Governance Component	Definition
Standards	Criteria or benchmarks used to assess as well as inform educational policy, provision and/or performance.
Incentives	Factors (financial or non-financial resources) that motivate a specific type of behaviour or action, which can be either positive or negative.
Information	Clear definition of educational outcomes and outputs combined with evidence-based data on performance (results).
Accountability	Act of holding all educational stakeholders answerable/responsible for the achievement of equitable educational processes and outcomes.

(Adapted From: Lewis and Pettersson, 2009, 4)

GEQAF (2012) also noted that educational governance,

> "…consists of multiple hierarchical layers, with various actors and stakeholders holding varying degrees of power, authority, influence and accountability. For quality learning, every level of the system has an important role to play. Hence, in trying to understand educational governance one must examine the complex web of institutional or governance arrangement designed to govern both formal and non-formal education settings at all levels" (UNESCO, 2012, 42).

Steinberg (2013) argued that "changes in the international political landscape led to a global emphasis on grassroots democracy and public participation and voice in public organizations" (5). The latter resulted in a push for the de-bureaucratization of society and decentralization of power (Murphy and Hallinger, 2012). In this sense, Courtney, McGinity and Gunter (2008) posited that "the centralized and hierarchical coordination and management of schools has given way to local decision-making and networking, framed by economic logics that model schools on the corporate competitive enterprise" (22). Hence, Courtney, Gunter, Niesche and Trujillo (2019) purported that,

> "school autonomy is largely conceptualized and exercised through the logic of competitive performativity; i.e. through systems of accountability that evaluate school, student and staff performance, often narrowly measured through quantifiable performance benchmarking or testing" (12).

In Malta, the concept of 'good governance in education' gained more relevance and momentum with the launch of the 'College Reform', which saw the decentralization of

centrally-controlled state schools into ten colleges. This governance model, which rests on school networking, aimed to increase the democratic development of the country by allowing colleges more administrative and curricular autonomy in decision and policy-making as well as in implementation processes within a consolidated framework of standards and quality assurance. Hence, the 'National Curriculum Framework' (2012) and the 'Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024' (2014) aimed to ensure the operationalization of 'good governance' across all system levels. Whereas the former "assures a linkage between learning outcomes, programmes of learning and assessment and examinations" (MEDE, 2012, 11), the latter enhances and synergises the structures by promoting system coherence through good governance standards. In this regard, 'Governance of Education Organisations' results as a major strategic pillar in the local framework for the education strategy to guarantee: "long term financing" "sustainability of funding"; "a structure that enables modernisation and innovation"; "adequate support for the development of administrative processes" and "transparency tools for governance, management and administration" (MEDE, 2014, 4).

3E.7.2 Strong Leadership for Good Governance in Education

Research (Day and Leithwood, 2007; Schmidt and Venet, 2012) indicates that 'strong leadership' is a crucial requisite for 'good governance' in educational settings, because 'strong educational leadership, management and administration' act as "catalysts for [college] school change, effectiveness and improvement" (Leithwood, 2008, 28) to respond effectively to "…the increasing importance of education in post-industrial societies; heightened international economic competition; and demographic changes in school-aged populations" (Steinberg, 2013, 4). Wilkins and Gobby (2020) also argued that,

> "educational leadership is a function and condition of governance since it provides a set of vital relays for linking formally autonomous operations of schools with the political ambitions of the state and the interests of the public. The relationship between governance and educational leadership, is crucial to map the current political moment, namely to detail the specific rationalities that bear upon the development of schools as organizations…"
>
> (As cited in: Courtney, Gunter, Niesche and Trujillo, 2020, 2-3).

Globalization and neoliberal pressures led governments to conduct several educational reforms (decentralisation of power; demand-driven accountability), which effected the way schools are organized, managed and run (Bezzina, 2005). Essentially, these "reforms aimed to give greater authority to schools and to its members to counter the autocratic,

individualistic and isolationist system of managing schools" (Bezzina, 2007, 45). The Ministry of Education (2001) in Malta posited that,

> "decentralisation means greater responsibility for the Head of School as the leader of the school. In this context, the managerial and leadership skills of Heads of Schools come into play. No amount of goodwill from the center will redress weakness in school management" (114).

Sharma (2016) noted that leadership "focuses on different roles and on diverse aspects" (51), i.e.: developing capacity for change (Thoonen et. al., 2012); attracting and retaining teachers to improve outcomes (Ladd, 2009); improving staff motivation, commitment to change, relational trust and working conditions (Branch, 2012); developing learning communities (Bush, 2008); and enhancing teacher effectiveness and organizational learning (Mulford and Silins, 2009). All this shows that,

> "the dominant principle of an organisation has shifted, from supervision and management to control an enterprise, to leadership to bring out the best in people and to respond to change" (Naisbett and Aberdene, 1990, 20).

Li, Hallinger and Walker (2015) also discerned "how leadership, focused on different facets of the organizational system, impacts teaching and learning processes, education equity, teacher commitment, student learning and school quality" (1). Hence "effective leadership is sensitive to the unique demands of specific colleges/schools" (Leithwood, 2005, 11) since it involves elements of equity, inclusion, diversity and social influence to structure activities and manage relationships that "stimulate a change process" for quality education provision (Yukl, 2002, 3). Therefore, educational leadership, viewed within the discourse of governance, is a technical, universal and politically neutral know-how for optimizing organizational processes, calculability and outputs (Wilkins and Gobby, 2019).

Bush (2008) identified 'social influence' as a central element in educational leadership (i.e.: the process of influencing stakeholders to identify and achieve shared vision and goals by fostering healthy relationships among teachers, students, parents and community partners). In this sense, Yukl (2002) noted that leadership influences,

> "the interpretation of events for followers, choice of objectives, the planning of work activities to accomplish objectives, the motivation of followers to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships and teamwork, and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people outside the group or organization" (3).

Bush and Glover (2003) also purported that,

> "…leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values. They articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence staff and other stakeholders to share the vision. The philosophy, structures and activities of the school are geared towards the achievement of this shared vision" (8).

Hence, successful educational leadership for 'self-repositioning' to eliminate 'deficit-thinking', involves the interaction of personality (personal and professional determination), vision, experience, dispositions (courage), attitudes, values and coping mechanisms to move colleges or schools in the direction of collegial structures and processes grounded in co-operative teamwork (Steinberg, 2012). Bezzina (2007) remarked that,

> "Decision-making processes have to ensure whole staff involvement based on effective top-down and bottom-up lines of communication. Within the school community, a culture of self-assessment needs to be cultivated and developed to ensure continuous improvement. The Head of School will be required to share responsibilities through real delegation. This will involve the passing on to the management team and other ranks key tasks that many heads are reluctant to let go. This would ensure ownership of decision-making and enhance levels of staff motivation"
>
> (As cited in: Ministry of Education, 2001, 114-115).

Leadership for 'good governance' in educational settings is separated from person, role and status and is concerned with relationships, connections, behaviours, conditions and processes to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization (Bush, 2008). Cauchi Cuschieri (2007) argued that,

> "…Managing is not enough: what is needed is leadership to help people achieve what they are capable of, to establish a vision for the future, to encourage, coach, mentor, and establish and maintain relationships" (65).

Bezzina (2003) also noted that "leaders cannot rely only on administering institutions; they have to adopt visionary leadership and effective management" (3) to be able to: (1) challenge the 'status quo'; (2) develop a 'culture of quality performance'; and (3) respond constructively to public accountability (Sharma, 2016). Similarly, Leithwood (2005) described 'strong leadership' as "doing right things right" (3), i.e. using the "objective perspective of the manager as well as the flashes of vision and commitment wise leadership provides" to enable and sustain 'good governance' (Bolman and Deal, 1997, xii-xiv). Steinberg (2013) also posited that educational leaders "today are seen less as program managers and more as education entrepreneurs, responsible for school improvement" (10). The latter shift better positioned leaders "to exert more influence in shaping the school community – the climate for teaching and learning, the practice

of instruction, and the quality of relationships among teachers and students" (Grisson et. al., 2011, 89). Within the latter process of increased decentralisation, Goldring et. al. (2007) presented also six core leadership components (Table 3.5), necessary for improved academic and social learning for all students.

Table 3.5: The Six Core Leadership Components for School Re-Positioning

Core Components	Meaning
High Standards for Student Learning	Development of quality goals (individual, team, college, school) for rigorous academic and social learning. This includes setting high expectations and standards for all students to close achievement gaps.
Rigorous Curriculum (Content)	Ambitious academic content and age-appropriate learning opportunities in core academic subjects for all students. The latter entails also aligning the content of instruction to the college's or school's high performance standards.
Quality Instruction (Pedagogy)	Effective instructional practices that maximize students' abilities. This includes: understanding the properties of quality instruction, finding ways to ensure that effective pedagogy is experienced by all students, and providing feedback and support to teachers to improve instruction.
Culture of Learning & Professional Behaviour (Learning is Central)	The development of healthy, supportive and respectful learning environments by integrating communities of professional practice in the service of student academic and social learning. The latter entails the 'repositioning' of schools as PLCs rather than as bureaucracies.
Connections to External Community	Establishing robust connections/linkages with parents and institutions within the community, while ensuring that the community's expectations and interests are part of the institution's goals, culture and decisions.
Systemic Performance Accountability	Individual and collective responsibility for all students' learning and for college/school improvement, which stem from external and internal accountability systems. The former refers to performance expectations that emerge from outside the learning community; whereas the latter alludes to individual responsibilities.

(Adapted from: Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott and Cravens, 2007, 4-9)

In addition, Hallinger (2013) emphasized the need for leadership to be grounded in firm personal and professional values to model and promote "respect for individuals, equity, fairness, integrity, honesty, and caring for the well-being and whole development of staff and students" (Bush and Glover, 2003, 4). Scheerens (2012) also stressed the importance of a "holistic and realistic vision" for the institution, which provides "a

mental picture of a preferred future and that is shared with all in the community" (99). Finally, Leithwood (2005) observed that "while influence and vision capture the core functions of leadership, those functions can be exercised in distinctly different ways in schools" (7).

As educational policies and practices change, the role of educational leadership has also changed. Both international (Sergiovanni, 2000; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000; Harris, 2002; Hallinger and Lee, 2013; Mulford, 2013; Steinberg, 2013; Sharma, 2016) and local (Bezzina, 2004; Bezzina and Cassar, 2005; Cauchi Cuschieri, 2007; Bezzina, 2012; Bezzina and Cutajar, 2013; Debono, 2015; Bezzina, Roofe and Holness, 2019; Bezzina and Madalinska-Michalak, 2019) research findings suggest that schools do make a difference in helping to promote educational and social mobility of learners. In this regard, there has been a shift from program management to instructional leadership to transformational leadership to help educational leaders understand the requirements needed to see through the different phases of the change process (also referred to as the 're-positioning-of-the-self-technique) in favour of a learning environment that respects diversity and fosters equal learning opportunities for all students (Loeb, 2011). Hence, research (Ainscow, 2007; Portelli, Shields and Vibert, 2007; Bezzina, 2014; Sharma, 2016) indicated three major leadership typologies (*Instructional*; *Transformational* and *Authentic* Leadrship) that support college/school effectiveness and improvement - even though these depend on diverse factors, namely: personal preferences or style, demands of the organizational setting, leaders' internal processes (cognitive processes, attitudes, values and beliefs), cultural norms and the staff's expectations (Leithwood, 2005).

3E.7.2.1 Instructional Leadership

Webb (2005) identified instructional leadership as a fundamental typology to support the 're-positioning' of colleges and schools in favour of socially just, inclusive and equitable education. This is so because instructional leadership "focuses on the goals of the organization and the effectiveness of the processes used to accomplish those goals" (Leithwood, 2005, 8). Hence, the instructional leadership style is "strongly concerned with the schools' core technology (teaching and learning), including the professional learning of teachers and student growth" (Southworth, 2002, 79). Furthermore, Bush and Glover (2003) noted that,

> "instructional leadership focuses on the teaching and learning process and on the behaviour of teachers in working with students. Leaders' influence

> is targeted at student learning via teachers. The emphasis is on the direction and impact of influence rather than the influence process itself (10).

In essence, the instructional leadership model presents three broad categories of practice (Table 3.6) or mission-building activities, which help teachers to 're-position-the-self' to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' processes and practices in schools.

Table 3.6: Instructional Leadership: Categories of Practice

Core Categories	Practices
Defining the School's Mission	Framing and communicating the school's vision and goals in favour of inclusive, socially just and responsive education.
Managing the Instructional Program	Supervising and evaluating teaching (instruction); co-ordinating the curriculum; and monitoring of students' progress.
Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate	Protecting teaching time, promoting professional development; maintaining high visibility; providing incentives for teachers and for learning.

(Adapted from: Leithwood, 2005, 8)

Blasé and Blasé (1998) indicated also that the instructional leadership model promotes professional dialogue and discussion with educators in order to encourage a culture of critical analysis and reflection on the school's core processes (policies) and practices (teaching) so as to sustain inclusive education. In so doing, instructional leaders tend to:

- Propose alternatives or give suggestions to teachers;
- Provide teachers with constant and meaningful feedback;
- Model actions and monitor teachers' behaviour and discourse;
- Use an inquiry-based approach to engage in professional discussions; and
- Praise and promote best practices.

Moreover, instructional leadership also entails effective and focused college or school development planning, which: emphasizes teaching and learning; develops coaching relationships; supports collaboration; encourages the redesign of educational programs; and implements action research to inform decision-making. Finally, Hallinger (2005) posited that instructional leaders are also "…strong directive leaders…" (3), who act as managers of the school, assume responsibility for timetabling and evaluate teaching approaches (Palaiologou et. al., 2011).

All this shows that instructional leadership is a necessary typology for colleges and schools as they develop shared accountability and responsibility, as well as shared pedagogic and curricular understandings, which are crucial to student success (Elmore, 2004). Hence, instructional leaders act as 'culture-builders', since they constantly try to influence colleges and schools to embrace inclusive attitudes and mind-sets.

3E.7.2.2 Transformational Leadership

Unlike instructional leadership (which narrows focus of educational leaders on the core technology in schools), transformational leadership adopts a much broader and a more systemic view "to influence major changes in attitudes and assumptions and to build commitment towards the organization's mission, objectives and strategies" (Yulk, 1994, 271). In this regard, Leithwood (2005) argued that transformational approaches to leadership emphasize,

> "emotions and share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of commitment towards organizational goals on the part of the leaders' colleagues. Increased capacity and commitment result in extra effort and greater productivity" (10).

Sergiovanni (2001) also pointed out that in transformative leadership,

> "leaders and followers are united in pursuit of higher-level goals that are common to both. Both want to shape the school in a new direction. When transformative leadership is practised successfully, purposes that might have started out being separate become fused" (125–26).

Furthermore, Northouse (2004) referred to "transformational leadership as a process that changes and transforms individuals" (169) to "achieve results beyond expectations by sharing a clear vision of excellent performance; seeking to have followers place the goals of the organization above their own interest; and getting followers to address their higher-level needs" (Nguyen, 2007, 3). Hence, both Shields (2010) and Sharma (2016) identified transformational leadership as an essential element to enable the 're-positioning-of-the-self' technique to eliminate 'deficit-thinking', discrimination and inequity. The latter because,

> "transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise of greater individual achievement and of a better life lived in common with others. Transformative leadership links education and educational leadership with the wider social context within which it is embedded. Thus, transformative leadership and leadership for inclusive and socially just education, are inextricably related" (Shields, 2010, 559).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) also emphasized the positive effects of transformational leadership on college or school re-structuring initiatives, since "transformative leaders succeed in gaining the commitment of followers to such a degree that…higher levels of accomplishment become virtually a moral imperative" (Caldwell et. al., 1992, 49).

Research (Southworth, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2009) shows that the transformative leadership model rejected the 'heroic' or 'great man' orientation to leadership in favour of a 'collectivist' or 'collegial' approach to (1) stimulate creative thinking; (2) increase collective responsibility and shared ownership; (3) enable shared decision-making; (4) develop a shared vision for 'communities of difference'; and (5) promote meaningful student learning. Hence, this leadership model adopts a bottom-up approach that,

> "causes change in both individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it creates valuable change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders…Enacted in its authentic form, this leadership model enhances motivation, morale and performance" (Bass, 1998, 21).

In this regard, Leithwood (1994) presented three broad categories of practice – each with specific sets of dimensions (Table 3.7), which support college/school repositioning to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' and better serve minority learners (Kose, 2009).

Table 3.7: Transformational Leadership – Categories and Dimensions

Categories of Practice	Specific set of Dimensions
Setting Directions or *Visioning Strategies* to create a sense of purpose in colleges/schools.	*Building a vision*; *fostering goal acceptance*; and *creating high performance expectations* through effective communication and monitoring.
Developing Strategies or *Efficacy-Building Strategies* to support educators' intellectual and professional development.	*Offering intellectual stimulation*; *modelling best practices*; and *offering individualized support* to increase enthusiasm; reduce frustration; transmit a sense of mission; and increase performance.
Redesigning the Organisation or *Context-Change Strategies* to transform colleges/schools into effective and responsive PLCs.	*Creating a productive culture*; *fostering culture-building*; and *creating collaborative processes to ensure broad participation in decision-making* to align organizational structures with the changing nature of the college/school improvement agenda.

The illustrated 'categories of practice' and 'specific set of dimensions' encompassed within transformational leadership, fit perfectly in the 'education for all' framework as they enable colleges and schools to examine thoroughly structures, norms, discourse

and curricular material to curb 'deficit-thinking' in favour of inclusive education (Kose and Shields, 2009).

Despite the noble dispositions of the transformational leadership typology, the contemporary policy climate within which schools operate raises questions about the validity and effectiveness of the model. This because the Maltese educational system increasingly requires school leaders to adhere to government prescriptions which affect aims, curriculum content and pedagogy, as well as values (Debono, 2014; Bezzina, 2012). In this sense, Bezzina (2012) argued that,

> "whilst the Maltese education authorities are decentralising a number of responsibilities to the school site to create the self-managing school and improve the quality of education…there is doubt as to what leadership model, if any, central authorities are trying to institutionalise at both systems and school level" (51).

Bottery (2001) also remarked that the British system is "increasingly adopting a more directed and controlled approach that dramatically reduced the possibility of realising a genuinely transformational education and leadership" (215), which encouraged school "leaders to be powerful and, if necessary, manipulative to ensure that the policies and practices agreed upon are ones that they can wholeheartedly support and defend" (Webb and Vulliamy, 1996, 313).

3E.7.3.3 Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership or principle-centred leadership is a leadership typology, which has its source in the intellect, heart, mind and souls of individuals and is sustained through meaningful relationships (Bezzina, 2012). This leadership model "calls for a radical shift away from traditional or conventional leadership" (Duignan, 1998, 20), towards "a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organisational context, which results in greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors to foster positive self-development" (Luthans and Avolio, 2003, 243). In this regard, Robinson (2014) indicated that authentic leadership implies authenticity and being genuine (i.e. being true to oneself) by:

> "drawing on the very essence of our values, beliefs, principles and morals that create our 'guiding compass' in the job. Authentic leadership holds making the most of our strengths, recognising and trading off our weaknesses and taking full self-accountability for the impact we have on others. What authentic leadership is not about is adopting the styles or traits of other leaders" (1).

Bezzina (1999) also indicated that authentic leadership "searches for honesty, integrity, trust, a sense of self-awareness, identity and passion in and among educators" (51) to make "leadership directly meaningful and relevant to people's lives" (Bezzina, 1999, 52) by concentrating development efforts on the college or school, i.e. seeing the college or school as a major unit of change in the educational system (Bezzina, 2012).

A central component of authentic leadership is 'genuineness', i.e. leaders who "act in accordance with deep personal values and convictions, to build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers" (Avolio et. al., 2004, 806). In this regard, Covey (1992) argued that authentic leadership,

> "…sees that people are not just resources or assets, not just economic, social, and psychological beings. They are also spiritual beings, who want meaning and a sense of doing something that matters. People do not want to work for a cause with little meaning, even though it taps their mental capacities to their fullest. There must be purposes that lift them, and bring them to their highest selves" (178-9, as cited by Bezzina, 2014, 299).

Essentially, authentic leaders are "…aware of their own and others' values or moral perspective, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and are confident, optimistic, resilient and high on moral character" (Avolio et. al., 2004, 4). In so doing, authentic leaders recognize and value individual differences; have the ability and motivation to identify talents; and support staff members to develop talents into strengths (Luthans and Avolio, 2003); which help to increase staff commitment, job satisfaction, productivity and collective accountability for all students' learning (Gardner et. al., 2005). Robinson and O'Dea (2014) presented four main characteristics of authentic leadership, namely:

1) Self-Awareness and Commitment: application and dedication towards self-learning to better understand the 'self' (as a person) and the world;
2) Humility: ability to overcome 'self-ego' to develop and empower staff members;
3) Influential and Inspirational: generate believability by being 'humane';
4) Strategic, Efficient and Productive: plan strategically and purposefully to be able to reach both short and long termed goals by aligning personal values to develop future leaders and to build sustainable successful organisations.

In essence, authentic leaders exhibit 'salience-of-self' over role through professionally effective, ethically sound and consciously reflective actions (Leithwood, 2006). The latter actions help to 're-position' the local educational system's hierarchical structures,

centralised processes, and prescriptive and bureaucratic practices in favour of inclusive and democratic education for college and school improvement.

3E.8 Leadership Supporting 'Education for All'

Research (Bezzina, 2012; Debono, 2015; Sharma, 2016; Bezzina, Roofe and Holness, 2019) indicates that one of the most critical challenges faced by system-wide educational leaders related to 'HOW' to respond to an ever-increasing student diversity in colleges/schools, while maintaining high quality educational standards. The latter challenge raised growing concerns over issues of achievement gaps; disparity in basic skills in literacy, numeracy and science; absenteeism; enrolment in special education and/or compensatory programmes; and early school leaving. In this regard, research evidence (Gooden, 2014; Vang, 2005; Portelli, Shields and Vibert, 2007; Severiens and Wolff, 2009; Sharma, 2012; Portelli and Sharma, 2014) shows that minority learners are not sharing higher educational standards as their 'other' peers. Valenzuela (2000) also argued that minority learners were more liable to experience academic failure since school structures unintentionally reinforced 'subtractive schooling' practices, which systematically stripped minority learners of their social-cultural capital and academic wellbeing with intentions of assimilation to the majoritized group. To counterbalance the negative effects of 'subtractive educational practices', Ainscow (2016) stressed the importance of developing 'schools for all learners', i.e. learning settings that encourage sustainable change in favour of an 'additive schooling model', which fosters equitable learning opportunities for heterogeneous student populations (Ainscow and Sandhill, 2010). The latter conceptualisation, supporting 'education for all' learners, depends on effective and meaningful systemic leadership processes and practices, which encourage educators to challenge stereotypical assumptions on the abilities of minority learners (Demie, 2016). Hence, UNESCO (2009) emphasised the fundamental role of diverse educational leaders to help, support and lead educators in "viewing education as a basic human right, founded on the belief that 'diversity' is not a problem but an 'opportunity' for enriched teaching experiences" (12). Likewise, Griffiths (2013) posited that,

> "despite the overwhelming demands of the job, leaders occupy a critical position in improving schools and, most importantly, in supporting all students. At the heart of this process are Heads of School" (37).

Ainscow (2007) proposed to educational leaders an 'inclusive turn' by inspiring a common vision for 'education for all' (Ainscow, 2016); challenging the norm of all traditional teaching approaches and methods (Leithwood and Louis, 2011); providing strategic direction and administrative authority (Sergiovanni, 2010); empowering staff members through collective teamwork; and respecting the values of every member in the college/school community (Ainscow, 2012). The latter 'inclusive re-positioning' entails educational leaders with a strong commitment to move beyond the 'status quo', reject 'deficit-thinking' processes, align a shared set of inclusion-oriented values and articulate a clear vision to cater for all learners' needs. According to Riehl (2000) this process involves three main tasks:

a) Fostering new meanings around inclusion, fairness and equity through deliberative dialogue to develop new ways of teaching that respond to individual differences;
b) Promoting inclusive school cultures and instructional programmes to enable change in beliefs and attitudes that support quality education for all learners; and
c) Building productive relationships between schools and communities to ensure that all learners receive effective support from their families and/or communities.

Ryan (2006) also purported that,

> "the task for leadership…is to raise the consciousness of people so that they can recognise and tackle widespread and harmful exclusion practices. This requires school communities to perpetually raise questions on what they do and about the wider context within which learning occurs [since] any democratic society has an obligation to see that every individual is included fairly in schooling processes and in all social, cultural, economic and political institutions. Everyone has the right to participate in what the world has to offer and to reap the benefits of this involvement" (58-59).

In this regard, Shields (2009) remarked that the 'education for all' concept necessitates leadership processes that question the positioning of school policies and practices, vis-a-vis 'deficit theorizing'. Such a concept stimulates 'new-thinking' modes, which strengthen schools' internal-capacity, through their transformation into 'professional learning communities' (Bezzina, 2012). Such a change helps educational leaders to develop 'self-managing' learning settings that continuously try to improve the quality of educational experiences, by projecting a "clear vision and establishing a professional culture which offers choice, opportunity, authority and responsibility" (Bezzina, 2016, 299). Hence, the need for educational leaders to supervise and evaluate teaching, monitor students' progress, coordinate the curriculum, promote professional

development, maintain high visibility within schools, and provide incentives for teachers and for learning.

A fundamental component of the 'education for all' developmental process is 'deliberative thinking and dialogue' among all educators to "explore new perspectives, highlight unexamined assumptions [on inclusion, diversity, fairness and equity], search for points of agreement, and to create alternative evidence-based solutions" (Pickett and Vanderbloemen, 2015, 250). In addition, 'deliberative dialogue' promotes a 'culture of trust' and a 'collective sense of belonging and care' through meaningful relationships, which find their source in the intellect, heart, mind and souls of educators (Bezzina, 2016). The latter interactional process provides educators with opportunities to develop collegiality and to augment knowledge on 'culturally-responsive teaching', by: "putting learners at the heart of the teaching process, sharing power with students, focusing in caring for the whole child, and maintaining high expectations for all" (Riehl, 2000, 64). In this sense, Crockett (2002) presented a conceptual framework of five core leadership characteristics (Table 3.8).

Table 3.8: Crockett's Conceptual Framework

Core Characteristic	Meaning
Ethical Practice	*Ensuring access and accountability*: leaders analyse and reflect on complexities, respect others and advocate for social justice.
Individual Consideration	*Addressing both individuality and exceptionality in learning*: leaders focus on the intricate relationship between learning and culture and propose responsive pedagogies to address achievement gaps.
Equity Under Law	*Providing equitable and inclusive-oriented policies*: leaders develop evidence-based policies in favour of full high quality education for all learners.
Effective Programming	*Planning and developing individualized programmes to reduce achievement gaps*: leaders encourage differentiation and universal teaching approaches as well as monitor and review learning programmes.
Establishing Productive Partnerships	*Establishing partnerships*: leaders network, negotiate and collaborate with members within or outside the school premises. Leaders also encourage cooperation and collaboration between educators in the school.

(Adapted from: Crockett, 2002, 163)

Similarly, Shields (2004) argued that the "...task of the leader is to have a clear vision, to express it articulately and symbolically in ways that attract others, and then to help people work together to create inclusive and deeply democratic institutions" (146). In addition, Capper (1993) claimed that,

> "administrators have a responsibility not only to provide an education that is inclusive and meaningful to all students but also to be sure that students have access to information about identities and cultures representative of the diversity of society" (292).

In so doing, educational leaders embrace democracy and demonstrate ability to:

a) Create a college and school environment that promotes trust, aspiration and loyalty;

b) Develop and foster a collaborative and professional culture;

c) Build strong relationships with parents and the general community; and

d) Promote staff development.

All this shows that agility, flexibility and adaptability of leadership styles and approaches are essential to respond effectively to the rampant pace of change in an ever-changing educational landscape.

Section 3F: General Conclusion

This extensive review examined local and international literature around the notions of ‘neoliberalism’; ‘deficit-thinking’; ‘education for all or inclusive education’; ‘good governance’ and ‘educational leadership for inclusive education’. The first part of the review provided a theoretical analysis of the ‘deficit-thinking’ paradigm, i.e.:

- Neoliberalism and the ‘concept of the norm’;
- The three conceptual deficit frameworks; and
- Valencia’s six components forming the deficit framework.

The analysis revealed the complexity and interrelatedness of deficit-thinking processes, deriving from unquestioned neoliberal educational approaches, which are perpetuated unintentionally (but in a consistent manner) by educators in their teaching practices.

The central part for the literature review presents a comprehensive framework for eliminating deficit-thinking, through ‘the re-positioning of the self’ technique based on six main pillars: *human rights*, *social justice*, *equity*, *multi-culturalism*, *inclusion* and *democracy*. The latter substitute the six components of deficit-thinking (*blaming the victim*, *form of oppression*, *pseudo-scientific knowledge*, *educability*, *temporal changes* and *heterodoxic discourse*) and aim to:

a) Increase student attendance, academic achievement and holistic attainment;
b) Improve the structure of schools to reduce ELET;
c) Re-centre and strengthen staff capacity through focused CPD;
d) Strengthen school culture and community links; and
e) Create equity among students, parents and the general community.

Furthermore, the proposed paradigm shift promotes:

a) A truly democratic education for social justice;
b) A sense of community and belonging as a tool for creating inclusion;
c) Social justice as a tool of validation;
d) Deep democracy to develop shared understanding and productive participation;
e) Effective and empowering additional support structures;
f) Academic excellence for all learners as a tool for systemic change;
g) Responsive communication strategies to enable systemic change; and
h) Research-based and socially just teaching approaches for all learners.

This paradigm shift (Figure 3.3) led to the final section of the review, which focuses on ‘good governance’ and ‘strong educational leadership’ as critical prerequisites for inclusive education. Apart from exploring issues of ‘good governance’ in education,

the review also delves into elements of 'strong educational leadership' and examines three diverse leadership styles:

- The *Instructional* leadership style;
- The *Transformational* leadership style; and
- The *Authentic* leadership style.

Combined together it is proposed that the above styles facilitate the 're-positioning-of-the-self' process for 'education for all'. Moreover, the section provides a detailed analysis of leadership traits, which embrace the concept of schools as 'communities of difference' or 'PLCs' that sustain a change implementation process to eliminate 'deficit-thinking'. Among the most significant leadership traits, one finds the ability of educational leaders to:

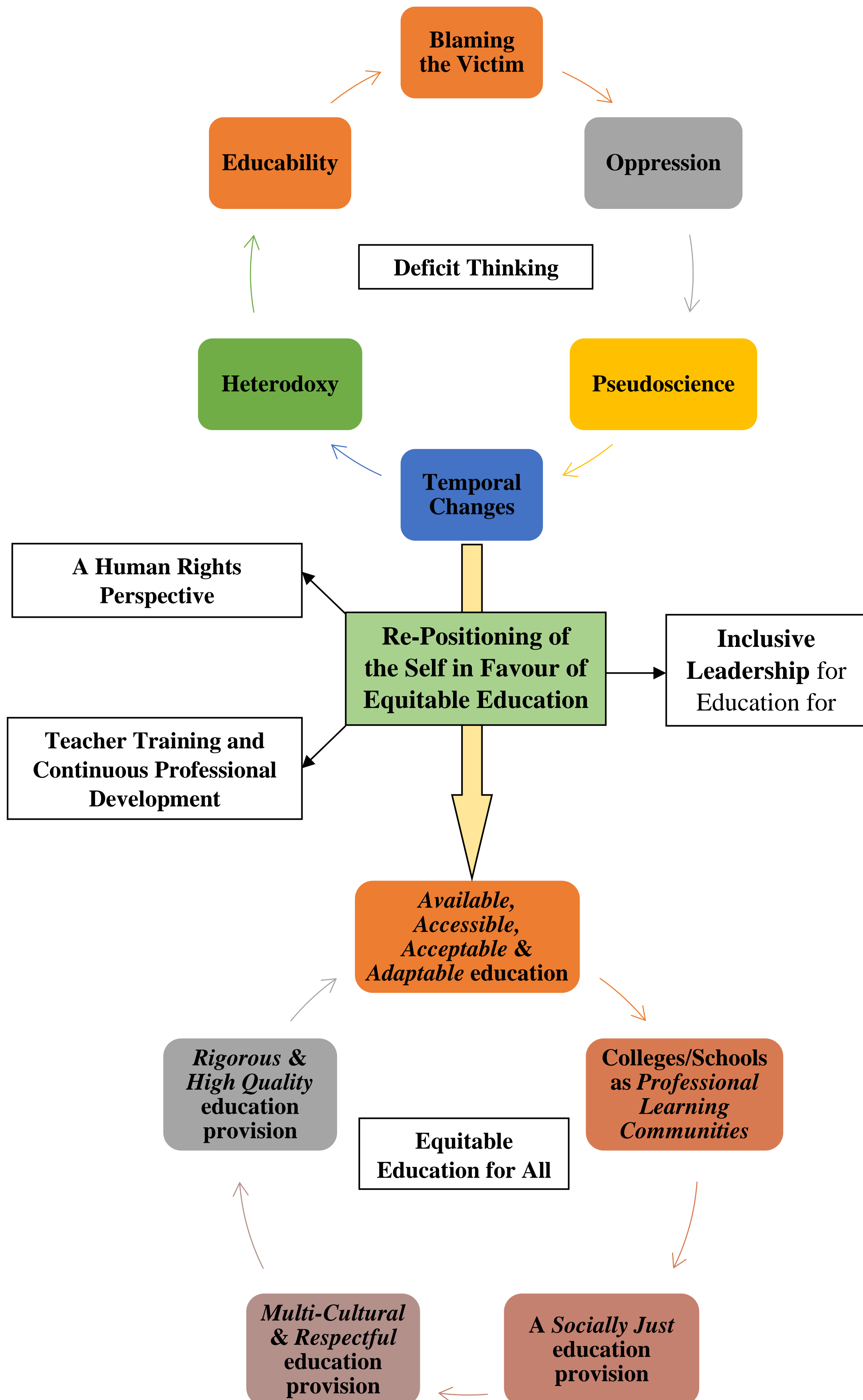
a) *Communicate* clearly with staff members to facilitate understanding of the change process and content;
b) *Consult* and *involve* staff members to secure ownership and commitment towards change through deliberative dialogue and thinking;
c) *Develop* personnel through focused CPD training;
d) *Promote* a 'culture of change' by enabling trust and allowing staff members to work collaboratively together without the need for excessive control;
e) *Demonstrate* confidence and enthusiasm during the change process.

Apart from the above traits, literature also highlighted the importance of other factors such as *teacher leadership* and *respect for pupils' voice*.

Literature suggests that the path towards full inclusion is not straightforward but requires strong leadership, commitment and planning to help all stakeholders move away from 'comfort zones' or 'status quo'. Hence, the need for educational leaders to advocate for a shift from personal awareness to social action, based on 'respect for diversity', advocacy, solidarity, awareness of societal structures of oppression, and critical social consciousness (Freire and Macedo, 1995). Ultimately, when school leaders challenge deficit practices and foster an equitable education, space is created to provide equity and equal access to every learner in public educational systems.

The next chapter (Chapter 4) focuses on the type of research methodology used during the processes of 'data collection' and 'data analysis' to examine the state of play of inclusive education in Malta.

Figure 3.3: Framework for Eliminating 'Deficit-Thinking'



Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) human beings "have long been concerned to come to grips with their environment and to understand the nature of the phenomena it presents to their senses" (5). The latter desire generated research studies in every aspect of human life. with the premise that research "will give us, as a society, what we need to know to improve our lives" (Bean, 2005, 65). This search for truth evolved also in "a process of systematic inquiry" in the field of education with the aim to improve or change "the educational experiences of students", suffering from marginalization, discrimination, oppression and/or exclusion (Mertens, 2010, 1). The desire to investigate the 'of' aspect of 'inclusive education' gave rise to the present research inquiry, which aims to 'free' the educational system from 'deficit-thinking'.

The current chapter (while acknowledging that educational research politics and decision-making are inextricably intertwined) draws attention to the politics of this study and the implications it had for the undertaken research (i.e. the move from 'pure' research towards applied and evaluative research) (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Hence, the chapter highlights analytical insights into the study's methodology, which utilized a robust and rigorous mixed-methods approach to propose the 'repositioning-of-the-self' technique as the main theoretical contribution of this thesis. In so doing, the chapter presents three main sections, namely:

1) Section 4.2 which provides a critical review of 'pragmatism' as the research study's 'paradigm' and an analysis of the ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinnings of the thesis. The section articulates philosophical reflections about ***how*** pragmatism is linked to the pursuit of inclusion, social justice and equity in relation to the study's research questions and investigations.
2) Section 4.3 illustrates the study's design, i.e. the utilized research tools; the research site and participants; specific sampling practices; and the data analysis process. The latter discussion explicates HOW the integration of both quantitative and qualitative research tools enabled the researcher to respond effectively to the study's main aims. Issues of trustworthiness, validity and reliability were also explored.
3) Section 4.4 presents the main ethical considerations; the researchers positionality and reflexivity; and the study's main strengths and limitations.

The chapter ends with a general conclusion, which summarizes the main foundations and theoretical perspectives of this research.

4.2 Methodology of the Research Study

Biesta (2010) described research methodology as a way to systematically solve research problems, by logically adopting various steps to understand both the product and process of the scientific inquiry. Essentially, research methodology is the "science of studying how research is to be carried out" to explore "the research problem/s from various possible angles to discover truth" (Martens, 2015, 3). Such a process involves the intersection of philosophy, research design and specific methods (Creswell, 2007).

4.2.1 The Research Paradigm: Pragmatism

Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) emphasised that "to ensure a strong research design, researchers need to choose a 'research paradigm' that is congruent with their beliefs on the nature of reality" (2). This is because 'paradigms' tend to summarize the researchers' beliefs and practices in relation to knowledge development. In this regard, Morgan (2007) identified four intertwined versions of the 'paradigm' concept, which function as "heuristics" or "practical tools" to assist researchers in organising research, solving research questions, and informing the interpretation and meaning of research data (Abbott, 2004, 142). The identified paradigmatic versions included (starting from the broadest to the narrowest level):

a) Paradigms as 'worldviews' or "all-encompassing ways of experiencing and thinking about the world, including beliefs about morals, values, and aesthetics" (Morgan, 2007, 50). The latter version viewed 'research paradigms' (namely the positivist, postpositivist, interpretivist, constructivist, transformative and pragmatic paradigms) as 'philosophical worldviews' or "as ways of thinking about and making sense of the complexities of the real world" (Patton, 2002, 69) through the use of "a set of basic beliefs, assumptions, strategies and criteria for rigour" that guide all research actions (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011, 78).
b) Paradigms as 'epistemological stances', which viewed the concepts of positivism, postpositivism, interpretivism, constructivism, transformatism, and pragmatism as distinct belief systems that endorsed broad differences on the study of the nature of knowledge and justification (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). This paradigmatic version funnelled down the researcher's potential research approach to a specific system of beliefs, that determined the choice of research methods (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods) and design to uncover knowledge (Creswell and Clark, 2011).

c) Paradigms as shared belief systems as regards meaningfulness of research questions and appropriateness of methodology. Denscombe (2008) viewed the shared beliefs version as being flexible, permeable and multi-layered to accommodate pluralistic research techniques to effectively investigate research questions and problems. This version demanded the development of communities of practice, where researchers undertook shared learning and mutual collaboration.
d) Paradigms as 'model examples' of research, which represented shared views about how to conduct research investigations by using the appropriate methodology. In essence, this version determined what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how results should be interpreted (Taylor and Medina, 2013).

Instead of viewing the above four paradigmatic versions as 'mutually exclusive', the researcher nested all versions within each other (Morgan, 2007) to effectively address the study's research questions and investigations. From a philosophical perspective, the 'paradigm' of this thesis study comprised,

> "...a view of the nature of reality – whether it is external or internal to the knower *(ontology)*; view of the type of possibly generated knowledge and the standards for justifying that view *(epistemology)*; and a disciplined and robust approach to create knowledge *(methodology)*" (Taylor and Medina, 2013, 2).

Essentially, the study's paradigm guided all methodological actions of the researcher, which ranged from the development of specific research questions to the selection of research participants or sites, to the choice of data collection instruments and procedures to data analysis techniques (Guba and Lincoln, 2005).

The vision for a strong, equitable and morally just educational system prompted the current research study, which strived to deconstruct 'deficit-rooted-stereotypical' myths in local policies and practices (at all system levels) to develop 'alternative modes of thinking' that nurture and sustain 'education for all' (Vinz, 2015). William (2007) argued that "research originates with at least one question about one phenomenon of interest" (45), which in this case inquired *why educational leaders at all system levels try to eliminate the 'deficit' ideology*. The latter problem generated other sub-research questions, namely:

1) How do 'neoliberal approaches to education' and 'deficit-thinking' constrict the re-structuring and re-culturing processes of the Maltese educational system?
2) Why does 'deficit-thinking' constitute a major challenge for 'education for all'?

3) What are the effects of 'deficit-thinking' on educators, learners and parents?
4) How does 'inclusive leadership' enable the 're-positioning of the self' technique to ensure that educators and students form an active part 'of' school organizations?
5) Why is the 're-positioning-of-the-self' technique fundamental to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' processes and practices?

These research questions gave rise to a relatively new research agenda in the field of 'inclusive education', which inquired the concept of 'education for all' by delving into the "pathologies of schools" to uproot the invisible strengths of 'deficit-thinking' in the Maltese educational system (Slee, 2001, 175). Rather than investigating 'disability' by considering the 'label' or 'syndrome' as a valid and unitary concept across individuals and contexts, the researcher probed into the discourse, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, practices, and relationships of educational leaders, teachers, learning support educators (LSEs) and learners to examine the consequences of 'deficit-thinking' on leadership, pedagogy and social relationships. The objective of this study was to move 'inclusive education' from the sphere of 'disability' and/or 'special education' to 'diversity', a terrain that "incorporates an extensive spectrum of concerns, discourse and practices" (Thomas, 2013, 474). In so doing, the researcher proposed the 'repositioning-of-the-self' technique as an effective method to: raise conscious awareness on established beliefs, challenge the 'status quo', change existent power structures and imbalances, strengthen social relations, and ascertain a systemic process for empowerment (Vinz, 2015). Similarly, Zarb (1997) posited that, "emancipation is not something with a fixed beginning and an end; rather it is an ongoing dialectical process of development or growth", leading towards the gradual elimination of 'deficit-thinking' (53).

Although the main objectives of this thesis study embraced the 'constructivist' paradigm, the latter worldview was not utilized. This is because the researcher refuted the claim that 'reality' or 'truth' in a social science inquiry could solely be accessed through a single method (Mexcy, 2003). Instead, 'pragmatism' was considered as the most suitable paradigm, since it advocated for "multiple methods of making sense of the social world", to develop sensible solutions to contemporary 'neoliberal-deficit-thinking' issues in the Maltese educational system (Greene, 2007, 120). Through, the 'pragmatic approach', the researcher managed to move beyond the metaphysical and emphasize the importance of common sense and practical thinking in studying the 'deficit' ideology. Hence, the 'pragmatic paradigm' supported the researcher to design

a flexible, practical, sensible and pluralistic process of enquiry (framework for action) that complemented the exploratory nature of the research study, which intended to generate different data from diverse data sources, to dispense a better understanding of the effects of 'neoliberalism' and 'deficit-thinking' (Hathcoat and Meixner, 2017; Hall, 2013). In this sense, Shannon-Baker (2016) also referred to 'pragmatism' as a "practical, useful and workable system of methods for achieving desired results" (57), while Molina-Azorin (2016) argued that "getting things done in research is often said to be pragmatic" (23). In essence, 'pragmatism' provided the necessary philosophical and methodological foundations to the use of mixed methods research, which allowed the researcher to be less restricted and rigid in the conduct of the study (Morgan, 2014). Moreover, research flexibility also helped the researcher to add in valuable knowledge to the field of 'inclusive education' through the identification and sorting out of "gross power imbalances", which "fuelled ethically questionable practices that contributed to systemic educational inequalities" (Taylor and Medina, 2013, 6).

To successfully uproot the ethically problematic effects of 'neoliberal-deficit-thinking' approaches to education, the current study emphasised on "actual behaviours (lines of action), different beliefs supporting behaviours (warranted assertions), and consequences emanating from behaviours (workability)" (Morgan, 2014, 27). Rather than focusing on antecedent conditions (theories) or methods, the researcher focused primarily on the research problem/s under investigation by: (1) concentrating on the research questions; and (2) utilizing pluralistic approaches to derive knowledge on the 'deficit-thinking' phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In this regard, the researcher utilized the 'pragmatist' notion of "what works" to effectively investigate the research questions by thoughtfully combining and integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods and data (Hall, 2013). The ultimate objective was to develop useful points of connection to create permeable and multi-layered shared beliefs that facilitated the implementation of mixed methods research techniques (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The latter approach represented an "important departure from the either/or assumptions of quantitative or qualitative approaches" because it appreciated the valuability of both methods to enhance theory development in the field of 'education for all' (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). Hence, this study largely used an abductive approach to reasoning both 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education'. By relying on abductive reasoning, mixed methods research offered an important new structure to conceive of the research

study; produced more robust measures of association; and allowed multiple paths to meaning to exist (Wheeldon, 2010). The latter because this study concentrated more on the nature of experience rather than on the nature of reality, since pragmatists doubt that reality could ever be determined once and for all (Cameron, 2011). The researcher viewed reality as a normative concept accessible through multiple empirical inquiries as knowledge claims could not be totally abstracted from contingent beliefs, habits and experiences (Barnes, 2019; Mitchell, 2018). To summarize, the three main motives that triggered the 'pragmatic approach' as the research study's paradigm, included: (a) the 'action-orientedness' nature of the approach; (b) the stress on action and learning from experiences (reflection) through abductive reasoning; and (c) the provision of a strong and appropriate framework for the research enquiry.

As a guiding research paradigm, 'pragmatism' (as a philosophy and also as a philosophical justification for the mixed methods research approach) was not immune to criticism. For instance, Hall (2013) criticized 'pragmatism' from a methodological stance for not defining clearly "what works", when it comes to research methods, while Sale et. al. (2002) decried 'pragmatism' from an axiological point of view for ignoring to address the role of values in research by failing to answer the question of "…what works: for whom and to what extent?" (57). However, the 'pragmatic approach' was firmly denounced for not addressing the differing assumptions of both quantitative and qualitative paradigms, which made mixing methods for cross-validation or triangulation not logical (Biddle and Schafft, 2015; Creswell, 2014). In trying to overcome the latter anomalies, this study presented 'pragmatism' as a coherent and integrated paradigm that combined quantitative and qualitative research methods as two intertwined (rather than conflicting) philosophies (Hathcoat and Meixner, 2017; Biddle and Schafft, 2015; Dieronitou, 2014; Hall, 2013). This research study rejected the privileging of ontology over epistemology and epistemology over method. Instead, it promoted a 'pragmatic approach' that centred methodology and its connection with epistemology and methods to combine numerically coded data with the reliability and validity of empirical counts on lived experiences (Hall, 2013; Johnson and Christensen, 2012). Hence, the mixed methods approach helped the researcher to conceptualize ontological, epistemological, and axiological beliefs for pragmatism, by advocating "…a non-singular *ontology*, a relational *epistemology*, a mixed methds *methodology*, and a value-laden *axiology*" to overcome the disadvantages inherent in monomethod research (Hall, 2013, 35).

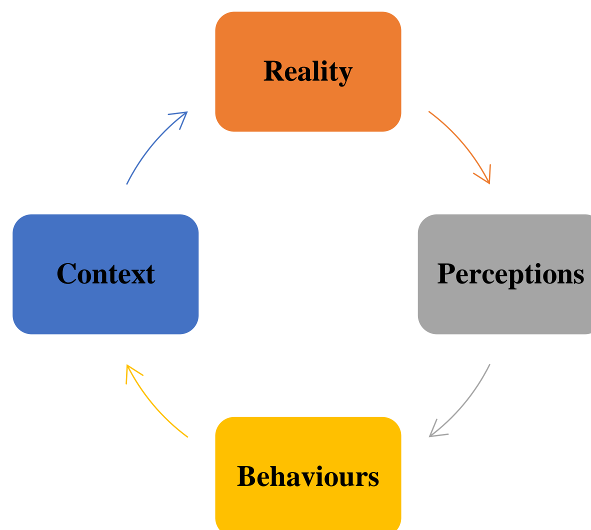
4.2.2 Philosophical Underpinnings of Pragmatism

'Pragmatism' as the overall research paradigm provided a solid philosophical framework that explicity addressed the thesis study's central concerns, namely: issues of 'neoliberalism', 'deficit-thinking', inclusivity, social justice, power, and leadership within the local educational system. The proposed research framework rested on two main credentials, i.e. (a) the rejection of the traditional ontological dualism between 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity'; and (b) the endorsement of "empirical inquiry" over 'idealistic' and/or 'rationalistic' approaches to "…develop shared understanding of the life-world experiences of both educators and students" in local colleges and schools (Taylor and Medina, 2013, 14). Furthermore, the latter credentials served to "bridge the gap between the scientific method and structionalist orientation of older approaches and the naturalistic methods and freewheeling orientation of relatively new research approaches" (Hall, 2013, as cited in Kaushik and Walsh, 2019, 2). By positioning, in the middle of the 'objectivity–subjectivity' continuum, the researcher managed to work in tandem with 'objective' quantitative approaches (questionnaires; sociometry) and 'subjective' qualitative methods (interviews, participant observations; focus groups; document analysis) to avoid conveying an 'anything goes' attitude while investigating and answering *what*, *why*, and *how* research questions (Hathcourt and Meixner, 2017; Johnson and Christensen, 2014). Glasersfeld (1995) also maintained that "it is certainly not the case that 'anything goes' in the pragmatic paradigm..." through the concept of 'viability' as a quality criterion for knowledge, i.e. corroborated knowledge to achieve second-order viability or knowledge that is not only useful for the researcher but also to others.

The study's main objective was to generate strong 'intersubjective knowledge' on the effects of 'neoliberal approaches to education', 'deficit-thinking', and 'inclusive education'. In so doing, the researcher adopted external but multiple views of reality (as opposed to positivism and realism) and chose the one that best fitted the research questions to develop theoretical and practical insights on the study's central concerns (Ma, 2012). The current research study regarded 'intersubjectivity' as "a key element of social life" (Morgan, 2014, 67), based on the "sum of interactions mediated by and through the larger external environment that results in the production of shared meaning, norms, and values, which, lead to group identity and collective actions" (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, 7). Hence, 'intersubjectivity', or the search for shared beliefs or

meanings, addressed the issue of 'incommensurability' by conceptualizing the 'reality cycle' as the research study's main ontological stance. The latter stance considered the existence of one social reality on both 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education' with multiple perceptions of that reality in the social actors' minds, which caused reality to change in a continuous process (Mertens, 2012). Essentially, the 'reality cycle' (Figure 4.1) presented four main characteristics, namely: (1) reality is perceived by humans or social actors differently; (2) perceptions of reality control humans' behaviours; (3) the interactions among these behaviours construct a new context over a period of time; and (4) the construction of a new context generates a new reality that is stable but changes periodically (Hathcourt and Meixner, 2017). The latter four characteristics correlated with the assumption that "truths are not relative…what are relative are opinions about truths" (Davila, 2001, 79), which premise underpinned the post-modern philosophical position that no individual can claim to have the ultimate truth and that the complexity of reality can only be represented through several coexisting and legitimate descriptions (Ameln, 2004). The 'reality cycle' standpoint allowed the researcher to switch between the objective and subjective views of the one external reality on 'education for all' and the multiple perceptions on 'difference' and 'inclusive education' in the participants' minds, through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Figure 4.1: The Reality Cycle



Flowing directly from the 'reality cycle' ontological stance is the thesis study's epistemological position, which considered knowledge as 'socially constructed' and governed by normative rules that are historically and culturally mediated (Flick, 2014). Human beings are considered as 'sentient and agentic species', who not only construct

and reconstruct reality but are also constrained by society in the process of construction and re-construction at the same time (Anastasiou and Kauffman, 2011). The question of how constructed knowledge (by diverse educational stakeholders on 'disability' or 'minorities') evolved into a commonly shared understanding of the 'deficit-thinking' reality is reflected in the current research study's construction of 'education for all'. In this regard, the researcher aligned the thesis study with 'social constructionism' (Hall, 2013), which maintained that,

> "constructionists do not try to rule on what is or is not fundamentally real. Whatever is, simply is. However, the moment we begin to describe and/or to specify what there is – what is true or objectively real – we enter a world of discourse" (Gergen, 2015, 219).

In the social process of knowledge construction, language played a crucial role since,

> "…discourse constructs the topic. It defines and produces the object of knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others" (Hall, 2013, 72).

Therefore, the 'concept of discourse' is also applied to focus on language issues during the knowledge construction process. The latter approach viewed knowledge and social systems as contingent on human practices and constructed out of interactions between human beings and the world in specific social contexts (Morgan, 2014). Galbin (2014) maintained that "individuals perceive and construct what practices and experiences mean for them, which meanings account to discourse, actions, and behaviour" (87). Burr (2015) also described the relationship between human beings and society as a 'dialectical process', where,

> "human beings continually construct the social world, which then becomes a reality to which they respond. So although human beings construct the social world they cannot construct it any way they choose. At birth they enter a world already constructed by their predecessors, which assumes the status of an objective reality for them and for later generations" (210).

Similarly, 'social reality' on 'inclusive education' is co-constructed through mental constructions and critical interactions and engagements with schooling processes and practices. How 'inclusive education' is perceived by educational stakeholders has a direct impact on how it is implemented. The latter because all conceived knowledge impacted on the educators' actions, which then affected power structures and relations. Hence, by challenging taken-for-granted understandings on

'inclusive education', the researcher unsettled existing power structures and relations in the Maltese educational system to develop a unique vision for future models of 'inclusive education', based on 'positive differentiation', which focused on elaborating individual skills rather than stressing on weaknesses or deviations (Gindis, 2003).

A major epistemological underpinning of this thesis study is that knowledge formation on 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education' was intrinsically linked to the research participants' use of language and discourse; actions; constant engagement in educational matters; and interactions as well as to learning from the latter experiences and outcomes of actions. Essentially, the study's social constructionist perspective, as opposed to a constructivist stance, "located meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a community context" (Zimmerman and Dickerson, 1996, 80). The latter approach challenged the imposition of one knowledge system considered as superior over another, which credence helped the researcher to question existing educational conditions and statuses. The study's social constructionist stance presented five cardinal principles, namely:

1) Realities in local colleges and schools were socially constructed;
2) The use of language (discourse) constructed current educational realities;
3) Knowledge is sustained by social processes;
4) Reflexivity in human beings was emphasised; and
5) The educational process was viewed as both a subjective and an objective reality.

Moreover, Crotty (1998) argued that,

> "there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with realities in the world. There is no meaning without a mind as meaning is not discovered but constructed. In this understanding, different people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (8-9).

Crotty's assumption also had significant implications for 'inclusive education' and the clientele it serves since,

> "it is principally through interacting with others that children find out what culture is about and how it conceives the world. Unlike any other species, human beings deliberately teach each other in settings outside the ones in which the knowledge that will be taught will be used" (Ma, 2012, 169).

Hence, the current research study: (1) rejected the traditional positivistic approaches to knowledge; (2) took a critical stance in relation to taken-for-granted assumptions on the social world, which reinforced the interests of dominant social groups; (3) upheld

the belief that the way humans understood the world was the product of a process of interaction and negotiation between groups of people; (4) maintained that the goal of research was not only to produce fixed knowledge, but to also come up with valid and strong alternatives and possibilities; and (5) redefined psychological constructs such as 'mind', 'self' and 'emotion' as socially-constructed processes that are not intrinsic to the individual but produced through social discourse and relationships. The latter conditions allowed the researcher to identify and accept observable and unobservable knowledge to dismantle 'deficit-thinking' from 'micro-and-macro-level' discourse. In addition, the development of 'double-faced' knowledge served to overcome portraying an 'anti-philosophical' attitude throughout the research study (Mertens, 2012). Finally, the concept of 'knowledge as constructed' (Galston, 2017) also applied for 'scientific knowledge' as research in itself is a process of construction or "the social construction of social constructionism" (Burr, 2015, 15). In this regard, the researcher declared the hereby-presented work as constructed in specific historical and cultural contexts.

The 'social constructionist' epistemological perspective influenced the thesis study's theoretical stance, which, in turn, informed the study's chosen methodology. The theoretical perspective that imbued all aspects of the current research project was 'critical pragmatism', which derived from the learnings of 'critical theory' or 'critical inquiry' (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). The latter perspective provided:

> "an analytical framework for examining the actual processes and outcomes of planning practice that is contextually situated; that operates within and through pervasive power relations, which are exercised through and influence multiple rationalities, and practice in which the planning choices that are made are value-laden and mutable"

The research study's proposed analytical framework dismissed 'positivism' for solely equating all knowledge with scientific knowledge and completely neglecting aesthetic, hermeneutic, moral, critical and creative forms of learning (Johnson and Gray, 2010). In this regard, 'critical inquiry' proved useful to not only "uncover issues of 'power imbalance' and 'status quo' [in local colleges and schools] but also to propose changes to emancipate the disempowered, redress inequality, and promote individual freedoms within a democratic society" (Morgan, 2014, 79). Hence, the latter analytic approach delved into five main elements, i.e. context, outcomes, rationality, power and ethics to reduce educational inequities by linking the study's conduct with college and school politics and policymaking (Ma, 2012). 'Critical inquiry' also helped to conceptualize

'the dialogical conscientization model' (Freire, 1972), to situate the study in the 'social justice' domain, by: (1) centralizing focus on the experiences of educators and minority learners to study how 'deficit-thinking' is structured and reproduced in local colleges and schools; (2) analysing the way educational inequities correlated with asymmetric power relations within the Maltese hierarchical educational system; (3) examining how inquiry on socially just educational processes and practices is linked to political, social and leadership actions/outcomes; and (4) investigating ways in which the educational system could be re-cultured/re-structured to enable 'education for all' (Mertens, 2009). Essentially, the researcher philosophized an action-oriented approach to knowledge in pursuit of social justice, democracy, freedom, and equity.

The study's theoretical perspective relied also on a strength-based stance, which "elaborated and expanded on [the educational system's] strengths to move the system from good to great, from doing well to always winning and from constantly correcting to forever innovating" (Pratt, 2016, 511). Cohen et. al. (2007) also posited that,

> "the purpose of critical educational research is intensely practical, to bring about a more just, egalitarian society in which individual and collective freedoms are practised to eradicate the effects of illegitimate power" (26).

In turn, the study's transformative mind-set generated a "substantive agenda", which is based on Valencia's (1997) investigation of 'deficit-thinking' and Shields' et. al. (2004) notion of 're-positioning-of-the-self' to examine:

> "…the relationships between school and society – how schools perpetuate or reduce inequality; the social construction of knowledge and curricula, who defines worthwhile knowledge, what ideological interests this serves, and how this reproduces inequality in society; how power is produced and reproduced through education; whose interests are served by education and how legitimate these are…" (Cohen et. al., 2007, 27).

The strong parallelism between the objectives of this research project and the principles of 'critical theory' allowed the researcher to: (1) construct an understanding of 'deficit-thinking'; (2) hypothesise that 'deficit-thinking' resulted from gross power imbalances; (3) identify cohorts of minority learners in the local educational system; (4) highlight discourse (language) as a powerful tool that perpetuated 'deficit-thinking' and enabled change resistance for inclusive education; and (5) demonstrate how educational leaders could be catalysts for meaningful change through 'inclusive leadership'. Hence, 'critical pragmatism' served as an effective tool to generate scientific and legitimate knowledge on 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education', which was free from any ambiguity to

create practical knowledge that had utility for action for making purposeful difference in practice (Goldkuhl, 2012) and to enable theory development in the field of 'education for all' (Green and Hall, 2010). Essentially, the research study promoted a problem-solving, action-oriented process of 'social inquiry', founded on democratic values and on a commitment to progress (Collins, 2017). All this established a natural connection between 'critical pragmatism' and social justice research on issues of equity, fairness, and freedom from 'deficit-thinking'. To summarize, this research study provided an all inclusive framework of inquiry that supported interdisciplinary research with an ethics-based pursuit of democracy, equity, justice and freedom (Koenig et. al., 2019).

4.2.3 Methodological Justifications for Pragmatism

Apart from clear and well-defined ontological, epistemological and theoretical standpoints, 'pragmatism', as the research study's guiding paradigm, necessitated also a robust methodological stance to better understand 'the process of scientific inquiry' to achieve reliable and legitimate knowledge on both 'deficit-thinking' and 'education for all' (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). According to Morgan (2014) methodology in research is,

> "…best conceived as a process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. It is a most important tool for advancing knowledge, for promoting progress, and for enabling man to relate effectively with the environment, to resolve conflicts" (as cited in Cohen et. al., 2007, 45).

Hence, this research study proposed 'mixed methods research' (Fettas and Molina-Azorin, 2017) or 'mixed research' (Johnson and Christensen, 2012) as the thesis' main methodological orientation (Creswell, 2014). Given that 'mixed-methods research' is also understood as an 'abductive process', the proposed methodology conformed to the study's pragmatic paradigm, which viewed the process of acquiring knowledge as a 'continuum' rather than as two opposing poles of either objectivity (through the use of quantitative methods and deductive reasoning) and subjectivity (by utilizing qualitative approaches and inductive reasoning) (Goles and Hirschheim, 2000). In this regard, the 'mixed methods' methodology facilitated the generation of 'intersubjective knowledge' by combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to operationalize the study's research questions. The latter process helped the researcher to move back and forth between deduction and induction to create reliable knowledge and to enhance theory development and practice (Goldkuhl, 2012). Essentially, the 'mixed-methods' approach

connected the process of designing the research to the research questions, and linked the design concerns to the choice of methods.

The 'mixed methods research' referred to the use of two or more methods of data collection in a research study, to map out and explain the richness and complexity of human behaviour from more than one standpoint, by using both quantitative and qualitative data. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) posited that,

> "…mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher combines elements of quantitative and qualitative research approaches (i.e. use of quantitative and qualitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis and inference methods) for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (123).

Moreover, 'mixed research' also provided the "opportunity to compensate for inherent method weaknesses; capitalize on method strengths; as well as offset inevitable method biases" (Greene, 2007, xiii) to "legitimate the use of multiple approaches in answering research questions, rather than restricting researchers' choices" (Johnson et. al., 2007, 17). The latter justification ended as a prime advantage for 'mixed method research' since it offered,

> "…an expansive and creative form of research, and not a limiting one. It is inclusive, pluralistic and complementary and it suggest that researchers take an eclectic approach to method selection in the thinking about and conduct of research" (Molina-Azorin, 2016, 231).

Hence, the 'mixed research' approach upheld the notion of 'complementary strengths' and rejected dogmatism (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). In so doing, the researcher utilized the strengths of one research method to enhance and support another method, to improve research quality and avoid overlapping weaknesses (Ma, 2012). Another advantage of the proposed research methodology was 'triangulation' (Greener, 2008; Molina-Azorin, 2016). The purpose of 'triangulation' was to enrich and strengthen research results by using different methods of data collection and analysis to gain a complete understanding of 'deficit-thinking'. Denzin (1978) contended that "…what is sought in triangulation is an interpretation of the phenomena at hand that reveals the subject matter in a thickly and contextualised manner" (39). Similarly, Flick (2007) argued that,

> "Triangulation…allows a principle surplus of knowledge…For example, triangulation should produce knowledge at different levels, which means they go beyond the knowledge made possible by one approach and thus contribute to promoting quality in research" (41).

Furthermore, triangulation was also used to check on findings from a particular method to another. Glogowska (2001) contented that, "…using interviews, observations and questionnaires together in a study, is an effective way of producing reliable, empirical data" (701). Essentially, triangulation presented three procedural purposes:

1) To test agreement of findings obtained from different measuring instruments;
2) To clarify and build on the results of one method with another method; and
3) To demonstrate how results from one method can affect subsequent methods or the inferences drawn from results (Caracelli et. al., 1997).

However, the 'mixed research' approach also presented a number of challenges (Morse, 2010), namely: (1) 'mixed methods' design can be complex to plan and to implement; and (2) triangulation presented difficulties to settle discrepancies that arose during the interpretation of findings (Bryman, 2007).

To gain a greater understanding of the chain of evidence that links 'neoliberal approaches to education' to 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education' to 'leadership', the study utilized a 'mixed-methods sequential explanatory approach' (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). In so doing, the researcher utilized quantitative results (numerical statistical data) to confirm and test outcomes of qualitative data, and qualitative results to approve and add meaning to quantitative data. Essentially, the qualitative aspect of this research study sustained and enhanced the study's quantitative domain. Similarly, Eckert (2013) contended that,

> "sequential explanatory approach involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data…In regards to the chain of evidence, the quantitative phase of the research established the linkages, whereas the qualitative phase brought nuance, context, and understanding to each link in the chain" (79).

Furthermore, Haralambos et. al. (2004) emphasised that,

> "…thanks to qualitative research, researchers are able to come up with certain results and knowledge which could solve human problems and increase productivity. Descriptive data are supported by humanistic methods, rather than scientific or numerical methods" (864).

Hence, the researcher utilized the 'grounded theory' approach (from a constructionist perspective) to effectively analyse all generated qualitative data (Charmaz, 2006). The latter because 'grounded theory' provided connections with broader contextual issues related to 'neoliberalism', 'deficit-thinking', 'inclusion' and 'educational leadership'. Finally, the sequential explanatory process helped the researcher to overcome the main

drawbacks inherent in: (1) quantitative methods, namely: the collection and provision of solely narrow numerical descriptions; and (2) qualitative tools, i.e.: generalizability difficulties; and the influence of bias when interpreting data (Harwell, 2011).

Table 4.1 below synthesises the methodology, which acted as the bedding rock of this research study, namely: ontology, epistemology, methods, and logic of inquiry.

Table 4.1: Methodology

Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology	Logic of Reasoning
'**Reality cycle**': the existence of a single reality on 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education' with participants having their own separate interpretations on both 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education'.	'**Social Constuctionism**': knowledge is socially and culturally mediated, i.e.: knowledge on 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education' is intrinsically linked to the participants' use of language, actions and interactions, and to learning from the latter experiences.	'**Mixed-Methods**': Quantitative research methods to test the single reality on 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education' among educators and learners. Qualitative methods to investigate, analyse and interpret separate interpretations of 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education'.	**Abductive Reasoning**: describing and understanding the concepts of 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education' as understood by the participants thereby producing a technical account from lay accounts.

The study's main intent was to focus on the participants' perceptions and experiences in the local educational system, and the way they made sense of their lived experiences in colleges and schools, with an attempt to understand not one but multiple realities (Lincoln and Guba, 2011). Hence, the researcher was "bound in a net of ontological and epistemological premises, which regardless of ultimate truth or falsity – became partially self-validating" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, 19). These premises influenced also the research design.

4.3 Research Design

Research design played a crucial role in the current research study as it helped to bridge the gap between research questions and research methods (Creswell, 2014). In essence, research design referred to the conceptual structure, with which research is conducted. It constituted the blue print for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. Research design was essential for the smooth sailing of the research investigations

and operations to make research as efficient as possible. Table 4.2 below illustrates the study's main sources of evidence in relation to research questions and investigations.

Table 4.2: Main Sources of Evidence and Research Questions

Research Questions	Research Investigations	System Level Analysis	Research Methods Applied
Why does 'deficit-thinking' constitute a major challenge to implement 'inclusive education' in the Maltese educational system?	To examine views on *deficit-thinking* and *inclusive education*; To identify cohorts of minority learners; To identify challenges minority learners bring to the system.	**Ministerial** **Directorate** **College** **School** **Class**	**Questionnaires**: *HoS, teachers, LSEs & learners*; **Semi-structured Interviews**: *Minister, DGs, Directors and CPs*; **Participant Observations** *of different lessons*; **Focus Groups** *with learners;* **Document Analysis**.
How do 'neoliberal approaches to education' and 'deficit-thinking' constrict the re-structuring and re-culturing processes in favour of equitable, inclusive, responsive and socially just education?	To investigate changes to eliminate 'deficit-thinking'; To examine practices to navigate 'neoliberal' logics; To investigate challenges that hindered 'inclusive education'.	**Ministerial** **Directorate** **College** **School** **Class**	**Questionnaires**: *HoS, teachers, LSEs & learners*; **Semi-structured Interviews:** *Minister, DGs, Directors, CPs, Union President; HoS*; **Job Shadowing Sessions** *with HoS*; **Participant Observations** *of different lessons and COH meetings*; **Document Analysis**.
What are the major effects of 'neoliberalism' and 'deficit-thinking' on educators, learners and parents?	To analyse the effects of 'neoliberalism' and 'deficit-thinking' on leadership, teaching processes, and on social relationships.	**College** **School** **Class**	**Questionnaires**: *HoS, teachers, LSEs & learners*; **Semi-structured Interviews** *with CPs and HoS*; **Job Shadowing Sessions** *with HoS*; **Participant Observations** *of lessons and CoH meetings*; **Focus Groups** *with learners*;

			Socio-metric Tests *with learners*.
How does 'inclusive leadership' enable the 're-positioning-of-the-self' technique to ensure that educators and students form an active part 'of' school organizations?	To analyse current leadership styles; To investigate leadership characteristics that enhance 'inclusive education'; To examine how educational leaders organize colleges and schools into PLCs;	**Ministerial** **Directorate** **College** **School** **Class**	**Questionnaires**: *HoS, teachers & LSEs*; **Semi-structured Interviews**: *Minister, DGs, Directors, CPs & HoS*; **Job Shadowing Sessions** *with HoS*; **Participant Observations** *of lessons and CoH meetings*; **Socio-metric Test** *with learners*; **Document Analysis**.
Why is the 're-positioning-of-the-self' technique fundamental to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' processes and practices?	To investigate main features of the 're-positioning of the self' technique.		

To gather and analyse all the necessary data, the researcher planned the data collection and analysis process on two parallel but independent phases, i.e. the *quantitative* phase and the *qualitative* phase (Table 4.3). Each phase aimed to answer similar aspects of the main research questions as indicated in Table 4.2 above. The two phases occurred simultaneously with a slight time lapse between each phase to enable a thorough and detailed analysis of all the collected data. The first phase of the process consisted of two stages, namely:

1) the distribution, collection and analysis of questionnaires; and
2) the administration and probing of sociometric tests.

On the contrary, the second phase, which consisted of five main stages, focused on gathering qualitative data from: semi-structured interviews; job-shadowing sessions; participant observations; focus groups and document analysis. The latter data helped to corroborate the main findings from the first phase, which data validation led to the formulation of conclusions and meta-inferences from both research phases.

Table 4.3: The Different Phases of the Study

Research Phases	Data Collection Stages	Justification
Phase 1: The QUANTITATIVE Phase	**Questionnaires** *with different educators, ranging from SMT members to support, class or subject teachers to middle leaders to LSEs to learners.*	The generation of numerical data and sociograms. This laid the bedrock for this research study through the identification of the main research themes.
	Socio-metric Tests *with different learners from diverse local colleges and schools.*	
Phase 2: The QUALITATIVE Phase	**Semi-structured Interviews** *with policymakers.*	The aim of this phase was to generate narrative data rich in detail to corroborate (i.e. to further explain or to confirm) findings in the quantitative phase. This helped to develop conclusions or meta-inferences.
	Job-Shadowing Sessions *with HoS.*	
	Participant Observations *of different lessons.*	
	Focus Groups *with different learners.*	
	Document Analysis *of different national policy documents.*	

The current research study adopted the 'collective case study design' (Creswell, 2013), as it offered a degree of flexibility to effectively address the study's research questions by allowing research findings to emerge from inherent themes in the study's raw data (Birks, Harrison, Franklin, and Mills, 2017). Moreover, the proposed design maintained deep connections to the research study's fundamental intentions and values due to its "particularistic, descriptive and heuristic" nature (Merriam, 2009, 46), which allowed the researcher to "examine in-depth ['deficit-thinking'] within 'real-life' contexts" (Yin, 2005, 380) to develop new knowledge and theory on 'education for all'. Hence, the 'collective case study approach' was the most appropriate research design for the current pragmatist, flexible and pluralistic research study.

The proposed research design provided a clear methodology for investigating and prioritizing examination to achieve a deeper understanding on 'neoliberal-deficit-thinking' approaches to education (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Kim, 2014). In this regard, the researcher paid attention to every detail shared by the participants from the multiple sources of data, to develop a strong theoretical framework on 'education for all' (Neale, Thapa, and Boyce, 2006). Yin (2009) described the 'case study' strategy,

> "as an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context; when boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clear; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (47).

Furthermore, this specific research design offered also,

> "…a means for investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich holistic account of a phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, 41).

Hence, the 'case study' design helped the researcher to effectively address the central *How* and *Why* questions of the research study: *How can 'deficit thinking' be eliminated from schools?* And *Why is it important to eliminate 'deficit thinking'?*

4.3.1 Research Site and Population

For this study, four colleges in the northern, central and southern regions of Malta were chosen as the learning sites for research purposes. The selected colleges were *College W; X; Y* and *Z*, which enrolled diverse student populations. In addition, the four colleges served as a representative sample of the Maltese educational system. From each college one primary and one secondary school were also chosen. A total of four primary (A; B; C and D) and four secondary (E; F; G and H) schools took part in the study upon acceptance. The main purpose behind the choice of these colleges and schools was to gain a deep understanding of how they navigated 'deficit-thinking and neoliberal logics' in favour of inclusive education.

Population in this study referred to all the research participants, who had one or more characteristics in common. Participants included the CPs of the four chosen colleges; members of senior leadership teams in all the participant schools (Heads and Assistant Heads); different teachers (ranging from primary to middle to secondary to support teachers); middle leaders (INCOs, HoDs and EOs); LSEs; and learners, aged between 8 to 15 years. Furthermore, the study benefitted also from the participation of educational policymakers at Ministerial and Directorate levels, namely:

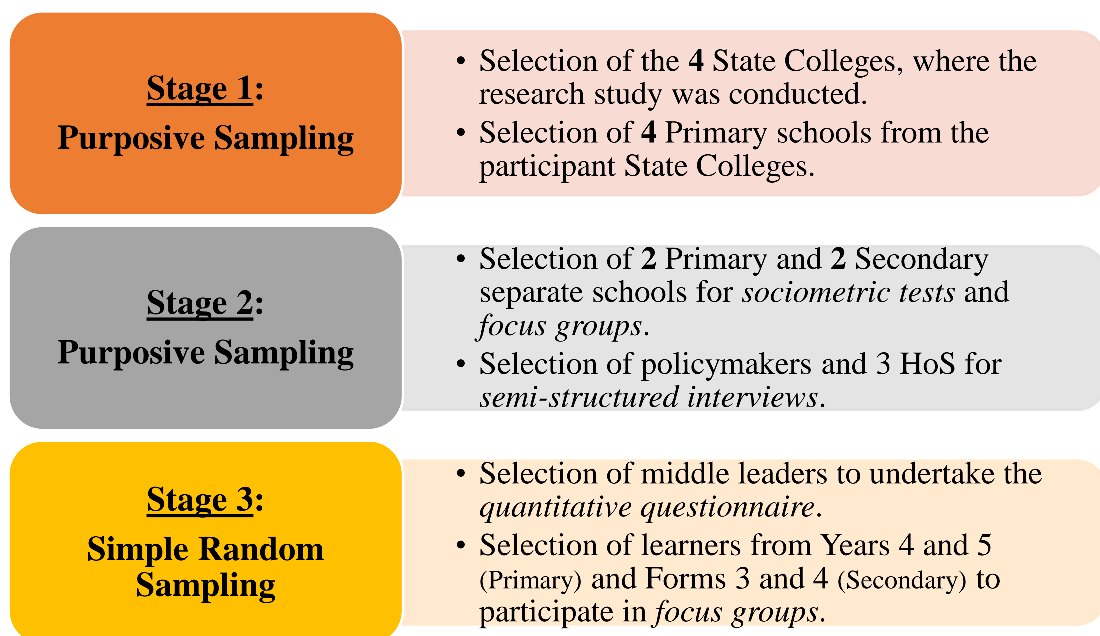
- the Minister for Education and Employment;
- Director General Education Services (DG ES);
- Director General Quality and Standards (DG QSE);
- Directors: Curriculum, Quality Assurance and National School Support Services;
- A Church Schools Secretariat Representative; and
- The President of the Malta Union of Teachers.

These policy-makers helped to contextualize policy reforms within MEDE, in favour of responsive and equitable education for all learners.

4.3.2 Research Sampling Techniques

Taddlie and Tashakkori (2009) argued that a crucial aspect of 'mixed-methods research' was its ability to match the study's design to both the research questions and purpose. Given that the objective of this research was to investigate the current state-of-play of 'inclusive education' in the local educational system, the researcher had to select a representative cluster of colleges and schools that embraced student diversity (enrolled a variety of student cohorts). Makhado (2002) contented that it was important to select information-rich cases, as these helped to provide meaningful information to address the objectives of this study. The use of 'sequential mixed-methods sampling' allowed the researcher to select 'units of analysis' by using *purposive* and *probability* (simple random sampling) sampling, as illustrated in the three-staged sampling process below (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Details of Sampling Stages



In the first stage, the researcher used 'purposive sampling' (which is also referred to as judgment, selective or subjective sampling) to select the four State Colleges, which served as the study's research site or 'units of analysis'. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) described 'purposive sampling' as a sampling approach, in which the researcher relied on his own judgment when choosing the research site and population. Similarly, Black (2010) contended that,

> "purposive sampling occurs when elements for the sample are chosen by the judgement of the researcher. Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgement, which will result in saving time and money" (147).

The choice of the four colleges was characterised by three main selection criteria, i.e.: *college size* (total number of enrolled students in the college); *geographical position* (location of the college in the Maltese islands); and *diversity* (college population with diverse groups of student cohorts). Finally, the selection of the participant colleges was also corroborated by additional information provided by the DG ES. In this regard, the researcher chose two colleges (one large and one small) in the Northern region; one-medium-sized college from the Central district; and one large college in the Southern part of Malta. All selected colleges also enrolled diverse student populations, namely: learners with physical, intellectual, psychological and/or communication impairments, learners with diverse learning styles, cognitive abilities, and aptitudes, and learners from difficult socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds. The same sampling process was also utilized to select four Primary State Schools from the four chosen colleges. Given that the selected colleges had only one Secondary school, the latter schools were automatically selected to participate in the study.

The 'purposive sampling' approach was also utilized in the second phase of the sampling process, which consisted of two main stages, namely:

1) The selection of primary and secondary schools for the conduct of socio-metric tests and focus groups. The researcher first selected the two Primary and two Secondary schools that best suited the rationale behind the use of sociometric tests. During this process, the CPs' advice and guidance proved beneficial and influential. The remaining two Primary and Secondary schools were then automatically chosen for focus groups sessions.
2) The selection of policymakers and 3 HoS to take part in semi-structured interviews. The latter choice rested on the researcher's judgement, following discussions with the thesis main supervisor on the policymakers' roles and responsibilities. The latter approach was also utilized to select the 3 HoS, two from the State and one from the Church sector, who took part in semi-structured interviews.

All participant primary and secondary schools also took part in job-shadowing sessions and participant observations.

In the third and final stage the researcher utilized 'simple random sampling' to select: (1) a cohort of ninety middle leaders to participate in the questionnaire; and (2) four learners from each of the two purposively selected Primary and Secondary schools to take part in focus groups. Gravetter and Forzano (2011) argued that 'simple random sampling' was the most popular method for choosing a sample among population for a wide range of purposes, while ensuring "…the removal of biases from the selection procedure to enable representative samples" (324). The choice of middle leaders (EOs, HoDs, INCOs) and learners was done using the lottery system. On the other hand, all SMT members, teachers and LSEs in the four selected colleges were asked to take part in the questionnaire. Finally, data from questionnaires was also used for 'triangulation' purposes to establish the validity of the research findings. The latter process consisted of three phases: (1) comparing the results of the three distinct questionnaires together; (2) confronting sectional results in the same questionnaire together; and (3) contrasting questionnaire results with data deriving from qualitative research tools.

4.3.3 Data Collection Tools

In order to address all the research questions and investigations effectively and efficiently, the researcher adopted a meticulous 'mixed-methods research approach', which employed a variety of educational stakeholders and a mix of quantitative and qualitative 'research tools'. This is because the issue of 'deficit-thinking' could not be explored solely in numerical-statistical data, since 'deficit ideology' existed in actions and beliefs of educators and administrators that interacted with students on a regular basis. In this regard, Gillborn (2010) contended that,

> "by focusing on how much inequality is associated with particular student identities (including class, gender, race, family structure and maternal education), such research can give the impression that the problem arises from those very identities – rather than being related to social processes that give very different value to such identities, often using them as a marker of internal deficit and/or threat" (272).

Hence, this necessitated the need to utilize also qualitative 'research tools' to better understand 'deficit-thinking' by analysing educators' beliefs, processes and practices.

In this research study, the term 'tools' referred to the instruments employed by the researcher to collect and analyse new facts or data on both 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education'. The selection of both quantitative and qualitative 'research tools' depended on three main considerations, namely: (a) the research questions and the

main investigations of the study; (b) the time at the disposal of the researcher; and (c) the personal competency of the researcher to administer the tools. Moreover, due to the complexity of the research topic, the researcher developed (under the guidance of the thesis supervisor) a variety of 'research tools', ranging from *questionnaires* to *socio-metric tests* to *semi-structured interviews* to *job-shadowing sessions* and *participant observations* to *focus groups* and *document analysis* (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Research Method, Research Tools and Target Group

Research Method	Research Tool	Target Group
Quantitative Methods	**Questionnaires** *(Generation of numerical and statistical data)*	**SMT members** (HoS and Assistant Heads). **Middle Leaders** (EOs, HoDs, INCOs). **Teachers** (Class, Subject, Support and Peripatetic). **LSEs**. **Learners** *taking part in focus groups*.
	Sociometric Tests *(Generation of sociograms)*	**Learners** *in Year 4 in Primary A and in Year 5 in Primary C.* **Learners** *in Form 3 in Secondary E and in Form 4 in Secondary G*.
Qualitative Methods	**Interviews** *(Generation of coded narrative data)*	**Policymakers**. **HoS** *(2 from the State sector and 1 from the Chruch)*
	Job-Shadowing *(Narrative descriptions of the work of the HoS)*	**HoS** *in all participant primary and secondary schools*. **2 COH meetings**.
	Observations *(Narrative data on how educators deal with 'deficit-thinking' in class)*	**Primary Class Teachers**. **Secondary Teachers**. **Support Teachers.** **LSEs**.
	Focus Groups *(Giving voice to learners)*	**Primary school learners** *in Years 4 and 5*. **Secondary school learners** *in Forms 3 and 4.*
	Document Analysis *(Coding of policy document)*	Analysis of **IEPs**, **SDPs**, and **CDPs**.

4.3.3.1 The Quantitative Research Tools

Creswell (2011) defined quantitative research as the "…approach explaining phenomena by collecting and analysing data through mathematically based methods

[in the form of] statistics to support and/or refute alternate knowledge claims…" (153) to establish, confirm or validate relations to develop generalizations that contributed to the development of theory. Hence, quantitative data helped the researcher to create correlations with qualitative research data to validate and corroborate main findings. Anonymous questionnaires with educators (Appendix A) and learners (Appendix B) and socio-metric tests (Appendix C) represented the quantitative aspect of this study.

4.3.3.2 The Questionnaires

Bell and Waters (2014) defined a questionnaire as "a set of questions dealing with some topic, given to a selected group of individuals for the purpose of gathering data on a problem under consideration" (68). In this regard, the researcher conducted two distinct questionnaire processes: one with *educators* and the other with *learners*. In both cases, the main aim was to explore the perceptions and views of educators and learners on the status of 'inclusive education' in their respective college and school. O'Leary (2014) contended that questionnaires,

> "…permit wide coverage at minimum expense in both money and effort. It not only affords wider geographic coverage, but also reaches persons who are difficult to contact" (189).

Similarly, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) posited that,

> "...questionnaires are a widely used instrument for collecting information, often numerical data, being administered without the presence of the researcher, and often being straightforward to analyse" (245).

Finally, Creswell (2013) also referred to questionnaires as measuring instruments that had great influence on the reliability of the research data. For the purpose of this study, questionnaires presented three prime advantages, namely: (1) questionnaires were easy to administer and to evaluate; (2) the generated numerical data facilitated comparison of results to determine "the extent of agreement or disagreement between respondents" (Yaunch and Steudel, 2003, 47); and (3) questionnaires generated also qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions (ACAPS, 2012). However, questionnaires encompassed also several disadvantages, such as: the inability to record and translate into numbers feelings, beliefs, behaviours and emotions, a general difficulty to gauge the respondents' level of attention and honesty, and limited participation of participants in the formation of questionnaires.

To reach the widest array of educators possible in the four participant colleges, the researcher developed three different questionnaires, i.e.:

- ***The Senior Management Team Questionnaire***, which was conducted among all HoS and Assistant HoS of Primary, Middle and Secondary Schools forming part of the four participant colleges;
- ***The Middle Leaders and Teachers Questionnaire***, which was administered with a cohort of ninety randomly selected middle leaders (EOs, HoDs and INCOs) and all class, subject, support or pertipatetic teachers in the four participant colleges;
- ***The Learning Support Assistants Questionnaire***, which was conducted with all LSEs within the four participant colleges.

During the design process of the above questionnaires, the researcher paid particular attention to the following considerations:

1) The designing of the three questionnaires was a complex process that required the continuous assistance and support from the thesis supervisor.
2) Questions in the three questionnaires were pre-tested to eliminate possible errors.
3) The questionnaires presented simple, straight-forward and easily understandable questions, which were free from bias, ambiguity, prejudice and technical language.

The questionnaires followed the same design and consisted of three different sections:

- Section A: *General Information* – provided biographical information about the diverse participant educators and general insights on the school and the educators' views on 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education'.
- Section B: *School or Class Population and Composition* – provided information on the school or the class population, which helped to identify minority learners and the main challenges or barriers.
- Section C: *Leadership for Inclusive Education* – focused on both leadership and management styles, which helped to enhance 'inclusive education'.

Altogether the three questionnaires aimed to identify cohorts of 'minority learners' in the local educational system, to analyse ways how school leaders and educators dealt with minority learners, and to determine the most common strategies employed by educators in schools to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' practices.

In general, the three questionnaires included open-ended and closed questions; lists; categories and rankings. The 'Likert-type scale' was used to organize and compare results, in search for correlations (Denscombe, 2008). Cohen, Manion and Morrison

(2007) pointed out that "closed questions…are quick to complete…do not discriminate unduly on how articulate the respondents are…and are straightforward to code" (248). Conversely, open-ended questions gave participants the opportunity to express their thoughts, ideas and beliefs in more detail and length (Coolican, 1994). The researcher administered the three questionnaires simultaneously between November and December 2016. 'SurveyPlanet' (an internet-based survey service) facilitated the distribution of the questionnaires among SMT members, middle leaders, teachers and LSEs. Finally, all questionnaire results were compared and contrasted with other coded data deriving from qualitative methods. Apart from the educators' questionnaire, the researcher also administered a short questionnaire with Primary and Secondary School learners, who took part in the focus group sessions. The aim of this one-page questionnaire was to strengthen the voice of learners on 'inclusive education'.

The Pilot Study

To pre-test the efficacy of the three developed questionnaires, the researcher conducted a 'pilot study' prior to the actual distribution of questionnaires. Oppenheim (1992) argued that "…a pilot has several functions, principally to increase reliability, validity and practicability of questionnaires" (48). Hence, the 'pilot study' helped the researcher to test how long it took respondents to complete the questionnaire; to check that all questions or instructions were clear and understandable; and to remove items that did not yield usable data. The researcher conducted the 'pilot study' in Secondary School F and SMT members, ten teachers and ten LSEs. Upon completion, participants had to answer the following questions:

- *How long did it take you to complete the survey?*
- *Were there any questions that were unclear, ambiguous? Please indicate which.*
- *Were there any questions that you did not feel comfortable answering?*
- *Was the layout of the questionnaire user-friendly?*
- *Do you have any other suggestions?*

The above information allowed the researcher to revise the questionnaires before their distribution; ascertain that they were free of grammatical, spelling and typographical errors; eliminate ambiguity; and remove any double, hypothetical leading or presuming questions. The 'pilot study' proved successful since participants viewed questionnaires as easy, simple, straightforward and not time-consuming. Moreover, no questions were altered or arranged.

4.3.3.3 The Socio-metric Tests

Sociometric testing presented the final quantitative tool in this research study. Sociometry helped to measure "socius", which is the interpersonal connection and/or relationship between two or more people (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Hence, sociometry resulted in the production of simple graphical representations, portraying the structure of social relations; lines of communication; and the patterns of friendship, attractions and rejection that exist among learners in local schools and classrooms. However, sociometry presented also several challenges, such as: "…sociometry stops with the production of 'sociograms' from choices expressed related to specific criteria" (Lucius and Kuhnert, 1995, 28); and "participants may tend to be uncomfortable with the process because they believe that feelings might be hurt, or are confused by their own ambivalences and lack of awareness of their reasons" (Collins, 2000, 277).

One of the main objectives of this research study was to examine the level of relatedness or relationship and acceptance among learners. Hence, sociometry allowed the researcher to "discover, describe, examine and evaluate learners' social status and structure, and to measure the acceptance and/or rejection felt between different peers" (Collins, 2000, 50). For this purpose, the researcher devised a socio-metric test, which consisted of four main questions, to identify the "*isolates* (whom nobody chooses); *stars* (whom everyone chooses) and *dyads* (who choose each other)" (Cohen et. al. 2007, 312). The test ended with a final question focusing on the learners' feelings. The researcher conducted the sociometric test between January and March 2017 as follows:

- Primary School A in College W in a Year 4 classroom;
- Secondary School E in College W in a Form 3 classroom;
- Primary School C in College Y in a Year 5 classroom;
- Secondary School G in College Y in a Form 4 classroom.

The above-indicated colleges, schools and classrooms were selected at random using the lottery system. Before the administration of the socio-metric tests, the researcher presented learners and their guardians with consent forms.

The results for each sociometric question were first inputted in a 'sociometric choice matrice' and then translated into 'sociograms', which included numbered circles to represent learners; single line arrow marks (→) and left right arrow marks (↔) to one-way and mutual choices, preferences and acceptance respectively. The point with

the greatest concentration of arrows indicated the 'star leader' and the point/s with the least or no constellation of arrow marks indicates the 'isolate'. Cillessen (2000) argued that there are many factors why children become 'isolates', namely:

a) Learner is a new member of the class;
b) Learner is shy and withdrawn by nature;
c) Learner doesn't like to make new friends; and
d) Learner may belong to a lower socio-economical level or a different ethnic group.

Finally, these tests equipped the researcher with knowledge on how to improve current emotional and social classroom climates.

4.3.3.4 The Qualitative Aspect of the Study

Semi-structured interviews (Appendix D), *job-shadowing sessions* (Appendix E), *participant observations* (Appendix F), *focus groups* (Appendix G) and *document analysis* represented the qualitative aspect of the current research study, which aimed to investigate multiple social realities present in local colleges and schools as well as to understand the different 'frames of reference' of diverse educational stakeholders vis-à-vis quality education for all learners. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) purported that qualitative researchers,

> "stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and…emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry…[Qualitative researchers note that] qualitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of casual relationships between variables, not processes…within a value-free framework" (10).

Similarly, Neuman (2006) contended that, "qualitative research does not narrow focus on a specific question but ponders a theoretical and philosophical paradigm based on an inquisitive and open-ended approach" (15), which "occurred in natural settings, and enabled researchers to develop a level of detail from being highly involved in the actual experiences…to understand how individuals interpreted experiences" (Creswell, 2011, 67). Hence, the need for semi-structured interviews, participant observations and job-shadowing sessions, focus groups and document analysis to better understand: (1) the effects of 'neoliberal-deficit-thinking' logics on the local educational system; (2) the way educators and learners perceived 'diversity' and 'inclusive education'; and (3) the way perceptions on 'diversity' and 'inclusion' influenced school organization and the teaching process. This because "…to gain a full appreciation of an organization, it is necessary to understand the social actors' opinions and what drives the organization's

behaviour" (Yauch, 2003, 472). Fundamentally, the primary strength of the qualitative approach was to probe for underlying values, beliefs and assumptions in a broad and open-ended manner. Conversely, Young (2007) indicated also a number of challenges related to the qualitative research approach, namely: a time-consuming and labour-intensive analysis process; the dependence on the researcher's investigative skills; and difficulties to make systemic comparisons. Moreover, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) also indicated that generated qualitative statements about reality were limited only to the time and context of the study, therefore, limiting generalizability to transferability of results from one context to another (ACAPS, 2012).

4.3.3.5 The Semi-Structured Interviews

Creswell (2009) argued that semi-structured interviews marked "a move away from viewing data as external to individuals…but regarded knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations" (11). Hence, semi-structured interviews enabled participants,

> "…to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view...[thus the interview] is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself; its human embeddedness is inescapable" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017, 267).

In this regard, the conducted semi-structured interviews helped the researcher to clarify perceptions about 'education for all', and to probe how educators at all system levels implemented 'inclusive education'. For this purpose, interviewees included:

- MEDE Minister;
- DGs ES and QSE;
- Directors: Curriculum, QA and NSSS;
- 4 CPs of the participant colleges;
- Church Schools Secretariat representative; and
- MUT President.

The above interviews helped to investigate governance issues and to explore national, college-and-school-based changes in favour of 'inclusive education'. Furthermore, the researcher conducted three other interviews with three HoS (two from the State sector and one from the Church sector) to further investigate school-based challenges for the elimination of 'deficit-thinking'.

Galletta (2013) regarded, "interviews as more appropriate than questionnaires to reveal information that is both complex-and-emotionally-laden or for probing the sentiments that underlie an expressed opinion" (153). Similarly, Bogdan and Bilken (2007) stressed that semi-structured interviews were useful to generate ideas rich-in-value from various respondents. In this study, semi-structured interviews proved fundamental in order to elicit data on 'past and present' initiatives and activities that favoured 'inclusive education' (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews also enabled greater flexibility, with:

1) The interviewees providing their perceptions on what they considered relevant and important; and
2) The interviewer being able to follow-up issues of interest at the time of the interview (Marshall, 1996; Burns, 2000).

In so doing, the researcher recorded all interviews using an MP3 player. Nonetheless, interviews also presented several disadvantages and challenges (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Disadvantages of Semi-Structured Interviews

A.	Distractive interruptions from outside (e.g. telephone calls)
B.	The risk of 'stage fright' in interviewees and interviewers
C.	Asking embarrassing or awkward questions
D.	Jumping from one topic to another
E.	Giving advice or opinions (rather than active listening)
F.	Summarizing too early or closing off an interview too soon
G.	Being too superficial, subjective and biased
H.	Difficulties to handle sensitive (legal, personal & emotional) matters (Berg, 1989).

To address the above challenges, the researcher conducted a pilot interview in Primary School A in College W. The latter interview did not take more than 45 minutes. Patton (1980) underlined the need for the researcher to "find out what terms interviewees use about the matter in hand, what terms they use amongst themselves and to avoid using academic jargon" (225). In this case, the researcher effected no specific amendments to the original interview questions; indicating that language used was understandable by all the participants. Each interview began with a brief introduction on the research problem, followed by a discussion on ethical issues. The latter included:

- the use of pseudo-names to guarantee anonymity;
- envisaged ways to maintain school confidentiality when describing context;
- the safekeeping of interview transcripts; and

- the participant's faculty to withdraw from the interview at any time.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) maintained that the interviewer,

> "…should brief the respondent as to the nature or purpose of the interview and attempt to make the respondent feel at ease. He should explain the way he will be recording responses, and if he plans to tape record, he should get the respondent's assent" (279).

All interviews were characterized by different levels of formality, ranging from small-talk to 'in-depth dialogical conversations', whereas, 'probing' (Cohen et al., 2000) also helped to elicit useful information from participants. Kvale et. al. (2009) emphasized that,

> "…the interviewer is a data collection instrument and should try not to let his own biases, opinions, or curiosity affect his behaviour. It is important not to deviate from his format and interview schedule although many schedules will permit some flexibility in choice of questions. The respondent should be kept from rambling away from the essence of a question, but not at the sacrifice of courtesy" (217).

Finally, during interviews, the researcher also paid due consideration to the following issues: (1) the sequencing and framing of the questions - 'what' questions preceded the more difficult and demanding 'how' and 'why' questions; (2) allocating enough responsive time for participants to internalize, think and then respond to questions; and (3) prompting interviewees whenever they encountered difficulties. These procedures helped participants to feel more at ease while strengthening the validity of research findings as questions did not focus solely on theories but also on emerging concepts.

4.3.3.6 The Participant Observations and Job-Shadowing Sessions

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) described participant observations and job-shadowing sessions as qualitative tools with roots in ethnographic methodology, which involved the researcher to:

> "participate in the social world as well as to reflect on the products of that participation…As participants in the social world research are able [at least in anticipation or retrospect] to observe activities 'from the outside' as objects in the world" (16-17).

In this research study, the researcher administered class participant observations and job-shadowing sessions to sustain the main findings from the three questionnaires, by observing educators (teachers and HoS) in action in their respective settings. Engelbrecht, Oswald, Eloff and Swart (2003) remarked that, "…observations are a major means of collecting data in qualitative research" because "they offered an original account of the

situation under investigation" (298). Similarly, Patton (2002) posited that, "participant observations allowed the researcher to look at what is taking place *in situ*" (203) and enabled,

> "…researchers to understand the context of programmes; to be inductive; to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed; to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations; to move beyond perception-based data (e.g. opinions in interviews) and to access personal knowledge" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017, 305).

Hence, class observations and job-shadowing sessions with HoS allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the: physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which study participants worked; relationships among and between educators, ideas, contexts, norms, and events; and educators' behaviour and activities – what they do, how frequently, with whom, and why.

In this research study, the use of 'structured participant observations' provided direct information on the main duties of HoS and teachers and on how they dealt with 'deficit-thinking' (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). In this regard, the researcher conducted different 'participant observations' in diverse learning sites as illustrated in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: Participant Observations Schedule

Observation	**Research Sites**		**Participants**
	Colleges	**Schools**	
4 Job Shadowing	W, X, Y & Z	Primary: A, B, C & D	HoS
4 Job Shadowing	W, X, Y & Z	Secondary: E, F, G & H	HoS
2 Class Observations	X & Z	Primary: B & D	Years 4 & 5 Class Teachers
2 Class Observations	W & Y	Primary: A & C	Complementary Teachers
2 Class Observations	X & Z	Secondary: F & H	Form 3 & 4 Teachers
2 Class Observations	W & Y	Secondary: E & G	Teachers of CCP classes.

The researcher conducted all the above observations during scholastic year 2017-18. Prior to the administration of each observation, the researcher personally met all HoS

and teachers to: (1) explain the objective of the study; (2) plan necessary arrangements; and (3) fix appointments.

For the purpose of class participant observations and job-shadowing sessions, the researcher developed two distinct observational checklists, which followed Le Compte and Preissle's (1993) set of directing guidelines. These checklists allowed the researcher to elicit information on:

- *Space* (physical setting);
- *Actors* (people in the situation);
- *Activities* (sets of related acts that took place);
- *Objects* (artefacts and physical things present in schools);
- *Acts* (specific actions of participants);
- *Events* (set of activities that took place);
- *Time* (sequence of acts, activities and events);
- *Goals* (what participants were trying to achieve); and
- *Feelings* (what participants felt and how they expressed their feelings).

Furthermore, checklists also helped the researcher to record all relevant information quickly and systematically so as to explore the physical barriers, which hindered the implementation of 'inclusive education' in schools. Hence, observational checklists helped to address some of criticism directed towards 'participant observations'. This is because they facilitated the data collection and analysis process and reduced the risk of omitting sensitive information.

Apart from the above observations in schools and classrooms, the researcher also conducted observations of COH and CCP meetings. The aim was to examine how leaders planned the 're-culturing' and 'restructuring' process at college and directorate levels. Below is a breakdown of these observations:

- 1 CoH observation in Colleges W and Z - conducted in February 2017; and
- 1 CCP observation - conducted in March 2017.

Once again, the researcher utilized pre-prepared observational checklists to record and store observational data, namely: (1) notes made *in situ*; (2) expanded notes made after initial observations; and (3) notes to record issues, ideas and difficulties.

4.3.3.7 The Focus Groups

Focus group is a type of in-depth interview accomplished in a group format. Savage (2013) described this tool as "...a strategy for obtaining a better understanding of a problem; concerning a new product, program or idea by discussing with a group of people, rather than discussing with each person individually" (79). Similarly, Breen (2007) described focus groups as,

> "…a form of group interviews, though not in the sense of a backwards and forwards between interviewer and group. Rather the reliance is on the interaction in the group, who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher" (as cited in Morgan, 1988, 9).

In the current study, focus groups were set up in two Primary and Secondary schools in Colleges X and Y. The objective was to explore learners' views and perceptions on 'inclusive education' to understand how educators strived to provide quality education for all learners. Morgan (2002) pointed out the importance of involving learners in research because "they have agency in constructing school relations which include or exclude" (196). Krueger and Casey 2008) also maintained that learners' "involvement helps to yield research that has greater validity and meaningfulness" (135).

Krueger and Van Zyl (2002) recommended that a focus group should consist of between six to ten participants in order to get as many different opinions as possible. In this research study, the researcher opted for groups of not more than eight randomly selected learners from *a Year 4 class in Primary School A in College W*; *a Year 5 class in Primary School B in College X*; *a Form 3 class in Secondary School G in College Y*; and *a Form 4 class in Secondary School H in College Z*. The composition of the four focus groups provided learners with the right ambience and conditions to share their ideas in a secure, structured and systematic manner. Prior to the administration of each focus group, the research presented learners and guardians with consent forms and an information letter on the research study. The researcher conducted the focus groups as follows:

- Focus groups in Primary Schools: between September and November 2017; and
- Focus groups in Secondary Schools: between November and December 2017.

To facilitate and encourage healthy discussions, the researcher developed a story with a set of questions. The latter guided the one hour and a half long sessions. The prepared questions helped the researcher to: (1) cover the maximum number of

important topics; (2) provide specific data; (3) promote interaction that explored the participants' feelings in-depth; and (4) explore the personal context in which selected learners generated responses to the topic. Finally, all focus groups were conducted in the participants' schools in free-from-distraction classrooms, which were arranged in U-shaped format for the occasion. The latter further helped learners to feel at ease and comfortable. All focus groups were recorded, transcribed and compared with data from questionnaires, interviews, sociometric tests and participant observations.

The application of the focus group technique in this research study allowed the researcher to collect an appropriate amount of data in a relatively short period. Krueger (1998) argued that focus groups yielded insights that might not otherwise have been available in straightforward interviewing. In essence, focus groups permitted richness and flexibility in the collection of data; spontaneity of interaction; triangulation with other research methods; and facilitated the formation hypothesis frameworks (Freitas, 1998).

4.3.3.8 Document Analysis

Merriam and Engelbrecht (2003) utilized the term 'documents' as an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of visual, written and physical material that is relevant to the research study. Hence, document analysis referred to the systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating printed or electronic educational documents at all system levels. Like any other analytical method in qualitative research, document analysis also required examination and interpretation of data to elicit meaning and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Throughout this research study, the researcher thoroughly examined and analysed the following documents:

- National Policy Documents;
- College or School-Based Policies such as Attendance or Behaviour Policies;
- College Development Plans of the four participant colleges;
- School Development Plans of all the participant schools; and
- Individual Educational Plans of learners with an 'official statement of needs'.

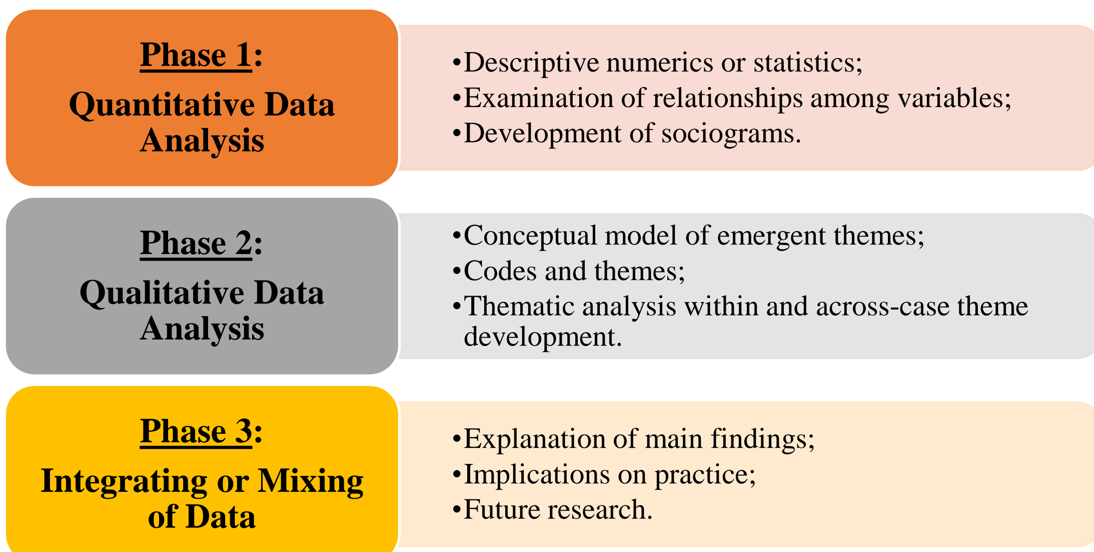
In so doing, the researcher managed to elicit relevant data, which was then compared and contrasted with other findings from questionnaires, interviews, socio-metric tests, observations and focus groups. The latter data eliciting process helped to shed light on how change processes in favour of 'education for all' took place at all system levels.

In this sense, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) contended that, "…document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods to enable triangulation, by drawing on multiple sources of evidence to seek convergence and corroboration through different data sources and methods" (291).

4.3.4 Methods of Data Analysis

The 'mixed-methods' approach allowed the researcher to not only collect and analyse but also to 'mix' both quantitative and qualitative data within the thesis study to gain a better understanding of the research problem (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). The rationale for 'integrating' both kinds of data was grounded in the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods (by themselves) were sufficient to capture the trends and details of the present situation (reality) in the local educational system (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2009). Hence, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data to present a more robust analysis, by taking advantage of the strengths of each method to elicit "think description" (Green and Caracelli 1997; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). In this regard, the research study utilized the 'mixed methods sequential explanatory approach', which implied collecting and analysing first quantitative and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson, 2003). Apart from enhancing straightforwardness, the latter approach provided opportunities for the exploration of quantitative data in more detail (Yin, 2013). For this purpose, the research study homed a three-phased data analysis process (Figure 4.3), which led to the identification of the research study's main findings.

Figure 4.3: The Data Analysis Process



The first phase (*Quantitative Data Analysis Phase*) consisted of collecting and analysing collected quantitative data from questionnaires and socio-metric test. Data from the educators' and the learners' questionnaires were analysed first, with the former (i.e. data from the educators' three questionnaires) serving as the main point of reference for the whole analysis process. For this purpose, the researcher analysed the three questionnaires (HoS, Teachers, LSEs) separately and then collectively, in search of similarities and discrepancies among the sets of responses. In this sense, similarities led to the identification of general themes in relation to the study's research questions and investigations, while discrepancies among data results alimented further lines of questioning. Analysis of the latter three questionnaires involved two main stages:

1) The analysis of all closed-ended questions in the three questionnaires by converting all the participants' choices into percentages. The latter were then translated into pie-charts or bar/line graphs. This process facilitated comparison and correlation of data from the three questionnaires. In this regard, SurveyPlanet proved extremely beneficial and helpful.
2) The analysis of all open-ended questions in the three questionnaires through the use of thematic coding as a 'heuristic' to link participants' responses to the study's three broad themes, i.e. 'deficit-thinking', 'education for all' ('inclusive education') and 'educational leadership'. Richards and Morse (2007) contended that "coding is not labelling, it is linking: it leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea" (137).

The same procedure was also used to analysis data from the learners' questionnaires. Following the analysis of all the gathered questionnaires, the researcher commenced a thorough examination of results from socio-metric tests. Essentially, the four socio-metric tests were analysed separately by:

1) Inputting the learners' choices in 'sociometric choice matrices' in order to quantify the number of choices obtained by each learner in the participant classrooms, and
2) Translating data in the 'sociometric choice matrices' into 'sociograms' to provide visual representations for the sociometric results. All 'sociograms' were developed manually by the researcher.

In total, the researcher developed four 'socio-metric choice matrices' and 'sociograms' respectively, which also helped the researcher to identify the '*stars*', '*dyads*', and the '*isolates*'. Finally, the analysed data from both quantitative research methods was also compared and contrasted to consolidate emergent themes.

The second phase (*Qualitative Data Analysis Phase*) comprised the analysis of all qualitative data to explain and elaborate on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase (Creswell, 2013). Throughout this phase, the researcher utilized 'grounded theory from a constructionist perspective' approach, which involved,

> "…developing increasingly abstract ideas about participants' meanings, actions, and words and seeking specific data to fill out, refine, and check the emerging conceptual categories. The latter work results in an analytic interpretation of the participants' worlds and of the processes constituting how these worlds are constructed. Thus [the researcher used] the process emphasis in grounded theory to analyse the relationship between human agency and social structure that pose theoretical and practical concerns in social justice studies" (Charmaz, 2005, 508).

The above process generated different lines of questioning, which informed the study's major findings in the quantitative phase. The qualitative analysis process involved three main stages, namely:

1) Analysis of semi-structured interviews and focus groups by using the software tool NVIVO-8 (QSR 2008), following transcription of both data sources. The researcher commenced the latter process by analysing semi-structured interviews individually, and then collectively in search of similarities and/or discrepancies among the fifteen conducted interviews. This process set the basis for the development of a 'coding framework for thematic ideas' (Gibbs, 2007). Saldana (2016) described a 'code' as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, evocative, and essence-capturing attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (4). Likewise, the same analysis procedure was utilized for the examination of data from the four focus groups.
2) Analysis of job-shadowing sessions and participant observations through the use of analytic memos. Saldana (2016) argued that analytic memos allowed researchers to reflect and to record on "the coding processes and code choices…and the emergent patterns, categories or sub-categories, themes and concepts..." (44). Analysis of job-shadowing observational checklists came first, by attaching analytic memos near all the recorded observations. Lempert (2007) described memos as "…the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding" (83). Similarly, the same procedure was utilized for the analysis of the eight lesson participant observational guidelists. The researcher completed this analysis process by categorizing each generated analytic memo under different themes.

3) Analysis of college-and-school-based documents (CDPs, SDPs, IEPs) by coding the content into several themes, which were then compared with other emergent themes or findings in the above two process. For this purpose the researcher utilized analytic memos, which helped to "fill in missing gaps or to respond to unanswered questions, and to provide insightful connections" (Saldana, 2016, 45). Upon completing the latter analysis, the researcher compared and contrasted emergent themes from the diverse qualitative data sources to identify a final list of general themes.

A common data analysis 'tool' in the above process was 'coding as a heuristic'. Hence, the researcher utilized open, axial, and selective coding to move the data from 'codes' to 'categories' to 'general themes or concepts' to 'theory'. In this regard, Richards and Morse (2007) contended that,

> "categorizing is how we get 'up' from the diversity of data to the shapes of the data, the sorts of things represented. Concepts are how we get up to more general, higher-level, and more abstract constructs…the ability to show how these themes and concepts systematically interrelated lead towards the development of theory" (157).

Hence, the researcher adopted the following coding techniques:

- Broad Coding: the researcher subjected data to thematic analysis. All the data was coded into different 'units of meaning' to generate thematic categories. In this sense, results from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews set the foundation for the coding framework, which helped to validate emergent themes and to ensure coding reliability. Given that the researcher considered 'coding' as cyclical process (rather than as a linear, one-time event), first-cycle and second-cycle coding occurred. The latter process helped the researcher to continuously de-construct and re-construct emergent data to fit in various categories pursuant to the criteria under investigation (researcher read through chronologically to generate broad-driven categories or free nodes with no reference to the research questions).
- Grouping themes into categories: categorization of all the gathered data according to research questions. In this regard, the researcher organized free nodes according to the specific research questions and investigations:
    - Definitions of 'deficit-thinking', 'inclusion' and 'integration';
    - Barriers and challenges to inclusive education;
    - Practices to overcome barriers to inclusive education;
    - Leadership styles for inclusive education and looking to the future.

- Coding by perspective: the researcher split the major themes by college, school and participant perspectives. The latter process facilitated comparison and correlation of data across colleges, schools, and the different participants.
- Generating summary statements using memos: generated memos formed the basis of the findings section, which was also illustrated by data from observational field notes, sociograms, data from learners' questionnaires and focus groups, as well as documentary sources. The use of memos facilitated also cross-case analysis.

The described coding process helped the researcher to search for meaning in patterns ('critical findings'), which allowed a deeper understanding of 'deficit-thinking' and leadership strategies for 'inclusive education'.

The final phase of the analysis process (*Integrating or Mixing of Data*) consisted of integrating both quantitative and qualitative data findings to develop a holistic and comprehensive picture of reality vis-à-vis 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education'. In this regard, the researcher employed triangulation strategies, by cross-checking the findings from quantitative data sources (questionnaires and sociometric tests), with emergent conclusions from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, job-shadowing sessions, participant observations, and document analysis. Comparative analysis (cross-method comparison and comparison of all data) facilitated the triangulation process, which allowed localized meanings to evolve into general themes following a logical chain of evidence (Scriven, 1974). The rationale behind this approach was that the quantitative data and the subsequent analysis provided a general understanding of the main research problem. Hence, qualitative data refined and explained statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998; Creswell 2003). In essence, the data analysis process ensured trustworthiness and enhanced credibility, reliability, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and validity (Yin, 2013).

4.3.5 Research Trustworthiness

For the purpose of this study, the researcher referred to trustworthiness as the accuracy and credibility of the research findings to enhance generalizability and usage by different educational stakeholders. Khumalo (2000) stressed that, "to establish the trustworthiness, of the data it is important that the researcher uses different procedures" (59). In this regard, Merrian (2009) identified 'validity' and 'reliability' as two main concepts in the notion of trustworthiness.

4.3.5.1 Validity Issues

Yin (2011) considered 'research validity' as an essential function to properly collect and interpret data to provide accurate conclusions that reflected the real world under examination. In this thesis study, the 'mixed-methods research' approach to data collection and analysis ensured 'inference quality' of the study's underlying findings, since "the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches together made it possible to offset the weaknesses inherent in any method and to draw conclusions that would be possible with either method alone" (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, 148). Hence, the researcher conceptualized 'inference quality' as *design quality* (the standards used for the evaluation of the methodological rigor) and *interpretive rigor* (the standards for evaluating the validity of conclusions) (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). In so doing, the researcher homed the 'integrative model of quality' to generate research findings that corresponded to real properties, characteristics, and variations in the physical and social world (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2006) (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: The 'Integrative Model of Quality': Standards and Criteria

Model Standard	Model Criteria
DESIGN QUALITY	**Within-design Consistency** – *uniformity of procedures that led to the emergence of inferences.*
	Design Suitability – *both research design and methods addressed research question/s.*
	Design Fidelity – *components of the research design were adequately administered and research tools implemented with rigor.*
	Analytic Adequacy – *the utilized data analysis techniques addressed the research question/s.*
INTERPRETIVE RIGOR	**Interpretive Agreement** – *consistency of interpretations across methods, which led to* **Interpretive Distinctiveness** *or the degree to which inferences were distinctively different.*
	Interpretive Consistency – *inferences closely followed the relevant findings in terms of type, intensity, and scope. The multiple inferences made from findings were consistent with each other.*
	Theoretical Consistency – *inferences were consistent with theory and the state of knowledge in the field.*
	Integrative Efficacy – *the meta-inference incorporated the inferences which stemmed from both phases of the study.*

(Adopted from: Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2006)

Essentially, the proposed 'integrative model of quality' allowed the researcher to focus on 'internal validity' (i.e. the internal logical relationships as linked to goals, reasons and meaning) rather than on 'external validity'. In this regard, the researcher focused on the research process (i.e.: from planning to administration of research tools to data collection to data analysis) to ensure content validity by mapping out 'HOW' research findings matched 'reality'. To this effect, the researcher developed general themes or concepts from numerical results and narrative data to each sub-question, where such themes were then further divided into sub-themes.

Coleman and Briggs (2002) remarked that 'content validity' depended heavily on the efficacy of research tools. In this regard, the researcher conducted a systematic, methodical, and vigorous validation process of all the developed research tools, which enabled the extraction of rich and thick data. In essence, the latter validation process comprised the following actions:

1) The identification of a relevant structure, design and set of components for each research tool, which helped to develop the tools' items or content;
2) The researcher bounced the developed research tools with the thesis supervisor and co-supervisor for their critical suggestions. Advice given was then incorporated in the respective tools;
3) The data collection process occurred in the participants' natural settings and was conducted over a span of time with intermittent intervals between one method and another;
4) The validity of both quantitative and qualitative methods was done through single-case (comparing participants' responses with each other) and cross-case analysis (comparing findings from different sources of data);
5) The use of numbered, dated and colour-coded analytic memos during the analysis process helped the researcher to categorize and classify codes into categories and categories into general themes or concepts.

Other features that further confirmed the research study's validity included: the high response rate amongst participants; and the level of access given to the researcher to college, school, or class-based documents. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), trustworthiness "includes fidelity to real life, context-and situation-specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, and honesty" (120). For this purpose, the researcher, during semi-structured interviews and focus groups, went beyond the 'spoken words'

and examined also characteristics, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body posture [though the use of note-taking]. In this sense, Cozby (2007) stressed that,

> "…everything that was said had to be said in some way – in some tone of voice, at some rate of speed, with some intonation and loudness...these are the signals by which you interpreted them and can now interpret again and perhaps differently, the meanings of your own interventions and that of your interviewee" (216).

Furthermore, Wengraf (2002) posited that the researcher,

> "…must be both listening to the informant's responses to understand what s/he is trying to get at and at the same time you must be bearing in mind your needs to ensure that all your questions are liable to get answered within the fixed time at the level of depth and detail you need" (198).

Hence, the audio-recording of semi-structured interviews and focus groups enabled the researcher (1) to concentrate more on the process rather than on writing notes; (2) to transcribe word-by-word all interviews and focus groups; as well as (3) to re-listen to recordings and to re-read transcriptions to ensure accuracy. The latter procedures and actions ensured also 'descriptive validity' of interviews' and focus groups' accounts. In addition, job-shadowing and participant observations checklists presented also high ecological validity as they lacked artificiality. Conversely, the questionnaires' validity was tested by means of a 'pilot study'. Altogether the latter processes and procedures led to the validation of data interpretation.

'Validation of research data' was another important prerogative of the current study, which the researcher achieved through the use of triangulation methods. Sethosa (2001) maintained that, "…triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods in the collection of data in order to compensate for the limitations of each method" (12). In this research study, triangulation was important because it provided credibility to the main research findings (Merrian, 2009). Triangulation occurred through the continuous cross-checking of data from questionnaires, socio-metric tests, interviews, observations, focus groups, and document analysis. Specifically, findings from questionnaires were triangulated with narrative data from interviews, job-shadowing sessions, participant observations and document analysis. This process ensured the accuracy of findings on 'deficit-thinking'; 'inclusive education'; leadership and management practices; and the teaching and learning process. Moreover, results from the learners' questionnaires and sociometric tests were also triangulated with descriptive data from focus groups, to corroborate findings on social relationships among different cohorts of learners. In the

latter process the researcher accepted all generated beliefs as true unless discrepant evidences emerged. During the process of interpretation, theories were generated and tested at various stages, with some of the analysed-generated data rejected and others retained and adapted (Watling, 2002). To summarize, triangulation involved:

1) The inclusion of different research methods to increase the results' validity.
2) Observing and analysing empirical data from different angles by using more than one lens.
3) Cross-checking all the gathered data through the use of comparative single-case and cross-case analysis.
4) De-contextualizing and re-contextualizing qualitative data.
5) Exploring cases separately and then collectively to identify universal themes.

Apart from the above processes, the researcher also discussed the research study's main conclusions with the four participant CPs; the two DGs (ES and QSE); and the thesis supervisor and co-supervisor, as expert professionals in the field of 'inclusive education'. Through the latter member-checking technique the researcher ascertained that all the analysed data was accurate and trustworthy.

4.3.5.2 Reliability Issues

Silverman (2002) defined reliability as "… the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research" (128). In this research study, reliability was enhanced through 'pilot testing'. Dane (1990) argued that "a pilot study is an abbreviated version of a research project in which the researcher practices or tests the procedures to be used in the subsequent full-scale project" (233). Similarly, Bailey (2007) described 'pilot study' as a "trial run" to "determine how the design of a project can be improved and to identify flaws in the measuring instruments" (98). In this study the researcher conducted two mini-pilot runs – one for the educators' questionnaires and the other for semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these pilot runs was to determine 'how' questionnaires and interviews would be understood by the different participants. Collected data from the pilot runs was not analysed. However, participants were encouraged to make remarks about specific items in both questionnaires and interviews. The feedback from participants and the suggestions from the supervisor were all included in the final drawing of the questionnaire and the interview questions. Given that questionnaires and interviews were two central tools in this research study, the 'pilot-runs' served to enhance reliability. The latter because:

a) The two pilot tests provided the researcher approaches and clues not foreseen prior to the study.
b) The pilot studies helped the researcher to identify topics which were left uncovered. In this regard, the researcher added two new questions to the interview schedule on ‘leadership for inclusion’ and ‘teaching in diverse classrooms’.
c) The pilot studies permitted a thorough check of the planned statistical and analytical procedures, thus allowing an appraisal of their adequacy in treating the data.
d) The pilot studies allowed the researcher to establish the approximate time required to complete questionnaires and interviews.

In summary, ‘pilot-testing’ indirectly strengthened the study’s validity, reliability and ‘inference transferability’ to other contexts, situations, times, and populations.

4.4 Ethical Issues and Considerations

Given that the current research study involved diverse educational stakeholders during the data collection process, ethical considerations played a vital and essential role. The main objective was to reduce the likelihood of harm and to eliminate concerns by treating participants with respect, dignity and honesty throughout the research process. In this regard, the research strived to build a positive, friendly and healthy relationship with all the selected research participants, by underlining clearly and unequivocally “the rights of the individual participants, whose privacy [was] safeguarded from harm, deceit, betrayal or exploitation” (Salkind, 2009, 60). Moreover, the researcher strived to build two-way trust with the research participants. For this purpose, the researcher informed the participants beforehand of the research study’s main aims, processes and practices (Oliver, 1997).

A) Informed and Voluntary Consent Forms

‘Informed consent’ represented one of the most important aspects of research ethics. In this research study, ‘consent’ referred to the need for participants to enter the research voluntarily, while understanding the nature of the study or any disadvantages and/or obligations these might encounter. To this effect, the researcher presented each participant with introductory letters and consent forms (Appendix H), which illustrated detailed information on the research study. The information letter and consent forms were written both in English and Maltese and were free from any technical jargon to avoid generating misunderstandings or misconceptions on the research process. The

latter information was also given verbally to participants before the administration of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observations, job-shadowing sessions and sociometric tests. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to discuss the details of the research and ask any questions they deemed necessary. With regards to learners' questionnaires, sociometric tests, and focus groups information was given in 'child-friendly' language. Since the study involved underage learners, the researcher also sent consent forms to parents or guardians to grant their permission. Where and when possible, the researcher also asked learners to purposefully complete the designed consent forms themselves. The principle of 'informed consent' included the avoidance of unnecessary deception, which in this research study played no part. All participants were given truthful and full information on the study's purposes and procedures.

The researcher also made sure not to exert pressure on participants so as not to invade their privacy. At no stage were participants coerced into taking part in the study. Hence, participants were not only notified but also assured that they could withdraw from the research at any point they deemed fit without any consequence. Furthermore, clear contact details of both the researcher and the thesis supervisor were provided, in case participants wished to clarify or notify anything about the research. Finally, the researcher presented participants with a 'schedule planner' to choose their preferred date, time and place where interviews, focus groups, socio-metric tests and participant observations would take place.

B) Anonymity and Confidentiality

Oliver (1997) described anonymity in research as "…giving respondents the opportunity to have their identity hidden in a research project" (77). Similarly, Salkind (2009) stated that "…anonymity in research means that records cannot be linked with names" and defined confidentiality as "assuring someone that what has been discussed will not be repeated" (81-82). Essentially, this study guaranteed both confidentiality and anonymity to all informants as "the narrators' immediate and long-range good could not be sacrificed for the researcher's gain" (Wengraf, 2002, 185). Hence, all the names of participant colleges, schools, and respondents are pseudonyms. The researcher also paid additional attention so as not to impart any gathered information to uninterested third parties and paid attention not to probe too deeply so as not to invade personal spaces. In addition, when describing background information of the research sites and

participants, care was taken not to divulge any information that could identify colleges, schools, educators, and learners.

C) Beneficence

This principle refers to the need for research to maximise the benefits and minimise any harmful effects on participants, which include psychological, emotional or physical harm and loss of confidentiality (Cozby, 2012). In this regard, the research study adhered completely to the guidelines set out by the University of Lincoln, School of Education, Ethics Committee. Before the administration of every research method, the researcher discussed the beneficences of the study with participants. Moreover, research only commenced once the researcher received the necessary permissions from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Lincoln and the Department for Research and Policy Development in Malta (Appendix I and J). During this process, the researcher was open and willing to conduct all the required changes to the original plan as directed by the two competent bodies. At the end of the research project, the researcher will also present a summary of all findings to the participant DGs, Directors, CPs, and HoS for future reference.

D) Permission

Permission to access the different identified colleges and schools was essential. The researcher contacted all CPs for their respective verbal consent. Upon acceptance, the researcher contacted the Department for Research and Policy Development for its official approval. Afterwards, the researcher started contacting participant CPs and HoS again, to hold individual meetings to explain the aims and objectives of the study in more detail, as well as to collaboratively plan the data collection phase. Furthermore, the researcher also conducted individual meetings with participant class and subject teachers, where participant observations were planned.

E) Data Keeping

The researcher saved questionnaire data on an external hard disk, secured with a password and kept in a safe place at the researcher's home. The latter hard disk contained also all the interviews' and focus groups' recordings and transcriptions as well as the sociometric test result matrices and 'sociograms'. The researcher also kept a 'participant observation journal' and a 'job-shadowing diary' to record all participant observations and job-shadowing sessions respectively.

4.4.1 Researcher Positionality, Self-Awareness and Reflexivity

For the purpose of this research study, positionality emerged as an exploration of the researcher's reflection on one's own place in the study, with the implication that such positioning might influence aspects of the research (Gardner and Mendoza, 2010). Positionality is "thus determined by where one stands in relation to 'the other' within the research study" (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Kee, Ntseane and Muhammed, 2011, 411). Hence, positionality played an important consideration in this research study, as it not only directly influenced how the research was carried out but also determined the prevailing outcomes and results of the study, i.e. whose voice/s would be heard. In this regard, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) contended that,

> "…no matter how much you try, you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value. Being a clean slate is not possible nor desirable" (38).

Prior to the commencement of this research study, precisely during the planning stage, the researcher 'laid open' his internal values, passions, behaviour, feelings and beliefs vis-à-vis diversity, social justice, equity, and inclusion in education. The latter process of 'self-awareness' allowed the researcher to critically reflect on his personality and experiences (both social and educational) to clearly delineate his position or stance in relation to the study. As an educator, an activist, and a harsh critic of capitalism and 'neoliberal approaches to education', I empathized with minority learners' difficulties, challenges and barriers to fully access the current mainstream curriculum. In this sense, I always placed minority learners at the centre of the educational provision and rejected 'a priori': the notion that not all learners can learn; blame-the-victim techniques for lack of educational success; and one-size-fits-all practices. On the contrary, I upheld the belief that all learners are capable to learn if provided with the right ambience and conditions that facilitate learning. Additionally, the various qualifications in the field of 'inclusive education' coupled with my educational experience in different positions or posts within MEDE further reinforced my firm conviction, determination and desire to re-structure and re-culture the local educational system's processes and practices in favour of a 'bottom-up' approach to education to better include minority learners. The latter self-orientation, as influenced by the readings of Don Lorenzo Milani (*Letters to a Teacher*) and Antonio Gramsci (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*), gave rise to the present research study, which investigated how 'neoliberal-deficit-thinking' logics could be eliminated from the Maltese educational system. The exposition of personal,

social and educational beliefs and experiences played a key role to appropriately define the study's research questions and to relate the latter to the research hypotheses and theoretical background, which involved a conceptual understanding of the utilized research methodology. In so doing, the researcher also identified potential 'prospective' (effects of the researcher on the study) and 'retrospective' (effects of the study on the researcher) reflexivity (Attia and Edge, 2016).

Given my staunch pro-inclusion stance, the greatest barrier for the researcher was to avoid falling into the trap of 'bias', which referred to "…any trend or deviation from the truth in data collection, data analysis, interpretation and publication, which can cause false conclusions" (Gardenier and Resnik, 2002, 67). Moreover, detachment from personal biases was also crucial in order to present a true picture of reality on the state-of-play of inclusive education vis-à-vis 'deficit-thinking', which was a relatively new research topic in the Maltese educational system. In this regard, 'pragmatism' (as the central paradigm) and 'mixed-methods' (as the main methodological orientation) allowed the researcher to maintain a neutral stance (or a middle positioning on the objectivity-subjectivity continuum) to avoid the jeopardising of the research site and participants or the selection of one outcome over others. Hence, the integration of both quantitative and qualitative research methods helped to channel bias with the intention to deconstruct and reconstruct the meaning of inclusion, i.e. by focusing on 'research *for* minority empowerment' rather than 'research *on* minority students'. Essentially, the 'mixed-methods sequential explanatory approach' together with 'triangulation of data' (1) reduced the risk of bias; (2) led to a better understanding of collected data; and (3) enhanced generalizability, transferability and accuracy.

Entry into meaningful research sites (i.e. colleges, schools and classrooms) depended on the purposive sampling process (Bernard, 2006). As such, field sites were dependent on the selected colleges, which also raised ethical considerations. Likewise, the researcher also selected participant schools and classrooms (in which the different research tools were administered) purposively, following critical advice from my supervisor, DG ES and DG QSE. The latter approach helped to increase the quality and the integrity of the study, while preventing participants from falsely purporting to address 'deficit-thinking'. Finally, throughout the data analysis process, the supervisor and the co-supervisor served as the main referents with whom the researcher bounced

all results, inferences and conclusions. This approach helped the researcher to always remain neutral in his judgement and to avoid succumbing to personal thoughts, biases or considerations during the analysis process.

4.4.2 Strengths and Limitations

The first difficulty dealt with finding local literature dealing with the concept of ‘deficit-thinking’, a concept which was quite under-researched in Malta. Moreover, local literature focused mainly on the ‘WHAT’ and ‘WHY’ rather than on the ‘HOW’ of inclusive education. Hence, I often found myself having to make sense of research carried out abroad by adopting a two-pronged approach: (1) applying foreign literature to the local context; and (2) notifying the main differences and similarities between Maltese and foreign educational system to enable generalizability.

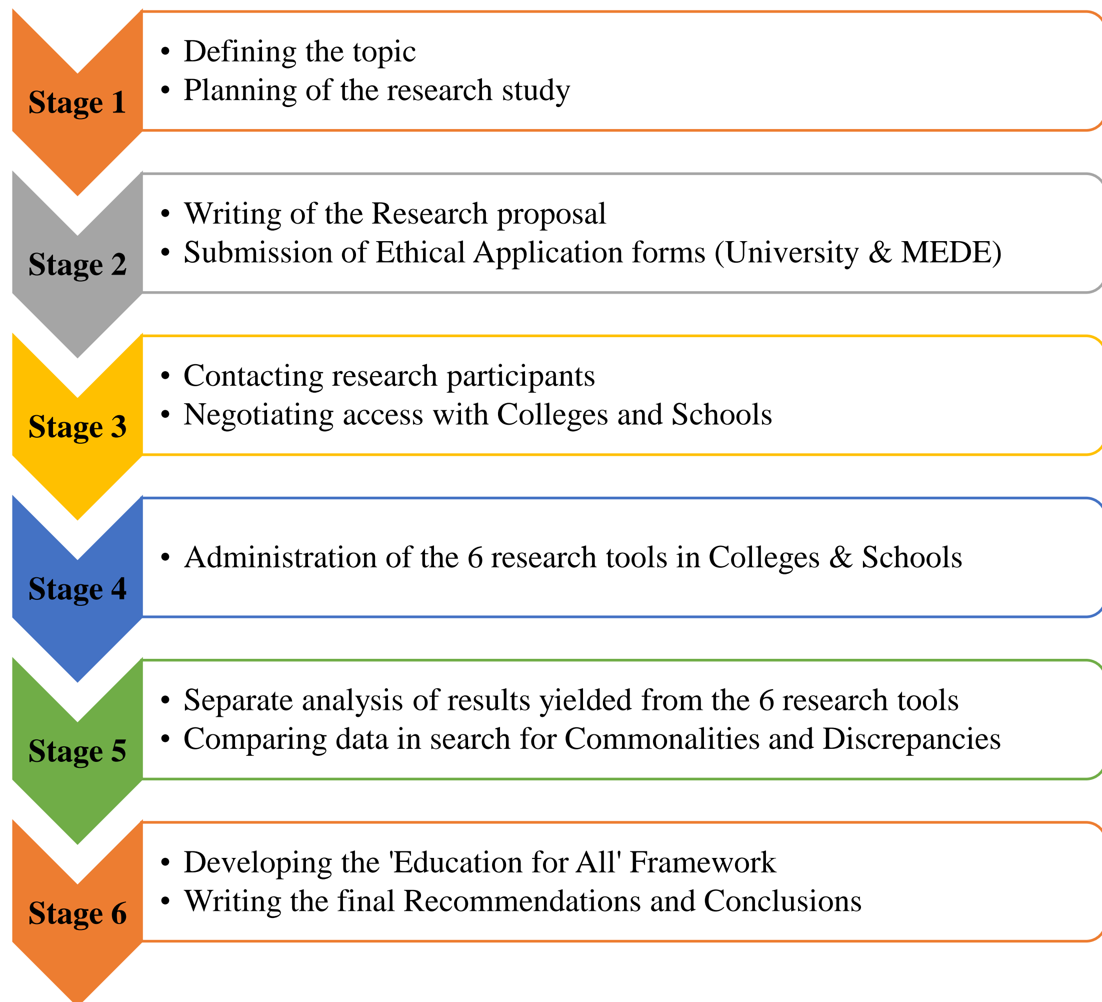
Probably the most wearying difficulty arose when it came to the process of transcribing and interpreting all the collected data from qualitative research methods (job-shadowing sessions, class participant observations, interviews, focus groups and sociometric tests). The latter process proved not only time-consuming but also very stressful and laborious to compare and contrast qualitative data with quantitative ones (questionnaires). Although encountering difficulties to structurally present the voluminous gathered data, the collected evidence helped the researcher to provide a thorough analysis of the state-of-play of inclusive education in Malta by prioritizing the voice of several key educational stakeholders. In this regard, quantitative methods to generalize data, while qualitative methods facilitated transferability of data. Hence, utilized research tools and structure ensured consistency, reliability and validity as well as facilitated the generation of plausiable, credible and transferable findings.

A delimitation of the study is the notion that a principal must be an inclusive leader to eliminate ‘deficit-thinking’, since the transformation of beliefs occurs through leadership deeply rooted in democracy with a focus on justice (Starratt, 1991). Finally, this research study could also serve as a solid platform for future research studies to continue addressing local research lacunas in the field of ‘inclusive education’, while filling knowledge gaps on ‘deficit-thinking’. It would be beneficial if a similar study is conducted in both the Church and the Independent educational sectors, given that the current study focused on the State sector. Together these studies would provide a true picture of reality across all educational sectors.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided the 'what', 'how' and 'why' framework for research methods and methodology. In so doing, the researcher described the research methods, techniques and procedures used during the six research stages (Figure 3.2).

Figure 4.4: The Six Research Stages



The next chapter (Chapter 5) presents and analyses all the gathered data. To facilitate understanding the researcher organized Chapter 5 as follows:

1. General Introduction: reiterates research questions and provides an overview of the aims of the data collection process.
2. Data Analysis: sub-divided into two parts, i.e.
   - *Analysis of Quantitative Data*; and
   - *Analysis of Qualitative Data*.
3. General Conclusion: highlights salient themes that will form part of the Suggestions and Recommendations chapter.

Chapter 5:Data Presentation and Analysis

Section 5A: General Introduction

Setting the Scene for the Main Research Findings

5A.1 General Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the collected data in relation to the study's research questions (as illustrated in Table 4.2 in Section 4.3 in Chapter 4). Given that the study adopted a 'mixed-methods sequential explanatory design', the researcher first analysed quantitative data (questionnaires and sociometric tests); then examined qualitative data (semistructured interviews; job-shadowing sessions; participant obsevations; focus groups and document analysis) to further explain and elaborate on the results obtained in the previous phase; and finally integrated both sets of data together to generate rich explanations on the study's main findings. Hence, Chapter 5 presents separate but interrelated analysis of all the gathered quantitative and qualitative data. Table 5A.1 illustrates the way this chapter is structured and organized.

Table 5A.1: Organization and Structure of Chapter 5

Chapter 5: **Data Presentation and Analysis**
General Introduction
Section 5A: General Introduction: *Setting the scene for the main research findings*
Quantitative Analysis
Section 5B: The Quantitative Analysis: *The Educators' Questionnaires*; *Sociometric Tests: Investigating Learners' Level of Relatedness*.
Qualitative Analysis
Section 5C: Semi-Structured Interviews Analysis: *Perceptions and Beliefs of Policymakers*
Section 5D: Job-Shadowing Sessions Analysis: *Leadership in Action: Role and Duties of HoS*
Section 5E: Class Participant Observations Analysis: *The Teaching and Learning Process*
Section 5F: Focus Group Sessions Analysis: *Giving Voice to Learners*
General Conclusion
Section 5G: General Conclusion: *Integrating or Mixing Quantitative and Qualitative Results*

The above structure allowed the researcher to reduce data overlap as well as to analyse:

1. The effects of 'neoliberalism' and 'deficit-thinking' on the whole system;
2. Governance and leadership issues at different system levels;

3. Minority groups and the challenges they bring to colleges and schools;
4. Social relationships among different learners in local classrooms; and
5. General pedagogy and current systems of additional support services.

These investigations complemented the EC's three key priority areas for improvement, namely:

> "…developing better and more inclusive schools; supporting teachers and school leaders for excellent teaching; and governance of school education systems: becoming more effective, equitable and efficient" (EC, 2017, 3).

Table 5A.2 below outlines the range, number of participants and the different research methods utilized during the eight month long data collection process. The latter resulted in ***592*** gathered questionnaires, ***15*** semistructured interviews, ***8*** job-shadowing sessions, ***2*** observations of leadership structures, ***8*** class-based participant observations, ***4*** focus group sessions and ***4*** whole class sociometric tests.

Table 5A.2: Range & Number of Participants in relation to Data Collection

Research Participants	Research Methods					
	Questionnaires	**Interviews**	**Job Shadowing**	**Participant Observations**	**Focus Groups**	**Socio-Metric Tests**
Minister		1				
DGs		2				
Directors		3				
Church Delegate		1				
Union 6President		1				
CPs		4				
HoS	16	3	8			
EOs	15					
Asst. HoS	26					
HoDs	20					
INCOs	5					
Specialist Teachers	50					
Primary Teachers	150			4		
Secondary Teachers	120			4		
LSEs	150					
Learners	40				4	4
Totals	**592**	**15**	**8**	**8**	**4**	**4**

The diverse tools and participants proved useful to identify system-wide challenges to propose the 'repositioning-of-the-self' technique as an effective tool for transforming colleges and schools into truly inclusive learning communities.

Education provision varies from one college, school and classroom to another since effective inclusionary practices depend on the beliefs, actions and attitudes of school leaders, teachers and support practitioners (Salend, 1998). To shed more light on the latter values and standpoints, 3 different questionnaires were distributed among HoS, middle leaders, teachers, support practitioners and LSEs in all schools within the 4 participant colleges. A total of 552 questionnaires (out of the distributed 1,143) were successfully completed. Table 5A.3 illustrates the total percentage response rates for all participants.

Table 5A.3: Participants' Response Rates

Questionnaire Type	Participants	Percentage Rate
SMT members	**SMT in Schools** *(Heads and Assistant HoS)*	42 responses out of 68 **62%**
Middle Leaders Different Teaching Grades	**Middle Leaders** *(INCOs; HoDs; EOs)* **Teaching Grades** *(Class/Subject & Support Teachers)*	360 responses out of 780 **46%**
Paraprofessionals	**LSEs** *(1-1; SSC; Shared Support)*	150 responses out of 295 **51%**
Total Response Rate *(Response rate of the three categories grouped together)*		552 responses out of 1143 **49%**

The three questionnaires served to (a) identify cohorts of diverse minority learners in local colleges and schools; (b) analyse the viewpoints of different educators on 'deficit-thinking', 'inclusive education', and 'culturally-responsive schooling'; (c) explore the attitudes and expections of educators towards minority learners; and (d) investigate and identify leadership profiles in favour of 'education for all'. The latter objectives were distributed over three main sections:

- <u>Section A</u>: Participants' General Information, Perceptions and Viewpoints;
- <u>Section B</u>: Students' Population, Diversity and Challenges; and
- <u>Section C</u>: Leadership for Inclusive Education.

A detailed analysis of the three questionnaires is provided in Chapter 5: Section 5B. The latter section includes also an analysis of the conducted 4 sociometric tests, which helped the researcher to test the learners' level of relatedness and to examine the social structures in:

a) Year 4 class in Primary school A;
b) Year 5 class in Primary school C;
c) Form 3 class in Secondary school E; and
d) Form 4 class in Secondary school G.

Learners took approximately 45 minutes to complete the 5 questions in the socio-metric test, which were then represented in 'sociograms' for analysis purposes. The latter data also served as a basis for the focus group sessions analysis (Chapter 5: Section 5F), which aimed to give voice to learners' concerns and ideas.

The perceptions, beliefs and discourse of policymakers proved fundamental in analyzing how minority learners are being included or marginalized in local colleges and schools. The analysed information from semi-structured interviews explored: (a) advantages, disadvantages and the main challenges of an inclusive system; (b) need for more sustained teacher training; and (c) governance, leadership and recruitment issues (Chapter 5: Section 5C). The latter analysis also helped the researcher to corroborate findings from questionnaires and sociometric tests (where and when possible). A total of 12 interviews were conducted (Table 5A.4).

Table 5A.4: Interviews Schedule

Interviewees	Duration	Location
MEDE Minister	1 hour 45 minutes	MEDE
DG ES	1 hour 30 minutes	DG ES Office
DG QSE	1 hour 30 minutes	DG QSE Office
Director Curriculum	1 hour 20 minutes	Director's Office
Director QA	1 hour 20 minutes	Director's Office
Director NSSS	1 hour 20 minutes	Director's Office
CP: College W	1 hour 30 minutes	Office of the CP
CP: College X	1 hour 30 minutes	Office of the CP
CP: College Y	1 hour 30 minutes	Office of the CP
CP: Colelge Z	1 hour 30 minutes	Office of the CP
Church Schools' Representative	1 hour 15 minutes	Church Secretariat Offices
Union President	1 hour 40 minutes	Union Offices

In addition, the researcher conducted 3 other semi-structured interviews with 3 HoS. The latter participants included:

a) HoS of a large State Primary school;
b) HoS of a small State Primary school; and
c) HoS of a large secondary school from the Church sector.

These interviews helped the researcher to: examine if school leaders' beliefs and actions complemented those of policymakers; identify barriers to inclusive education at school level; and sustain results obtained from the SMT questionnaires. During the analysis process, the researcher utilized (a) the thematic method to identify all themes emerging from the two sets of interviews; and (b) the comparative approach to compare responses together (Cohen et al., 2000, 148).

The journey to transform schools into inclusive learning communities is a long and challenging process that necessitates the involvment of HoS. Hence, the researcher conducted 8 job-shadowing sessions to analyse thoroughly the main responsibilities and duties of local school leaders vis-a-vis inclusion (Table 5A.5).

Table 5A.5: Job-Shadowing Sessions with HoS

Session	College	Sector	Time-Spent
School A	College W	Primary	Whole-day session
School B	College X	Primary	Whole-day session
School C	College Y	Primary	Whole-day session
School D	College Z	Primary	Whole-day session
School E	College W	Secondary	Whole-day session
School F	College X	Secondary	2 half day sessions
School G	College Y	Secondary	2 half day sessions
School H	College Z	Secondary	Whole-day session

The above sessions helped the researcher to: (a) analyse leadership styles; (b) delve into management issues; (c) identify challenges to inclusive education; (d) examine how HoS organize their respective work days; and (e) scrutinize HoS overall discourse and actions. In addition, the researcher conducted observations in two highly important leadership structures at both directorate and college levels. The latter included: (a) *one observation* of a CCP meeting, which structure includes all CPs and is chaired by DG ES; (b) *two observations* of CoH meetings in Colleges W and Z. The latter two councils are chaired by the CP and include all primary and secondary HoS in colleges W and Z.

Together with the 8 job-shadowing sessions, observations in CCP and COH structures helped the researcher to: (a) analyse dynamics at both college and school levels; and (b) understand the way CPs and HoS participated in strategic decision-making processes (Chapter 5: Section 5D).

To unveil teacher-related issues vis-a-vis inclusion, the researcher conducted 4 mainstream classroom observations and 4 compensatory teaching settings observations in CE and CCP classrooms. The latter participant observations helped the researcher to (a) analyse attitudes of educators and peers towards minority learners; (b) observe class dynamics and atmosphere; (c) investigate pedagogy and support strategies; and (d) examine the interaction between teachers and LSEs in classrooms. Table 5A.6 outlines the college, school and year groups in which participant observations took place; the lessons observed; the participants involved; and the duration of each observation.

Table 5A.6: Class Participant Observations

College	School	Year	Lesson Observed	Observation	Duration
College X	Primary B	Year 5	Maltese	Teacher & LSEs	50 mins.
College Z	Primary D	Year 4	Mathematics	Teacher & LSEs	55 mins.
College X	Secondary F	Form 3	English	Teacher & LSEs	1 hour
College Z	Secondary H	Form 4	Physics	Teacher & LSEs	1 hour
College W	Primary A	Year 4	Literacy	CE Teacher	45 mins.
College Y	Primary C	Year 3	Basic Reading	CE Teacher	45 mins.
College W	Secondary E	Form 3	Basic English	CCP Teacher & LSEs	50 mins.
College Y	Secondary G	Form 4	Basic Mathmatics	CCP Teacher & LSEs	50 mins.

Analysis of the above-illustrated participant observations included the examination of the following teaching-related themes:

a) Teachers' class and time management skills;

b) Delivery and pace of lessons;

c) Use of resources, support techniques and type of differentation used;
d) Student involvement and utilized questioning techniques; and
e) Assessment processes and practices.

All emergent issues and themes were compared and contrasted with results obtained from questionnaires, sociometric tests, semistructured interviews and job-shadowing sessions (Chapter 5: Section 5E).

In an attempt to voice learners' ideas on the state-of-play of inclusive education, the study also made use of focus groups. A total of 4 focus groups were conducted in 4 different schools (Table 5A.7). Each focus group consisted of 8 randomly selected learners from Years 4 and 5 in primary schools and Form 3 and 4 in secondary schools.

Table 5A.7: Focus Groups with Learners

College	School	Year Group	No. Of Participants	Duration
College W	Primary A	Year 4 Year 5	4 learners 4 learners	1 hour 15minutes
College X	Primary B	Year 4 Year 5	4 learners 4 learners	1 hour 20 minutes
College Y	Secondary G	Form 3 Form 4	4 learners 4 learners	60 minutes
College Z	Secondary H	Form 3 Form 4	4 learners 4 learners	1 hour 10 minutes

To motivate and facilitate a healthy discussion, the researcher presented learners with 'The Story of Wedeb', which focused on an Ethiopian refugee student living in Malta. Accompanying the latter story were a number of questions that guided the discussion during the focus group sessions. For this purpose, video clips from the film 'The Blind Side' were also utilized (Chapter 5: Section 5F).

5A.2 Conclusion

The next part of this chapter, entitled *The Quantitative Analysis*, deals with both the analysis and presentation of results obtained from the educators' questionnaires and sociometric tests. The latter analysis served as the basis/foundation for the examination of qualitative data in Sections 5C, 5D, 5E and 5F. Finally, data correlations of both sets of data analysis (quantitative and qualitative) led to the identification of the main research findings in the final part of this chapter (*General Conclusion*).

Section 5B: Quantitative Analysis

Analysis of the Educators' Questionnaires & Sociometric Tests

5B.1 General Information of Questionnaire Participants

5B.1.1 Sample Size and Demographic Information

The quantitative data collection process consisted in the distribution of three different questionnaires to SMT members; Middle leaders (EOs, HoDs, INCOs); class, subject and support teachers; and LSEs in 11 Primary (65%) and 6 Secondary schools (35%) (Table 5B.1). In total, the researcher distributed 1143 questionnaires to 17 HoS, 51 Assistant HoS, 90 Middle leaders, 690 teachers, and 295 LSEs. From the latter, 552 questionnaires (51%) were collected. Participation rates varied from one educator to another, with SMT members registering the highest participation rate (73%) whereas Middle leaders recorded the lowest engagement rate (44%) (Table 5B.2).

Table 5B.1: Questionnaires Research Site

Region	College	Schools	
		Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
Northern Region	W	2	1
	X	2	1
Central Region	Y	3	2
Southern Region	Z	4	2
Total		11	6

Table 5B.2: Questionnaire Participants

Questionnaire Type	Participants	Distributed	Collected	Response Rate
SMT Members	HoS	17	**16**	**94%**
	Asst. HoS	51	**26**	**51%**
Middle Leaders (EOs, HoDs, INCOs)	EOs	40	**15**	**37%**
	HoDs	40	**20**	**50%**
	INCOs	10	**5**	**50%**
Teachers	Primary Teachers	250	**150**	**60%**
	Secondary Teachers	300	**120**	**40%**
	Peripatetic Teachers	55	**25**	**45%**
	Specialist Teachers	65	**25**	**38%**
Personalized Learners' Support	LSEs	295	**150**	**51%**

The majority of respondents were female educators (60%) and 40% were males (Table 5B.3). The latter discrepancy suggests that, in Malta, females are more inclined to commence a teaching career than males. Burn (2001) warned of the indirect effects of gender imbalance in the teaching profession and posited that, "if pupils don't come across a gender balanced workforce they may feel that teaching is only for a specific type of person" (6).

Table 5B.3: Gender of Questionnaire Participants

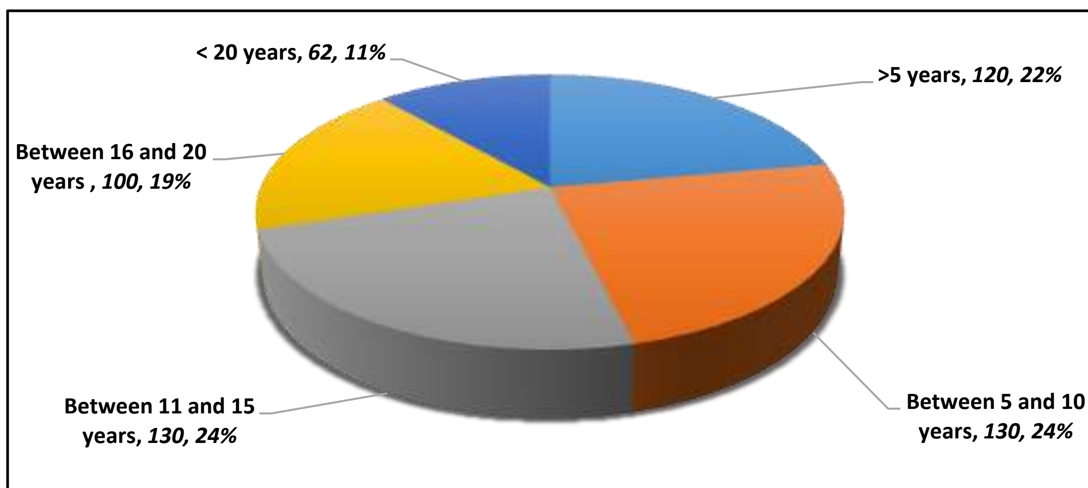
Gender of Questionnaire Participants				
Stakeholders	**Males**	**Percentage**	**Females**	**Percentage**
HoS	5 out of 16	**31%**	11 out of 16	**69%**
Asst. HoS	15 out of 26	**58%**	11 out of 26	**42%**
Educators	170 out of 360	**47%**	190 out of 360	**53%**
LSEs	30 out of 295	**20%**	120 out of 295	**80%**

Participants presented also different years of teaching experience as illustrated in Table 5B.4 and Figure 5B.1 below.

Table 5B.4: Years of Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	SMT Members	Educators	LSEs
Less than 5 years	**0**	**55** out of 360 – **16%**	**65** out of 150 – **43%**
Between 5 and 10	**0**	**85** out of 360 – **24%**	**45** out of 150 – **30%**
Between 11 and 15	**12** out of 42 – **29%**	**97** out of 360 – **28%**	**21** out of 150 – **14%**
Between 16 and 20	**16** out of 42 – **38%**	**73** out of 360 – **21%**	**11** out of 150 – **7%**
More than 20 years	**14** out of 42 – **33%**	**40** out of 360 – **11%**	**08** out of 150 – **5%**

Figure 4B.1: Years of Teaching Experience



SMT Members

SMTs in all participant schools had more than 10 years of teaching experience. The majority (38%) had between 16 and 20 years of service, 33% had more than 20 years and 29% had between 11 and 15 years teaching practice. Recruitment criteria for the post of Assistant Head specify that prospective candidates need to have at least 10 scholastic years teaching experience (Appendix K), while HoS required an additional "4 scholastic years of service in the grade of Assistant Head" and a "post-graduate qualification (MQF Level 7) in Educational Leadership and Management" (Appendix L). The majority of HoS (50%) and Assistant Heads (62%) also had between 5 and 10 years' experience in their respective grades.

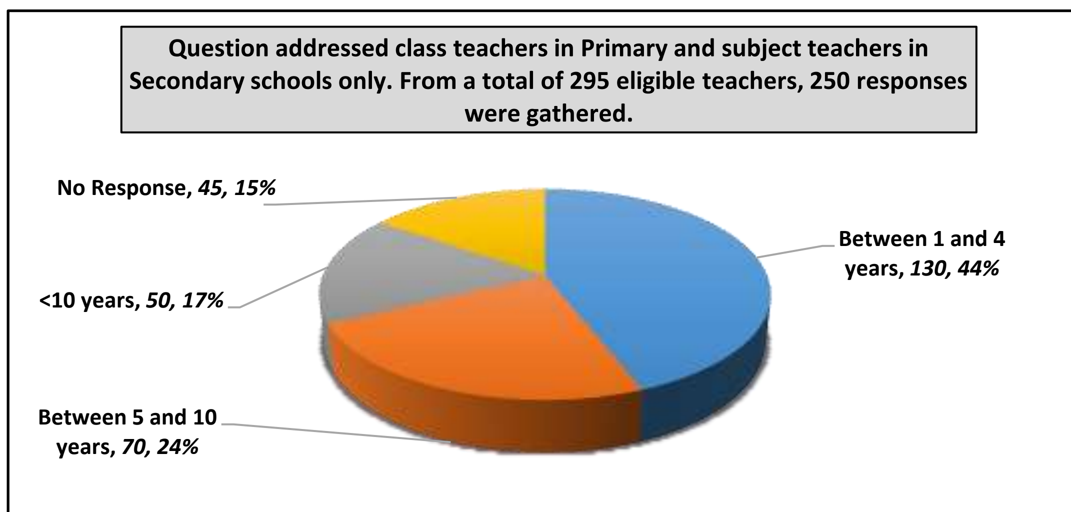
Educators

The majority of educators (28%) indicated that they had between 11 and 15 years of teaching experience. On the other hand:

- 24% chose 'between 5 and 10 years experience';
- 21% chose 'between 16 and 20 years experience';
- 16% chose 'less than 5 years experience'; and
- 11% chose 'more than 20 years experience'.

The above data indicates that "the teaching profession has lost much of its capacity to attract candidates due to a decline of prestige in the teaching profession; deterioration of working conditions and unattractive salaries" (http://erc.europa.eu). The majority of educators (44%) also indicated that they never spent more than 4 years teaching in the same school (Figure 5B.2).

Figure 5B.2: Teaching Experience in the same School



LSEs

53% of LSEs hailed from the secondary sector while 47% worked in primary schools, with the majority engaged on 'SSC' or on 'FT 1-1' basis. LSEs resulted as the least experienced cohort of educators, with 43% having 'less than 5 years' and 30% having 'between 5 and 10 years' working experience. The majority (72%) indicated that prior to their recruitment, they never worked in the educational sector. Instead, they served as clerks, receptionists, nursing assistants, beauticians or care workers. Post-secondary level education (43%) resulted as the highest educational level amongst LSEs (Table 5B.5).

Table 5B.5: LSEs' Level of Education

Level of Education of Current LSEs		
Educational Level	**Number of LSAs**	**Percentage**
Secondary Level Education	**40** out of 150	**27%**
Post-Secondary Level Education	**65** out of 150	**43%**
Tertiary Level Education	**45** out of 150	**30%**

5B.1.2 Initial-Teacher-Training and its Effectiveness

The majority of SMT members and teachers (53%) received their ITT from the UoM and held the B.Ed. (Hons.) degree, which is a four-year course aimed at preparing prospective teachers for the teaching profession. Apart from the bachelor degree, HoS completed successfully the PGDEL course. The latter is a 60 ECTS course aimed to,

> "provide participants with knowledge base, rigorous intellectual analysis and leadership experience [...] centred around what educational leaders need to know to be able to understand societal needs as well as to effect change in response to social demands" (http://www.um.edu.mt).

21% undertook the course for 'Supplementary Teachers', 18% received their training from the Teachers' College, and 8% followed a teaching course at MCAST or from a private foreign tertiary institution. The majority (69%) rated the training received as not effective (Table 5B.6).

Table 5B.6: Effectiveness of Training Received

	Training was Effective	**Training was NOT effective**
SMT Members	**6** out of 42	**36** out of 42
Teachers	**120** out of 360	**240** out of 360
Total	**126** out of 402 **31%**	**276** out of 402 **69%**

Figures show that ITT courses required immediate reviewing to better equip educators with the necessary skills and competences to provide quality education to all learners. In this regard, Geyer (1996) posited that,

> "...University is a role model and pace setter to the community and people that it serves. When university fails to address issues in the world in which we live, it fails in its mission to educate and prepare students for the future" (31).

On the contrary, the majority of LSEs (87%) received training after their recruitment with MEDE. Training consisted of a compulsory 10-week course offered by NSSS, focusing mainly on SEN issues. LSEs (60%) did not deem the training as effective as it failed to address their 'real everyday' needs and challenges. Hence, LSEs expressed the need to receive training prior to their recruitment and to transform the current 10-week compulsory training course since content was "too theoretical and not rooted in everyday realities" while its structure was "fragmented and not sustained over time" (LSE).

5B.1.3 Working with Minority Learners

Participants were asked to indicate if they ever worked with minority learners. 70% (387 out of 552) replied in the affirmative, 24% (135 out of 552) pointed out that they never worked while 6% (30 out of 552) were non-committal (Table 5B.7).

Table 5B.7: Have you ever worked with a minority learner?

Participants	Yes	No	Don't Know
SMT Members	42 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Teachers	300 (83%)	60 (17%)	0 (0%)
LSAs	45 (30%)	75 (50%)	30 (20%)
Total	**387**	**135**	**30**
Percentage Rate	**70%**	**24%**	**6%**

Unlike SMT members and teachers, the majority of LSEs (50%) indicated that they never worked with 'minority learners', even though, they supported learners with an official statement of needs. Reasons for the latter could be two-fold:

a) LSEs lacked knowledge on the meaning of the term 'minority learners'; and

b) Support structures lacked stringent procedures to curb service abuse.

The majority of SMT members and teachers (84%) described their working experience with minority learners as either 'Not so pleasant' (49%) and 'Frustrating' (35%). Only

16% rated their experience as 'Pleasant'. On the contrary, a relative majority of LSEs (40%) viewed their experience as 'Pleasant' (Table 5B.8).

Table 5B.8: LSEs Working Experiences

General Feeling	LSEs Responses	Percentage
Pleasant	**60** out of 150	**40%**
Not so Pleasant	**30** out of 150	**20%**
Frustrating	**20** out of 150	**13%**
Mixed Feelings	**40** out of 150	**27%**

5B.2 Participants' Viewpoints and Beliefs

5B.2.1 Understanding of Inclusive Education and Minority learners

The 'Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action' considered 'inclusive education' or 'education for all' as an all-encompassing framework in which,

> "schools should accommodate all children regardless of their intellectual, physical, social and emotional, linguistic, nationality or other conditions. This should include also disabled and gifted students; street and working children; children from remote and nomadic populations; children from linguistic, ethnic or religious minorities and children from marginalized areas or groups" (UNESCO, 1994, 10).

Both the NMC (2000) and the NCF (2012) upheld the 'education for all' objectives and contended that,

> "...society has a moral responsibility to affirm diversity if it believes in the broadening of democratic boundaries…in the fostering of a participatory culture, in the defence of basic children's rights, in the constant struggle against all those factors that prevent students' different abilities from being brought to fruition and in safeguarding the country's achievements and success" (NMC, 2000, 36).

For this purpose, participants were asked to define the term 'inclusive education'. The latter question allowed the researcher to examine educators' general understanding of the 'education for all' concept. A thorough analysis of the gathered responses revealed that participants viewed 'inclusive education' as:

- A process that "respects and celebrates all forms of diversity";
- The "antithesis of one-size-fits-all" practices;
- A "socially-just product" that supports learners to "…access the curriculum and to participate actively in school life"; and

- A "support service in schools" to facilitate the integration and placement of learners with multiple forms of disability.

In addition, respondents referred to 'inclusive education' as a "challenging process and practice, which was difficult (if not impossible) to implement" due to "lack of expertise on diversity issues". In this regard, one Head of School questioned, "How can schools respond to all learners' needs if these are not fully equipped and supported to do so?".

Furthermore, participants also defined the term 'minority learners'. Among the most common definitions of the latter term there were:

- "Learners who have specific social, emotional, physical and educational needs and who are less in number than the rest";
- "Learners who do not follow school norms and are disadvantaged or marginalized when compared to other peers";
- "Learners who do not fit in the general education system";
- "Learners from low socio-economic or cultural backgrounds"; and
- "Early school leavers or learners sidelined by the educational system or society".

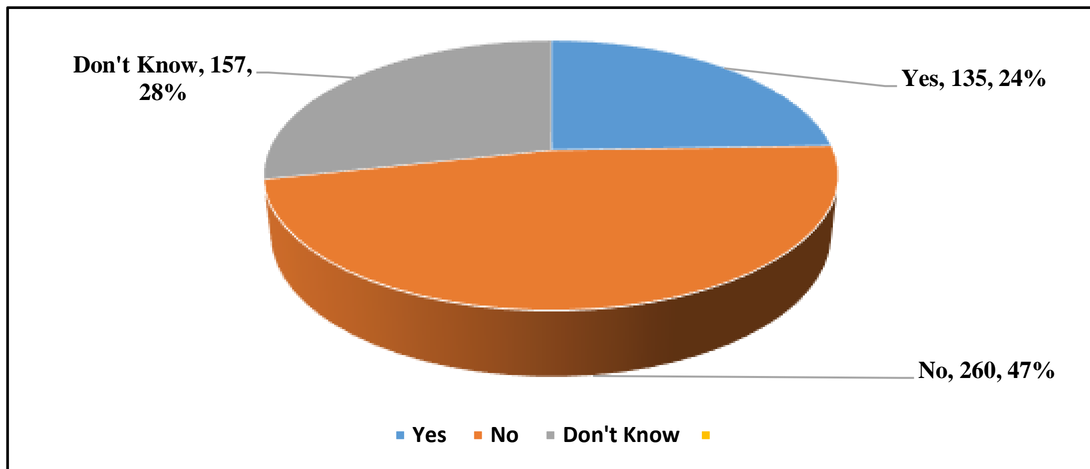
Finally, collected definitions on the term 'minority learners' correlated positively with the notion of the 'concept of the norm', which followed 'bell-shaped curve' theory.

5B.2.2 Inclusive School-Based Policies and School Development Plans

According to Ainscow (2012), the transformation of schools into fully inclusive learning settings required analytical thinking, systemic planning and the development of evidence-based policies. In this regard, the distributed questionnaires investigated if participant schools had specific school-based policies related to 'inclusive education'. The majority of participants (53%) indicated that schools did not have such a policy, but abided to 'The National Policy for Inclusive Education for Students with Disability' (Ministry for Education, 2000). Conversely, 26% confirmed the existence of policies, which tackled "diversity issues to promote a culture of respect, acceptance, tolerance, and equity". Finally, 21% were unable to indicate whether schools upheld an inclusive policy or not. Among the main reasons to justify the latter choice, there were: (a) "lack of engagement and involvement in decision-making processes" (Primary Teacher); (b) "lack of communication with SMT members and teachers" (LSE); and (c) "high levels of indifference among teachers vis-à-vis inclusion" (Secondary HoS). Apart from the lack of school-based policies on 'inclusion', participant schools lacked also inclusive

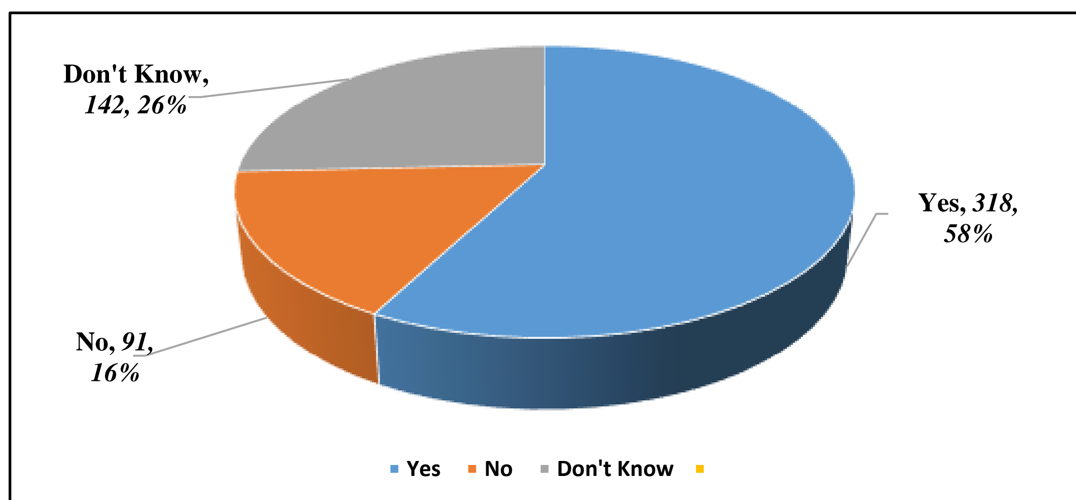
planning or programming. In fact, the majority of respondents (47%) pointed out that inclusion did not feature in the SDP; 28% did not know; and only 24% replied in the affirmative (Figure 5B.3).

Figure 5B.3: Inclusion as a Key Priority Area in SDP



Finally, participants were also asked to indicate if they rated their school as an inclusive one. The majority of HoS, Assistant HoS, Middle leaders, teachers, and LSEs (58%) regarded their schools as inclusive, since: "all SEN learners are provided with personalized additional support and help" (Secondary HoS); "in our school we cater for a lot of foreign students" (Primary Teacher); and "our school is equipped with a lot of educational resources to help different learners" (Middle School LSE) (Figure 5B.4).

Figure 5B.4: Is the School an Inclusive one?



5B.3 Minority Learners and Systems of Additional Support

5B.3.1 Identification of Minority Learners

A key pillar of the 'education for all' framework is to place 'the interests of all learners at the heart of every educational decision-making process' to ensure that "all students receive the right support, at the right time, from the right professionals" (The Scottish Government, 2008, 5). Hence, educators need "to really get to know all their students to help them recognise their comptences, demonstrate their strengths and work towards their aspirations" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007, 110). For this purpose, the questionnaires presented eight categories of 'minority learner groups' for participants to classify by using a Likert Scale from 1 to 5[2]. The main objective was to identify the '*Most Common*', '*Least Common*', and the '*Emerging*' minority groups of learners within the Maltese educational system. The eight categories included:

a) *Learners with diverse learning skills and abilities*, i.e. learners with diverse learning styles, including high, average and low achievers;
b) *Learners with diverse cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds*, i.e. returning migrants, regular and irregular immigrants, and Hispanic learners.
c) *Learners with diverse religious and faith backgrounds*, i.e. learners whose family religious' beliefs differ from that of the majority (Christianity);
d) *Learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds*, i.e. learners from families with diverse income, levels of education, occupation, social status and family structure;
e) *Learners with gender differences*, i.e. learners with diverse sexual orientations, such as Trans, Gender Variant, and Intersex students;
f) *Learners with physical disabilities, psychological conditions or both*, i.e. learners presenting functioning and mobility limitations (visual and hearing impairment); learners with asperger syndrome, autism and downs syndrome; or multiple disabilities;
g) *Learners with communication difficulties*, i.e. learners experiencing difficulties in language development or knowledge;
h) *Learners with diverse aptitudes towards schooling*, i.e. learners with challenging or defiant behaviour and learners who do not show interest towards schooling.

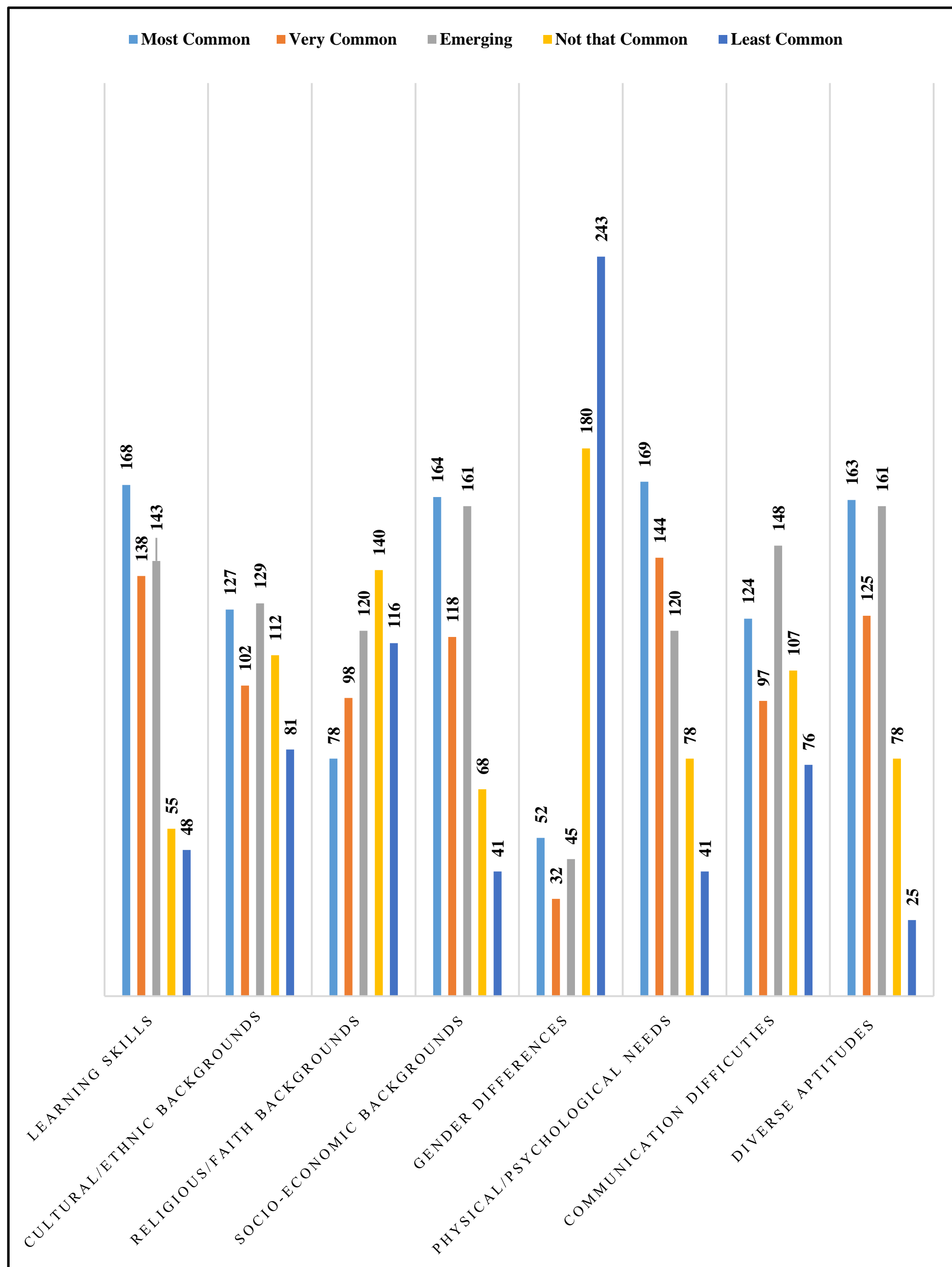
Table 5B.9 below presents the responses obtained from the three groups of participants to enable cross tabulation while Figure 5B.5 shows the latter information graphically.

[2] 1 being *'Most Common'* and 5 being *'Least Common'*.

Table 5B.9: Participants' Ratings of Minority Learners

	Diverse Minority Groups	Participants' Preferences				
		Most Common	Least Common	Emerging Groups	Not that Common	Least Common
SMT	*Learning skills & abilities*	16/42	10/42	3/42	5/42	8/42
Teachers		102/360	108/360	90/360	35/360	25/360
LSEs		50/150	20/150	50/150	15/150	15/150
Totals		**168/552 30%**	**138/552 25%**	**143/552 26%**	**55/552 10%**	**48/552 9%**
SMT	*Cultural & Ethnic backgrounds*	12/42	5/42	11/42	7/42	6/42
Teachers		90/360	72/360	68/360	80/360	50/360
LSEs		25/150	25/150	50/150	25/150	25/150
Totals		**127/552 23%**	**102/552 18%**	**129/552 24%**	**112/552 20%**	**81/552 15%**
SMT	*Religious & Faith backgrounds*	8/42	8/42	10/42	8/42	8/42
Teachers		50/360	65/360	70/360	92/360	83/360
LSEs		20/150	25/150	40/150	40/150	25/150
Totals		**78/552 14%**	**98/552 18%**	**120/552 22%**	**140/552 25%**	**116/552 21%**
SMT	*Socio-Economic backgrounds*	14/42	8/42	11/42	5/42	4/42
Teachers		110/360	80/360	90/360	53/360	27/360
LSEs		40/150	30/150	60/150	10/150	10/150
Totals		**164/552 30%**	**118/552 21%**	**161/552 29%**	**68/552 12%**	**41/552 8%**
SMT	*Gender differences*	2/42	2/42	5/42	5/42	28/42
Teachers		35/360	25/360	20/360	130/360	150/360
LSEs		15/150	5/150	20/150	45/150	65/150
Totals		**52/552 9%**	**32/552 6%**	**45/552 8%**	**180/552 33%**	**243/552 44%**
SMT	*Physical disability & Psychological conditions*	19/42	14/42	5/42	3/42	1/42
Teachers		100/360	90/360	80/360	60/360	30/360
LSEs		50/150	40/150	35/150	15/150	10/150
Totals		**169/552 31%**	**144/552 26%**	**120/552 22%**	**78/552 14%**	**41/552 7%**
SMT	*Communication difficulties*	9/42	10/42	8/42	9/42	6/42
Teachers		85/360	77/360	80/360	68/360	50/360
LSEs		30/150	10/150	60/150	30/150	20/150
Totals		**124/552 22%**	**97/552 18%**	**148/552 27%**	**107/552 19%**	**76/552 14%**
SMT	*Aptitudes towards schooling*	13/42	10/42	11/42	3/42	5/42
Teachers		110/360	90/360	90/360	60/360	10/360
LSEs		40/150	25/150	60/150	15/150	10/150
Totals		**163/552 30%**	**125/552 23%**	**161/552 28%**	**78/552 14%**	**25/552 5%**

Figure 5B.5: Graphic Overview of Minority Learners' Categories



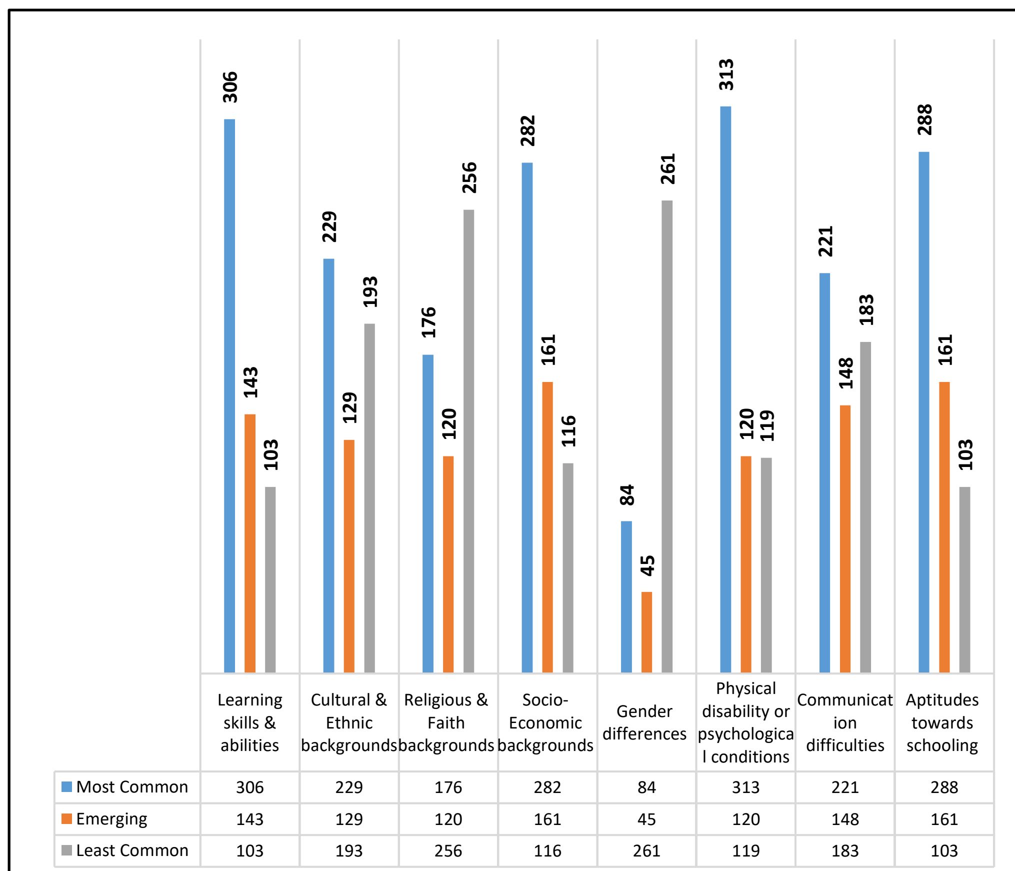
Results show the unique and diverse realities of participant schools, which vary from one college to another according to their geographical position. In this regard, the choice of *'learners from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds'* was significantly high in Northern and Centrally located schools; whereas *'learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds'* and *'learners with diverse aptitudes towards schooling'* were selected mostly by educators in the Southern region of Malta. The selection of '*learners*

with different learning skills and abilities' and *'learners with physical disabilities, psychological conditions or both'* was consistent in all the participant schools. To better identify minority groups, the researcher merged the '*Most* and *Very Common*' responses and the '*Not* and *Least Common*' preferences together to present the eight minority categories under three main groups: 'Most Common', 'Emerging', and 'Least Common' (Table 5B.10 & Figure 5B.6 respectively).

Table 5B.10: The 3 Main Minority Group Categories

Minority Learners' Categories	Most Common		Emerging	Least Common	
Learning skills and abilities.	(168 + 138)	**306**	**143**	(55 + 48)	**103**
Cultural and Ethnic backgrounds.	(127 + 102)	**229**	**129**	(112 + 81)	**193**
Religious and Faith backgrounds.	(78 + 98)	**176**	**120**	(140 + 116)	**256**
Socio-Economic backgrounds.	(164 + 118)	**282**	**161**	(68 + 48)	**116**
Gender differences.	(52 + 32)	**84**	**45**	(18 +243)	**261**
Physical disabilities, Psychological conditions or both.	(169 + 144)	**313**	**120**	(78 + 41)	**119**
Communication difficulties.	(124 + 97)	**221**	**148**	(107 + 76)	**183**
Aptitudes towards schooling.	(163 + 125)	**288**	**161**	(78 + 25)	**103**

Figure 5B.6: Most Common, Least Common and Emerging Minority Groups



‘*Learners with physical disabilities or psychological conditions*’ (313); ‘*learners with diverse learning skills and abilities*’ (306); and ‘*learners with diverse aptitudes towards schooling*’ (288) resulted as the three most common minority groups in local colleges and schools. The latter groups were followed by:

a) *Learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds* (282);

b) *Learners with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds* (229);

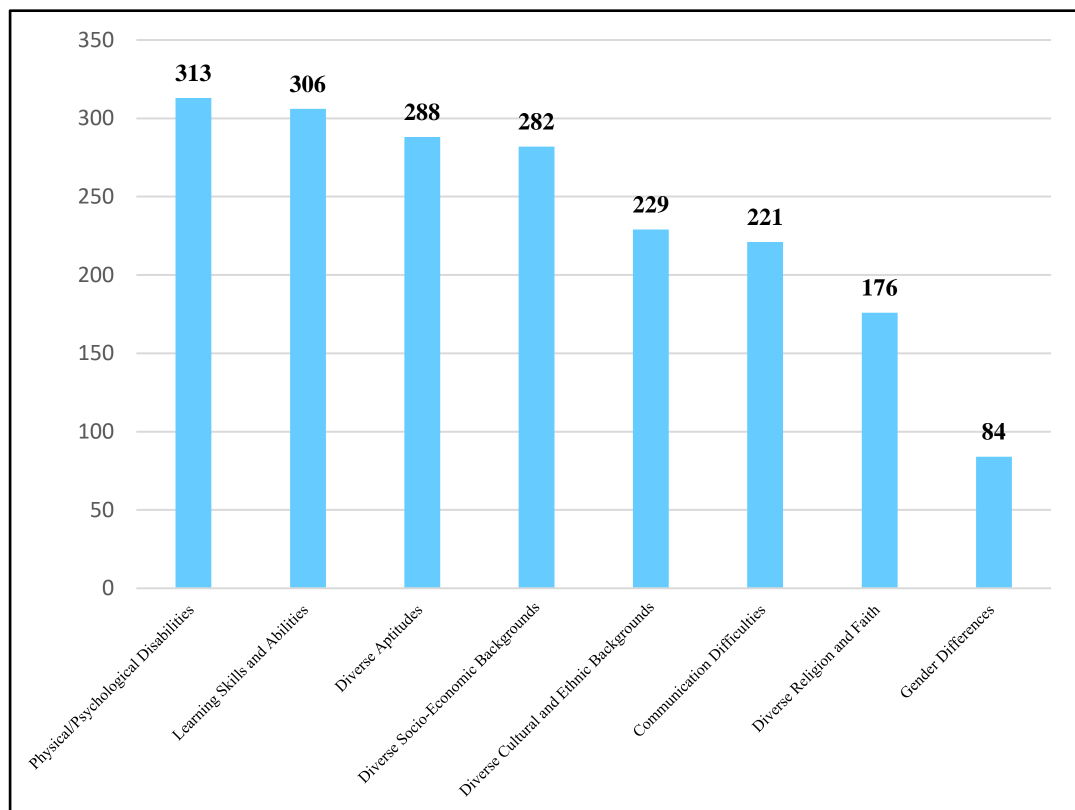
c) *Learners with communication difficulties* (221);

d) *Learners with diverse religious and faith backgrounds* (176); and

e) *Learners with gender differences* (84).

To enable better understanding, Figure 5B.7 presents the above information graphically.

Figure 5B.7: The ‘Most Common’ Minority Groups

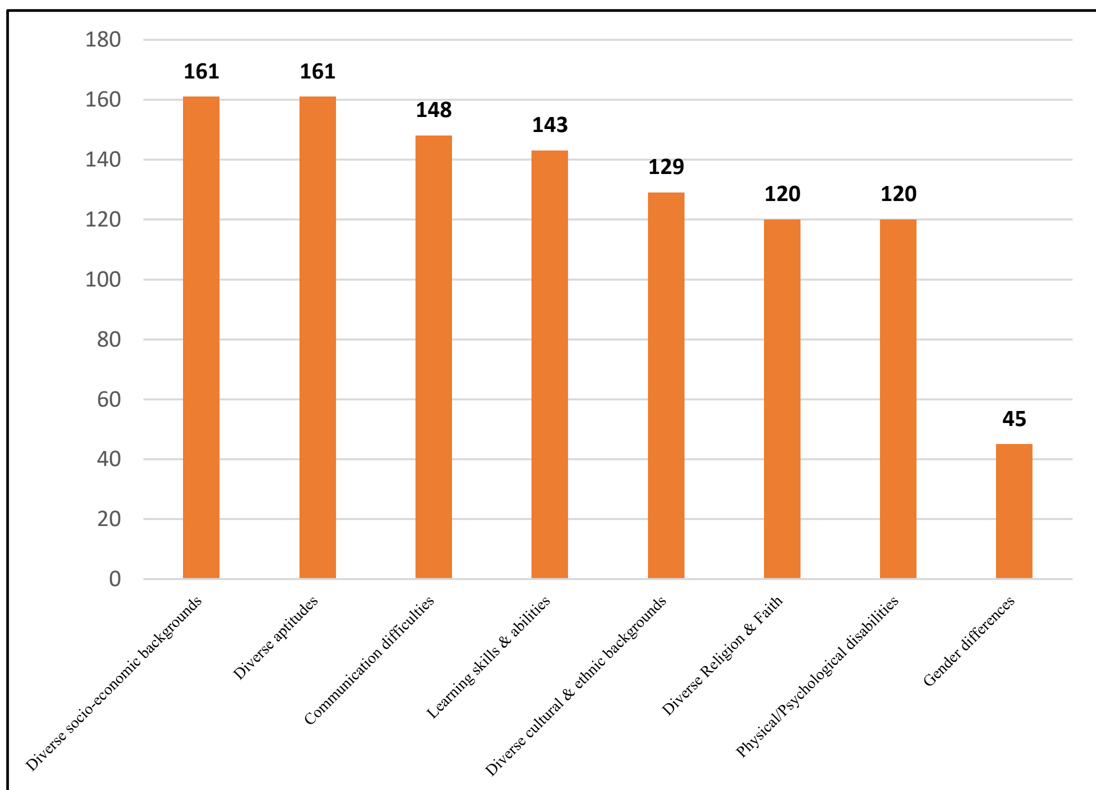


Collected results indicate how ‘deficit-thinking’ manifested itself in local colleges and schools, with the pseudoscientific framework dominating over the socio-economic and the socio-cultural frameworks. The three groups of minority learners topping the ‘Most Common’ list benefitted from additional support, either through the provision of an in-class LSE (following medical or psychological assessment and the issuance of an ‘official statement of needs report’) or through ‘compensatory withdrawal’ learning programmes. Moreover, data also shows that ‘deficit-thinking’ related to the ‘socio-economic’ and

'socio-cultural' frameworks experienced an upsurge, due to an increase in social and economic challenges as well as a boom in migration and inter-marriages between local inhabitants and foreigners.

'*Learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds*' together with '*learners with diverse aptitudes towards schooling*' topped the list of the 'Emerging' category, with a total of 161 preferences respectively. Following the latter two minority groups were: *'learners with communication problems'* (148); '*learners with different skills or learning abilities'* (143); '*learners from diverse cultural or ethnic backgrounds*' (129); '*learners with different religious and faith backgrounds'* (120); '*learners with physical disabilities or psychological conditions'* (120); and '*learners with gender differences'* (45) (Figure 5B.8).

Figure 5B.8: The 'Emerging' Minority Groups



The above data clearly shows that the category of '*learners from divese socio-economic backgrounds*' was increasing progressively in local colleges and schools due to a sharp increase in poverty and social problems. In this regard, the National Statistics Office (2017) remarked that the rate of "families at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion, in Malta, stood at 23.8%" (www.maltatoday.com.mt). In turn, the difficulties faced by

the latter families materialiazed in educational, behavioural and attitudinal challenges among learners in local schools. Devlin and McKay (2011) conteneded that learners in poverty circles or from low socio-economic backgrounds were "…inclined to exhibit challenging behaviour and to experience academic failure" (51). De facto, the categories of '*learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds*' and '*learners with different aptitudes towards schooling*' correlated positively with each other. Collected data also revealed that the categories of '*learners with communication difficulties*' (3rd placed); '*learners with different learning skills and/or abilities*' (4th placed); and '*learners from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds*' (5th placed) correlated positively and directly with '*learners with diverse aptitudes towards schooling*'. This because the majority of participants indicated that learners in the former three minority categories exhibited (a) lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learning; and (b) displayed challenging behaviour and emotional difficulties at school.

Finally, the three 'Least Common' minority groups of learners (Figure 5B.9) in the participant schools resulted to be:

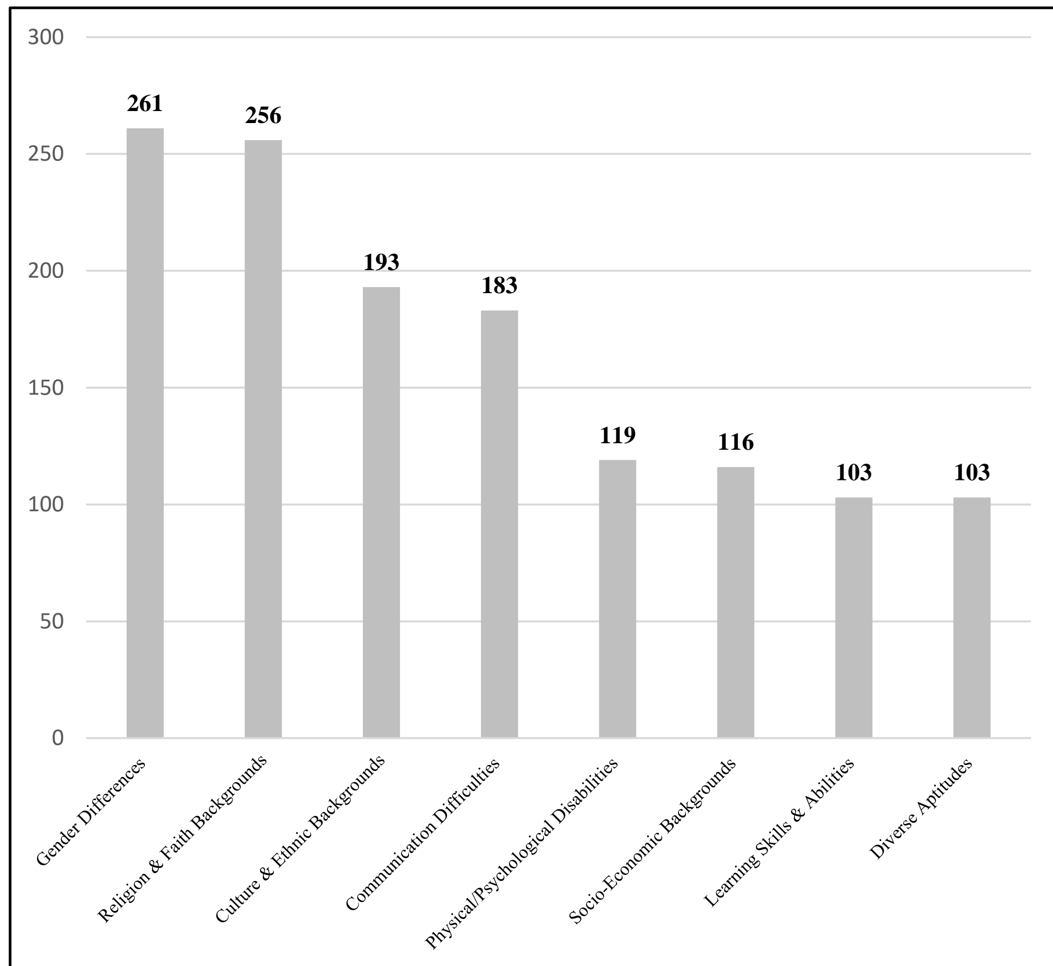
a) '*Learners with gender differences*' (261);
b) '*Learners with diverse religious and faith backgrounds*' (256); and
c) '*Learners from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds*' (193).

Following the above were:

a) '*Learners with communication difficulties*' (183);
b) '*Learners with physical disabilities and/or psychological conditions*' (119);
c) '*Learners from different socio-economic backgrounds*' (116);
d) '*Learners with diverse learning skills and abilities*' (103); and
e) '*Learners with diverse aptitudes towards schooling'* (103).

The least occurring minority category referred to learners exhibiting different sexual orientations and gender identities due to lack of knowledge among both educators and parents on 'gender and sexual diversity' (GSD) or the 'fear of difference', which gives rise to stereotypes and prejudice. Similarly, Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen and Palmer (2012) argued that over 60% of students tend not to report sexual harassment and/or assaults (related to GSD) to school staff members out of fear or lack of action. On the other hand, '*learners with diverse religious or faith backgrounds*' and '*learners from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds*' were mostly selected by participants in the Northern and Central regions of Malta.

Figure 5B.9: The 'Least Common' Minority Groups



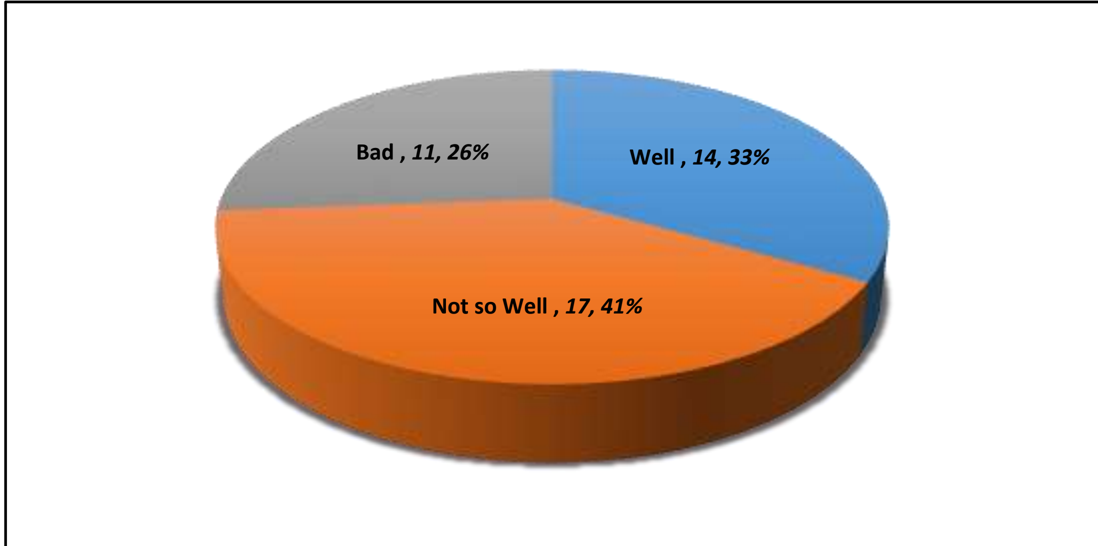
Finally, the results for the 'Least Common' minority groups also correlated positively with the ones in the other two categories ('Most Common' and 'Emerging'), indicating a strong relationship between the three minority groupings.

5B.3.2 Attitudes, Behaviour & Academic Performance

Gunuc (2014) specified that there exists a "positive correlation between student engagement and academic success" (220). The latter because student engagement relied heavily on learners' behaviour (persistence, effort, attention) and attitudes (motivation, willingness to learn, enthusiasm, interest, active participation and pride in success). Similarly, Hancock, Lawrence, Shepherd and Zubrick (2013) contended that 'highly engaged students' enjoy teaching and learning more than non-engaged learners as they 'seek out activities' (inside and outside the classroom), which enhance curiosity and a desire to further enrich knowledge. Hence, active student engagement helps (a) to improve school attendance rates; (b) to encourage participation and positive behaviour; and (c)

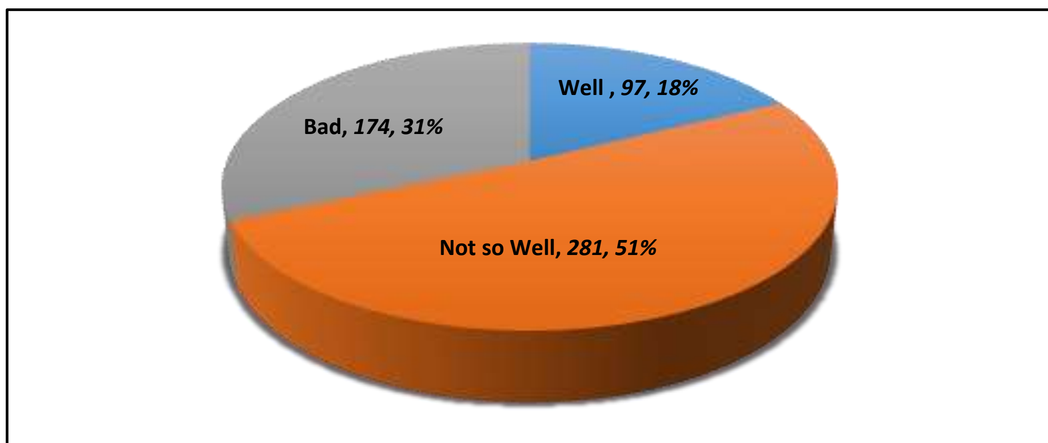
to reduce risks of ELET. In this regard, the SMT questionnaire investigated the attitudes and general behaviour of minority learners in participant schools (Figure 5B.10).

Figure 5B.10: Minority Learners' General Behaviour at School



The majority of SMT members (67%) indicated that the general behaviour of minority learners in schools was either '*Not so Well*' (41%) or '*Bad*' (26%). Only 33% indicated that minority learners presented composed behaviour and positive attitudes at school. To help minority learners "overcome behavioural issues" (Primary School HoS), SMT respondents remarked that they referred minority students to attend 'Nurture Groups' or 'Learning Support Centres'. Similalry, British educators also removed disruptive learners from mainstream schools to place them in centres for learners with behavioural problems (Connolly, 2008). Apart from minority learners' behaviour, questionnaires investigated also the academic performance of minority students (Figure 5B.11).

Figure 5B.11: Minority learners' Academic Performance



Results indicate that minority learners underperformed when compared to their 'other' peers. Only 18% indicated that minority learners performed '*Well*' academically. The latter results correlated positively with national statistical data, which shows that 52% of local students do not manage to access the general curriculum. The vast majority of participants attributed academic failure to: (a) unresponsive curricula and syllabi; (b) rigid teaching and assessment practices; and (c) ineffective support services.

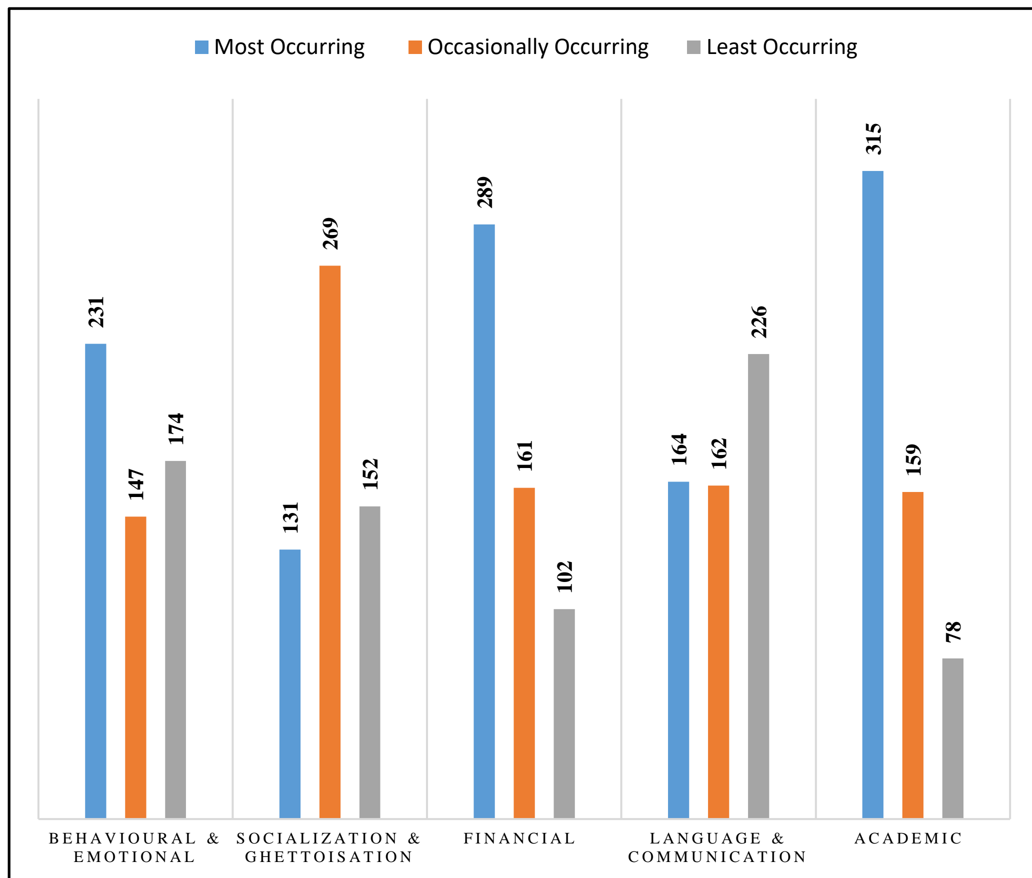
5B.3.3 Challenges Encountered by Minority Learners

In order to investigate minority learners' main barriers to effective schooling, the researcher asked participants to rate (using a scale from 1 to 3) the following five main challenges: *Behavioural and Emotional*; *Financial*; *Academic*; *Socializing and Ghettoisation*; and *Language and Communication* challenges. Table 5B.11 illustrates the participants' choices and Figure 5B.12 represents the latter responses graphically.

Table 5B.11: Minority Learners' Challenges: Participants Responses

Challenges	**Rating of Challenges**								
	Most Occurring			**Occasionally Occurring**			**Least Occurring**		
	SMT	**Teachers**	**LSEs**	**SMT**	**Teachers**	**LSEs**	**SMT**	**Teachers**	**LSEs**
Behavioural & Emotional Challenges	18	153	60	14	83	50	10	124	40
Totals	**231**			**147**			**174**		
Socialisation & Ghettoisation Challenges	6	80	45	19	195	55	17	85	50
Totals	**131**			**269**			**152**		
Financial Challenges	19	200	70	11	100	50	12	60	30
Totals	**289**			**161**			**102**		
Language & Communication Challenges	14	120	30	12	100	50	16	140	70
Totals	**164**			**162**			**226**		
Academic Challenges	20	210	85	11	120	28	11	30	37
Totals	**315**			**159**			**78**		

Figure 5B.12: Minority Learners' Challenges: Graphic Representation



'*Academic challenges*' resulted as the most occuring barrier for minority learners, who experienced severe difficulties to access the general curriculum and to follow mainstream lesson explanations. Participants attributed the latter difficulies to:

a) "…innate learning difficulties, disabilities or conditions";

b) "…lack of basic skills and competences in mainstream core subjects";

c) "…learners' negative attitude and lack of motivation to learn";

d) "…lack of cooperation and collaboration from parents"; and

e) "…learners' cultural, familiar and ethnic backgrounds".

Responses strengthened the 'blaming-the-victim' mentality since participants focused on minority learners' perceived weaknesses rather than on limitations in mainstream curriculum or syllabi. Notably, none of the participants identified teaching pedagogy or support strategies as potential barriers. Data indicated also a significant relationship between '*Academic*' and '*Financial*' and '*Behavioural and Emotional*' challenges. The latter two challenges ('Financial' and 'Behavioural and Emotional') resulted as deterrents to academic success. In this regard, participants remarked that:

a) "…parents lacked financial resources to sustain their children's schooling";

b) "…parents are not interested or else do not have enough time to concentrate on their children's schooling due to the many social difficulties they face";
c) "…minority learners lacked love and affection…they have to assume carer duties at home, which in turn demotivate and alienate children"; and
d) "…minority learners are 'time poor' since they are burdened with family duties or encouraged to take up employment from a very young age to support their family's financial situation".

Other mentioned challenges leading to minority learners' academic failure included: "inability to pay attention for a sustain period of time"; "low IQ and severe learning difficulties"; and "lack of maturity and impulsiveness". The latter justifications blamed minority learners for academic failure and revolved around the notion of the pseudo-scientific defitic-thinking framework.

'*Language & Communication*' and '*Socialization & Ghettoisation*' challenges were mostly common in schools in the Northern and Central parts of Malta, which, over the past 15 years, experienced an influx of migrant learners. Local statistics show that "…37% of foreign students attending school in Malta did so in the north of the island, with a further 30% doing so in the northern harbour district. Just 5% attended schools in the southern region of Malta" (www.timesofmalta.com). Given the lack of competences in both Maltese and English, '*Language & Communication*' resulted as the most occurring barrier for migrant learners. Hek (2005) maintained that "migrant learners face several difficulties that children of native-born parents do not, including learning a language that may not be spoken at home" (67). Pottinger (2005) also argued that because of emotional turmoil or the 'waiting-to-migrate' mentality these students lose focus on their schoolwork; exhibit 'acting out' behaviour; and show poor self-esteem.

Apart from the five presented challenges, participants indicated other barriers, which all had a negative impact on minority learners. The latter included:

a) "Health and mental health challenges, which effected negatively minority learners' general quality of life and development";
b) "Social and parental challenges leading to bullying, bad behaviour, absenteeism and lack of parental interest and involvement";
c) "Inadequate school premises to include learners with mobility challenges";

d) "Attendance challenges…Minority learners tend to fail school very often"; and
e) "School-related anxiety and stress to manage academic demands".

The identified challenges, which "are entangled in webs of social relations produced by a capitalist society and [sustained] by government policies", insinuated themselves "into the very grit and gristle of our everyday lives" (Griffiths, 2013, 1) and act as the major reasons for marginalisation and exclusion. Moreover, challenges also exposed the failure of the local education system in its mission to help all learners become more resilient in the face of adversity; feel more connected with people around them; and to aim higher for the future (OECD, 2017). Schleicher (2017) pointed out that, "...schools are not just places where students acquire academic competences" but also "the first place where children experience society in all its facets…which experiences can have a profound influence on students' behaviour in life" (115). Finally, the collected data on minority learners' challenges reinforced the existence of the 'deficit ideology' in local schools since "teachers seem to assume that it is up to the learner to adjust to the school system rather than vice-versa, while the parents are required to prepare the child for the system…" (Ainscow, 2013, 176). Both assumptions are quite contrary to the idea of 'education for all' learners or inclusive-oriented schooling.

5B.3.4 Strategies to Include Minority Learners

Inclusion is not just a philosophy but also a socially just process and practice to provide quality education to all learners. In this regard, Griffiths (2013) contented that, "given the imperceptible nature of contemporary exclusion in schools, it is vital that all educators champion inclusion" (xxv). Hence, in the three questionnaires, participants were asked to indicate strategies they used to include minority learners at school.

Griffiths (2013) pointed out that SMT members "occupied a critical position in improving schools and, most importantly, in supporting all students" (xix). In this sense, the majority of local school leaders asserted that they focused on improving learners' and educators' general well-being by creating safe and welcoming school environments based on acceptance, belonging and community. Hence, school leaders:

a) "invested heavily to make school premises more accessible to learners' with special or mobility needs" and "funded several educational resources to make teaching and learning more enjoyable";
b) "organized diverse extra-curricular activities and made sure to include all learners";

c) "sought professional support from specialist teachers and/or support professionals to ensure the provision of adequate additional support to minority learners";
d) "facilitated the development, implementation, monitoring and reviewing of IEPs", "coordinated the provision of support services", and "encouraged differentiation by encouraging teachers to either adapt or modify curricular content material" and
e) "monitored, reviewed and evaluated general school practices".

Equally important actors in the development of inclusive education are class or subject teachers and LSEs since they are "the key players in determining how students fare in schools" (Griffiths, 2013, xxi). In the Maltese educational system, the inclusion of minority learners in mainstream classrooms is a main responsibility of class teachers, who, among other duties, are responsible of planning, preparing and delivering lessons to all students and to teach according to the educational needs and abilities of learners. '*Differentiation of content material*' resulted as the most common pedagogical tool used by teachers in both Primary and Secondary schools. The latter practice included:
a) "preparing adapted/modified work, i.e. handouts, for diverse groups of learners";
b) "regulating the amount of class and homework given to minority learners";
c) "organizing graded activities";
d) "presenting whole-to-part and part-to-whole information";
e) "re-teaching student who needed further explanations or exempting students from working on particular tasks"; and
f) "providing individual attention to minority learners".

Moreover, data indicated also lack of '*differentiation of process*', '*differentiation of the learning environment*' and '*differentiation of product*', since educators mentioned the below teaching strategies with less prominence:
a) "the use of group/pair work or the buddy system approach";
b) "constant encouragement and prompting to minority learners" and "using positive reinforcement, praise and reward systems to motivate minority learners";
c) "using time-outs to help minority learners to refocus and regroup" and "using visual aids mainly flashcards, charts and graphical organizers"; and
d) "individualized attention through one-to-one lesson explanations" and "provision of extra-time to complete given work".

Apart from '*content modifications and adaptations*', LSEs emphasized the importance of "showing empathy and care"; "providing emotional support"; "using multi-sensory

and hands-on activities" and "seeking specialist support". This because the aim of a differentiated classroom is "to plan actively and consistently to help each learner move as far as possible along a learning continuum" (Tomlinson, 2003, 2).

5B.3.5 Systems of Support at all Levels (College, School & Class)

To facilitate inclusion of minority learners, the educational system presented an infinite number of support services, delivered by "an impressive pool of qualified and experienced personnel" (EASNIE, 2014, 69), who provided curricular, psychological, social, emotional, linguistic, and behavioural support. The vast majority of participants (76%) indicated that minority learners always received additional support, while 24% indicated the opposite. Participants were also asked to indicate the type of additional support provided to minority learners. The latter varied from the provision of targeted interventions by specialist teachers to enrolling minority learners in separate multi-levelled learning programmes (Table 5B.12).

Table 5B.12: Additional Support Provisions

Provision	Description of Support Service
Complementary Education	Learners in Years 1, 2, 3 & 4 who lack basic literacy skills receive additional literacy lessons (Withdrawal Sessions).
Social Work Service	The service targets learners facing personal, social, family and neglect difficulties, leading to sustained absenteeism.
Psychological Service	Service consists in conducting educational psychological assessments for learners presenting learning difficulties.
Prefect of Discipline	Co-ordinates policies, procedures and activities that encourage good behaviour in school communities.
Early Intervention Service	The service provides support to children and parents with developmental disabilities or delays from 0 to 5 years.
SEBD Support Service	Supports learners who exhibit challenging behaviours due to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
Autism Spectrum Support Team (ASST)	Service aims to empower educators and parents to meet the educational needs of learners within the autism spectrum.
Nurture Groups / Learning Zones	Provision of specialized programmes for learners with social, emotional and behavioural development difficulties.
Migrant Hubs	Promote the inclusion of migrant learners in the education system through the acquisition of linguistic competences.
Resource Centres	Provide specialized support services to students with severe physical/psychological needs.

The majority of participants indicated "the provision of class LSEs" as the most popular support service to provide individualized educational (assistance during lessons) and care support (assisting learners' physical needs). SMT members and teachers viewed LSEs as SEN experts, "who are delegated with the overall responsibility of addressing and meeting statemented students' needs and opportunities". On the other hand, LSEs felt "isolated" due to "lack of assistance from class teachers, who tend to abdicate from their responsibilities vis-a-vis minority learners".

The majority of the mentioned services promoted 'class-withdrawal practices', which home the six components of the deficit-thinking model (Valencia, 1997). Hence, compensatory services (migrant hubs, learning support zones, multi-level grouping, complementary education, CCP and ALP) although not ill-intended, harbour forms of segregative practices. The EASNIE (2014) pointed out that, "the current support system is geared towards a 'certifying' function and relies heavily on 'expert assessment' – mainly clinical tests by psychologists", which pose challenges to respond inclusively to "...the complex learning needs of learners" (59). Salend (1998) also contended that, "the development of learners cannot be achieved by separating them into ability groups" (9).

5B.3.6 Barriers and Challenges to Include Minority Learners

Griffiths (2013) argued that the development of inclusion in schools is not an easy task and "demands that many individuals work together" (Griffiths, 2013, XX) to develop a strong education system that supports and responds to all learners' needs and abilities. However, the majority of participants asserted that, "unfortunately, the local system, is not in a position to do so as most often support to educators is sporadic and ineffective". In this regard, SMT members complained of:

a) "lack of flexibility, school autonomy, respect and trust from authorities";
b) "a stressful exam-oriented system, which limits innovation and creativity";
c) "learners' low self-esteem and demotivation" and "staff resistance to change, lack of professionalism, and fear of change";
d) "lack of support to overcome social and cultural challenges"; and
e) "parents' lack of participation and interest in the teaching process".

On the other hand, teachers and LSEs indicated the following barriers and challenges:

a) Lack of clarity and lack of a clear vision from SMT members on inclusion;
b) Lack of time to plan and prepare inclusive lessons and resources;

c) 'One-size-fits-all' syllabi and a culture of excessive competition;

d) Absenteeism and trauncy, especially in Secondary schools;

e) Space and infrastructural barriers as well as overpopulated classrooms;

f) Unresponsive assessment techniques focused on high-stake examinations; and

g) Parents' negative attitudes towards schooling.

Apart from the above challenges, educators also complained about the lack of adequate training on how to effectively respond to students' diversity. The latter challenges was also widely mentioned by SMT members. Moreover, both SMT participants, teachers and LSEs referred to parents' attitudes as a majore barrier to inclusive education.

5B.4 Leadership for Inclusive Education

According to Ainscow and Sandhill (2010), the process for the development of 'schools for all learners' demands proactive and innovative leadership, i.e. leadership that: (a) provides clear vision and administrative authority; (b) challenges the norm of traditional leadership and teaching approaches; and (c) empowers all staff members to participate and active engagement in decision-making processes (Sergiovanni, 2010). Hence, decentralization of power, together with increased school autonomy and greater flexibility, allowed school leaders to promote a more responsive and engaging school culture and climate (Day and Leithwood, 2011). In this regard, the local policy document 'For All Children to Succeed' (2005) upheld the latter objectives and presented a new network organisation for State schools in Malta, which aimed to provide "a quality leap forward to ensure present and future generations with equitable learning opportunities, full participation in a healthy democracy and a strong economy replete of challenges and opportunities" (MEDE, 2005, xi). However, collected data revealed that the latter reform did not manage to attain all its desired outcomes (Table 5B.13).

Table 5B.13: SMT Feelings

SMT Questionnaire Statements	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
Have enough power and autonomy to execute change.	**3** out of 42 **(7%)**	**7** out of 42 **(17%)**	**12** out of 42 **(28%)**	**20** out of 42 **(48%)**
Feel continuously supported from the 3 Educational Directorates.	**4** out of 42 **(10%)**	**4** out of 42 **(10%)**	**30** out of 42 **(70%)**	**4** out of 42 **(10%)**
CPs provide the necessary help and support.	**19** out of 42 **(45%)**	**14** out of 42 **(33%)**	**4** out of 42 **(10%)**	**5** out of 42 **(12%)**
Feel valued and trusted at all time.	**13** out of 42 **(31%)**	**7** out of 42 **(17%)**	**12** out of 42 **(28%)**	**10** out of 42 **(24%)**

Collected data in Table 5B.13 revealed that SMT members:

a) Lacked executive power and autonomy to execute change in their schools: 48% of SMT members feel that power is center-based in MEDE's various departments and directorates. Only 7% indicated the opposite.

b) Lacked assistance from national authorities: SMT members (70%) indicated that support and assistance from national authorities (DGs; Directors; Assistant Directors) was sporadic and "not in synch with the schools' real needs because of lack of sustained consultation and collegiality". On the other hand, school administrators pointed out that they '*always*' (45%) received support from their respective CPs.

c) Felt devalued and not trusted: SMT members stressed that "because of lack of trust there existed a growing sense of fear and resistance towards change at school level" since "educators' actions and decisions were not valued by educational authorities".

Moreover, teachers and LSEs also expressed concerns similar to the ones put foward by SMT members (Table 5B.14).

Table 5B.14: Teachers' and LSEs' Feelings

Questionnaire Statements	Middle Leaders and Teachers Responses			
	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
Receive constructive advice and feedback from SMT.	**80** out of 360 (22%)	**80** out of 360 (22%)	**100** out of 360 (28%)	**100** out of 360 (28%)
Feel constantly empowered and supported by support specialists like INCO.	**40** out of 360 (11%)	**60** out of 360 (17%)	**100** out of 360 (28%)	**160** out of 360 (44%)
Learning activities are the result of regular discussions.	**40** out of 360 (11%)	**60** out of 360 (17%)	**80** out of 360 (22%)	**180** out of 360 (50%)
Feel supported to implement responsive assessment.	**40** out of 360 (11%)	**50** out of 360 (14%)	**80** out of 360 (22%)	**190** out of 360 (53%)
	LSEs Reponses			
LSEs Responses	**Always**	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
SMT supports me whenever I encounter difficulties.	**15** out 150 (10%)	**35** out of 150 (23%)	**60** out of 150 (40%)	**40** out of 150 (27%)
INCO helps me to support statemented learner in class.	**25** out 150 (17%)	**35** out of 150 (23%)	**40** out of 150 (27%)	**50** out of 150 (33%)
Receive suggestions from teachers on how to modify or adapt curricular material.	**10** out of 150 (7%)	**15** out of 150 (15%)	**45** out 150 (30%)	**80** out 150 (53%)
Feel empowered by all support specialists.	**10** out 150 (7%)	**40** out of 150 (27%)	**50** out of 150 (33%)	**50** out of 150 (33%)

A major barrier that transpired from data in Table 5B.14 related to lack of collegiality, trust, consultation, support and collaboration. Among teachers and LSEs prevailed the 'silo mentality' approach, which hindered operative processes and practices. Despite, the presented limitations, 56% of the participants indicated that they "*Always* (20%) or *Very Often* (36%) managed to address the learning needs of all learners". On the other hand, 34% chose '*Sometimes*', while 10% indicated that minority learners' needs were '*Never*' adequately addressed. Finally, respondents unanimously agreed that the current educational system needed to sideline 'one-size-fits-all' approaches to reinvent itself (Figure 5B.13) to provide more equitable learning opportunities (Figure 5B.14).

Figure 5B.13: Re-Inventing Current Educational Structures

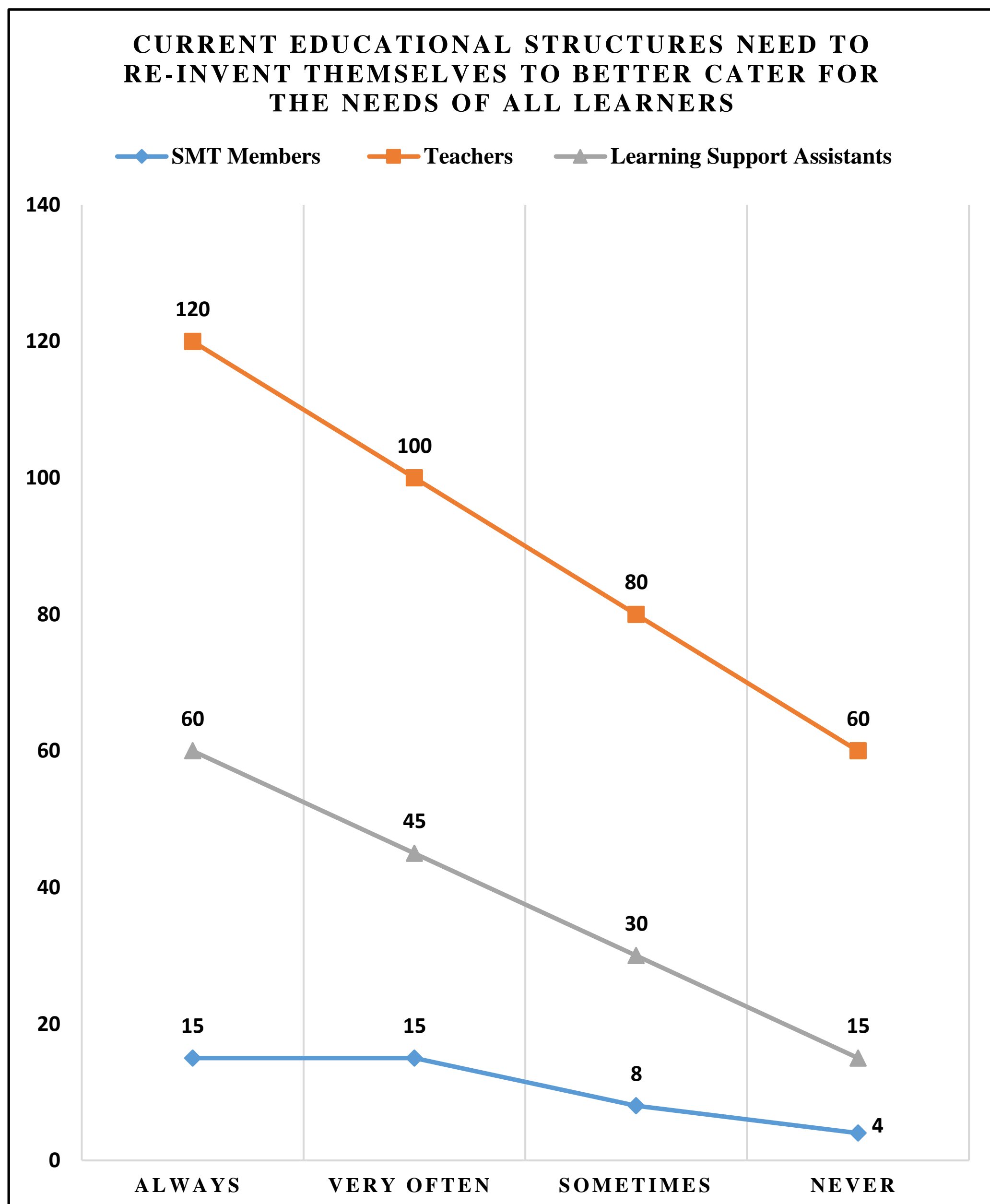
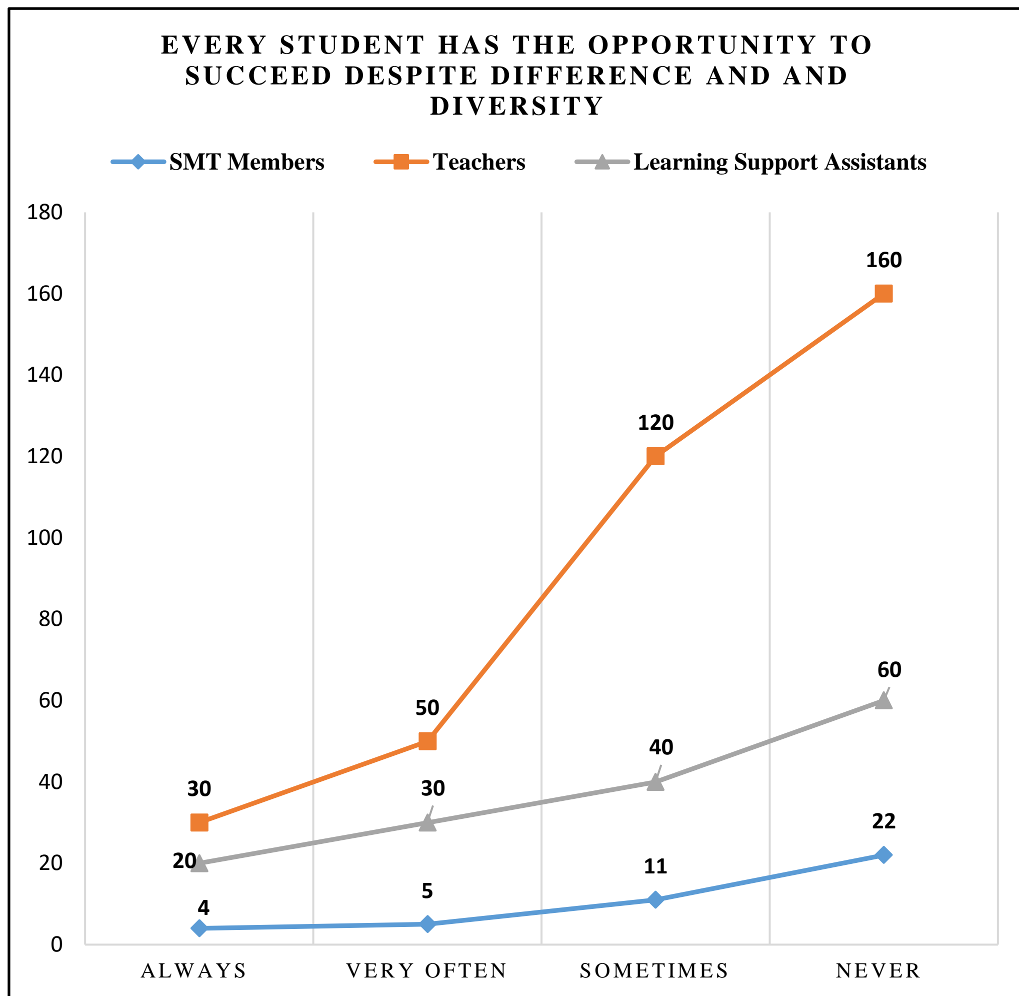


Figure 5B.14: Provision of Equitable Opportunities for All Learners



The presented data in Figures 5B.13 and 5B.14 both correlated with national statistics, which portrayed an ESL rate of 21% and an illiteracy rate of 33% (NSO, 2017). In this regard, Peterson (2002) contended that, "...if schools do not stand for something more profound than raising achievement levels, then it probably does not make a memorable difference to teachers, students and parents" (62). Put on a spiritual plane, schools need to develop a deeper and a more socially just soal.

5B.4.1 An Inclusive Vision

According to Griffiths (2013), the development of 'schools for all' cannot occur with "quick fixes, shortcuts or simple recipes", but requires school leaders to create a clear understanding of what constitutes an inclusive school vision (xxi). Lindqvist (2013) also argued that "school leaders' beliefs on inclusion are fundamental as these influence the way they organized their schools" (56). Similarly, Slee (2011) remarked that inclusive schooling explicitly required a particular value base and a clear vision.

However, collected data in Table 5B.15 shows that in local schools the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a proactive and inclusive vision was quite problematic.

Table 5B.15: A Shared and Evidence-Based Vision in Schools

School Vision Statements	AGREE			DISAGREE		
	SMT	**Teachers**	**LSEs**	**SMT**	**Teachers**	**LSEs**
Staff share a common vision on the school's central goals.	**38**	**191**	**80**	**4**	**169**	**70**
	55.97%			***44.03%***		
School goals on inclusive education and 'deficit-thinking' are clear to me.	**28**	**110**	**40**	**14**	**250**	**110**
	32.24%			***67.76%***		
All school members know what constitutes 'deficit-thinking' and the difference between inclusion and integration.	**25**	**90**	**50**	**17**	**270**	**100**
	29.89%			***70.11%***		
The school's vision is evidence-based and data informed.	**15**	**100**	**50**	**27**	**260**	**100**
	29.89%			***70.11%***		

Whilst 55.97% own the schools' vision for inclusive learning, 67.76% indicated that goals on inclusive education and 'deficit-thinking' were not clear. 70.11% pointed out that staff members held diverging beliefs on deficit thinking, integration and inclusion and that the process of vision building in school was not data-informed or evidence-based. The fact that 44.03% did not share their schools' vision indicated also lack of communication and constructive dialogue at school level to:

a) Develop a shared vision to foster the acceptance of group goals;
b) Motivate, inspire and clarify roles and objectives; and
c) Identify, plan, assess and promote effective organizational learning.

Hence, the restructuring process for 'inclusive education' required educational leaders that promoted an unifying vision to transform schools into learning environments that responded, valued and respected diversity in the micro-cultural politics of schools as organizations. Hence, HoS play a critical role to "envision a set of coherent objectives by successfully articulating personal, moral and educational values...and to formulate and implement a clear implementation map" (Earley et al., 2002, 16).

5B.4.2 Leadership Practices and Styles in Schools

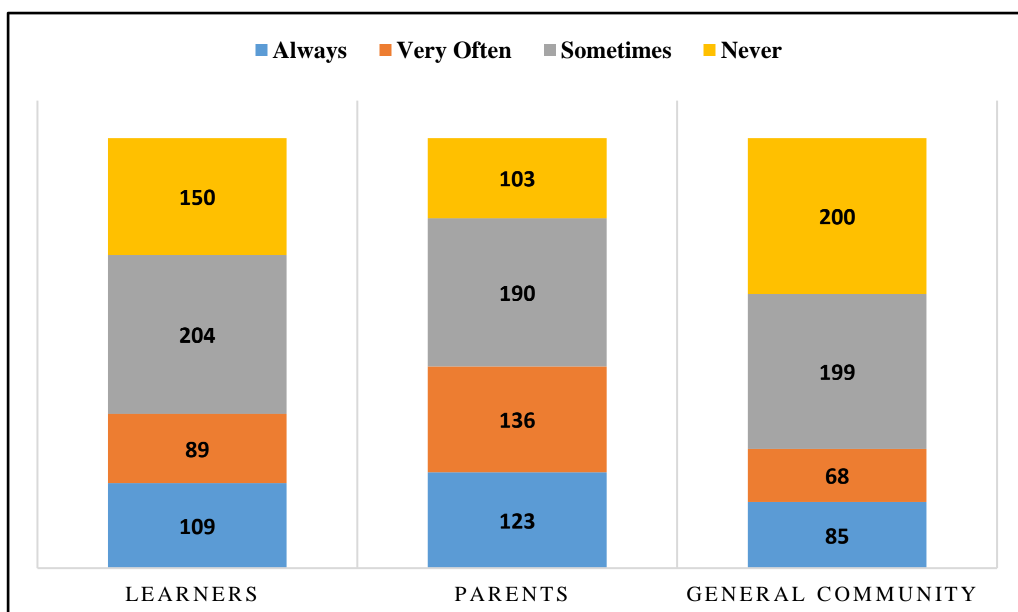
Research shows that leadership plays a vital role in ensuring equity, inclusion and social justice (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006). Similarly, Ainscow (2013) argued that the process towards equitable and socially just education required efforts by educational leaders to: (a) foster new meanings on diversity; (b) promote inclusive school cultures and instructional programmes; and (c) build productive relationships between schools and communities. In essence, educational leaders that,

> "...model behaviour; assist in the development of suitable pedagogies and assessments; encourage leadership among teachers, parents and learners; provide dialogue opportunities; share decision-making with others; foster positive relationships with the general community and devise strategies to deal with the many obstacles that get in the way" (Ryan, 2006, 35).

In this regard, Bezzina (2014) emphasised on the importance of transforming schools into 'Professional Learning Communities' by bringing together all educators, learners, parents, and the general community to collegially re-position the schools' core values and aims (Timperley, Kaser, and Halbert, 2014). In this regard, the three questionnaires investigated the following concerns:

a) Engagement of Learners, Parents and the General Community in decision-making processes: Collected data in Figure 5B.15 indicates *community* (200), *learners* (150) and *parents* (103) engagement as the 'least occuring' activity in participant schools. The latter results shows a high degree of diffedance by school leaders to involve learners, parents and the general community in leadership processes and practices.

Figure 5B.15: Engaging Learners, Parents and the General Community



b) Leadership Styles, Traits or Characteristics of local school leaders: Devecchi and Nevin (2010) stressed the importance of 'inclusive school leadership' to: implement systemic change; improve educational services; and set new attitudes and practices. Hence, school leaders (HoS) played a critical role to create the right conditions for a positive learning environment, academic rigor, and shared ownership within the school community. In this regard, Griffiths (2013) argued that inclusive leaders had the ability to: (a) empower staff members to take leadership roles; (b) delegate work fairly among staff on the basis of expertise and experience; (c) engage in meaningful dialogue or consultations to improve teaching and learning practices; and (d) listen and evaluate feedback before taking a final decision. Collected data in Figure 5B.16 shows that the latter leadership traits, although present, were not regularly upheld by local school leaders. The latter because the '*Sometimes*' and '*Very Often*' choices prevailed over the '*Always*' and '*Never*' preferences for all the presented statements, except for '*encourage educators to take leadership roles*'. The gathered data revealed also divergent opinions among SMT members, teachers and LSEs, which divergance indicates systemic 'forces of inertia' at school level.

Table 5B.16: Empowerment, Encouragement and Delegation of Work

Heads of School:	Always			Very Often			Sometimes			Never		
	SMT	Teacher	LSEs	SMT	Teacher	LSEs	SMT	Teacher	LSEs	SMT	Teacher	LSEs
Distribute leadership to empower staff.	20	80	60	18	70	40	3	120	50	1	90	0
	160 – 29%			**128 – 23%**			**173 – 31%**			**91 – 17%**		
Listen to, discuss and evaluate all feedback given.	15	80	50	12	150	60	10	130	40	5	0	0
	145 – 26%			**222 – 40%**			**180 – 33%**			**5 – 1%**		
Engage in meaningful dialogue with all the school stakeholders.	12	20	20	12	150	30	10	70	40	8	120	60
	52 – 9%			**192 – 35%**			**120 – 22%**			**188 – 34%**		
Encourage educators to take leadership roles.	9	80	20	10	70	20	15	100	40	8	110	70
	109 – 20%			**100 – 18%**			**155 – 28%**			**188 – 34%**		

A major incongruance that emerged from the data in Figure 5B.16 was that although the majority of participants (52%[3]) indicated 'distributed leadership' as a common leadership style among HoS; 34% indicated that they were never encouraged to take leadership roles at school.

c) The Transformation of schools into 'Professional Learning Communities' (PLC) to facilitate school change: Provini (2012) argued that PLCs required school leaders, who were capable of "articulating a clear, specific and compelling vision; expanding leadership roles; and making coordination easy" (56). However, collected data from the three questionnaires indicated that:

- Many local schools lacked a culture of collaboration and cooperation. Educators felt more comfortable to work on their own rather than in teams. 41% indicated that participant schools could not be described as PLCs. 20% and 26% noted that PLC elements were '*Very Often*' and '*Sometimes*' present in schools. Only 13% indicated the opposite (Refer to: Results below).

School can be described as a Professional Learning Community.	**Always**	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
SMT Members	10	10	15	7
Teachers	50	70	100	140
LSEs	10	30	30	80
Totals & Percentages	**70 (13%)**	**110 (20%)**	**145 (26%)**	**227 (41%)**

- Local school leaders encountered difficulties to work 'teamwork' with all other stakeholders in the school. In this sense, 32% indicated that cooperation between school leaders and educational stakeholders (teachers and LSEs) was sporadic and not adequately sustained (Refer to: Results below).

Work in synergy with all other stakeholders in the school.	**Always**	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
SMT Members	22	14	6	0
Teachers	50	80	120	110
LSEs	50	40	50	10
Totals & Percentages	**122 (22%)**	**134 (24%)**	**176 (32%)**	**120 (22%)**

[3]The sum of *'Always'* (29%) and *'Very Often'* (23%).

- Participant teachers and LSEs indicated that school-based training was not rooted in their everyday needs. On the contrary, SMT members felt that training was '*Always*' (17) and '*Very Often*' (17) effective. The latter difference in opinions between participant HoS and educators is synonymous of an ineffective school-based training identification practices. In total 40% of the participants indicated '*Never*', while only 16% opted for '*Always*' (Refer to: Results below). .

Sustain professional development through focused school-based training during PD sessions.	**Always**	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
SMT Members	17	17	8	0
Teachers	55	45	100	160
LSEs	15	25	50	60
Totals & Percentages	**87 (16%)**	**77 (15%)**	**158 (29%)**	**220 (40%)**

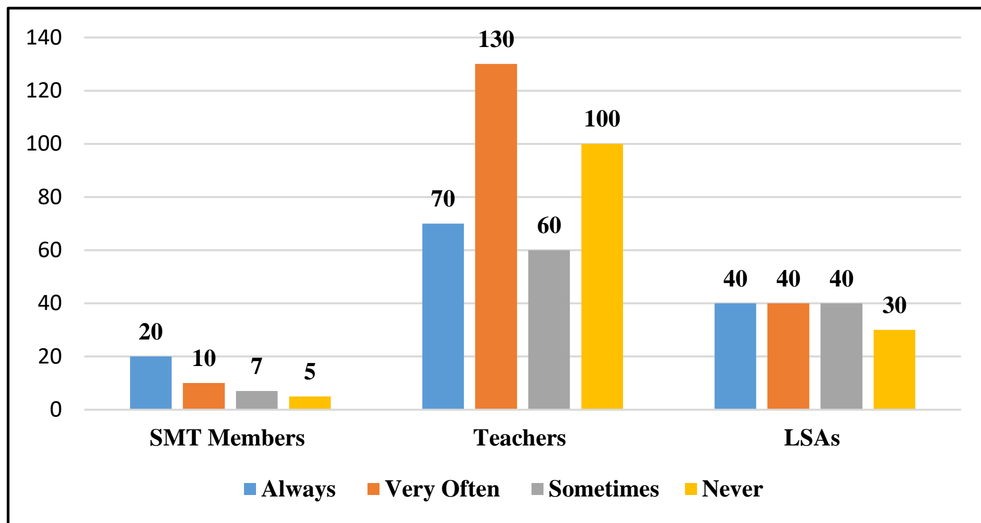
- Collected results in the table below indicated the lack of staff mentoring in local schools. In this regard, 28% and 39% of the participants chose '*Sometimes*' and '*Never*' respectively. Conversely, 13% and 20% held complete diverse opinions.

Mentoring of staff members whenever they faced with a particular problem or challenge.	**Aways**	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
SMT Members	9	9	18	6
Teachers	50	80	90	140
LSEs	10	20	50	70
Totals & Percentages	**69 (13%)**	**109 (20%)**	**158 (28%)**	**216 (39%)**

Participant SMT members attrituted the lack of staff mentoring to limited 'time' as a result of an overwhelming list of duties they are responsible of. In turn, lack of staff mentoring resulted also in lack of shared understanding and expectations.

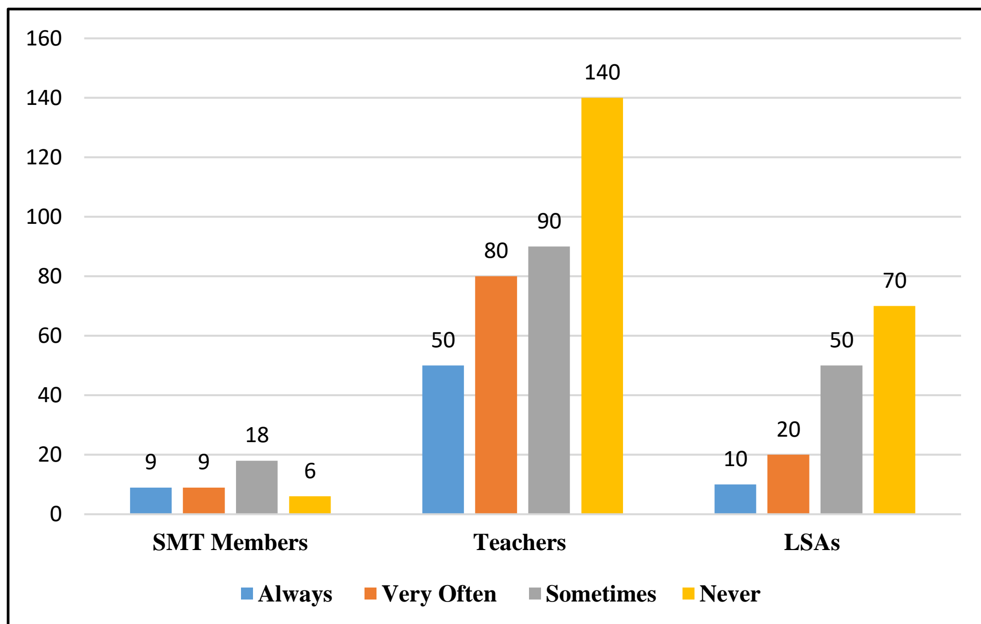
d) The primary focus of school leaders: Griffiths (2013) pointed out that school leaders "must endeavour to support all learners' diverse needs" (xxiii). Similarly, Marzano (2003) posited that quality teaching should be the primary priority of all educational leaders. However, analysed data in Figure 5B.16 indicates clearly that not all local educators prioritized teaching and learning.

Figure 5B.16: Teaching and Learning as Primary Focus



Bezzina (2014) posited that *classroom monitoring observational visits* helped SMT members to keep in sych with 'class pedagogical teaching strategies'. However, the majority of teachers and LSEs indicated that class monitoring visits were '*Never*' conducted by SMT members due to "an ever-increasing load of tasks and pressures" (Griffiths, 2013, xxiii). A total of 178 participants chose '*Always*' (69) and '*Very Often*' (109), while 158 respondents indicated '*Sometimes*' (Figure 5B.17).

Figure 5B.17: Observational Classroom Monitoring Visits



All the gathered data in this section shows that the transformation of schools into truly inclusive educational settings required knowledgeable school leaders with an arituclate philosophy in favour of inclusive beliefs and practices (Day and Leithwood, 2011).

5B.4.3 General Beliefs and Attitudes

According to Portelli and Sharma (2013), 'education for all' required eductors to reject 'deficit-thinking' and to adopt new ways fo thinking to:

a) Value diversity as an opportunity and an asset to increase learning (Clark, 2010);
b) Augment a 'sense of belonging' in educators and learners (Ainscow, 2013);
c) Promote optimal teaching and learning communities that sustain a unifying vision for equitable, socially just and culturally responsive education (McLeskey, Waldron and Redd, 2014);
d) Restructure and reculture schools into organizations that accommodate and respond effectively to all forms of diversity (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002); and
e) Ensure long-term sustainability through an equitable re-distribution of national resources and support services (Drudy and Kinsella, 2010).

However, the EASNIE (2014) audit report remarked that locally the educational system "is still rooted in medical-deficit-integrative beliefs" (60). For this purpose, the three questionnaires investigated the beliefs and attitudes of SMT members, Middle leaders, teachers and LSEs vis-a-vis inclusive education (Table 5B.17).

Table 4B.17: Educators' General Beliefs on Inclusive Education

	Always			Very Often			Sometimes			Never		
	SMT	Teacher	LSEs	SMT	Teacher	LSEs	SMT	Teacher	LSEs	SMT	Teacher	LSEs
Some learners are not fit for mainstream schools.	14	120	50	6	100	30	10	110	40	12	30	30
	184 – 33%			136 – 25%			160 – 29%			72 – 13%		
Failure results from factors beyond the schools' control.	25	120	50	8	130	60	4	50	20	5	60	20
	195 – 35%			198 – 36%			74 – 14%			85 – 15%		
More special services are needed.	20	150	60	15	150	60	5	60	30	2	0	0
	230 – 42%			225 – 41%			95 – 17%			2 – N/A		
Place blame on teaching methods rather than on learners.	8	40	40	8	60	20	16	120	30	10	140	60
	88 – 16%			88 – 16%			166 – 30%			210 – 38%		

The collected data in the above table shows that participants viewed inclusion as either a 'physical accessibility' and 'a placement issue' or as 'another initiative, an additional responsibility, and a charitable imperative'. Few participants regarded inclusion as a 'developmental process' to respond effectively to learners' diversity. Moreover, results confirmed the existence of 'deficit-thinking' beliefs among participants, who justified the lack of minority learners' academic success to '*factors beyond the school control*' (i.e. social norms, parents and learners attitudes) (71%) or on '*learners' weaknesses and deficit rather than on teaching methods*' (68%). In this regard, the vast majority of participants (83%) indicated the need for '*more special support services*' to address the needs of all learners. The latter result suggests a high degree of 'shifting-of-responsibility' on LSEs or support specialist/practitioners by SMT members and teachers, who viewed the task of 'meeting diversity issues' as an additional responsibility or a burden. Given that the majority of participants belief that *'not all learners are capable of learning'* (76%) and that '*inclusion demotivates high-achievers*' (53%), all respondents expressed their firm belief that homogenous or ability grouping provided the ideal learning environment for all learners. Hence, streaming, banding, tracking and setting approaches resulted as the most preferred teaching systems (Table 5B.18).

Table 5B.18: Teaching Settings

	Always			Very Often			Sometimes			Never		
	SMT	Teacher	LSE	SMT	Teacher	LSE	SMT	Teacher	LSE	SMT	Teacher	LSE
Ability grouping is essential.	23	190	70	10	100	50	5	60	20	4	10	10
	283 – 51%			160 – 29%			85 – 15%			24 – 5%		
Tracking limits opportunities for minority learners.	9	60	20	8	50	20	10	120	40	15	130	70
	89 – 16%			78 – 14%			170 – 31%			215 – 39%		
Streaming is the best solution.	13	190	70	13	100	50	9	50	20	7	20	10
	273 – 49%			163 – 30%			79 – 14%			37 – 7%		
Streaming helps all learners.	18	170	70	18	170	70	6	20	10	0	0	0
	258 – 47%			258 – 47%			36 -6%			0		
I prefer mixed-ability teaching.	8	20	20	5	10	10	7	50	40	22	280	80
	48 – 9%			25 – 4%			97 – 18%			382 – 69%		

Morevoer, the above results indicate also segregative-integrative mindframes founded on the false premise that not all learners have the ability to access the same curriculum. Hence, the need for 'alternative settings' commensurate with learners' abilities to better address their educational needs and challenges.

Apart from investigating general beliefs, the questionnaires also probed into the participants' general attitudes and practices (Table 5B.19). Collected data shows that although educators *empathized with learners' diverse needs and social issues* (79%), the latter challenges are rarely addressed (41%), due to lack of knowledge on how to respond to the tensions between increasing academic outputs and meeting individual learning needs. As such, educators indicated that they '*Never*' (45%) or '*Sometimes*' (25%) '*hold high expectations for all learners*'. Finally, the '*ethic of care*' approach resulted as the most common practice used by educators in all participant schools.

Table 4B.19: General Attitudes and Practices

	Always			Very Often			Sometimes			Never		
	SMT	Teacher	LSE	SMT	Teacher	LSE	SMT	Teacher	LSE	SMT	Teacher	LSE
Empathize with learners' needs.	22	100	60	15	180	60	5	80	30	0	0	0
	182 – 33%			255 – 46%			115 – 21%			0 – 0%		
Not my responsibility to address social needs.	8	80	30	12	60	40	13	120	50	9	100	30
	118 – 21%			112 – 20%			183 – 34%			139 – 25%		
I use an ethic of care.	28	100	50	14	120	50	0	80	30	0	60	20
	178 – 32%			184 – 33%			110 – 21%			80 – 14%		
I hold high expectations for all learners.	8	60	20	8	40	30	10	100	30	16	160	70
	88 – 16%			78 – 14%			140 – 25%			246 – 45%		

EASNIE (2014) remarked that teaching strategies and practices in local schools complied with "traditional teaching methods and a prescribed curriculum" (EASNIE, 45). In this regard, the researcher investigated also general teaching pedagogies in the 17 participant schools. The majority of participants (78%) pointed out that 'high stake exams' and 'rigid syllabi' influenced the way they teach. Hence, emphasis was more

on content coverage (what students learn) rather than on how well students are learning (quality of teaching). The latter data correlated positively with collected data in Table 5B.20 below. This because the majority of participants (71%) *focused the weaknesses of minority learners*, while, another 43% indicated that they '*Never*' managed to *match teaching expectations with the learners' potential*. Moreover, 46% of the participants revealed that minority learners are 'Never' granted equal access to the curriculum. The latter results indicate that educators lacked knowledge on how to effectively include minority learners in class and on how to respond to diversity issues and challenges.

Table 5B.20: General Teaching Practices

	Always			**Very Often**			**Sometimes**			**Never**		
	HOS	**Teachers**	**LSEs**	**HOS**	**Teachers**	**LSEs**	**HOS**	**Teachers**	**LSEs**	**HOS**	**Teachers**	**LSEs**
Focus is on weaknesses.	**18**	**130**	**60**	**12**	**120**	**50**	**5**	**60**	**20**	**7**	**50**	**20**
	208 – 38%			**182 – 33%**			**85 – 15%**			**77 – 14%**		
Expectations match learners' potential.	**8**	**60**	**30**	**8**	**40**	**20**	**10**	**100**	**40**	**16**	**160**	**60**
	98 – 18%			**68 – 12%**			**150 – 27%**			**236 – 43%**		
Learners granted equal access to curriculum.	**12**	**40**	**20**	**8**	**30**	**30**	**10**	**120**	**30**	**12**	**170**	**70**
	72 – 13%			**68 – 12%**			**160 – 29%**			**252 – 46%**		

Finally, participants indicated 'excessive academic competition' among learners and parents as another barrier for inclusive teaching. In this sense, Valencia (1997) argued that "competition was detrimental to the development of inclusive education" (187). Moreover, these results correlated positively with the findings in the EASNIE report (2014), which stated that, "the current focus on benchmark examinations is leading to a disconnect between teaching and learning" and "is limiting opportunities for minority learners to demonstrate their abilities" (45). Hence, "there is little evidence of assessment for learning across schools and limited possibilities for learners to have control over their learning, as curriculum is closely linked to summative assessments" (EASNIE, 2014, 47). Finally, educators did not regard 'personalised learning' as a priority since in the Benchmark and SEC examinations, learners undergo the same exam papers.

5B.5 Collective Responsibility for All Students' Learning

'Collective responsibility' helps to "create a strong desire and shared belief that teachers work to do their best to advance all students' learning" (Bolam, 2005, 8), as well as to:

a) Increase efficacy (Goddard, 2000), "sustain commitment and put peer pressure and accountability on those who do not do their fair share" (Bolam, 2005, 8);
b) Increase relational trust among educators by emphasising professional and personal interconnectivity, mutual trust, respect and commitment (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Bryk & Schneider, 2002);
c) Ease isolation and vulnerability (Bryk & Scheider, 2002) by ensuring that educators are held accountable for all students' learning, successes and failures (Cotter, 2007);
d) Address organisational fragmentation and 'shifting-of-responsibility' attitudes by developing teacher collegiality to enable consistency and quality of teaching across classrooms (Newmann, 2000);
e) Develop 'inclusive learning communities' based on "common understandings about what students should learn, how instruction should be conducted and how teachers and students should behave" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, 30); and
f) Create a continuum of support for all learners and educators by developing the role of specialist professionals as part of a coherent and interdisciplinary support service (EASNIE, 2014).

In addition, Lee and Smith (1996) posited that "achievement gains are higher and more socially just and equitable in schools, where teachers uphold collective responsibility for all students' academic success or failure rather than putting the blame on learners" (103). For this purpose, the three distributed questionnaires investigated and analysed the interdependence of collaboration, collective responsibility, and trust in the research study's 17 participant schools.

5B.5.1 Relational Trust

Covey (2006) contended that 'respect', 'personal regard for others', 'personal integrity', and 'competence in role' are essential qualities to nurture relational trust in schools, since "sharing the innermost actions of one's teaching practice with colleagues involves exposing and making vulnerable one's practice to critique" (89). In this regard, the researcher investigated the degree of relational and faculty trust in the 17 participant

schools. Table 5B.21 below illustrates the results obtained from the diverse participants on state-of-play of relational and faculty trust.

Table 4B.21: Relational and Faculty Trust

	Always			Very Often			Sometimes			Never		
	SMT	Teachers	LSEs	SMT	Teachers	LSEs	SMT	Teachers	LSEs	SMT	Teachers	LSEs
Educators care about each other.	**23**	**150**	**50**	**10**	**150**	**50**	**9**	**40**	**40**	**0**	**20**	**10**
	223 – 40%			**210 – 38%**			**89 – 16%**			**30 – 6%**		
Educators trust each other.	**15**	**100**	**30**	**10**	**90**	**30**	**11**	**120**	**60**	**6**	**50**	**30**
	145 – 26%			**130 – 24%**			**191 – 35%**			**86 – 15%**		
Educators discuss feelings and frustrations.	**18**	**90**	**30**	**10**	**90**	**20**	**10**	**130**	**40**	**4**	**50**	**60**
	138 – 25%			**120 – 22%**			**180 – 33%**			**114 – 20%**		
Educators trust and include parents.	**5**	**30**	**30**	**4**	**60**	**20**	**8**	**140**	**40**	**25**	**130**	**60**
	65 – 12%			**84 – 15%**			**188 – 34%**			**215 – 39%**		

The above results indicate that relational trust in local schools depended on individual bonds. While the majority of educators (78%) *showed a caring attitude towards each other*, only 26% indicated that they '*Always*' trusted their teacher colleagues. The latter result shows that local edcuators preferred to extend trust to teachers they perceived as similar to themselves. Moreover, 'lack of time', 'educators' continuous mobility' and 'transience' resulted as the main barriers to the formation of trust, which also effected the extent to which *educators shared their feelings and frustrations*. Notably, educators lacked *trust to include parents* in the teaching and learning process. Only 12% of the participant educators indicated that they '*Always*' included parents. Conversely, 39% chose '*Never*' and 34% selected '*Sometimes*'. The latter results correlated positively with the findings in Section 5B.4.2, dealing with parental engagement.

5B.5.2 Teachers' Collective Responsibility for Students' Learning

The EASNIE audit report (2014) remarked that in the Maltese educational system prevailed "a culture of blame", where educators "abdicated or shifted their professional

responsibility" for meeting the diverse needs of all learners (55). The results obtained from the three questionnaires also confirmed the EASNIE report findings. Table 5B.22 illustrated the results obtained on the issue of 'collective responsibility' for all students' learning in the 17 local representative schools.

Table 5B.22: Collective Responsibility

Statements	Always			Very Often			Sometimes			Never		
Educators feel:	SMT	Teacher	LSA	SMT	Teacher	LSA	SMT	Teacher	LSA	SMT	Teacher	LSA
Responsible when students fail.	**10**	**80**	**40**	**9**	**90**	**30**	**10**	**100**	**30**	**12**	**90**	**50**
	130 – 24%			**129 – 23%**			**140 – 25%**			**152 – 28%**		
Responsible to make inclusive schools.	**12**	**60**	**40**	**13**	**80**	**20**	**13**	**100**	**40**	**4**	**120**	**50**
	112 – 20%			**113 – 20%**			**153 – 28%**			**174 – 32%**		
Responsible to help all students develop holistically.	**13**	**100**	**60**	**12**	**90**	**70**	**9**	**110**	**20**	**8**	**60**	**0**
	173 – 31%			**172 – 31%**			**139 – 25%**			**68 – 12%**		
Responsible for all students' learning.	**12**	**120**	**50**	**10**	**100**	**50**	**9**	**100**	**10**	**11**	**40**	**60**
	162 – 29%			**160 – 29%**			**119 – 22%**			**111 – 20%**		
Responsible for all students irrespective of needs.	**10**	**60**	**30**	**6**	**40**	**30**	**11**	**120**	**50**	**15**	**140**	**40**
	100 – 18%			**76 – 14%**			**181 – 33%**			**195 – 35%**		

The collected data in Table 5B.22 presented a major contradiction. While the majority of educators indicated that they feel '*responsible to help all learners develop holistically*' (62%) and '*responsible for all students' learning*' (58%), they also specified that they do not feel '*responsible when students fail*' (28%) and '*responsible for all students in class irrespective of needs*' (35%). Notably, 32% of the participants indicated that they do not feel '*responsible to develop inclusive schools*', while 28% specified that they 'Sometimes' feel such responsibility. Finally, the latter results also correlated with the one obtained in Section 5B.4.3 on 'General Beliefs and Attitudes' vis-a-vis inclusive education.

5B.5.3 Collaboration for Inclusion

Collaboration, interdisciplinary approaches as well as educators' ability to work within multi-disciplinary teams are essential requisites to create inclusive communities,

since the latter approaches help to diminish teacher isolation and address considerable challenges related to inclusive education (Nevin, 2009). Giangreco (2003) argued that ‘collaboration for inclusive education’ occurs when all educators (HoS, mainstream and specialist teachers and LSEs) interact, show supportive behaviour towards each other, and share expertise. Similarly, Sharma (2013) described the latter process as “a developmental approach in which general and special educators or other related service providers jointly plan for and teach heterogeneous groups of students" (19). Given the importance of ‘collaborative approaches for inclusive education’, the three distributed questionnaires investigated the state-of-play of collaboration in schools (Table 5B.23).

Table 5B.23: Working within a Team

	Always			**Very Often**			**Sometimes**			**Never**		
	SMT	Teacher	LSE	SMT	Teacher	LSE	SMT	Teacher	LSE	SMT	Teacher	LSE
All educators collaborate together.	**10**	**100**	**30**	**5**	**50**	**30**	**10**	**50**	**20**	**17**	**160**	**70**
	140 – 26%			**85 – 15%**			**80 – 14%**			**247 – 45%**		
Teachers and LSEs plan & work together.	**10**	**80**	**30**	**8**	**50**	**30**	**12**	**100**	**20**	**12**	**130**	**70**
	120 – 22%			**88 – 16%**			**132 – 24%**			**212 – 38%**		
IEPs are a joint effort.	**7**	**90**	**15**	**11**	**90**	**25**	**10**	**60**	**43**	**14**	**120**	**67**
	112 – 20%			**126 – 23%**			**113 – 20%**			**201 – 37%**		
Lessons include IEPs content.	**7**	**80**	**20**	**11**	**80**	**10**	**10**	**90**	**40**	**14**	**110**	**80**
	107 – 19%			**101 – 18%**			**140 – 26%**			**204 – 37%**		
IEPs are reviewed.	**13**	**40**	**40**	**10**	**60**	**30**	**10**	**100**	**30**	**9**	**160**	**50**
	93 – 17%			**100 – 18%**			**140 – 26%**			**219 – 39%**		
INCOs provide support.	**8**	**40**	**50**	**9**	**30**	**40**	**13**	**130**	**40**	**12**	**160**	**20**
	98 – 18%			**79 – 14%**			**183 – 33%**			**192 – 35%**		
INCOs presence is felt at school.	**8**	**40**	**30**	**8**	**20**	**30**	**13**	**130**	**40**	**13**	**170**	**50**
	78 – 14%			**58 – 11%**			**183 – 33%**			**233 – 42%**		

The above results indicate limited opportunities for collaboration among class/subject teachers, LSEs, INCOs, and support specialists. In fact, the ‘*Never*’ choice prevailed for all the presented statements. Hence, edcuators, rather than creating a continuum of interdisciplinary support, tend to focus on ‘direct restorative-intervention’ practices. In this regard, participants highlighted the lack of formal participatory and collaborative

action planning to identify, implement, monitor and evaluate educational goals. This because current support structures presented limited interprofessional communication opportunities to discuss and debate differing perceptions and expectations on support strategies for minority learners. Similarly, support services lack a culture of systematic critical self-reflection on pedagogical practices.

Lack of collaboration is also evident at classroom level between teachers and LSEs. EASNIE (2014) argued that, "...teachers only engage with learners supported by LSEs on a limited basis" since they tend to shift responsibility for inclusive education on LSEs (71). Conversely, LSEs remarked about the sporadic involvement of teachers in the development, implementation and reviewing of IEPs together with the lack of support received from INCOs. In fact, 42% of the participants indicated that the INCOs presence at school was '*Never*' felt.

5B.6 Continuous Professional Training Issues

According to Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017), the provision of CPD training to educators was crucial to "support the development of a transformative teaching profession" (733). Given the importance of CPD training to sustain 'inclusive education', the distributed questionnaires probed into the effectiveness of CPD training among all educators in the 17 participant schools (Table 5B.24).

Table 5B.24: Effectiveness of Received CPD Training

Statements on CPD	HoS		Teachers		LSEs	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Training helped me to plan inclusively.	21	21	160	200	50	100
	50%	50%	44%	56%	33%	67%
Training helped me to develop responsive IEPs.	18	24	140	220	70	80
	43%	57%	39%	61%	47%	53%
CPD complemented my needs as an educator.	24	18	165	195	50	100
	57%	43%	46%	54%	33%	67%
CPD is sporadic and based on deficit-mastery model.	18	24	240	120	90	60
	43%	57%	67%	33%	60%	40%
CPD sustains a coordinated focus on the schools' targets.	30	12	100	260	40	110
	71%	29%	28%	72%	27%	73%
CPD is offered after the administration of a TNA.	11	31	100	260	40	110
	26%	74%	28%	72%	27%	73%

Collected data shows that the vast majority of teachers (56%) and LSEs (67%) rated the received CPD training on 'inclusive education' as ineffective, unproductive, and unmotivating. Moreover, 50% of the participant HoS shared the same belief as teachers and LSEs. On the contrary, the remaining 50% of HoS rated the received training as a positive and satisfactory experience. In general, teachers and LSEs indicated that CPD training: *did not complement their educational needs and challenges*; *was sporadic and based on the 'deficit-mastery' model*; *did not sustain inclusive planning and teaching*; and *provided lack of opportunities for knowledge sharing and hands-on practice* (such as the development of responsive IEPs). Coversely, the majority of HoS rated received CPD training as *complemetary to their personal needs on 'inclusive education'* (57%) and as *having a coordinated focus on the schools' main goals and objectives* (71%). Finally, the vast majority of HoS (74%), teachers (72%) and LSEs (73%) indicated that the identification of training needs did not result from the administration of a TNA at school or college level.

5B.7 Social Relationships and Levels of Relatedness

Sharma (2013) warned of the indirect negative effects of 'deficit-thinking' on social relationships among different learners in mainstream schools. In this regard, the researcher compared results from the educators' questionniares and the four conducted sociometric tests to: (a) determine the level of acceptance and discover the relationships that exist among learners; (b) reveal group structures; and (c) identify sub-groups and various types of group positions, such as: '*stars*' (learners who receiev the highest number of choices); *'populars'* (learners with the second highest number of preferences); '*dyads'* (learners who choose each other reciprocally), and *'isolates'* (learners with no preferences or choices). The 'criterion selection' process of the sociometric tests consisted of four specific questions in which learners had to nominate classmates with whom they enjoyed working and/or playing (during and after school hours). The researcher represented the collected data in 'sociograms', which illustrated the sociographic positions and the relationship of all learners in each participant classroom. Appendix M illustrates all the 16 developed 'sociograms' as per sociometric test results.

Table 5B.25 below illustrates basic general demographic information on the four participant classrooms in Primary Schools A and C and Secondary Schools E and G, as per information provided by class/subject teachers prior to the administration of sociometric tests.

Table 5B.25: General Demographic Information on Participant Classrooms

	College W	**College Y**	**College W**	**College Y**
School	Primary A	Primary C	Secondary E	Secondary G
Class/Form	Year 4	Year 5	Form 3	Form 4
No. of Learners	23	21	17	15
Gender	14 M 9 F	12 M 9 F	10 M 7 F	8 M 7F
SEN learners	3	4	2	2
Grouping	Mixed-Ability	Mixed-Ability	Mixed-Ability	Mixed-Ability
Educators	1 Teacher 2 LSEs	1 Teacher 2 LSEs	1 Teacher 1 LSE	1 Teacher 1 LSE

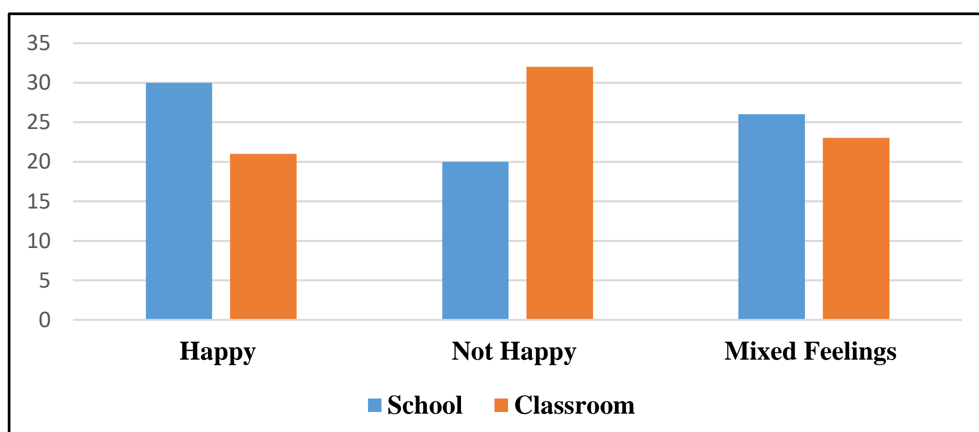
Apart from officially diagnosed SEN learners, participant classrooms presented also: *learners from diverse cultural or ethnic backgrounds* (i.e. migrant students, EU nationals, and Third Country Nationals); *learners from different socio-economic backgrounds* (i.e. students from diverse family income levels and social backgrounds); *learners with diverse academic abilities* (i.e. high, low and average achieving students); *learners with diverse aptitudes towards schooling* (i.e. students with different learning abilities or motivational levels towards schooling); and *learners with behavioural difficulties* (i.e. students with concentration, emotional and behavioural challenges). The information on the composition of the participant classrooms correlated significantly with findings on minority learner groups in Section 5B.3 (Sub-Section 5B.3.1).

Collected data from the three questionnaires indicated that educators' general beliefs, attitudes, and teaching practices indirectly influenced learners' relationships and interactions in local classrooms. Similarly, sociometric results also evidenced lack of interaction among low, average and high achieving learners, who in formal teaching settings preferred to interact with same ability peers. Essentially, class ability grouping and class seating arrangements resulted as two highly influential variables on learners' choices, since nominations mirrored the nominees' class seating placement (Appendix M: Sociograms for Question 1). Moreover, parents' negative perceptions and attitudes towards minority learners emerged as another prominent variable that accentuated the 'ability divide' in local mainstream classrooms. The majority of educators in the three questionnaires (69%) indicated that parents of the more affluent students were resistant to 'mixed-ability grouping' activities, because they feared that minority learners' "*bad*

behaviour", "*aggressive manners*", "*limited attention*", "*lack of motivation in class*", and "*negligence towards schooling*", would negatively effect the "*overall classroom behaviour*" and "*the academic attainment of the whole class*". Such stereotypical and 'deficit-rooted' credence reinforced the neoliberal logic of a highly competitive and selective educational system, which hampered students' interaction during formal in-class lessons. To this effect, class teachers focused on the academic needs of high and average achieving learners and delegated the responsibility for SEN and low achievers on LSEs. The latter practice justified the strong relational bond between SEN learners with an 'official statement of needs' and low achievers (Appendix M: Sociograms for Question 3). Sociograms indicated also increased risks of '*marginalization*' among all learners attending 'class withdrawal additional support services' (complementary or CCP classes) and '*ghettoisation*' among learners from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Appendix M: Sociograms for Questions 1 and 3).

Conversely, sociometric results for learners' choices and reactions in informal educational settings differed from the ones obtained in formal learning environments, where '*class stars*' were 'high-achievers'; '*class populars*' were both 'high-average or average achievers'; and '*class isolates*' were 'minority learners'. Essentially, in non-formal educational activities (i.e. doctrine; sport, music and drama activities; and structured play during break time) learners felt more comfortable to interact together as evidenced by the sociograms' different 'triangles', 'chains' and 'dyads' (Appendix M: Sociograms for Questions 2 and 4). The latter difference suggests that extra-curricular activities offered learners opportunities to strengthen their social bonds. In addition, sociometric tests also tried to guage learners' feelings on their schools and classrooms (Figure 5B.18).

Figure 5B.18: Learners Feelings on their Schools and Classrooms



Gathered data shows that the majority of learners looked forward to go to school (30), but did not feel comfortable in their respective classrooms (32). Furthermore, 26 and 23 other learners indicated that they had mixed feelings on their school and classroom respectively. Among the reasons put forward by learners to explain their discomfort in mainstream classrooms, there were: *bullying* in the form of 'name-calling'; *curricular* difficulties resulting from lack of grade readiness; *communication* challenges due to limited Maltese or English proficiency; *rigid disciplinary* procedures; lack of *school-based activities*, *space* and *resources*; and unequitable *class treatment*. In addition, the latter concerns related positively with findings on 'Barriers and Challenges to Include Minority Learners' from questionnaires (Section 5B.3 – Sub-Section 5B.3.6).

5B.8 Barriers to Inclusive Education

The three questionnaires investigated the main challeges and barriers that local schools faced to: (a) reduce barriers to learning and participation for all learners; and (b) increase the capacity of schools to respond to the diversity of learners in an equitable and inclusive manner (Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick, and West, 2012). For this purpose, the researcher presented educators with six main challenges to 'inclusive education' to indicate their frequency of occurance. Table 5B.26 illustrates the latter results.

Table 5B.26: Barriers to Inclusive Education

	Always			Very Often			Sometimes			Never		
	SMT	Teachers	LSEs	SMT	Teachers	LSEs	SMT	Teachers	LSEs	SMT	Teachers	LSEs
Lack of Policies	**10**	**180**	**60**	**10**	**150**	**60**	**9**	**30**	**30**	**13**	**0**	**0**
	250 – 45%			**220 – 40%**			**69 – 13%**			**13 – 2%**		
Time & Finance	**38**	**180**	**60**	**4**	**150**	**60**	**0**	**30**	**30**	**0**	**0**	**0**
	278 – 50%			**214 – 39%**			**60 – 11%**			**0 – 0%**		
Rigid Syllabi	**38**	**200**	**90**	**4**	**130**	**40**	**0**	**30**	**20**	**0**	**0**	**0**
	328 – 59%			**174 – 32%**			**50 – 9%**			**0 – 0%**		
Lack of Training	**28**	**230**	**90**	**4**	**90**	**40**	**7**	**40**	**20**	**3**	**0**	**0**
	348 – 63%			**134 – 24%**			**67 – 12%**			**3 – 1%**		
Parents attitudes	**30**	**200**	**60**	**5**	**100**	**20**	**7**	**60**	**40**	**0**	**0**	**30**
	290 – 53%			**125 – 23%**			**107 – 19%**			**30 – 5%**		
Lack of Interest	**30**	**200**	**90**	**7**	**100**	**50**	**5**	**60**	**5**	**0**	**0**	**5**
	320 – 60%			**157 – 27%**			**70 – 12%**			**5 – 1%**		

The above collected data clearly shows that the biggest barrier to 'inclusive education' was '*lack of specific training on inclusive education*' (63%) that failed to empower and to enhance educators' teaching skills and abilities. Following the latter challenge were: '*learners' lack of interest and/or motivation to participate in school activities*' (60%); '*rigid subject syllabi and 'one-size-fits-all' assessment techniques*' (59%); '*negative parents' atitudes and unrealistic expectations*' (53%); '*limited time and lack of finance to support inclusion-oriented initiatives*' (50%); and '*lack of clear policies to support the implementation of inclusive education in schools*' (45%). In addition to the latter challenges, SMT members listed other equally important barriers, namely: "*schools' physical environment because of lack of facilities and equipement to accommodate diverse learners*"; "*the organization of the educational system, which is to centralized and not conducive to change*"; and "*teachers' low educational expectations of minority learners and their resistance or fear of change*".

5B.9 Conclusion

This section aimed to present the main findings from the three questionnaires and the four conducted sociometric tests, which helped to establish a solid foundation for the analysis of qualitative data (semi-structured interviews; job-shadowing sessions; participant observations; focus groups; and document analysis) to further explain and elaborate quantitative findings. In this regard, the next section (Chapter 5: Section 5C) delves into the main findings obtained from semi-structured interviews, conducted with diverse policy-makers on the current state of play of 'inclusive education' and 'deficit-thinking' in the local educational system.

Section 5C: Qualitative Analysis

Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews with Policymakers

5C.1 Introduction

A total of 15 (out of 16) semi-structured interviews were conducted with diverse State and Church educational policymakers (Table 5C.1). To analyse all the generated data, the researcher utilized the thematic approach, which helped to enhance findings from questionnaires on the effects of 'deficit-thinking'; challenges/barriers to inclusive education; and socially just leadership processes and practices. Finally, the researcher used pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and to protect and not disclose site and participants' names.

Table 5C.1: The Interviewees

System Levels	Interviewees	Designation	Appendix
Ministery	Hon. Bartolo	Minister MEDE	A1
	Mr. AA	President MUT	A2
Directorate	Mr. BB	DG ES	A3
	Mr. CC	DG QSE	
Departmental & College	Dr. DD	Director QAD	A4
	Mr. EE	Director Curriculum	A5
	Mr. FF	Director NSSS	A6
	Fr. GG	Archbishop's Delegate	A7
	Ms. HH	CP: College W	A8
	Mr. II	CP: College X	
	Mr. JJ	CP: College Y	
	Mr. KK	CP: College Z	
School	Ms. LL	HoS State Primary I	A9
	Ms. MM	HoS State Primary J	
	Mr. NN	HoS Church Secondary K	
Classroom	Educators	Teachers, Practitioners, Support Specialists, LSEs, INCOs and EOs	Appendix A: (Open-ended questions in questionnaires)

5C.2 Educational Provision: Why and How?

The Government's holistic vision for education is "…for Malta to become an active learning nation, where learning plays a fundamental role in personal growth and emancipation to strengthen prosperity and solidarity" (http://lifelonglearning.gov.mt). In this regard, Hon. Bartolo stressed that MEDE's ultimate objective was "to help all

learners develop their talents, personal and social potential and acquire skills, attitudes, knowledge and competences through a value-oriented formation, including diversity, equity, inclusivity and social justice". Similarly, all participant interviewees (within the State and Church sectors) shared the Minister's vision for education, even though they indicated many overlapping challenges.

5C.2.1 The State Sector: Directorates & Departments: Mission Statements

DES and DQSE are two major directorates within MEDE. The former is responsible for ensuring "the effective and efficient operation and delivery of services in State colleges and schools within an established framework of decentralisation and autonomy", i.e. "…planning the provision and allocation of resources, services and learning tools (pedagogical, psychosocial, managerial and operative)" (Educ. Act, CAP. 327, 7). An important structure within DES is NSSS, which is liable for "the provision of educational support services…in State colleges and schools, with some services (Early Intervention) also provided in other sectors and institutions…" (Mr. FF). NSSS strives to "deliver a specialized and timely support service" to help colleges/schools "respond effectively to students' diversity" (Mr. FF).

Conversely, DQSE "establishes, monitors and assures standards and quality" in educational programmes and services provided by schools (Educ. Act, CAP. 327, 5). Hence, DQSE evaluates and reports "on the results and the various elements of compulsory education…to assure quality education for all and promote good practices in educational activities within a national curriculum framework of lifelong learning" (Educ. Act, CAP. 327, 5). An essential department within DQSE is the Learning and Assessment Programmes or the Curriculum Management Department, which "oversees the teaching and learning domain" through the "development and revision of national syllabi; provision of annual examination papers; monitoring of the teaching process through regular in-class observations; training of class teachers; and the provision of textbooks and online resources" (Mr. EE). Another equally important department is the Quality Assurance Department, which "regulates the pre- and post-compulsory and compulsory education by performing external reviews that serve as a sign-post for effective school improvement" (Dr. DD). The latter mission correlated positively with the main recommendations of the ET2020 Working Group on Quality Assurance for School Development, which advocated for "…a culture of quality and innovative

enhancement" to "transform schools into professional learning communities to enable school development, with emphasis on improvement rather than quality control" (EC, 2017, 4).

Both departments presented also ambitious mission statements, which focused on good governance and effective leadership to "ensure that all learners received the best possible educational experiences in an inclusive and future-focused curriculum framework" (Mr. CC). Whereas the Curriculum department encouraged "the provision of relevant teaching and learning experiences by giving teachers suggestions on how best to implement national syllabi" (Mr. EE); the QAD aimed to strengthen "a culture of effective internal self-evaluation to inform school development planning, to provide schools with feedback and to recommend priorities for future action" (Dr. DD).

5C.2.2 Participant State Colleges

Four colleges, in the Northern, Central and Southern parts of Malta, participated in the study. Table 5C.2 provides brief information on each participant college.

Table 5C.2: Description of Participant State Colleges

Name of College	Description
College W (Ms. HH)	College W is situated in the Southern part of Malta and is composed of *seven Primary schools*, *one Middle School*, *one Secondary School* and *two learning centres* (one for boys and one for girls). This college is characterized by "socio-economic challenges", which lead to 'stigma'.
College X (Mr. II)	College X is situated in the Northern region of Malta and consists of approximately 500 staff members and 5,000 students (from 40 different countries). It is one of the biggest colleges and is characterized by "socio-cultural challenges".
College Y (Mr. JJ)	College Y is found in the Central region of the island and consists of *six Primary schools*; *one Middle school*; *one Secondary school* and *a Resource Centre*. Although relatively small, this college experienced an exponential growth in population due to the "many foriegners residing or working in the area".
College Z (Mr. KK)	College Z is situated in the Northest region of Malta and is composed of *eleven Primary Schools*, *one Middle School* and *one Secondary School*. This College performs "very well in national standardized tests" and "reaches the top national 75% attainment performance".

Participant colleges presented also different cohorts of 'minority learners', namely: *learners from different socio-economic backgrounds*; *learners from diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds*; *SEN learners* (physical disabilities and psychological conditions); and *learners with diverse educational abilities, aptitudes and/or behavioural traits*. The latter data corroborated findings from questionnaires on minority learners' group categories. The colleges' mission statements not only recognized the vast repertoire of individual and social difference in student populations but also proposed an enabling pedagogy based on respect for learners' needs and aspirations. In this regard, Mr. JJ emphasised on "the concept of happy schooling by catering for the holistic well-being of learners in a caring, joyful, and non-stressful teaching environment". Moreover, all mission statements embodied Principle 2 of the NMC (1999) ('Respect for Diversity'), which committed "…the State to ensure that all learners are provided with the best possible educational experiences, irrespective of their social realities" (Hon. Bartolo).

5C.2.3 Participant State Schools

The two conducted interviews with Heads of State Primary schools helped the researcher to: (a) further de-construct the notions of 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education'; (b) explore the impact of 'deficit-thinking' at school level; and (c) examine the role of school leaders in eliminating 'deficit-thinking' to enable inclusive education. Table 5C.3 illustrates demographics of the two participant schools.

Table 5C.3: Overview of Schools' Profile

Site	Location	Population	Additional Information
Primary School I (Ms. LL)	**Northern Region** (College Z)	**80** (Age range from 3 to 11 years)	Classrooms (1 per year group) are relatively small (10 students per class). A total of 10 educators (2 KEs, 2 LSEs & 6 teachers) work in the school.
Primary School J (Ms. MM)	**Southern Region** (College W)	**240** (Age range from 3 to 11)	There are 15 classrooms (three Kinder classes & two classes from Years 1 to 6). The school's staff consists of *a HoS* and *an Asst. Head*, *three KEs*, *eight LSEs* and *twelve qualified teachers*.

The schools' mission statements emphasized the need for all "stakeholders to cater for all learners' individual needs" (Ms. LL) to "help students maximise their full

potential" to "become productive and independent future citizens" (Ms. MM). HoS also encouraged staff "to work cooperatively together" and to "provide personalized teaching" (Ms. LL) to help learners develop "holistically (not only academically), by paying particular attention to their social and emotional well-being" (Ms. MM). Both interviewees' emphasised that the aims of the schools' mission statements were being achieved successfully. Ms. LL attributed the latter success to the fact that she "leads a united learning community…where all stakeholders respect each other…and teachers do their best to provide learners with meaningful and targeted individual attention". On the other hand, Ms. MM praised educators' dedication, sacrifices and efforts for the continuous success the school registers in benchmark examinations.

5C.3 The Church Schools Sector

The Church Schools sector is "the second largest educational institution in Malta, which consists of a number of early-years settings (Kindergarten); Primary and Secondary schools; and Post-Secondary institutions" (Fr. GG). A major characteristic of this sector is "autonomous decision-making, since schools have full autonomy and freedom to identify challenges, develop intervention strategies, and take decisions to address the identified needs by themselves" (Fr. GG). The latter approach contrasted with the way State schools were managed, given that the majority of SMT members (48%) through the questionnaires indicated 'lack of executive power and autonomy to carry out change in schools'. Moreover, Fr. GG contended that, "autonomous decision-making ensured a strong sense of belonging, guaranteed shared responsibility for the efficient administration of schools, and enabled collective accountability for effective teaching and learning". Within this framework of decentralization, the Secretariat for Catholic Education "limited itself to develop and maintain healthy relationships with all schools as well as to provide the necessary support and help to schools whenever it is needed" (Fr. GG). In this regard, the Secretariat offered various support services provided by:

- *Social workers*, who helped learners and parents with their social requirements;
- *Educational psychologists* and *councillors* to support diverse SEN learners;
- *INCOs*, who assisted learners with diverse disabilities;
- *Support teachers* to oversee the development of literacy and/or numeracy; and
- *HoDs*, who supported teachers in the delivery of the curriculum.

Essentially, the above support services "aimed to help schools develop their internal capacities to enable equitable, socially just and inclusive education" (Fr. GG).

Apart from the participation of Fr. GG, which was essential to better understand the dynamics of the Church sector, the researcher analysed also the contribution of a Head of a male Catholic Secondary School (School K) to explore in detail management and leadership processes. Table 5C.4 below provides a brief demographic description of Secondary School K.

Table 4C.5: Overview of School K

<table>
<tr><th>Site</th><th>Learners' Population</th><th>Staff Population</th><th>No. of Classrooms</th><th>Classification System</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Secondary School K</td><td>346 male students</td><td>102 educators</td><td>15 classrooms</td><td rowspan="3">Banding is used to classify learners since "it allows for a controlled degree of mixed-ability as the academic gap between students in the same band is not wide as in the mixed-ability system" (Mr. NN).</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Additional Information</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3"><u>Learners' Demographics</u>:
• Students' age ranges from 11 to 16 years.
• 52 learners possess an 'official statement of needs'.

<u>Staff Demographics</u>:
• <u>SMT</u>: 1 HoS and 2 Asstistant Heads.
• <u>Staff</u>: 62 Teachers; 12 HoDs; 23 LSEs; 2 Guidance Teachers; 1 Librarian; 1 Spiritual Director; and 2 Prefects of Discipline.

<u>Class Demographics</u>:
• There are 3 streams per year group (Form 1 - Form 5) with an average of 25 students in each stream.</td></tr>
</table>

School K also has "an ambitious and forward-looking vision", which among other things strives to: "strengthen learners' individual and academic formation; encourage priestly vocations and missionary life; and inspire lay people to be actively involved in helping others in the family, church, and society" (Mr. NN). In this regard, Mr. NN remarked that, "the school was managing to achieve its objectives since the majority of students succeed: to find a job; to continue post-secondary and even tertiary education; to commence priestly life; and to be of valuable contribution to society in

various areas" (Mr. NN). The interviewee also stressed "the need for more whole-school constructive improvement to guarantee success to all learners" (Mr. NN).

5C.4 The 'Deficit-Thinking' Phenomenon

5C.4.1 Defining 'Deficit-Thinking'

Valencia (1997) defined 'deficit-thinking' as a dominant paradigm that shapes educational thoughts, practices and explanations to justify widespread school failure among minority learners. Hence, the researcher asked participants to define 'deficit-thinking' to analyse their level of awareness on the subject. The majority of participants (10/12) linked 'deficit-thinking' to: "one-size-fits-all approaches" (Dr. DD); "constant shifting of responsibilities" (Mr. EE); "holding low expectations for minority learners" (Mr. FF); "focusing on learners' weaknesses, perceived needs or deficits" (Ms. HH); and "normalization processes to 'fix' minority learners' weaknesses" (Mr. II). DG QSE was more specific and posited that,

> "deficit-thinking is a practice and process that educators engage with to place blame on parents and students, who are traditionally underserved in schools. As a result, teachers marginalize minority students and perpetuate the achievement gap. This attitude also leads to finger blaming; shifting of responsibility; labelling and categorization of learners in different ability groups" (Mr. CC).

The gathered definitions also revolved on the predominant belief that "minority learners lacked the ability to accomplish a task, grasp a concept, improve a skill, or achieve at specific levels because of their prior performance, gender, race, ethnicity, religion or physical characteristics" (Mr. JJ). Hence, 'difference' is considered as 'a deficit' or as "an endless list of problems that reinforce the need to diagnose and categorize minority learners to provide them with additional support" (Mr. KK).

5C.4.2 'Deficit-Thinking': Perceptions, Manifestations and Challenges

Definitions revealed that 'deficit-thinking' was the direct result of stereotypic assumptions and misconceptions on minority learners' aptitudes and abilities, which, in turn, created negative self-fulfilling prophecies or compensatory approaches. These findings re-inforced the belief that the local education system "is rooted in a medical-deficit model, with little attention paid to inclusive pedagogical practices" (EASNIE, 2014, 50), since 'deficit-thinking' pervaded the lived experiences, discourse, practices and assumptions of educators (Mr. EE). Valencia (1997) compared 'deficit-thinking'

to a "protean theory", which alienated educators from system-wide factors impacting on students' abilities (Foucault, 1991). In this regard, data from questionnaires shows that the majority of educators blamed learners (personal) and families (social) to justify educational failure (Table 5C.5). To this effect, Hon. Bartolo maintained that "a shift in mentality among educators is urgently needed to overcome the general perception that minority learners are incapable of handling and accessing mainstream curriculum and syllabi".

Table 5C.5: Determinants of Educational Failure: Open-Ended Questionnaires

Personal Characteristics	Social Characteristics
"lack of motivation and attention"	"a culture of poverty"
"lack of confidence and self-esteem"	"inadequate housing conditions"
"poor school attendance"	"lack of parental support"
"lack of interest in schooling"	"lack of parental affection"
"lack of participation in class activities"	"lack of parental follow-through"
"lack of academic skills"	"limited access to academic material"
"severe emotional and behavioural problems"	"difficult socio-economic conditions"
"severe physical disabilities or conditions"	"low parental educational attainment"
"severe communication difficulties"	"difficult cultural backgrounds"
"severe reading and numeracy difficulties"	"lack of financial capital"

Executive members of MEDE's top management team indicated that "a one-size-fits-all mentality dominated schooling practices…" (Mr. KK) to the extent that "statementing procedures increased exponentially" (Mr. FF). Director QAD argued that, "the centralised system of additional support provision disempowered and de-skilled classroom teachers, who shifted responsibility for minority students' learning on expert professionals" (Dr. DD). To this effect, participants viewed support services "as effective in providing indivualized support" but "weak to empower and to enable mainstream school staff members" (Mr. EE). Moreover, the latter system of support reinforced a framework of "blame and abdiction from collective responsibility" (Dr. DD) with "policymakers criticising educators and the latter blaming the system, parents, learners and support professionals for high levels of educational failure" (Mr. CC). The

latter data corroborated questionnaire results on 'collective responsibility for students' learning' in Section 5B.5.2. Hence, the 'deficit paradigm' negatively influenced "the understanding and operationalization of inclusive education in schools" (Mr. BB).

According to Ms. MM, the "exponential increase in student diversity" posed problems to educators to address achievement gaps, which barrier reinforced the firm belief among CPs, HoS and teachers that homogenous grouping (banding) provided the best learning environments to challenge high-achievers without frustrating lower ones (Mr. AA). In this sense, Dubley-Marling (2007) remarked that banding was a mere reflection of society's "capitalist and neoliberal approach to living, where many are content with labelling, inequalities and segregation" (10). Furthermore, Dubley-Marling (2015) remarked that,

> "the circumscribed, low level, basic skills curriculum common in lower academic tracks, more or less ensures that low achieving students will fall further and further behind their peers in higher academic tracks who are challenged with thoughtful and engaging curricula" (63).

Similarly, Director QAD emphasized that "minority learners had the highest dropout rate, an over-representation in special education and under-representation in gifted and advanced placement programs" (Dr. DD).

Apart from the above challenges, interviewees also cited other system-wide barriers, which sustained and reinforced the deficit paradigm in local colleges/schools. Identified challenges and barriers included:

1. Market-driven educational targets and objectives,
2. Lack of school autonomy and top-down decision-making processes,
3. Rigid curricula, including assessments, and content-oriented syllabi,
4. Confusion on how to implement the LOF framework,
5. Lack of continuous professional development,
6. Lack of parental and learners' engagement,
7. Limited collaborative approaches, and
8. Lack of enabling systems of additional support.

In turn, the above challenges "facilitated the labelling of diverse learners" (Mr. AA); "influenced choice of pedagogical and assessment strategies" (Mr. NN); and "sustained self-defeating attitudes, limited creativity and misplaced expectations" (Hon. Bartolo). Notably, the identified challenges to inclusive education and their negative effects on

minority learners correlated positively with the ones elicited from questionnaires in Section 5B. Hence, the need for effective leadership at all system levels to dismantle the 'deficit agenda', which rests on the entrenched culture that, "educators always do what is in the best interest of learners" (Dr. DD). To this effect, educators needed help and support to: "consider constructivist approaches in teaching" (Mr. NN); "examine the social ecology of colleges, schools and classrooms to contextualize, uncover and challenge tacit assumptions on students' weaknesses" (Weiner, 2006, 43); and "adopt an 'ethic of care approach' together with a "pedagogy based on respect and celebration of difference" (NCF, 2012, 30). In essence, effective school leadership techniques help to overcome complexities, ambiguities, and the deep-seated 'dilemma of difference' that intersects with the dilemma of the extent to which the purpose of education can be located at the level of the individual or the State.

5C.5 Inclusive Education

5C.5.1 Defining Inclusive Education

Hansen (2012) referred to inclusive education as a complex and elusive notion, which means different things in different contexts to different stakeholders. The latter ambiguity also transpired in the educators' understanding of 'inclusive education' as evidenced in Section 5B.2 (Sub-Section 5B.2.1). Despite the many justifications for inclusive education from a human rights, social, educational and moral perspective, no universally institutionalized definition of this "influential, ambitious and contentious" concept exists (Opertti, Walker, and Zhang, 2014, 89). Similarly, in Malta, no explicit definition of 'inclusive education' exists within the 'Education Act' (1988) or in any other official MEDE policy document. Hence, during interviews, the researcher asked interviewees to define 'inclusive education'.

Collected responses presented contrasting definitions, which showed a general "uncertaintity on how to teach inclusively and how to create inclusive environments" (Allan, 1999, 10). Likewise, the EASNIE (2014) audit report concluded that,

> "…while there exists a clear commitment on the part of policymakers to promote inclusion, its definition and benefits were not adequately debated with school educators, who still view it as a locational issue" (41).

Hence, policymakers and educational leaders viewed 'inclusive education' as a human rights process based on the 'social and capability approaches of disability' to address

marginalization issues and to develop human capital in all learners. In this regard, the values that emanated from the gathered definitions revolved around issues of access, quality, social justice, diversity, participation, and the balancing of unity. Essentially, Hon. Bartolo contended that,

> "…we need to widen the 'inclusive umbrella' and include other minorities, apart from SEN learners. In this capitalist and globalized world educators can't afford to exclude disadvantaged people. In my opinion, it is the duty of the education system to effectively support and include all minority learners so that they can experience success. We need to work towards students' full dignity by recognizing their unique diversity and difference".

Hon. Bartolo's interactionist ideology moved inclusion from the field of disability into the realm of diversity – a terrain that "incorporates an extensive spectrum of concerns and discourse" (Thomas, 2013, 474). In so doing, the Minister distanced the "education system from the industrial one-size-fits-all mentalities" and focused on "respecting and celebrating all forms of diversity to develop all learners' abilities in a personalized and equitable manner". Similarly, Norwich (2000) re-positioned inclusive education "from benevolent humanitarianism to a discourse of rights…i.e.: the right to participate in mainstream schools, the right to respect and the right for individually relevant learning" (10). Furthermore, Bailey (1998) defined inclusion as "being in an ordinary school with other students, following the same syllabi, in the same class, with the full acceptance of all, and in a way, which makes students feel no different from others" (173). Other equally important definitions of 'inclusive education' included:

> "Inclusive education is a developmental approach aimed to provide all learners with fair and socially just education, i.e. a system that is flexible and that provides all learners the opportunity to choose their own learning pathways" (Mr. KK).
>
> "A system that celebrates and responds to all forms of diversity to make all learners feel comfortable in an environment, which is conducive to learning. Hence, a system that moves beyond mainstream accessibility and class placement issues" (Fr. GG).
>
> "Inclusion is the art of providing high quality education to all learners irrespective of their needs and challenges. Such a system transforms itself to empower and encourage all learners to experience success. It doesn't label or categorize learners...and promotes also effective leadership, i.e. leadership that supports and empowers the whole school community to experience success" (Dr. DD).
>
> "Inclusion encourages all stakeholders to rediscover the true meaning of education – the Why, What and How – which is there to help all learners

> lead a meaningful and fulfilled life. Inclusive education is also a complex process, which intends to provide high quality education to all students in a caring, loving, condusive and supportive environment" (Mr. CC).

In essence, all collected definitions emanated four main conclusions, namely:

• The term 'Education for all' substituted 'inclusive education'.
• 'Education for all' required a 'strategic developmental process' for change.
• 'Education for all' corresponded to socially just philosophy.
• 'Education for all' promoted equitable, ethical and high quality services.

Conversely, participant teachers and LSEs presented narrow-medical-oriented definitions of inclusive education, which viewed 'disability' as a 'defect' necessitating medical intervention to 'fix' SEN learners. In this regard, a participant Primary school teacher defined 'inclusive education' as "the process of providing specialized support to learners with disabilities, psychological conditions or severe learning difficulties either in regular schools or in any special educational institutions". Similarly, one LSE argued that 'inclusive education' is "a special and personalized support service to help all SEN learners access the curriculum in class". Among the themes that emerged from the collected definitions of 'inclusive education', there were:

1. *Placement* issues: educators argued that "learners with severe physical disabilities or psychological conditions are not 'fit' for mainstream classes" (Primary Teacher);
2. *Access* issues: educators believed that (certain) minority learners "…lacked basic academic skills to access regular curricula or to fulfull in-class tasks…" (Secondary Teacher); and
3. *Labelling* issues: teachers and LSEs defined 'inclusive education' by labelling SEN learners to their particular impairment or capacity limitation. They failed to address social factors such as discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice.

Fundamentally, teachers' and LSEs' definitions of inclusive education focused mainly on minority learners' individual needs rather than on the larger political, economic and material structures. Within this context educators: used 'inclusion' and 'integration' interchangeably; expected minority learners to adapt to existent class dynamics; and portrayed minority learners as scapegoats for consistent lack of academic success.

5C.5.2 Inclusive Education: Dilemmas

Although inclusive education is a much-contested term (Opertti et al., 2011), confusion and ambiguity on its true meaning remain. For this purpose, the majority of

interviewees defined 'inclusive education' in a way that best suited and described their specific contexts and circumstances. Hence, "in the Maltese educational system, the biggest dilemma is to determine whether 'inclusion' represents simply a linguistic shift or a new educational agenda" (Hon. Bartolo). In this sense, whereas MEDE's vision is to "free inclusion from 'special education' in favour of a broader diversity agenda" (Mr. BB); educators (teachers, LSEs and support practitioners) viewed 'difference' as "a problem or barrier" rather than "as an opportunity for increased experimentation to develop more effective practices" (Mr. CC).

Moreover, lack of knowledge on 'inclusive' and 'integrative' approaches also emerged through the responses of open-ended questions in the questionnaires. Many participants were unable to highlight the difference between the two approaches, but contended that: (1) "inclusion cannot occur unless learners are integrated at school" (Ms. MM); (2) "both terms depend on each other – inclusion cannot occur unless full integration is in place" (Mr. KK); (3) "integration is the first step towards inclusion" (Mr. NN); and (4) "inclusion is more superficial than integration" (Ms. LL). In addition questionnaire participants associated: (a) '*inclusion*' solely with "disability or SEN issues" (Dr. DD); and (b) '*integration*' with "the assimilation of third country nationals in schools" (Ms. LL). Conversely, Ms. HH defined 'integration' as "the practice of pretending learners to change to 'adjust' to classroom practices" and 'inclusion' as "a process that transforms school systems to embrace all learners in schools". The evidenced misconceptions on 'inclusion' and 'integration' created tensions between the concepts of "*inclusion as a learning opportunity*" and "*inclusion as placement*" (Norwich, 2014, 4), which created dilemmas at the *functional macrosystem level* of education; the *organizational level* in colleges and schools; and the *interaction level* in classrooms. In this regard, educators (HoS, Middle leaders, class/subject teachers, support specialists, LSEs) faced ethical dilemmas on "how to be caring, fair, honest and equitable to all learners" (Mr. CC) as the "main purpose of education is not only to provide meaningful and relevant learning opportunities but also to equip all learners with the competences and information they need to participate in the community as independent citizens" (Mr. CC).

5C.5.3 Inclusive Education: Challenges

Among all participants exists a general feeling that "the objectives of the broad definition of inclusive education exit in theory, but not in practice because of the many

challenges that prevent or limit its full implementation in schools" (Ms. MM). In this regard, Cohen (2013) contented that,

> "barriers exist at all levels, and range from the class through the operations and practices of State governments. Some barriers are subtle, while others are quite obvious" (53).

Furthermore, Cohen (2013) grouped challenges into ten different categories, namely: "legal, attitudinal, technological and instructional, leadership, accessibility, regulatory, organizational, financial, operational and implementation" (53). Collected data from semi-structured interviews on challenges to 'inclusive education' correlated positively with Cohen's (2013) ten barriers and with the challenges outlined in the questionnaires' analysis (Section 5B.8). The identified challenges included:

1) Regulatory Barriers

The lack of a national policy on the broad definition of 'inclusive education' resulted as a major challenge because of lack of clarity on the concept of inclusion, which increased system fragmentation and reduced effectiveness of support services. In the regard, Mr. JJ argued that, "MEDE's vision for 'education for all' is difficult to implement due to lack of clear policies and guidelines that outline educational goals for the benefit of all learners". Similarly, Mr. KK posited that "the current inclusion policy focused only on SEN learners" since it,

> "describes the functions of an IEP and stipulates situations when a formal statementing process is necessary. It regulates the composition, functions and procedures of the Statementing Panel to develop Statutory Assessment (known as Assessment); and regulates the establishment, composition and functions of the Appeals and Reviewing Boards" (MEDE, 2000, 4).

According to Mr. BB, the national inclusion policy on learners with a disability also failed to provide clear and stringent eligibility criteria for referral, which lacuna led to an unsustainable increase in referrals and LSEs". Moreover, Dr. DD remarked that "existent schools-based policies or SDPs lacked SMART objectives and clear strategies on how to maximise learning opportunities for all students at both school and class levels". In this regard, interviewees (CPs and HoS) argued that:

> "No, the school does not have a specific policy focusing on inclusion, but the developed SDP aims to support all learners' needs" (Mr. LL).

> "No, not in the formal sense. We adopt inclusion in our everyday practices and processes to support all learners whenever they encounter problems or

> difficulties. I think that inclusion is well-ingrained in our school climate and do not envisage the need for a formal policy" (Ms. MM).
> "No, but the school takes immediate action whenever students encounter difficulties. These include referring students to SMP or to receive expert support" (Mr. NN).

> "Not in the form of a written policy. However, all our students are treated equally and fairly through the provision of personalized teaching" (Mr. II).

All the above clearly indicates lack of strategic leadership for inclusive education at both college and school levels.

2) Leadership Barriers

Literature indicates that leadership has a tremendous potential to eliminate deficit-thinking (Ainscow, 2013; Griffiths, 2013). However, collected data highlighted that a 'culture of blame' cascaded the hierarchical levels of the local educational system, with policymakers (DGs & Directors) blaming CPs; CPs shifting responsibility on school leaders; and HoS criticising teachers and LSEs. Moreover, data indicated also lack of strategic and systematic planning for inclusive education at college and school levels. In this sense, CPs posited that within CDPs "inclusive education did not feature as a main priority target" (Mr. KK), whereas in SDPs inclusion,

> "featured indirectly in all key identified areas. Most of the strategies in the SDP are inclusive in nature as they cater for all learners" (Ms. MM).

Similarly, Mr. NN stressed that,

> "inclusion doesn't feature in the SDP, which, in turn proposed inclusion-friendly actions. This year focus is on 'dyslexia-friendly' and 'assessment for learning' measures".

Finally, participants also indicated other leadership-related barriers, namely: "lack of autonomy" because of rigid 'top-down' approaches (Ms. MM); "limited shared decision-making at all system levels" (Mr. JJ); "lack of networking among colleges and schools" (Ms. HH); "lack of knowledge on inclusive education" (Mr. FF); "lack of conviction on the benefits of inclusive education" (Mr. GG); "inconsistent vision on how to support inclusive practices" (Dr. DD); "resistance and lack of initiative" (Mr. BB); and "limited professionalism and accountability" (Mr. CC).

3) Recruitment Barriers

The recruitment of personnel with MEDE takes place after an interviewing process, which aims "to choose the most appropriate candidates" to the profession, following a "rigorous, thorough, meritocratic and fair" selection processes (MEDE, 2012, 1).

Despite the latter nobile and well-intentioned prospect, interviewees described the current recruitment process as a major deterrent to the implementation of inclusive education. To this effect, participants felt that MEDE's selection process:

- "is neither meritocratic nor fair"; (Secondary Teacher)
- "is segregative on the basis of age and work status"; (Primary Teacher)
- "favours experience over knowledge and qualifications"; (Primary Teacher)
- "depends on *who you know* rather than *how much you know*" (Asst. Head);
- "is a de-motivating process in which merit counts very little" (INCO);
- "is a waste of time and a humiliating process that is discouraging educators from having a positive outlook for their career" (EO); and
- "kills creativity, innovation and the desire for change in teachers" (LSE).

Moreover, Ms. MM contented that,

> "the current selection process raises a lot of questions and doubts. It is hard to understand how interviewers manage to select candidates on a 15-25 minutes interview. More doubts arise when not fit for purpose candidates are selected for sensitive posts/positions at the expense of more qualified and dedicated ones".

Similarly, Mr. NN questioned: "How a panel of three interviewers can assess and select candidates fairly when the latter are more qualified that the three interviewers put together?". More diplomatically, DG QSE asserted that,

> "the current selection system has its positives and negatives, given that in our system one finds very good educators and others who are simply not fit for purpose. The challenge lies in ensuring a dynamic selection process to ensure best choices. The latter should be based solely on meritocracy, knowledge and certain degrees of experience. In my opinion, the current recruitment system, based on a simple 15-30 minutes interview, is very limiting and reductive".

Likewise, Hon. Bartolo posited that,

> "I would be dishonest if I declare that I am completely satisfied. The current recruitment process attracted committed leaders but also awarded candidates that were simply not fit for purpose. This is reality and as we all know, reality is always messy. But, yes, there is room for improvement in this field".

Hence, the need for more meritocracy and fairness in current recruitment processes to enable the transformation of colleges/schools into inclusive PLCs.

4) <u>Financial Barriers</u>

The EC's 'Strategic Framework: Education and Training 2020' stressed that,

> "effective education is about inclusiveness to ensure that every learner has an opportunity to feel part of a shared future. Building effective education and training systems requires a focus on inclusion as part and parcel of the broader quest for excellence, quality and relevance" (EC, 2015, 7).

The World Bank (2014) argued that increased investment in 'inclusive education' has significant impact on economic growth, employment and social inclusion. The Maltese Government not only acknowledges the benefits of education to society but also "invests heavily in this sector" (Hon. Bartolo). To this effect, the Government's general expenditure on education, in 2018, stood at 14.2%. Despite the latter outlay, CPs and HoS remarked that they "constantly faced financial constraints to support adequately inclusionary initiatives" (Mr. NN). Similarly, Ms. HH posited that,

> "…lack of finance impacted negatively on the development of inclusive education in the college…Not always is the college in a position to sustain all the planned initiatives, to address accessibility issues or to invest in technological resources (such as IT software)".

Ms. LL also remarked that "the school is not in a position to undertake projects and initiatives in favour of inclusion on its own", while Ms. MM maintained that:

> "…as a HoS I would like to invest more augmentative, communicative and technological resources and in diversity-friendly textbooks, whilst making the school more accessible and learner-friendly. However, it is very difficult to do all this since the school lacks financial resources".

Likewise, teachers and LSEs also complained about lack of financial help to sustain inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Several educators stressed that they,

> "…finance differentiated resources (handouts, flashcards and charts) from their own wage but not only. On many occasions, we also provide minority learners with lunch and pay their school outing fees. It is difficult to sustain all this from a relatively low wage like ours" (Primary Teacher).

Hence, the need to set up "more innovative financial incentives to help colleges and schools prioritize spending through proactive planning" (Mr. CC).

5) **Resource Barriers**

Apart from financial barriers, participants also indicated "lack of human resources as a constraint to inclusion" (Fr. GG). Although, general expenditure on education in Malta "registered a rise of €87 million, mainly as a result of a higher outlay on wages and salaries" (Hon. Bartolo), participants emphasised the need for additional support speciliasts or practitioners "to be able to deliver timely support" (Ms. LL). The latter divergent claims highlight incongruencies in the present recruitment and funding systems in terms of the distribution and sustainability of national resources.

In this regard, DG ES argued that "the current individualized in-class support system (through the provision of LSEs) had a negative impact on MEDE's recruitment plan to strengthen college multidisciplinary teams to facilitate support provision and help schools further develop their internal capacity". Similarly, Mr. FF posited that, "the ever-increasing recruitment of LSEs in local schools is absorbing MEDE's allocated national budget and leaving few space for maneuver to equip other equally important support services with more specialised personnel". To this effect, Mr. BB urged and proposed "a comprehensive scrutiny of all forms of resource allocations, especially the current LSE system, to ensure long-term sustainability of all services, through a transparent analysis of how support resources/services could potentially be allocated using preventive rather than compensatory approaches". This because the provision of compensatory support services "did not necessarily lead to enhanced educational provision or to the removal of barriers to inclusion" since the question of "lack of resources is being used as a pretext to exclude minority learners" (Dr. DD).

6) **<u>Environmental Barriers</u>**

School environment and population, classroom sizes and accessibility issues also resulted as challenges to inclusive education. In this regard, participants indicated that certain schools: "were too old to cater effectively to all learners' diverse needs" (Ms. LL); "had limited outdoor-indoor space and overpopulated classrooms" (Mr. JJ); "lacked inclusive designs, which supported SEN learners' physical needs" (Mr. II); and "lacked attractive and conducive environments" (Mr. FF). Furthermore, Mr. KK described the majority of schools forming College Z as "following a 'one-size-fits-all' model, which created 'physical barriers' to SEN learners to access services". Coversely, other participants depicted their school as "being partially accessible as it presented significant access challenges to certain parts of the school (playground or school hall), especially to learners with mobility difficulties" (Primary Teacher). Hence, the need "to improve or remodel existent building to bring accommodations up to high quality standards" and "to continue building new schools, which provide more than the standardized norm by following inclusive designs to better serve 21st century teaching and learning" (Hon. Bartolo).

7) **<u>Attitudinal Barriers</u>**

Literature (Pearson, 2009) shows that teachers' attitudes and beliefs have an impact (positive and negative) on 'inclusive education' practices. Moreover, questionnaire data in Sub-Section 5B.4.3 (General Beliefs and Attitudes) correlated positively with

Pearson's (2009) main findings. According to de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011), 'personal attitudes' consist of "three components, namely: the *Cognitive* compenent (beliefs and/or knowledge), the *Affective* component (feelings) and the *Behavioural* component (predisposition to act)" (333). In this regard, Unianu (2012) argued that,

> "a main barrier to inclusive education is represented by teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and its principles...Attitudes are influenced by several factors, such as the degree and nature of learners' impairments; teachers' class experiences with SEN learners; trust in their own capabilities and their expectations towards SEN learners, no matter what the differences between them and the curriculum are" (901).

The EASNIE (2014) report also stressed the need to "develop positive attitudes, values, beliefs and skills" in favour of inclusive education (88), since educators are "role models, whose attitudes have an impact on all learners" (Mr. CC). Likewise, Mr. BB stressed that, "inclusive eduaction depends on the educators' appreciation, respect for diversity, and positive attitude towards schooling". The need for positive teacher attitudes to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' was also expressed by Mr.NN, who posited that:

> "teachers play a vital role in promoting and perpetuating deficit-thinking. The elimination of the latter depends entirely on the attitudes and will of individual teachers".

Moreover, the way inclusion is portrayed, planned and implemented together with the type of 'disability' of the included learner affected also the valence of the attitude (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Ms. MM pointed out that,

> "…for the sake of inclusion one can't hinder the progress of the majority. I believe that certain learners with severe disabilities are not fit to include in schools as they constantly disturb the teaching process…Many times we end up perpetuating superficial inclusion".

Interviewees at Directorate, Departmental and College levels held different beliefs from school-based personnel and urged for a:

> "complete change in mentality, from a negative to a more constructive and positive approach to inclusion. However, it is very difficult to bring about such a change due to educators' resistance, 'comfort zones', fear of change and stereotypical behaviour and discourse" (Mr. KK).

Similarly, Mr. JJ asseted that,

> "many times there isn't a disposition from our educators to think outside the box to change teaching practices, processes and procedures. This once again brings us to the notion of 'culture change' – a shift from the current 'one-size-fits-all' mentality to a more dynamic and innovative approach".

The broadening of the concept of 'inclusive education' in response to continuous societal changes resulted in schools having to cater and respond to different diversity issues (as evidenced in the quantitative analysis Section 5B.3 – Sub-Section 5B.3.1), which "created scepticism and increased educators' pessimistic outlook on inclusion" (Dr. DD). In this regard, the majority of participants regarded 'inclusive education': "as an add-on activity" (Mr. KK); "as an activity that focused mainly on minority learners at the expense of 'other' groups" (Mr. LL); "as a practice, which lowered national standards and expectations" (Mr. NN); and "as a theoretical philosophy that gave rise to the 'US vs THEM' mentality" (Mr. MM). Hence, "…many educators erroneously believed that SEN learners shouldn't be placed in mainstream classes but in special centres, alternative or compensatory learning programs" (Dr. DD). In this context, educational leaders play a crucial role to bring about "attitudinal change in favour of inclusive education" (Fr. GG). Hence,

> "leaders need primarily to be knowledgeable on this area so as to identify 'deficit-thinking' circumstances at all system levels. They need to believe strongly in equity and social justice" (Mr. II).

Moreover, educational leaders need to be catalysts of change to ensure that the inclusive theory becomes a more realistic and reachable practice.

8) <u>Curricular & Assessment Barriers</u>

Interviewees indicated curriculum, syllabi, pedagogy and assessment techniques as major challenges to 'inclusive education'. Similarly, Hon. Bartolo contended that the current educational system,

> "…is not maximising the abilities and talents of all the learners but caters mainly to the average student. National statistics indicate that for almost 30% of learners the current schooling system is irrelevant. Our curriculum and teaching strategies still try to normalize, standardize and/or steamline learners as much as possible".

The EASNIE (2014) external audit report remarked that, "the focus on benchmark examinations in syllabi is leading to a disconnect between teaching and learning" (45). In this sense, Hon. Bartolo described the current teaching system "as a constant race against time for syllabi coverage so that learners could reproduce knowledge in exams". To this effect, Dr. DD pointed out that "a system, driven solely by exams, offered limited opportunities for learners to demonstrate social learning or wider achievement" since teaching "slowly loses its true value, i.e. to empower people to lead a healthy and successful life" (Hon. Bartolo). Interviewees also highlighted that

in schools: there is little distinction between 'achievement' and 'attainment' (Mr. CC); success is attributed to leaners' performance in high stake exams (Mr. EE); and quality of teaching provision is rarely monitored (Dr. DD). Furthermore, Mr. BB argued that the current educational system "reinforced the formal teaching of a prescribed 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum", which "limited learning possibilities for students to have control over their learning" (Mr. EE). Hence, the need to "move away from a 'one-size-fits-all' mentality" (Hon. Bartolo), which "de-motivates and discourages minority learners" and "stresses the majority of educators" (Ms. LL). Other related challenges included:

- Lack of time to plan for individual needs and to differentiate the curriculum.
- Insufficient time to give minority learners individual attention or extra support.
- Differentiation difficulties including *differentiation of instructional strategies* and the pace of teaching; *differentiation of curriculum content*; *differentiation of material*; and *differentiation of students' output*. Educators remarked that, "it is unrealistic to prepare differentiated material for all learners" (Primary Teacher).
- Rigid syllabi which limit teachers' innovation and creativity to enhance learners' and parents' enagagement in the teaching process. "Unless syllabi are reduced and emphasis on exams is mitigated, it would be difficult to adopt student-centred teaching approaches" (Secondary Teacher).
- Parents' disinterest or inability to help with children's schooling, resulting in teachers holding low expectations for minority learners.
- Lack of readiness for grade level, which poses challenges to teachers' ability to include these learners, despite content and output differentiation.

Finally, Mr. EE expressed optimism that the LOF would bring about changes in teaching pedagogies and assessment techniques since it would help teachers to "be more creative in the use of student-oriented methods like group work, higher order questioning, direct engagement of learners in the teaching process and allocation of more time for learners to present their work". However, questionnaire data clearly shows that eduators lacked conceptual and operational clarity on the LOF.

9) Operational Barriers

Operational challenges refer to lack of standardized and evidence-based processes and procedures needed to develop and implement inclusive education in colleges and schools. To this effect, interviewees indicated six main operational barriers:

- Lack of a standardized model for additional support services, which refers to the way support services were organized or managed. According to interviewees '*the withdrawal model of support*' (withdrawing students on a one-to-one or small group basis from the classroom) was predominant. Collected data shows that the most popular 'compensatory services or structures' included: *Complementary Education*; *CCP* and *ALP classes*; *Learning Support Zones*; and *Nurture Groups*. While Mr. AA and Mr. BB were not against the latter services, both emphasised the need "to mitigate or curb issues of stigma and marginalisation" (Mr. BB).
- Limited collaboration that resulted in a 'silo-working' mentality across all the hierarchical levels of the educational system. In this regard, Dr. DD argued that, "more intra-departmental collaboration and college networking was required to change the system into an inclusive one". The latter proposal required different educational departments to work hand-in-hand and the ten Colleges to network together to enable the transformation of schools in PLCs.
- Lack of coordination between support services and schools, i.e. limited multi-agency sharing of information and lack of collaboration between educators and support specialists/practitioners. Interviewees highlighted that "many educators felt unprepared to deal with diversity…inclusion is still perceived as a theoretical concept" (Mr. JJ). In this regard, CPs and HoS emphasised the need for INCOs to take a more proactive role in schools to "support teachers and LSEs in 'meeting diversity issues' in the classroom" (Mr. BB). Furthermore, Mr. FF argued that, "NSSS cannot keep working in isolation or in a vacuum but needs to constantly create partnerships with other departments, colleges and schools".
- Ineffective transition processes, which lacked "networking and collaborarion" practices to "develop integration programmes" (Ms. MM); "to foster a positive climate" (Ms. LL); and "to ensure continuity in students' learning experiences" (Mr. NN). Hence, Mr. BB proposed "the re-introduction of transition organizers to support schools in the organization of transition processes and practices".
- Lengthy Statementing processes and weak IEPs for SEN learners. Interviewees discribed the current Statementing procedures as lengthy, bureaucratic, and often resulting in long waiting lists. In addition, policymakers lamented on "the lack of productive and effective IEPs" (Dr. DD), since "very few learners manage to register sustained progress in areas of weaknesses" (Mr. BB). The latter because

teachers "did not value and uphold the importance of IEPs" but regarded them as "bureaucratic additional paperwork" (Mr. CC). In this regard, Dr. DD contended that IEPs: "failed to link special and general educational programs together"; and "lacked shared belonging and ownership".

- Ineffective pre-service and CPD training to sustain inclusive education. Dr. DD argued that "most teachers lacked knowledge on how to respond to diversity or on how to implement inclusion in practice". Fr. GG also emphasised the need for "the system to train all educators, not just teachers, on diversity issues".

Apart from the above challenges, participants cited (with less frequency) other barriers, namely: "an increase in behavioural difficulties and disciplinary problems" (Ms. LL); "issues of prejudice among teachers and bullying among students" (Mr. NN); "lack of motivation and poor self-esteem among minority learners" (Ms. MM); "poor school attendance" (Mr. KK); "increased within-child issues and diverse cultural expectations, which generated socialization problems" (Mr. JJ). Hence, the need for preventive and restorative system-wide actions to overcome all the identified challenges to inclusive education in a proactive manner. Table 5C.6 illustrates all the participants' proposed actions to promote and enhance inclusive education at Directorate, College and School levels.

Table 5C.6: Actions to Promote and Enhance Inclusive Education

System Levels	Proposed Preventive and Restorative Actions
Directorate	• Develop a broad national policy on inclusive education. • Strengthen recruitment processes. • Increase financial assistance to colleges and schools. • Reform current Statementing processes. • Transform current LSEs support system.
College	• CDPs that focus on inclusive education. • Develop a multi-leveled agency culture of support. • Standardize models for additional support. • Encourage multi-disciplinary work. • Align training opportunities with college needs.
School	• SDPs focusing on the implementation of inclusive education. • Create inclusive school learning environments or designs. • Increase collaboration practices. • Adopt student-centred pedagogies. • Strengthen IEP development, implementation, monitoring, reviewing and evaluation processes. • Increase home-community and school partnerships.

5C.6 Enhancing Leadership for Inclusion

5C.6.1 Decentralizing Decision-Making Processes

The College reform aimed to give State schools, "greater autonomy to nurture their own identities to adapt the National Curriculum to their own needs" by promoting "effective school networking" to: address the "dichotomy of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches"; transform schools into democratic PLCs; provide quality education through enhanced collaborative planning; and improve learners' transition through the different phases of education (MEDE, 2005, iii-iv). In principle, all interviewees were in accordance with the proposed "college system" as it represented: "a sincere attempt to decentralize decision-making" (Mr. CC); "helped to inculcate democratic practices, through greater school engagement" (Mr. FF); and "increased a sense of pride and/or belonging among educators and community members" (Ms. HH). However, collected data indicates that, "the 'college system', as implemented, fell short of expectations as it failed to fully address decentralization and leadership issues" (Mr. CC). In this sense, Mr. KK contended that, "…colleges created another tier in the educational hierarchy, without providing the necessary autonomy to schools to develop curricular policy and practice".

Insufficient leadership, resulting from "lack of vision, initiative and collective responsibility", also featured as a major constrain to 'bottom-up' approaches (Mr. CC). In this regard, Dr. DD maintained that,

> "Colleges depend on the effectiveness and type of leadership present in the cluster of schools forming the college. Where there are motivated, dynamic and innovative CPs and HoS, this system proved to be successful".

Similarly, Mr. AA questioned:

> "Are CPs and HoS managing to communicate effectively their vision for the college or schools? Are college and school leaders adopting democratic leadership styles in the planning, development and implementation of both CDPs or SDPs? In my opinion some CPs and HoS simply have unrealistic expectations".

The 'college system' was also criticized by HoS and teachers. Essentially, HoS posited that, "the college system not only failed to address 'top-down' approaches, but helped to increase bureaucracy and paperwork" (Ms. MM). Similarly, Ms. LL described the college system as "another surveillance mechanism, masked under the good prospects of collegiality and imposed by the Directorate through a policy mandate". Likewise,

teachers indicated that, "to date, despite the introduction of the college system, we are still the least consulted and considered people in the educational system…our voice is rarely taken into consideration" (Primary Teacher). Another Secondary School teacher argued that, "the only notable difference was that before the Education Division issued orders, while now these are communicated and mandated to us by CPs through HoS". Mr. NN also pointed out that,

> "the argument that Church schools have more autonomy than State ones is a false claim. As Head of a Church school I do not enjoy full autonomy as the school is obliged to follow policies and directives issued by MEDE and the Church Schools secretariat. Perhaps the only difference is that I enjoy full control on teacher-LSE recruitment processes".

From the collected data on the effectiveness of the 'college system' in the State sector and the operationalization of Church schools, the issue of enhanced 'school autonomy' emerged with great prominence. To this effect, the majority of participants perceived 'school autonomy' as a complicated mixture of both centralizing and de-centralizing tendencies happening together; where central authorities are allowing schools to make decisions that were formerly the prerogative of the central office, but are also retaining or taking on new roles that were not previously undertaken.

Two important structures within the college system are the ELC and the COH, which aim to "bridge the gap between MEDE, colleges and schools" (Mr. CC); and to "promote constructive and cooperative thinking and planning" (Dr. DD). The ELC allows MEDE's top management team (PS, DGs, Directors, and CPs) "to meet, discuss and plan together national educational issues" (Ms. HH). However, participants did not regard the management of the ELC as beneficial and useful because "it is more of an information giving session rather than an effective foray where to discuss and challenge ideas" (Dr. DD). Likewise, Mr. KK contended that, "it is useless spending a whole day hearing passively to information on 'fait accompli' decisions, which could be easily communicated through memos and/or letter circulars". In addition, other interviewees described the ELC as: "very prescriptive in nature" (Mr. JJ); "having an endless and rigid agenda, which limited constructive planning" (Mr.EE); "allowing limited time for constructive dialogue" (Mr. II); and "following a rigid 'top-down' approach" (Dr. DD). In this regard, all interviewees concorded on the need to transform the current ELC to "ensure the direct and active involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making" (Ms. HH). A very similar structure to the ELC is also present in the Church sector, which

allows HoS to "discuss and focus on staff capacity building, resourcing and financing, curricular activities and present school challenges" (Mr. NN).

Conversely, the COH is a college-based decision-making structure. The latter is headed by a CP and brings together all HoS in the college to discuss and plan college related educational issues. Ms. HH argued that the COH "gives HoS the opportunity to discuss and plan the college's way forward in an democratic and inclusive manner". In addition, the COH: "encouraged collegiality, through constructive dialogue" (Mr. KK); "served as a bridge of communication between the Ministry and schools" (Mr. JJ); and "ensured increased ownership" (Mr II). However, participants also believed that COH meetings needed to be "more meaningful, productive and constructive" (Mr. KK), since

> "meetings not always focus on schools' real needs. True discussions rarely take place as a lot of time is wasted listening either to CP or guest speakers disseminating information from ELC meetings" (Ms. MM).

Moreover, Mr. KK argued that, "the effectiveness of COH meetings rested mostly on the leadership styles of CPs and HoS, who have their hidden agenda and dealing with them is simply not an easy task". Hence, participant CPs and HoS expressed the joint desire to "transform the COH council into a critical reflective session on curricular, leadership and operational issues" (Mr. JJ).

The need to transform the 'college system' was also expressed by Hon. Minister Bartolo, who posited that, "what is needed is to envisage new ways how to support colleges and schools in developing meaningful CDPs and SDPs" to ensure sustained improvement. In this regard, the newly proposed Education Act "gaves colleges and schools the necessary 'autonomy' to develop their own curricular actions" (Mr. CC). Hence, the proposed Education Act enabled schools to "assume full responsibility of students' learning in a democratic and socially just manner" (Hon. Bartolo). However, Dr. DD argued that "by increasing 'school autonomy' alone, will not in and of itself result in creating better schools". Likewise Mr. CC asserted that,

> "increasing autonomy is simply not enough to create inclusive educational settings. Unless CPs and HoS decide to use their increased authority to influence, guide and drive change, meaningful changes can never occur".

Hence, increased autonomy can only be beneficial when educational leaders challenge 'comfort zones' and the 'status quo' through: whole-of-college/school empowerment; and collective responsibility to enable capacity-building.

5C.6.2 The Role of Educational Leaders in Addressing ‘Deficit-Thinking’

Educational leaders play a fundamental role in the restructuring and reculturing process of schools in favour of inclusive and culturally responsive education (Day and Leithwood, 2011). In this regard, Fr. GG remarked that, “change cannot occur without strong leadership” since “human beings are in constant search for inspiring, visionary, and supportive leaders to shape a better future” (Mr. CC). According to Mr. MM, the local educational system required “leaders who strongly believed in inclusion and who were catalysts for change” to: challenge the norm of the traditional teaching approach; provide leadership and administrative authority interchangeably; inspire a clear mutual vision on inclusive education; and empower staff (Sergiovanni, 2009). Collected data shows that local educators preferred ‘democratic leadership’ over *Transformational*; *Instructional*; *Distributed*; *Strategic*; and *Authentic* leadership styles. The latter because educational leaders (DGs; Directors; CPs; and HoS) sought to: “develop pragmatic and realistic expectations” (Mr. EE); “listen to all feedback and to value ideas and abilities” (Mr. KK); and “reach consensus by widening the platform to encourage participation” (Mr. FF).

Educational leaders at Directorate, Department and College levels asserted that HoS, teachers and LSEs “played a sensitive role in either perpetuating or eliminating deficit-thinking” (Mr. EE) as “their discourse, attitudes, beliefs, planning and actions have a direct effect on the school environment and the teaching and learning process” (Dr. DD). To this effect, Mr. BB argued that, “HoS and teachers can make or break a whole school system”, whereas, Mr. II posited that, “it is useless to develop policies if these are not fully owned by the school community – unless this is done, the language of teaching will never change”. Similarly, Mr. CC pointed out that, “school change in favour of inclusive education is not a one-track process” but required all educators “to assume full responsibility of the change process to facilitate the shift from integration to true inclusion”. However, the proposed change process,

> “is not taking place in all schools. Actions against ‘deficit-thinking’ are sporadic and strategic leadership for inclusive education is limited…The much required ‘culture change’ has not materialized as yet. This created a leadership crisis within the local educational system” (Mr. BB).

Hence, the need for “strategic re-culturing and re-structuring to start eliminating the seeds of the deficit ideology from local colleges and schools” as well as to “effectively address leadership challenges and barriers in a constructive manner” (Mr. AA).

5C.6.3 Leadership Barriers for Inclusive Education

According to Sergiovanni (2009), leadership for change for inclusive education presented many challenges to educational leaders. Hence, the researcher asked all the interviewees to highlight the challenges they faced to transform the educational system into an inclusive one. The collected challenges were categorized into two main groups, i.e. 'challenges at national level' (Ministry, Directorate, Departmental levels) and *'*challenges at college and school levels*'*. At a national level the identified challenges included the lack of: *a solid national framework that challenged deficit-thinking*; *collegiality among the diverse educational stakeholders*; *communication and cooperative approaches*; *a strong recruitment process*; *relevant training to all educational leaders*; *enabling and effective support services*; and *quality assurance practices for inclusive education*. On the contrary, challenges for participant leaders at college and school levels included: *lack of autonomy in decision-making practices*; *teacher resistance*; *high levels of bureaucracy*; *increased administrative work, which reduced time to monitor teaching*; *excessive pressure and unrealistic market-driven expectations in line with neoliberal logics*; and *lack of enabling and timely support services*. Notably, the latter two sets of challenges positively correlated with data from questionnaires in Section 5B.8 and Sub-Sections 5B.3.6 and 5C.5.3.

To start addressing challenges in a proactive manner, Hon. Bartolo argued that, "the educational system needed to rediscover once again the joy of teaching by making the latter experience more relevant and meaningful by diversifying pedagogy to reach out to all learners". To this effect, MEDE needed to help CPs and HoS to: break down the dividing wall between teachers, students and communities; transform colleges and schools into learning organisations; develop relational trust among all stakeholders; be proactive, innovative and forward-looking; and uphold equity and inclusive practices and measures. Hence, the practical implementation of inclusion in colleges and schools resulted as the overriding challenge due to: (a) lack of coherence and support through the whole system; and (b) endless resistence to change to strengthen achievement of high ambitions.

5C.7 Conclusion

The conducted semi-structured interviews helped participants to describe their experiences and to openly express their opinions on 'deficit-thinking', 'inclusion' and

'leadership for inclusive education'. Interviewing offered the researcher "access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words, rather than the words of the researcher" (Reinhartz, 1992, 19). Hence, the data analysis uncovered factual truths as well as provided a deeper insight and meaning to complex human behaviours (Kvale, 1996), which indicated that, "there is no single objective reality, but multiple realities based on subjective experiences and circumstances" (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007, 30). Moreover, data from semi-structured interview was also corroborated with analysed data from questionnaires in Section 5B.

Apart from the semi-structured interviews, the research project utilized also other qualitative tools, which helped the researcher to describe, understand and propose rather than to predict and control social change. Hence, *job-shadowing sessions* with HoS (Section 5D), class *participant observations* (Section 5E), and *focus groups* with learners (Section 5F) not only helped to enrich the qualitative aspect of the research study but also to strengthen the agenda for social change that embodied the beliefs of pooling knowledge to define and resolve the deficit ideology problem through effective and inclusive college/school based leadership. The next section (Section 5D) focuses on the role of SMT in schools, particularly the role played by HoS to challenge 'deficit-thinking' practices. Collected data from the 'job-shadowing sessions' were triangulated with findings from both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Section 5D: Analysis of Job-Shadowing Sessions

Leadership in Action: The Role and Duties of Heads of School

5D.1 Introduction

Job-shadowing sessions embodied a life-enhancing approach to "systemically collect and analyse data for the purpose of taking action and making change possible", by administering research "*with* rather than *on* participants" (Herr and Anderson, 2015, 25). Hence, eight job-shadowing sessions were conducted with HoS in diverse schools in the four participant colleges (Table 5D.1). To safeguard the interests of participants pseudonyms were utilized.

Table 5D.1: Job-Shadowing: College, School, Sector and Region

College	Name of School	School Sector	College Region
W	School A	Primary	Southern
	School E	Secondary	
X	School B	Primary	Northern
	School F	Secondary	
Y	School C	Primary	Central
	School G	Secondary	
Z	School D	Primary	Northern
	School H	Secondary	

The above job-shadowing sessions helped the researcher to shed light on the duties of HoS and to scrutinize: *general school dynamics*; *leadership styles and skills*; and *major challenges in the development and implementation of inclusive education*. Table 5D.2 provides a general overview of the eight participant schools.

Table 5D.2: School Demographics – General Information

School	Sector	Asst. Heads	Teachers	LSEs	Population	Statemented Students	Students Awaiting Statement
A	Primary	3	24	35	***435***	*50*	*10*
B	Primary	4	35	34	***594***	*38*	*20*
C	Primary	2	25	18	***430***	*22*	*6*
D	Primary	2	14	20	***162***	*12*	*2*
E	Secondary	4	86	27	***397***	*47*	*5*
F	Secondary	4	110	17	***510***	*32*	*5*
G	Secondary	4	88	32	***388***	*42*	*7*
H	Secondary	4	100	28	***420***	*56*	*0*

Moreover, collected data revealed that the participant schools lacked specific school-based procedures to support the continuous development and effective implementation of 'education for all'. Coversely, the schools' development plan promoted strategies, which focused on the narrow definition of inclusion, i.e. inclusion as service provision for SEN learners. The latter information corroborated with data from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

5D.1.1 Schools' Strengths, Weaknesses and Needs

Tables 5D.3 and 5D.4 illustrate participant schools' strengths and weaknesses, following thematic coding of all the collected data from observational checklists.

Table 5D.3: Strengths

All the participant schools presented the following *strengths*:
• Welcoming environments that fostered a community-like atmosphere.
• Strong ethos, sense of belonging.
• Effective staff management.
• Satisfied and qualified educators (teachers and LSEs).
• Staff members upheld inclusive values.
• Structured in-class needs identification processes.
• Referral system in place to secure additional support services.
• Resources are well-kept and organized.

Table 5D.4: Schools' Weaknesses

All the participant schools presented the following *weaknesses*:
• Lack of strategic and pro-active planning for the broad view of inclusion.
• Over-reliance on short-term and quick fix measures.
• Lack of school-based policies.
• Deficit-medical-integrative teaching practices.
• Diversity perceived as a problem rather than as a valuable resource.
• Educators felt not trained enough to respond to diversity.
• Over-reliance on referral and statementing procedures.
• Promoted a content-based pedagogy rather a responsive one.
• Lack of collaboration among educators.
• Ineffective IEP development, implementation and reviewing.

Both sets of data were compared and contrasted together and with findings from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to identify the areas in need for improvement

for the transformation of schools into inclusive PLCs. Hence, the need for a shared and a long-term vision for 'inclusive and culturally responsive education' that is sustained by: *strategic SDP planning*; *collective accountability for students' learning*; *whole-of-school collaborative approaches*; *structured CPD training* and *continuous mentoring*; *strong internal-school quality assurance practices*; and *more targeted IEPs*.

5D.2 The Role of Middle Leaders in Schools

Harris and Jones (2017) remarked that responsibility for school leadership does not sit solely with HoS, but is shared among all educators to facilitate organisational change for sustained learning outcomes. In this regard, middle learners (Assistant HoS, INCOs) play a fundamental role to: (a) maintain the nature and quality of the teaching process; (b) implement school policies; and (c) facilitate the change process (Farnham, 2009).

5D.2.1 Duties of Assistant Heads of Schools

As indicated in Table 5B.2 above, all participant schools had between two or four Assistant Heads, who helped HoS to (a) shape innovation; (b) lead the teaching and learning process to raise students' achievements; and (c) liaise with students, the wider community, parents (Bezzina, 2014). In the local educational system, the core responsibility of the Assistant HoS,

> "is to assist/deputise for the HoS…by undertaking educational, operational and administrative duties as delegated by the HoS…and foster a climate of genuine collegiality through active engagement and involvement" (MEDE, 110/2019, Circular NO. HR MEDE 20/2019).

Delegation of work to Assitant Heads was the sole prerogative of the HoS, who deputised work meritocratically by taking into consideration knowledge, experience, and areas of specialization. In so doing, HoS tried to address the tensions of,

> "how to repond to diversity in a context of a hyper-accountable educational system, with exhaustive reliance and emphasis on test scores? There is also significant pressure on HoS to ensure that test scores improve each year" (Griffiths, 2013, xviii).

In essence, the duties and responsibilities of Assistant HoS ranged from *administrative* to *operational* to *educational* (SDP plenary work; Curricular work; Assessment issues) to *pastoral care* and *inclusion-related* tasks. Table 5D.5 illustrates the most common everyday tasks associated with Assistant HoS, as observed during shadowing sessions.

Table 4D.5: Responsibility Areas and Tasks

Responsibility Areas	Observed Specific Tasks
Administration Work	• Coordinate school transport supervision; • Coordinate and monitor break supervisions; • Record sick or special leave of staff members; • Report truancy and/or absenteeism to parents; • Input and update school data; • Complete both Requisition or Referral Forms; • Supervise ancillary and clerical staff; • Coordinate School Activities and Outings; • Disseminate circulars and/or memos; • Supervise schools' open spaces; • Coordinate daily appointments for HoS.
SDP Plenary Work	• Plan and coordinate SDP with HoS; • Monitor SDP implementation and progress; • Liaise with QA Department on SDP matters; • Coordinate NQTs' induction programme.
Inclusion and Pastoral Care	• Plan pastoral care activities; • Fill Referral forms and monitor process; • Organize and participate in IEP conferences; • Liaise with college-based INCO.
Curriculum and Assessment Operational Issues	• Review teaching files and schemes of work; • Deliver class lesson observations; • Coordinate exam access arrangements; • Monitor CCP, ALP and VET programmes; • Organize logistics for PD sessions; • Liaise regularly with Curriculum Department.

The above duties aimed to relieve HoS from bureaucratic daily administrative work so that HoS could focus on inclusion-and curriculum-related issues. Notably, Assistant HoS focused mainly on the narrow aspect of inclusive education, i.e. the inclusion of SEN learners in mainstream classrooms. To this effect, Assistant HoS: coordinated the referral process of minority learners to secure provision of additional support services; organised IEP conferences; and monitored implementation of IEPs. Participant HoS also pointed out that many Assistant Heads lacked knowledge and expertise on how to respond effectively to diversity issues, mainly because of lack of focused training and experience in the field.

5D.2.2 Duties of the INCO

Ainscow (2013) remarked that inclusive coordinators play an important role in motivating, inspiring and stimulating school communities to respond effectively to all forms of diversity. In this sense, INCOs need to provide directional leadership and to enhance knowledge on diversity and equity issues, by "viewing 'difference' not as a 'problem to fix', but as an opportunity for democratizing learning" since "all learners matter equally" (Ainscow, 2013, 13). More specifically, INCOs need to: (a) provide strategic direction for inclusive education; (b) support responsive pedagogy; (c) give evidence-based advice to SMT; and (d) assist all educators to ensure participation of all learners. Similarly, in the local educational system, the INCO (or HOD Inclusion) is expected to: "*collaborate with other educators by engaging in the development of School Development Plans*"; "*support the development of a College-wide inclusion policy in collaboration with the CP, SMT, staff members, learners, and parents*"; and "*ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of the inclusion policy so as to ensure equitable access to the mainstream curriculum for learners with IENs*" (MEDE 66/2019, Circular No.: HR MEDE 21/2019). As per call for application (Appendix N), INCOs are also expected to: *formulate, monitor, evaluate, and review IEPs for SEN learners*; *support Assistant Heads to coordinate exam access arrangements for SEN learners*; *assist educators in designing 'special examination papers' for SEN learners*; *attend IEP and Transition conferences*; *support educators to include SEN learners in classrooms*; and *facilitate links among multidisciplinary services*.

In the local educational organigram, INCOs form an integral part of college-based 'multidisciplinary teams', who visit schools once every forthnight. However, HoS contested the effectiveness of the latter system and specified the need for "school-based INCOs (forming part of the SMT) to support schools at all time in preparing long-term plans on inclusion" (HoS G) and to "provide specialised assistance to all teachers and LSEs in catering for diversity" (HoS E). Collected data also shows that HoS were not fully satisfied with the INCOs' level of support, since "their presence in the school is inconsistent" (HoS D) and "they focused a lot on SEN learners rather than on how to incorporate all students within the school community" (HoS F). In this regard, there exists a direct link with results from questionnaires on 'Collaboration for Inclusion', as illustrated in Section 5B.5 (Sub-Section 5B.5.3). Other duties, as specified by HoS, during job-shadowing sessions, included:

a) Coordinating IEP case-conferences.
b) Attending IEP case-conferences for full-time one-to-one learners.
c) Supporting LSEs in the development of IEPs (when and where possible).
d) Monitoring (when possible) IEP implementation through class observations.
e) Reviewing IEPs with LSEs and parents at the end of the year (when possible).
f) Conducting in-class needs identification observations.
g) Supporting HoS during the referral process of SEN learners.

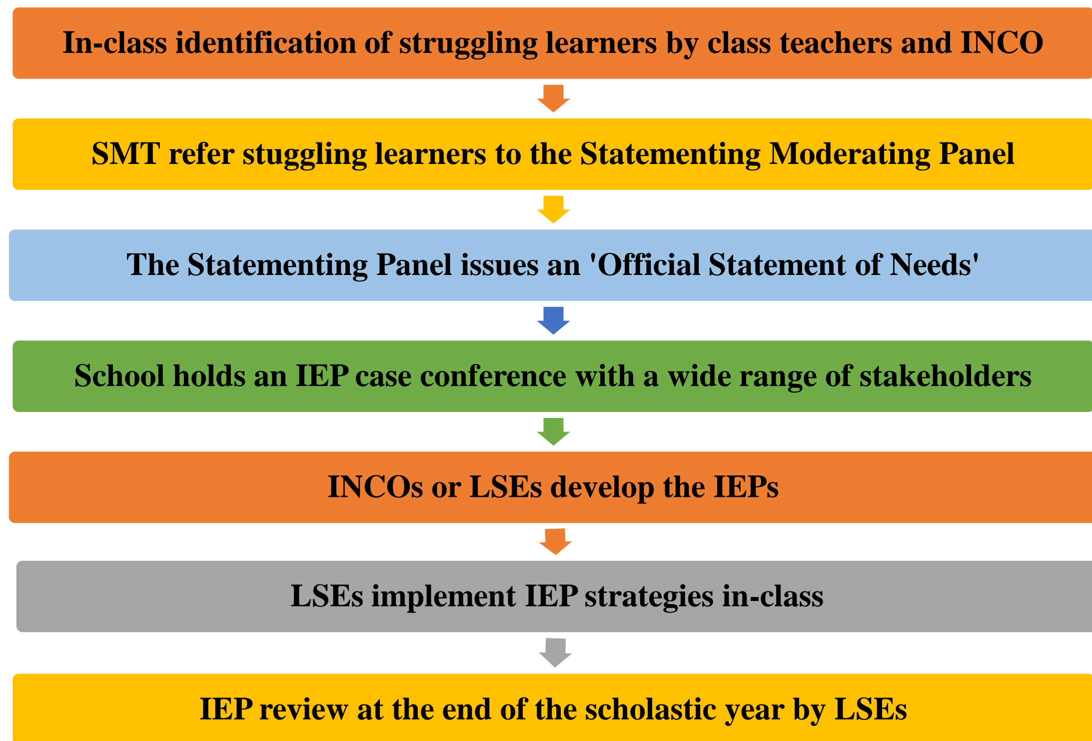
The above responsibilities reinforced the general belief that INCOs focused mainly on the operationalization of the 'narrow definition of inclusive education' rather than on sustaining whole-school change in favour of 'education for all'.

5D.2.3 The IEP Process

According to Ainscow (2013), IEPs support the implementation of inclusive policies in schools because, "their main function is to provide information and develop awareness of all learners' needs and abilities at a level that is useful to and useable by staff members" (36). In this regard, IEPs specify, "SMART learning goals, strategies, resources, and supports needed to achieve predetermined goals" (NCSE, 2014, xiii). Hence, IEPs: (a) allow students to progress at a level commensurate with ability; (b) involve collaboration; (c) focus on responsive teaching and assessment strategies; and (d) help to monitor students' progess (NCSE, 2006, 4).

In the Maltese educational system, IEPs play a fundamental role to ensure the inclusion of officially statemented learners in mainstream schools. Collected evidence shows that participant schools presented a strong and structured needs identification and referral process (Figure 5D.1), but weak IEP processes due to the elevated number of statemented learners in each school. To this effect, INCOs attended case conferences and actively participated in the development of IEP documents for severely diagnosed SEN learners only. The IEP of other statemented learners was first developed by LSEs and then corrected (proof read) by the INCO, since the majority of teachers shifted-responsibility of the IEP development and implementation on LSEs. Moreover, HoS remarked that monitoring of IEP strategies was sporadic, whereas, IEP reviewing was conducted once yearly by LSEs, with the help of Assistant HoS. The latter findings correlated directly with results from semi-structured interviews in Section 5C.5.3.

Figure 5D.1: Needs Identification and IEP Process



Finally, the analysis of IEP documents (using the thematic approach) revealed lack of SMART learning goals; focused individualized or whole-class intervention strategies; and clear success criteria to monitor learners' progress. IEPs also failed to record SEN learners' attainment progress and to convey specific duties to educational stakeholders.

5D.3 HoS Daily Duties

Leithwood, Day, Sammons and Harris (2006) described the HoS as "the central source of leadership influence in schools" (81), while, Fullan (2004) claimed that HoS, "can no longer function as managers, but need to become leaders of learning" (87), by: (a) shaping a vision based on high expectations; (b) cherishing a cooperative spirit; (c) creating hospitable climate to education; (d) cultivating leadership skills in others to facilitate vision sharing; (e) managing school processes; and (f) improving instructions to enable meaningful, responsive, and productive teaching (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). In the Maltese educational system, HoS are expected to serve as Educational and Operational Leaders, with the aim of ensuring equitable educational provision to all learners (MEDE, 2018, HR Plan). The latter was also confirmed by DG ES (Mr. BB) and DG QSE (Mr. CC) during semistructured interviews. Table 5D.6 illustrates the recorded actions of HoS during job-shadowing sessions.

Table 5D.6: HoS Daily Actions in Schools

General Administration	Curriculum and SDP Development
Address morning assemblies and perform school dismissal.	Perform monitoring school walk-abouts.
Brief minor and clerical staff.	Perform class monitoring observations.
Answer telephone calls and e-mails and oversee effective use of resources/space.	Review class teachers and LSEs teaching files, including schemes of work.
Tackle school maintenance issues.	Visit staff rooms and plan teachers CPD.
Plan daily staff replacements.	Approve choice of Literacy Reading Schemes or Numeracy textbooks.
Endorse SEN learners referral forms.	Oversee the smooth running of exams.
Oversee school transport service.	Liaise with INCOs, HoDs, and EOs.
Teaching Staff	**Home-School-Community Links**
Deliver daily meetings with Asst. HoS.	Endorse school activities and/or outings.
Deliver year or form staff meetings.	Liaise with community organizations.
Deliver meetings with specialist teachers.	Organize parent activities (parents days).
Address staff requirements.	Hold daily 1-1 meetings with parents.
Mentor and provide assistance to NQTs.	Support and help parents.
Management of Finance	**Student Matters**
Plan school budget estimates.	Tackle issues of misbehaviour.
Oversee management of school funds.	Address students' individual requests.
Approve purchasing of resources.	Involve learners in daily activities.
Visit staff rooms and plan teachers CPD.	Respond to students' social needs.
Issue payments and keep updated records of school finance.	Hold regular meetings with members of the Students' Councils.

HoS A asserted that, "increased administrative and managerial duties made it difficult to focus on the school's teaching needs". Similarly, HoS G complained about "…the endless amount of telephone calls, e-mails, or requests received from the Directorates, which limited planning time for inclusive education". HoS E also remarked that, "day-to-day management tasks prevailed over other duties, such as class observations". In this regard, HoS expressed their desire to conduct more class monitoring observations to evaluate educators' competences in: *lesson planning*; *classroom arrangement*; *time and behaviour management*; *questioning techniques*; and *use of differentiation, group and/or pair work*. HoS in the Primary sector claimed that on average, in a scholastic year, they conducted two class observations per teachers and reviewed educators' work (schemes of work and lesson plans) three times yearly. Coversely, class observations

and teaching material reviewing were less frequent in Secondary schools. The issue of lack of time to conduct class observations to monitor the teaching and learning process and to empower teachers with constructive feedback also emerged from questionnaire data in Section 5B.4. Finally, during break time, the shadowed HoS tended to: continue with their office work; brief staff members; and supervise particular school areas, such as playgrounds, toilets and corridors.

5D.3.1 Leadership Styles and SDPs

The researcher investigated also the different leadership approaches utilized by HoS in all the participant schools. Hence, HoS were first asked to select their preferred leadership style (Collegial, Distributed, Achievement-Oriented, Authoritarian, Shared, Transformational, and Authentic) and then to explain their choice. The 'achievement-oriented' approach resulted as the preferred leadership style among HoS. This was deemed necessary given that, "an outcome-based system demanded the achievement of results" (HoS D) to address "increasing economic expectations, demands and social pressures" (HoS H). The latter claims reinforced the belief that neoliberal logics "dominated reforms and decisions in the current educational system" (HoS F).

Fullan (2007) argued that, "schools required proactive approaches to planning" to "respond effectively to change and complexity" (181). However, strategic forward-looking planning resulted as a major weakness, due to the absence of school-based policies and long-term initiatives in SDPs, which resulted in 'crisis-management' and deferred attention away from holistic SDP development. In this regard, analysed SDPs revealed limited 'tailored and systemic approaches' to address proactively school needs and future risks. In turn, SDPs presented short-termed and quick fix initiatives on three main key developmental areas, i.e. *School Ethos*; *Teaching and Learning*; *Educational Leadership and Management*. Essentially, the reviewed SDPs lacked:

a) Systematic Vision to integrate piecemeal inclusion activities in a coherent plan;
b) Collaborative Initiatives among all stakeholders to shape the future together;
c) Cyclical-Ongoing reviewing practices to record and yield cumulative results; and
d) Enhancing and Enabling approaches because of limited training opportunities.

The above weaknesses reduced collective responsibility for the implementation of the designed strategies. From an inclusion point of view, SDPs lacked a clear vision for:

a) School Effectiveness to meet all learners' diverse educational needs;

b) School Improvement to review progress, identify priorities and plan accordingly;
c) Teacher Development to help staff enrich professional skills and competences;
d) Effective use of Resources to support effectively all minority learners; and
e) Management of Change to develop strong internal school capacities to respond effectively to national educational priorities.

Finally, similar limitations emerged also during CCP and CoH meetings, which lacked a culture of strategic decision-making processes to enable constructive discussions and productive planning to meet emerging educational exigencies. In this regard, meetings resembled more information-giving sessions. This was also confirmed by both CPs and HoS during semistructured interviews.

5D.4 Conclusion

This section presented a detailed account of participant schools' dynamics and an overview of the daily duties of HoS. Moreover, the analysis delved into the HoS leadership skills for inclusive education. Analysed data indicated that HoS possessed: strong professional and moral values; refined communication skills; and responsive technical skills (management of staff members and of resources for equity). Coversely, HoS lacked strategic leadership skills to guide school change and collective learning due to weak internal self-evaluation processes, which affected the transformational process of colleges and schools into PLCs. The next section presents the analysis of 'class participant observations', which helped to scrutinize teaching practices and to present how minority learners are included or excluded in local classrooms.

Section 5E: Class Participant Observations

The Teaching and Learning Process

5E.1 Introduction

Schensul (2000) described participant observations, "as the process of learning through exposure or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants" (91). In this regard, the researcher conducted a total of 8 class participant observations in mainstream and compensatory teaching settings (Table 5E.1).

Table 5E.1: Participant Observations

College	Sector	Setting	Year	Lesson
X	Primary B	Mainstream *(Mixed Ability Class)*	Year 5	Maltese
Z	Primary D	Mainstream *(Mixed Ability Class)*	Year 4	Mathematics
X	Secondary F	Mainstream *(Banded Class)*	Form 3	English
Z	Secondary H	Mainstream *(Banded Class)*	Form 4	Physics
College	**Sector**	**Setting**	**Year**	**Lesson**
W	Primary A	Compensatory *(Complementary Withdrawal Class)*	Year 4	Basic Literacy
Y	Primary C	Compensatory *(Complementary Withdrawal Class)*	Year 3	Basic Reading
W	Secondary E	Compensatory *(CCP Withdrawal Class)*	Form 3	Basic English
Y	Secondary G	Compensatory *(CCP Withdrawal Class)*	Form 4	Basic Mathmatics

In addition, the researcher observed a '*Role-Play*' activity in Primary B; a *PE lesson* in Primary D and the *two breaks* (morning and mid-day) in Secondary F. The conducted observations allowed the researcher to develop "analytical descriptions of behaviours, events, and artifacts" (Marshall, 2013, 179) to: *investigate teaching pedagogies and support strategies*; *examine interactions between class teachers and LSEs and between learners*; and *analyse teachers' attitudes*. Collected evidence was also compared with results obtained from questionnaires, semistructured interviews and job-shadowing sessions.

5E.2 Mainstream Class Demographics and Physical Arrangements

Over the past years, Malta experienced social and demographic changes, which brought about new realities and challenges in local schools. In turn, societal changes increased pressure on schools to provide, "quality education to all learners, not just

those with physical disabilities" (Thomas, 2013, 76). Table 5E.2 presents demographic information on participant mainstream classroom settings (class population, number of adults in classrooms, number of learners with or who are still awaiting an official statement of needs).

Table 5E.2: Mainstream Classrooms General Information

School	Year/Form	Class Population	Learners with a Statement of Needs	Learners Awaiting Statement	Adults in Class	
					Teacher	LSEs
Primary B	Year 5	20	3	0	1	2
Primary D	Year 4	19	2	1	1	1
Secondary F	Form 3	21	0	0	1	0
Secondary H	Form 4	20	2	0	1	1

Collected evidence shows that SEN learners in possession of an 'official statement of needs' received personalized in-class support through the provision of LSE support to enable both personal and curricular help. Table 5E.3 illustrates the type of LSE support offered to SEN learners in the observed classrooms.

Table 5E.3: Provision of Support to Officially Statemented Learners

School	Class	SEN Learners	Official Diagnosis	Type of LSE Support
Primary B	Year 5	3	• 2 learners with ADHD.	• *SSC* Support.
			• 1 Learner with Autism.	• *Full Time 1-1* Support.
Primary D	Year 4	2	• ADD and Learning Difficulties.	• *SSC* Support.
Secondary H	Form 4	2	• SEBD & Development Delay.	• *SSC* Support.

In addition, the above classrooms presented also other minority learner groups, i.e.: *learners with diverse learning skills/abilities*; *students with diverse aptitudes towards schooling*; *learners with behavioural* challenges; and *learners from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds*. Table 5E.4 below presents the number of diverse ethnic students and their respective nationalities in the observed Year 5 (Primary B) and Form 3 (Secondary F) classrooms.

Table 5E.4: Learners from diverse Ethnic Backgrounds in Year 5 and Form 3

School	Class	Class Population	Foreign Learners	Nationalities
Primary B	Year 5	20	8	Russian (1); Bulgarian (1); Romanian (1); Serbian (1); Italian (1); Eritrean (2) and Nigerian (1).
Secondary F	Form 3	21	7	Somalis (1); Eriterian (1); Nigerian (1); Syrian (2); Croatian (1) and Italian (1).

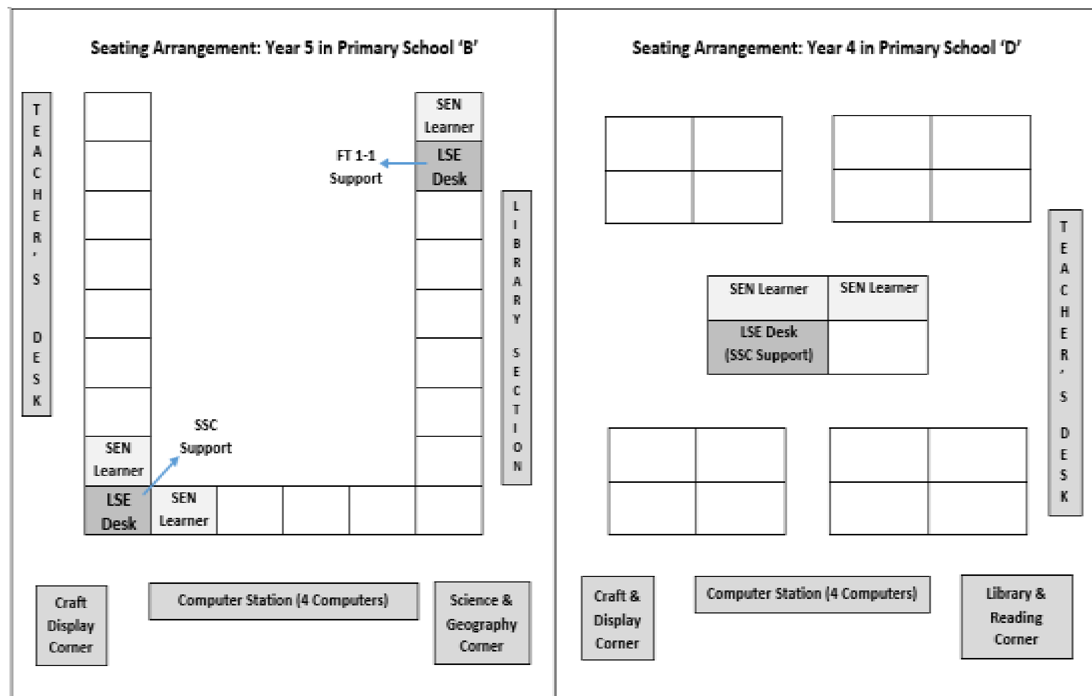
Collected data shows also that 'learners from diverse ethnic backgrounds' presented a number of difficulties, which hindered their academic attainment, class participation and socialization. Difficulties included: *communication and language problems*; *lack of readiness for grade level*; and *incompatible cultural norms*. Conversely, observed classrooms in Primary D and Secondary H *included learners who experienced difficult social and familial realities* and *learners from low-income or in-poverty families*. The latter social situations had a negative impact on learners' aptitudes towards schooling; general behaviour; attendance; and academic attainment. Notably, the presented data on minority learners in the aforementioned classrooms correlated positively with the identified minority learners from questionnaires (Section 5B.3). The teaching process of the identified minority learners fell directly under the responsibility of class/subject teachers.

In the two observed primary classrooms, teachers were aware of the benefits of creating inclusive learning environments. In both classrooms a connecting, warm and cordial atmosphere was felt and learners were provided with:

a) Adequate help and support, whenever they encountered difficulties;
b) Extra attention; and
c) Opportunities to work and construct knowledge collaboratively.

In this regard, Cefai (2005) posited that, "there is a direct correlation between students' education and the class design since it affected students' behaviour, attitudes, and work ethic" (73). In essence, conducive classrooms: *enhanced learners' intellectual ability*; *fostered socio-emotional development*; *eased students' interactions*; *facilitated class management*; and *increased academic attainment* (Figure 5E.1).

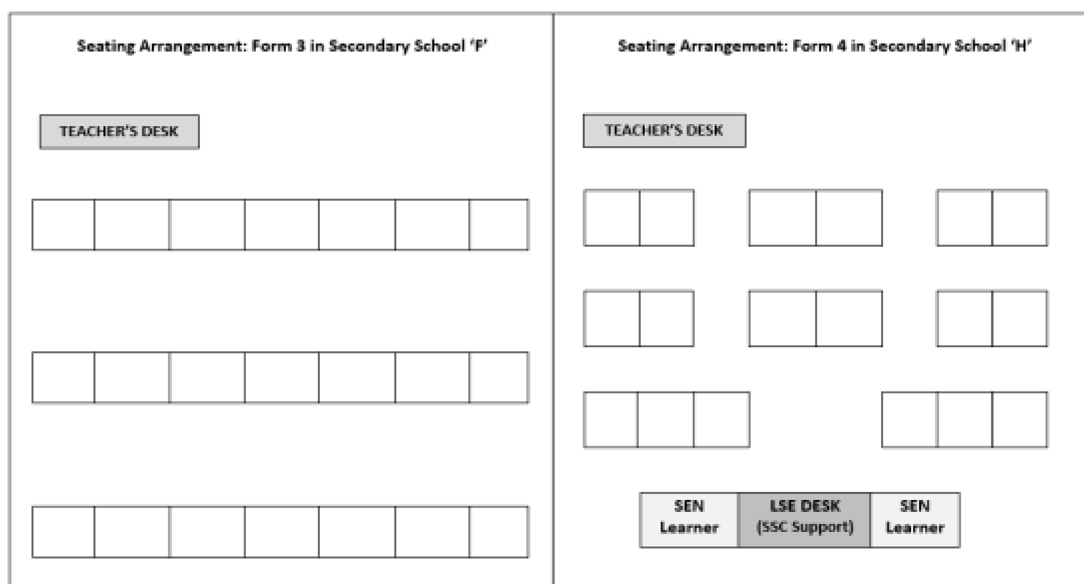
Figure 5E.1: Seating Arrangements In The Primary Classrooms



Both arrangements helped teachers to create a responsive atmosphere in classrooms, where learners constantly interacted, helped and collaborated with each other through 'group work' or the 'Buddy System'. Both teachers regarded "students not as passive recipients of static content but as creative thinkers and producers of knowledge" (NMC, 2000, 32).

Conversely, at Secondary level, students experienced a different situation from the one observed at Primary level. During observations in Forms 3 and 4, the researcher notified considerable differences in 'class atmosphere' and 'teaching approaches'. Both forms presented uninspiring classrooms that "negatively affected students' motivation and learning" (Salend, 2008, 78). To this effect, observed teaching practices followed the traditional teacher-centered approach, with '*compliance*' valued over '*initiative*' and '*passive learning*' preferred over '*active learning*'. In this regard, teachers focused mainly on syllabi coverage rather than on skill or competence enhancement. Hence, classroom authority "was transmitted in a hierarchical manner, i.e. teachers exerting direct control over students" (Norwich, 1993, 3). Similarly, the physical design of both classrooms encouraged continuous focus on subject teachers, since classrooms were organized so that desks face teachers (Figure 5E.2). The latter finding corroborated analysed data from the HoS semistructured interviews in Section 5C.5.

Figure 5E.2: Seating Arrangements In The Two Secondary Classrooms



Finally, Primary schools B and D and Secondary schools F and H adopted the 'Withdrawal' approach, i.e. withdrawing minority learners from mainstream classes on a one-to-one or small group basis to provide additional support. At Primary level, learners with acute literacy problems attended CE classes (Table 5E.5).

Table 5E.5: Learners attending the CEC Compensatory Teaching Setting

School	Year Group	Number of Learners attending CEC	Lesson Frequency per week
Primary B	Year 5	3 students	Twice a week
Primary D	Year 4	2 students	Once a week

On the other hand, learners at Secondary level attended CCP classes in either Maltese, English or Mathematics, depending on the learners' identified needs. Table 5E.6 shows the number of learners and the type of CCP classes attended.

Table 5E.6: Learners attending CCP Classes at Seconday Level

School	Year Group	Learners attending CCP classes	Type of CCP class attended
Secondary F	Form 3	4 students	• 2 students attend Maths CCP. • 1 student attends Maltese CCP. • 1 student attends English CCP.
Secondary H	Form 4	3 students	• 2 students attend English CCP. • 1 student attends Maths CCP.

The 'Withdrawal' approach, which is similar to the Irish model, "presented limitations in terms of developing inclusive and responsive learning settings" since "students missed out important learning when withdrawn for additional support" (NCCA, 2003, 345). Moreover, withdrawal programs, "*hindered minority learners from receiving a broad and balanced curriculum*"; "*facilitated social isolation and/or segregation*" and "*decimated cohension and/or group integrity of classrooms*" (NCCA, 2004, 13). The latter findings also correlated positively with data from questionnaires, semistructured interviews and job-shadowing sessions.

5E.3 Classroom Management and Teaching Techniques

According to Wong, Wont, Rogers, and Brooks (2012), class management is intrinsically related to the way teachers use power to bring learners' behaviour under stimulus control. Essentially, class management incorporated: *the organisation of the physical environment*; *the establishment of class rules and routines*; *the teaching and learning process*; *the prevention and response to misbehaviour*; and *the development of effective class relations*. In this regard, VanHousen (2013) encouraged educators to adopt an instructional approach based on 'the constructivist principles of learning' to embrace "a person-centered, rather than a teacher-centered, orientation towards class management, which features shared leadership, community building, and balancing needs of teachers and learners" (68). Collected data revealed that local teachers used an eclectic approach to control misbehaviour and to deliver planned lessons. However, educators at Primary level employed a more student-centered approach than those in Secondary schools, who constantly adopted teacher-centered strategies. Hence, class participant observations revealed the following evidence on:

A. <u>Teaching Techniques</u>

Observed primary school teachers managed to create condusive learning settings, where knowledge was scaffolded and co-constructed with learners. In this regard, educators helped students to engage critically with various topics and to search below the surface to develop personalized knowledge (Ryan and Cooper, 2001). Observed teachers also shared power control and encouraged learners to assume increased responsibility and ownership for their own learning. In both classrooms, teaching strategies included: *reflective thinking and inquiry-based activities*; *role-playing and demonstration exercises*; *explanatory group discussions*; *project-based learning activities*; and *adapting activities to students' interests*. Moreovoer, in CE

classroom settings teachers utilized multisensory techniques to help learners: *gather, sort and link information with prior knowledge*; *perceive logic involved in problem-solving*; *understand relationships between different concepts*; and *store information for later recall* (Ainscow, 2013). Hence, the observed 35-minutes long withdrawal CE lessons included a mixture of the following activities: *peer assisted reading*; *phonological awareness games*; *computer-based games*; *graphical organziers*; *use of manipulatives*; and *cutting, painting and drawing exercises*. The main objective of the two observed lessons was to strengthen learners' visual, auditory, tactile and kinaesthetic skills to further help them access the mainstream curriculum. On the contrary, observed Secondary teachers in Forms 3 and 4, adopted a teacher-centered pedagogy to maintain control over learners' attention and general behaviour. Both lessons took a lecture-like format with teachers conveying critical information and students listening carefully, taking notes or working on a set of given tasks. Other teaching methods included: *drill and practice*; *demonstrations*; *guided discovery*; *guided discussions*; and *recitation*. Similarly, the latter strategies were also used in CCP classes but with less focus on examinations and less stress on students.

B. Behaviour and Class Management Techniques

Collected data shows that pedogogy had an impact on learners' general attitudes and class behaviour. Hence, the diverse humanistic approaches utilized by observed teachers in Years 4 and 5 helped learners to exhibit positive behaviour, as opposed to the challenging, rebellious and unrespectful behaviour evidenced by Secondary school students. Table 5E.7 illustrates the differences in classroom management in the observed Primary and Secondary classrooms.

Table 5E.7: Differences in Classroom Management

Observed Primary Classrooms (Years 4 and 5)	Observed Secondary Classrooms (Forms 3 and 4)
Strategies to empower all learners	Strategies to supervise learners
Discipline comes from the self	Discipline comes from the teacher
Learners form an integral part of the classroom management system	Only well-behaved learners allowed to become teacher's helpers
Rules are co-developed	Class rules developed by teachers
Extrinsic Rewards	Intrinsic Rewards
Learners' well-being given priority	Syllabi coverage given absolute priority

Discussions held with both Years 4 and 5 teachers evidenced that both educators reinforced 'positive behaviour' by: *eliciting student participation when developing classroom rules*; *sharing responsibility of diverse classroom tasks* (taking attendance, updating class calendar, distributing and collecting copybooks); and *encouraging learners to assume responsibility in regulating own behaviour* by focusing on the development of social skills through 1-1 meetings, circle time, peer mediation programmes; and community building activities. In addition, the Year 4 teacher highlighted '*social stories*' as a fundamental behavioural tool, while, the Year 5 teacher indicated the importance of developing targetted *BMPs* to tackle severe challenging behavioural struggles. Conversely, Secondary teachers in Forms 3 and 4 used strategies, which focused on strengthening 'control' through mandated class rules and punishments (or loss of special privileges). In both classrooms, '*task completion*' was one of the prerequisites to obtain: *tangible rewards* (stickers), *activity rewards* (free time), and *social rewards* (praise). The latter contrasted with the approach adopted by Primary teachers, who focused on enhancing intrinsic motivation to encourage appropriate behaviour not for the sake of a reward but for the good of the whole class.

5E.4 Lesson Observations and Challenges to Inclusive Education

Minority learners in the observed mainstream classrooms required additional support to fully access the curriculum (apart from the one provided by LSEs). In this regard, the researcher delved into the way teachers and LSEs addressed both inclusion and multicultural issues in their respective classrooms.

To facilitate the analysis process, the researcher utilized the thematic approach and grouped all the recorded sessions under the following themes:

A. **The Extra-Curricular lessons**, which consisted of a role play activity on different means of transport in Primary 'B' and a PE lesson in Primary 'D'. Both activities lasted for about 45 minutes and aimed to enhance intercultural and intellectual skills in learners. Massoni (2011) remarked that similar extra-curricular activities "helped to build self-esteem and to improve test scores" (87). The two observed activities helped all learners to: *learn how to compromise*, *work collaboratively*, *interact with other peers*, and *showcase their talents*.

B. **English Reading and Maltese Grammar Lessons** in Year 5 and Form 3. In both classrooms, minority learners, especially students from diverse ethnic backgrounds,

presented severe literacy problems, which ranged from limited understanding to lack of reading skills to limited vocabulary. During both lessons minority learners looked fidgety, uncomfortable and unmotivated due to communication difficulties (listening, speaking, and writing skills). These shortcomings also had a deleterious effect on the behaviour of minority learners, who adopted a 'laissez-affair' attitude, resulting in limited attention and lack of home and class work. To facilitate the inclusion of minority learners, the Year 5 and Form 3 teachers used diverse support strategies, namely: *code-switching*; *provision of differentiated material* (handouts), *individual attention*, *extra-time*, and *visuals* (flashcards). Throughout the lessons, minority learners also received the support of LSEs. Collected evidence shows also lack of cooperative planning between class teachers and LSEs, who also denounced difficulties in accommodating the gaps in learning associated with lack of readiness for grade levels. The latter challenges correlated positively with questionnaire results on barriers to inclusive education and CPD training for inclusion.

C. **<u>The Science Subjects</u>**, which consisted of a Year 4 Mathematics lesson in Primary 'D' and a Form 4 Physics lesson in Secondary 'H'. In the latter classrooms, minority learners, who lacked basic numeracy and literacy skills, found it hard to access the Mathematics and Physics syllabi. Moreover, both classes presented a wide range of diverse abilities, which posed challenges on teachers to help learners understand complex concepts in Mathematics and Physics. The Year 4 primary teacher utilized '*differentiation of content*' as the main support strategy, while the Form 4 secondary teacher shifted the responsibility of minority students' learning on the LSE. Finally, both teachers expressed their reservations on the sustainability of differentiation because of lack of training and expertise on the implementation of the LOFs. These findings significantly correlated with data results from questionnaires, interviews and job-shadowing sessions.

D. **<u>The Morning and Mid-Day Breaks</u>** in Secondary 'F'. During both breaks learners interacted and socialized well with each other, even though instances of ganging and bullying were also evidenced. This result linked positively with the sociometric test findings (Refer to: Section 5B.7 and Appendix C: Questions 2).

Moreover, collected data, from observational notes and post-observation discussions, revealed other teacher-related challenges to inclusive education, namely:

A. <u>Lack of time</u>, which centered around teaching difficulties *to cater for all learners' diverse expectations*; *to accommodate the needs of SEN and ethnic diverse learners*

in classrooms; and *to compensate for the absence of academic support from parents*. In this regard, teachers indicated the need for less rigid curricula and more contact time with learners. Lack of time for effective planning to develop new programs or to differentiate curriculum material also featured predominantly. Both teachers in Year 5 and Form 3 complained about "insufficient time to provide extra help and support, and individual attention" to minority ethnic learners. Data also showed that ethnic learners were reluctant to participate in class-based activities or in group discussions.

B. Differentiation challenges, namely to differentiate planning and teaching to cater for the needs and abilities of all learners. Teachers expressed lack of confidence in differentiating learning goals to meet students' individual needs. Hence, difficulties centred on four different aspects of differentiation, i.e.:
   - *Differentiation of curricular content* to organise whole-class lessons;
   - *Differentiation of instructional strategies* and pace of teaching to cater for all learners' needs due to lack of knowledge on responsive teaching strategies;
   - *Differentiation of teaching materials* to challenge critical thinking; and
   - *Differentiation of output* including classroom tasks/activities and homework to encourage active participation and involvement of all learners.

   In this regard, Tomlinson (2003) posited that, in Irish schools, educators regarded their lack of knowledge on differentiation as their biggest challenge.

C. Accommodating gaps in learning for students, who lacked skills in comprehension, language, vocabulary, coordination, reading, writing and mathematics at particular grade levels. Hence, literacy and numeracy-based barriers, such as the "*inability to read materials at a level close to class level*" (Form 3 Teacher); "*the inability to participate in class discussions*" (Year 5 Teacher); and "*the inability to recognize numerical signs or to understand the language of mathematics*" (Year 4 Teacher), posed challenges to teachers' ability to differentiate material. Research (Cummins, 2001) shows that although minority learners might cope academically with the early years of schooling, they experienced difficulties as "the gap widened" in primary and secondary grades, where subject content becomes more complicated and language of instruction is more technical and specific. Observed teachers also indicated other causes for lack of readiness for grade levels, namely: *poor academic skills*; *poor general knowledge*; *poor attendance rates*; and *lack of support at home*.

Data also indicated that poor attendance was more common in Secondary than in Primary schools. Finally, the latter barriers reinforced the "dilemma of difference" (Wedell, 2005), i.e. deciding whether to withdraw students from the mainstream class for individual and/or small group additional support, or whether to offer them access to the full curriculum alongside their peers, with the risk of not meeting minority learners' needs.

D. Lack of expertise because of insufficient pre-service and CPD training for teachers. All the observed teachers remarked that they lacked the expertise, knowledge and the preparation to deal with the inclusion of minority learners. Moreover, collected data showed that lack of CPD on inclusive education affected negatively teachers' confidence due to: *limited of knowledge on how to use responsive pedagogy*; *lack of awareness on how to include IEP targets in mainstream planning*; *failure to link special and general education programmes*; and *limited support and help from INCOs and specialist teachers*.

All the above findings on challenges and barriers for inclusive teaching and learning correlated positively with results from questionnaires and semistructured interviews.

5E.5 Conclusion

Finally, the current thesis aimed also to give space to different learners to voice their ideas, beliefs and viewpoints on the current educational system. In this regard, the researcher conducted four different focus groups in Primary schools A and B and Secondary schools G and H. The latter enriched the already voluminous corpus of data and facilitated triangulation with other applied research methods. The next and final section of this study (Section 5F) presents the analysis of the focus groups in more detail.

Section 5F: Analysis of Focus Groups

Giving Voice to Learners

5F.1 Introduction

The conducted focus groups aimed to give voice to learners on general school-class-based inclusion processes and practices. The researcher conducted a total of 4 focus groups in Primary Schools A (College W) and B (College X) and in Secondary Schools G (College Y) and H (College Z). Each group consisted of eight randomly selected learners from Years 4 and 5 (in Primary schools) and from Forms 3 and 4 (in Secondary schools). Table 5F.1 below presents demographic information on the four conducted focus groups.

Table 5F.1: Focus Group Demographic Information

Focus Group 1 with Primary School Learners		
College	**School**	**Focus Group General Information**
College W	Primary A	The focus group consisted of 4 eight-year old Year 4 learners and 4 nine-year old Year 5 learners. In this focus group the presence of male learners (5) outnumbered that of female students (3). Among the participants there were: • A male SEN learner (diagnosed with ADHD); and • A female Nigerian ethnic diverse learner.
Focus Group 2 with Secondary School Learners		
College Y	Secondary G	The focus group included 5 fourteen-year old and 3 thirteen-year old learners. Male and female learners were equally represented in the focus group, which among others included two ethnic diverse learners (a male Turkish learner and a Syrian female student), who have been living in Malta for the past 3 years.
Focus Group 3 with Primary School Learners		
College X	Primary B	This focus group mirrored the one in Primary A, with the exception that it included more female (5) than male learners (3). Forming part of the focus group were: • A male learner with severe economic difficulties; and • A female student with difficult social/cultural realities.
Focus Group 4 with Secondary School Learners		
College Z	Secondary H	The majority of learners in this focus group (5) were thirteen-year old male learners, while the remaining (3) were fourteen-year old female students. The focus group included also two below class-average academic learners.

In order to facilitate discussion and ease interaction among participant learners, the researcher utilized a focus group guide (Appendix G), which consisted of a set of questions on: *a story on an Ethiopian migrant learner living in Malta*; and *two video*

clips from the film 'The Blind Side'. The discussions in the four focus groups helped the researcher to elicit learners' viewpoints and concerns on:

- **Macro**-school level inclusion related issues to investigate:
  1. The WHO: Who were the minority learners in Primary and Secondary schools?
  2. The HOW: How were minority learners included in schools? And
- **Micro**-class level inclusion related isssues to explore the type of pedagogy used in classrooms to provide high quality education for all learners.

Finally, focus groups further helped to gauge learners' feelings and sentiments on the state of play of inclusive education in participant schools.

5F.2 Analysis of Focus Groups

The researcher utilized the open-coding technique to facilitate analysis of the collected focus group data. The latter technique allowed the researcher to "segregate, group, regroup, and rethink emergent codes to further consolidate meaning" (Grbich, 2007, 21). All emergent codes formed the backbone of the current analysis.

5F.2.1 General Perceptions on Wedeb's Story

The story used during the focus group sessions was about an Ethiopian learner, called Wedeb, who together with his family left his native country to settle in Malta in search for a better future. The story:

- Explained *why Wedeb's family escaped from Ethiopia*;
- Narrated *the travelling process undertaken by Wedeb to arrive in Malta*; and
- Depicted *Wedeb's first experiences in a local primary school*.

Participants in the four focus groups immediately linked Wedeb's story with the ever-increasing presence of migrant learners (regular and irregular) at school and community levels. Learners indicated that foreign learners in their respective schools included EU, Eastern European, African, Middle East and Asian nationals. During scholastic year 2017-2018, the population of foreign learners "from Pre-Primary to Secondary local schools, more than doubled and now accounts to one foreign student for every ten local learners" (www.timesofmalta.com). The rate of foreign learners in local schools also mirrored nationwide demographic shifts in the population, which, in 2018, exceeded 475,000, of whom 12,407 were non-EU workers and 30,564 were EU nationals (NSO, 2018). The latter figures also corroborated results from questionnaires on the presence of minority learners from diverse ethnic backgrounds in local schools.

During focus group sessions, Maltese participant learners managed to empathize with the difficulties experienced by migrant learners. In this regard, they stressed that, "foreign students, like Wedeb, are unfortunate as they do not live a happy and peaceful life" (Focus Group 2), since they: "*live in poverty*" (Focus Group 1); "*live in countries where there are civil wars and many illnesses*" (Focus Group 2); "*lack basic needs like food and water*" (Focus Group 3); and "*do not have the opportunity to receive a proper education*" (Focus Group 4). Furthermore, participant migrant learners indicated other causes for migration, namely: "*lack of freedom and speech or expression*"; "*political, tribal, and religious oppressions*"; and "*unemployment and instability*" (Focus Group 2). Grillo (2000) maintained that "poor living conditions, violence and armed conflicts, environmental problems, and an everincreasing gap between rich and poor countries… influenced migration trends" (159). Throughout the four focus group sessions, local learners showed compassion, pity and tolerance towards their migrant peers. The three migrant learners in Focus Groups 1 and 2 asserted that their families left their native countries "in search for a better future in Europe, after years of harships and misery". Although migrant learners described Malta as a beautiful and peaceful country with a "a lot of open spaces and job opportunities", they "still felt nostalgic" of their "country of origin". The latter because migrant families "faced severe challenges of integration, since they have to absorb alien ideas and new habits and to move into a society, which is not always inclined towards their full integration and inclusion" (www.jrsmalta.org). In this regard, migrant learners in Focus Group 2 asserted that:

- "After three years living in Malta, my family and I still find it very difficult to adjust completely to the Maltese life" (Turskish migrant learners); and
- "On certain occasions I feel that Maltese people are not happy with out presence in Maltese…certain people look at us in a very strange way" (Syrian migran learner).

Moreover, local participants in Focus Groups 1, 3, and 4 echoed their parents' concerns about the ever-increasing number of migrants in Malta and claimed that: "*my parents fear migrants, mainly when they gang in groups at night*" (Focus Group 1); "*my father says that because of migrants crime and illnesses increased in Malta*" (Focus Group 3); and "*my parents believe that migrants will take over Malta*" (Focus Group 4). The latter claims suggest that scepticism and fear of the 'other' continues to prevail in the Maltese 'psyche' and 'public opinion' since "migrants are more and more targeted as the scapegoats for all type of domestic problems" (Pizarro, 2001, 35).

5F.2.2 Minority Learners in Schools and Classrooms

Apart from "foreign students like Wedeb", participant learners indicated also other minority learner groups, namely: "*poor students*"; "*learners with disabilities*"; "*students from broken-families"*; "*students who perform badly in exams*"; "*learners who do not attend religion lessons*"; and "*learners who are all the time misbehaving*". The latter findings on minority learner groups correlated with the results obtained from questionnaires in Section 5B.3. Essentially, learners were not against the inclusion of minority learners in local classrooms but remarked that they "need to be less disruptive in their behaviour" (Focus Group 1). Moreover, participants expressed dissatisfaction towards the fact that:

1. Minority students received more personalized class attention that 'other' learners: "*during classwork teachers do not support all learners equally*" (Focus Group 2); "*teachers focus more on students who misbehave*" (Focus Group 3).
2. Minority learners received more praise and rewards than their peers – "*our teachers never praise our work"* (Focus Group 1); "*I was never rewarded for bringing home work on time and for doing it correctly*" (Focus Group 4).

The above concerns correlated with the claims put forward by the Director Curriculum (Mr. EE) and the DG ES (Mr. BB) during semistructured interviews, who posited that, "educators were not doing enough to accommodate the needs and expectations of high achievers in local classrooms" (Mr. EE) and emphasised the need for "more responsive and inclusive teaching strategies to respond to the needs, abilities and expectations of all learners in the local educational system" (Mr. BB). Finally, participant learners also seconded Katrina's[4] choice of engaging with Wedeb during school-time. To this effect, learners expressed their willingness to include minority learners in play activities and to help them during lessons, on condition that they do not: "*encounter difficulties to study at home"* (Focus Group 4); "*miss out teachers' explanations*" (Focus Group 2); and "*end up getting the assigned work wrongly*" (Focus Group 3).

5F.2.3 State-of-play of Inclusive Education in Schools (Questions 11 to 14)

This section delves into the participants' responses for questions 11, 12, 13 and 14 on the 'focus group guidelist' to reveal the general opinions and feelings of all the participant learners on the state-of-play of inclusive education in schools.

[4]Katrina is a main character in the story of Wedeb.

5F.2.3.1 General School-Class Processes: Learners' Description (Question 11)

In question 11 participants in the four focus groups were asked to describe their respective schools and classrooms. During the analysis process the researcher utilized the 'comparative analysis approach'. In so doing, the researcher: (a) analysed all the responses per focus group per school separately; (b) compared the responses together in search of similarities and discrepancies; and (c) elicited general themes that emerged from the learners' descriptions. In essence, the latter analysis revealed that the majority of participant learners (17) believed that general school-class processes and practices failed to include ALL learners equitably because of a number of concerns that emerged predominantly from the learners' descriptions and justifications. The latter included:

- Verbal and/or Physical Bullying: '*verbal bullying*' (mainly in the form of 'name-calling'), '*physical bullying*' and '*cyber bullying*' were on the increase across all age groups;
- Favouritism: issues related to fairness and impartiality in the educators' decisions, who tended to protect and safeguard the interests of the more affluent learners;
- Xenophobia: the influx of migrant learners in local schools led Maltese students to fear loss of culture, identity and values and to perceive migrant learners as 'others';
- Socialization and Friendship: certain learners did not have friends to work and play with because of communication difficulties and labelling issues;
- Rigid school-class Discipline: authoritarian school-class disciplinary processes that lacked student empowerment and engagement;
- Curricular Issues: teaching strategies are rigid, exam-oriented and unresponsive to students' abilities and needs. Learners described lessons as "boring";
- Lack of Extra-Curricular Activities: educators focused only on syllabi coverage, at the expense of other equally important extra-curricular activities in schools, such as drama, art and craft, music, physical education, and science;
- School-Class Environment: unstimulating and unattractive physical school-class environments. Physical tiredness issues also emerged because learners had to wake up early to arrive to school on time.

The above concerns corroborated findings from classroom observations in Section 5E, but constrasted the results obtained from questionnaires and semistructured interviews. While, educators blamed learners for lack of success, students denounced general school-class processes and practices as main barriers to inclusive education.

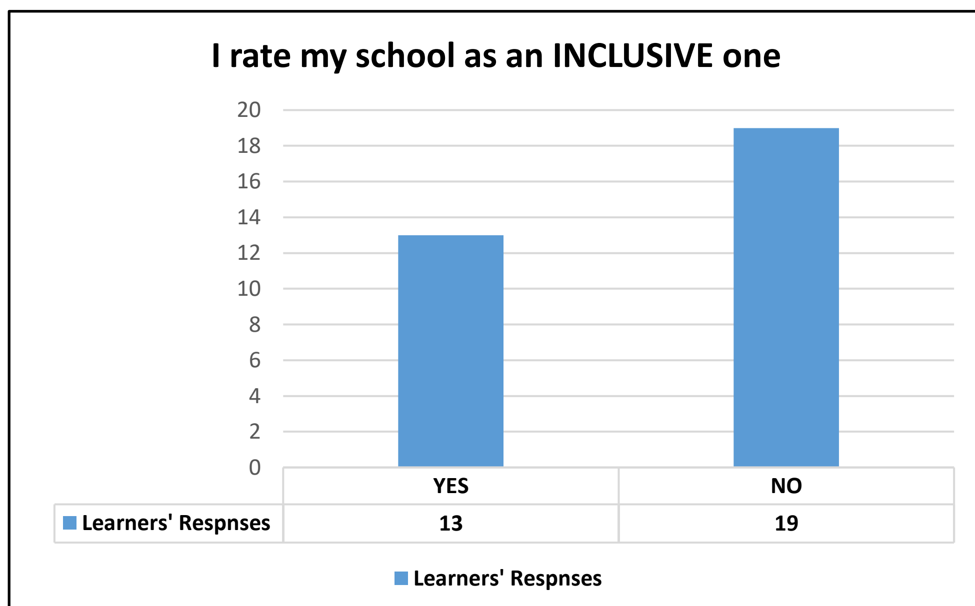
5F.2.3.2 School-Class Based Activities that Enhanced Inclusion (Questions 12 & 13)

In questions 12 and 13 participant learners had to indicate the type of school activities and/or class lessons that enhanced 'inclusive education' at school level. In this regard, the NCF (2012) emphasised the importance of inclusion-oriented whole-of-school-based activities that, "facilitated learning in an enabling environment, which captures diversity and inclusivity and leads students towards personal growth in the values of solidarity, respect, and social justice" (15). To this effect, participant learners unanimously confirmed the existence of inclusion-oriented whole-of-school activities (mostly in Primary rather than in Secondary schools) which ranged from *field days* to *sports days* to *school concerts* to *celebration days* to *school outings* to *parents days* to *awareness campaigns* to *informative sessions or talks for parents*. Conversely, class-based initiatives supporting inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism were sporadic and limited only to subjects like *Religion*, *Ethics*, *Social Studies*, *PSCD*, *History* or *Geography*. In addition, participant learners in Secondary Schools, complained about: "*lack of clear direction from guidance teachers and counsellors*"; "*lack of involvement during lessons*"; and "*lack of group activities*" (Focus Groups 1, 3 and 4).

5F.2.3.3 Do you rate the school as inclusive? (Question 14)

Finally, question 14 explored whether participant learners rated their respective schools as inclusive (Figure 5F.1), i.e. learning settings that championed processes and practices that responded to student diversity.

Figure 4F.6: Schools Respond Effectively to Student Diversity



The vast majority of participants (19), mostly learners in focus groups in Secondary schools G and H, indicated the lack of school processes and practices that effectively catered for the diverse needs of all learners. Hence, the need for a national starategy that views “diversity as a goal in itself” and affirms “diversity in a political framework of cultural criticism and commitment for social justice” (McLaren, 1994, 54).

5F.2.4 General Perceptions on the Teaching and Learning Process

The term ‘pedagogy’ refers to the way teachers transform “content expertise in an accessible form of communication with students, to help them create their own semantic map, to move from one idea to another or to link topics together” (Zumbrunn, 2014, 6). Conducted focus groups investigated also teaching processes and practices to examine how teachers respond to diversity at local classroom level. In this regard, the researcher used two short video clips from the film the ‘Blind Side’, which helped participants to better engage with the posed questions. The first clip, entitled ‘White Walls’, described the way Michael Oher (the film’s main protagonist) felt in mainstream classrooms, whereas, the final clip portrayed different responsive teaching strategies used by educators to support Michael Oher’s learning process. A thorough analysis of all the collected data revealed that in local classrooms exam-oriented conventional and standardized teaching pedagogy prevailed over student-centred teaching practices.

5F.2.4.1 Learners’ Reactions to the Video Clip: ‘White Walls’

During the video clip ‘White Walls’, Michale Oher described his experience with mainstream class teachers as frustrating and demotivating because standardized teacher-centered pedagogy failed to fully maximise his talents and abilities. Similarly, the majority of participant learners remarked the difficulties faced by local teachers to “support every student in class” (Focus Group 3). The latter because educators: “*talked down to us*” (Focus Group 2); “*blamed us unjustly*” (Focus Group 4); “*shouted at us*” (Focus Group 1); and “*punished the whole class …including innocent students*” (Focus Group 3). In addition, lack of student engagement and consideration (“*teachers do not listen to our opinions*”) and negative teacher-student relationships (“*teachers treat us as babies*”) effected negatively the inclusion of learners at classroom level. Additional themes, which emerged as barriers to inclusive education included:

- Pedagogy: “*lessons consist in working out exam past papers*” (Focus Group 4); and “*we spend a lot of time writing notes and reciting information*” (Focus Group 3);

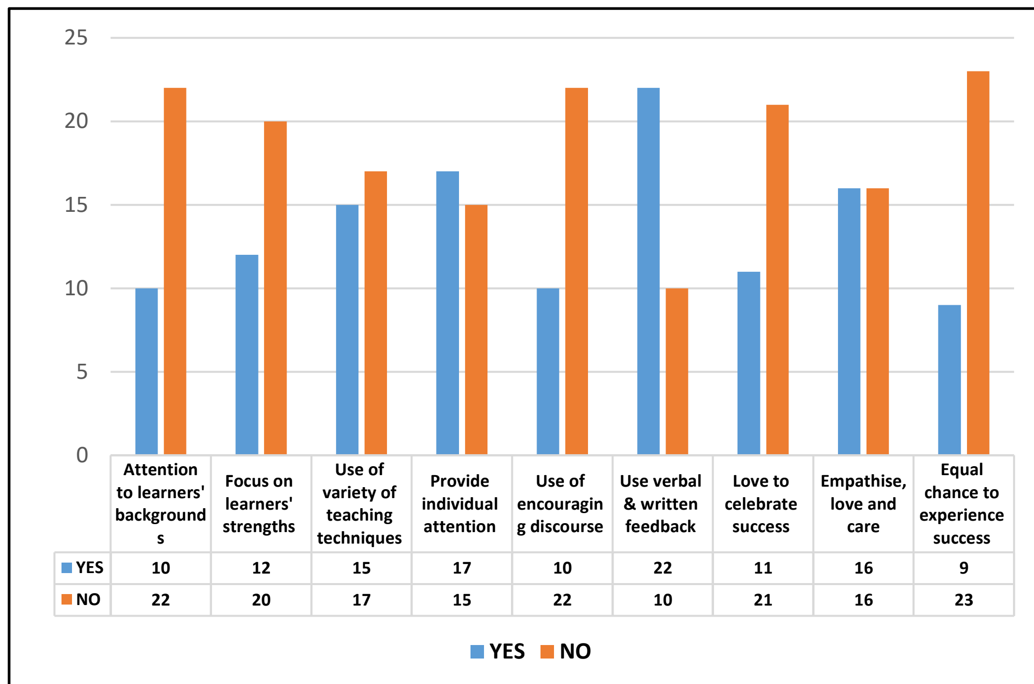
- Strict rules: "*teachers expect complete silence during lessons*" (Focus Group 1);
- Rigid explanations: "*terminology is hard to understand*" (Focus Group 2); "*lessons are directed all the time by the teacher*" (Focus Group 1); and "*teachers think that we are all capable to understand all lessons at once*" (Focus Group 3);
- Inadequate access to the curriculum: "*I hate Maths, Maltese and English because these are hard for me*" (Focus Group 2); and "*I attend the same lessons and do the same exams like my peers, even though I am not good at school*" (Focus Group 4);
- Lack of modifications: "*our classroom is very ugly – teachers do not decorate the class*" (Focus Group 3); and "*in class we always sit in the same place and near the same peers…I wish I could sit near my best friend*" (Focus Group 2).
- Classwork and homework: "*if I do not finish classwork, I have to complete it at home together with the homework*" (Focus Group 3); and "*my parents do not allow me to watch my favourite TV programme because I have lots of homework and things to study*" (Focus Group 4); and
- Smmative Assessment: "*throughout the year teachers put pressure on us because of exams*" (Focus Group 1); "*teachers expect all learners to obtain high marks in exams*" (Focus Group 2); and "*I feel stressed during exam week*" (Focus Group 1).

The above issues also impacted negatively on participant learners' motivation and concentration. In this regard, participants remarked that during lessons they feel: "*de-motivated and demoralized*" (Focus Group 2); "*discouraged and stressed*" (Focus Group 4); "*unhappy*" (Focus Group 1); and "*angry and anxious*" (Focus Group 3). The latter frustration resulted also in "*lack of attention*" and "*bad behaviour*", which lead "*teachers to take strict and harsh disciplinary measures*" (Focus Groups 2 and 3). All this shows that standardized conventional teaching hindered educators from balancing individuality, diversity, and communality.

5F.2.4.2 Learners' Reactions to the Video Clip: 'Courage and Honor'

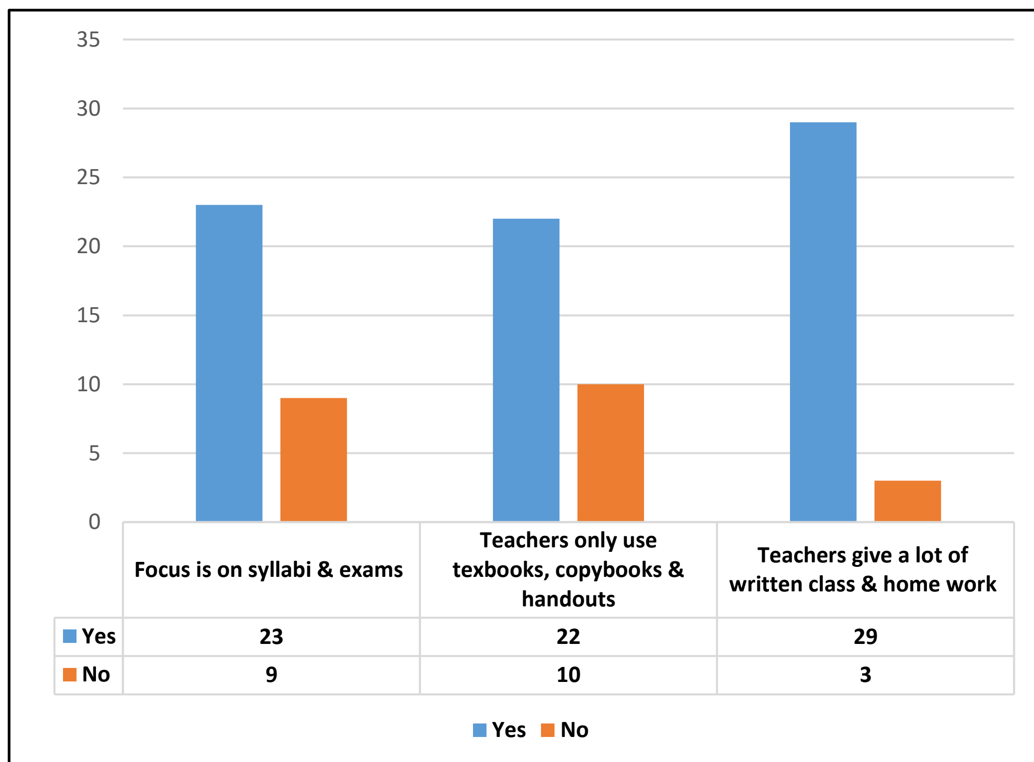
The video clip, 'Courage and Honor', described how responsive pedagogy and 'an ethic of care' approach helped to transform Michael Oher's negative aptitude and attitude towards schooling. Hence, focus groups examined how educators supported learners during the teaching process, by presenting participant learners 12 YES/NO statements (9 statements describing responsive strategies and 3 portraying conventional techniques), to respond individually. Figures 5F.2 and Figure 5F.3 below illustrate the latter results.

Figure 5F.2: Use of Responsive Teaching Pedagogies



	Attention to learners' backgrounds	Focus on learners' strengths	Use of variety of teaching techniques	Provide individual attention	Use of encouraging discourse	Use verbal & written feedback	Love to celebrate success	Empathise, love and care	Equal chance to experience success
YES	10	12	15	17	10	22	11	16	9
NO	22	20	17	15	22	10	21	16	23

Figure 5F.3: Use of Conventional Teaching Techniques



	Focus is on syllabi & exams	Teachers only use texbooks, copybooks & handouts	Teachers give a lot of written class & home work
Yes	23	22	29
No	9	10	3

Collected results show that conventional techniques prevailed over responsive teaching strategies in local schools. The majority of Secondary school participants in Focus Groups 2 and 4, highlighted the prevalence of teacher-centred pedagogies, namely:

1. *Limited consideration to learners' culture, strengths and aspirations*;

2. *Limited use of responsive resources*;
3. *Limited student-controlled discussions and group work activities*;
4. *Limited individualized and personalized attention*; and
5. *Lack of motivating discourse, which celebrates efforts and success*.

However, at Primary level the situation is slightly better than the one experienced by learners in Secondary classes. Unlike learners in Secondary schools, Primary school respondents (in Focus Groups 1 and 3) contended that teachers were more "*caring and helpful*", "*supportive and understanding*" and "*creative and encouraging*". The latter difference was also highlighted by Karanezi (2014), who posited that,

> "primary teachers are more open towards modern teaching strategies and presented more negative attitudes toward traditional techniques when compared to secondary school teachers…[The latter] believed that modern methodologies are not applicable and/or very difficult to apply with secondary school students" (1571).

Results show that both Primary and Secondary teachers placed a lot of emphasis on syllabi coverage in preparation for annual exams, mainly by: (a) *providing verbal and written feedback during lessons*; (b) *using textbooks and/or handouts* (workable handouts and handouts as notes to study); and (c) *giving a lot of written work as reinforcement*.

Finally, participant learners indicated also the presence of LSEs in classrooms. Respondents pointed out that LSEs generally supported:

1. "*learners with physical disabilities*" (Focus Group 1);
2. "*learners with Autism*" (Focus Group 2);
3. "*learners who have bad behaviour in class*" (Focus Group 3); and
4. "*learners with learning difficulties and who do not like school*" (Focus Group 4).

In addition, "*LSEs also try to help other students in class, especially those who do not understand lessons*" (Focus Group 3) and "*learners who encounter difficulties to finish classwork*" (Focus Group 2). The latter findings correlated positively with conclusions in the 'Education for All' external audit report, which stated that "many teachers see LSEs as experts in supporting and in meeting individual needs" (EASNIE, 2014, 89). Finally, participants asserted that LSEs "*unlike their class teachers, presented learners with a lot of motivating resources and practical activities*" (Focus Group 4).

5F.2.5 Transforming Schools into Inclusive Settings: Learners' Views

Finally, focus groups investigated learners' perceptions on how to transform schools into inclusive settings. Participant learners unanimously expressed the desire

to not only experience success but also to "be able to achieve all personal dreams and goals in life" (Focus Group 3), like Michael Oher in the film 'The Blind Side'. In this regard, the majority of respondents expressed the wish to: "*pass all examinations with high marks*" (Focus Group 1); "*go to University and become a doctor*" (Focus Group 4); and "*become a famous football player*" (Focus Group 2). Table 5F.2 illustrates suggestions put forward by participants to educators and peers to help schools become more inclusive and culturally responsive.

Table 5F.2: Learners' Proposal to make Schools more Inclusive

Stakeholders	Learners' Proposals
SMT Members need to:	• *"listen to the ideas of all learners";* • *"organize more extra-curricular and sport activities";* • *"treat students as human beings";* • *"take concrete actions against bullying";* • *"avoid shouting and labelling students";* • *"understand learners better";* • *"address all learners by name";* • *"treat all learners equitably";* • *"visit classrooms regularly".*
Teachers need to:	• *"understand students' difficulties";* • *"decorate and make classrooms more welcoming";* • *"include all students and avoid preferences";* • *"make sure all students understood lessons";* • *"reduce the amount of homework";* • *"organize more group work activities";* • *"involve all learners during lessons";* • *"reduce shouting and picking on the same students";* • *"organize more interesting lessons and encourage students even when they do badly in tests or exams".*
LSEs need to:	• *"support and help all students in class";* • *"help more our teachers in class";* • *"include their students with other learners in class";* • *"use resources with all learners in the class".*
Learners need to:	• *"help and support each other";* • *"avoid bullying and picking on other students";* • *"be tolerant and to respect each others' opinions";* • *"obey teachers and LSEs in class";* • *"include and to play with all learners during breaks".*

The above proposals justified the need for more inclusive processes and practices that enabled the transformation of schools and classrooms into PLCs. The latter need was also evidenced by findings from questionnaires, interviews, job-shadowing sessions, and class participant observations.

5F.3 Conclusion

The analysis of the collected data from focus groups indicates that meaningful learning occurs in settings where creativity, inquiry and critical-thinking activities form an integral part of instruction. Hence, responsive learning environments adapt to the individual needs of all students and encourage learning by promoting collaboration among learners.

Section 5G: General Conclusion

Merging data Findings

5G.1 Minority Learners, Inclusive Education and Deficit-Thinking

The research tools (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, job-shadowing sessions, participant observations, sociometric tests and focus groups) and the inter-related analysis of the gathered quantitative and qualitative data helped the researcher to address the research study's proposed research questions in Chapter 1: Sub-Section 1.5.1. Hence, the researcher:

- Identified cohorts of minority learner groups and analysed challenges faced by these learners in the local educational system because of neoliberal logics.
- Reviewed teaching strategies; probed local additional support service structures; and examined social relationships among learners in local classrooms.
- Determined the level of engagement of learners and parents in decision-making processes in local educational settings.
- Investigated leadership profiles that enabled and sustained inclusive processes and practices under which quality teaching thrived.
- Scrutinized challenges posed by neoliberalism faced by *policymakers*, *Directors*, *CPs*, *SMTs*, *teachers* and *LSEs* to transform the educational system into an inclusive and culturally-responsive one.

Collected data indicated that because of globalization and neoliberalism, local schools experienced an increase in minority learners (arranged in descending order):

1. Learners with physical disabilities and/or phychological conditions.
2. Learners with diverse learning skills and abilities.
3. Learners with diverse aptitudes towards schooling.
4. Learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.
5. Learners from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
6. Learners with communication difficulties.
7. Learners with diverse religious and/or faith backgrounds.
8. Learners with gender differences.

Apart from academic difficulties, minority learners presented *financial*; *language and communication*; *behavioural and emotional*; *social and parental*; *socialization*; *health and mental health* challenges, which affected teaching experiences negatively. For this reason, the NCF (2012) encouraged, "a pedagogy based on the celebration of and the respect for the vast repertoire of diversity, needs and social differences" to enhance quality education for all learners (10). However, analysed data indicated the lack of a clear vision for the implementation of 'inclusive education' due to:

- The absence of a national framework to address 'deficit-thinking' and to guide the change process in favour of 'education for all';
- The lack of college-school-based inclusive policies to facilitate the transformation of colleges and schools into PLCs; and
- The lack of inclusion-based key priorities and measures in CDPs and SDPs to plan, measure and improve teaching and learning processes for all learners.

The aforementioned shortages generated system-wide difficulties to institutionalize an unanimously agreed upon definition of 'inclusive education', which created dilemmas on "how to teach inclusively and how to create inclusive schools" (Allan, 2008, 112). In this regard, the majority of participants linked 'inclusive education' with 'special education provision', namely with issues of *disability*, *access* and *placement*, rather than placing the concept into the realm of diversity, i.e. a terrain that "incorporates a more extensive spectrum of concerns and discources" (Thomas, 2013, 474). The lack of consensus on the theoretical and practical (WHAT & HOW) meaning of 'inclusive education' also resulted as a problematic factor for the institutionalization of inclusion (how best to respond to the diverse needs of diverse learners) throughout the diverse hierarchical levels of the local educational system.

Moreover, the above uncertainties indirectly helped the six components of the 'deficit ideology' to permeate in the educational system's processes and procedures. To this effect, findings indicated the prevalence of 'diagnosing-labelling-categorizing' practices to 'fix' minority learners' weaknesses by providing compensatory teaching programs based on 'class-withdrawal' approaches. Conversely, issues of *participation and fellowship*, *quality*, *balancing unity and diversity*, and *inclusive teaching*, occured with less prominence in the data analysis. Hence, the majority of educators attributed failure to learners' weaknesses rather than to the way schools functioned.

5G.2 Barriers and Challenges to Inclusive Education

Findings from all data sources revealed systemic weaknesses, which hindered the transformation process of the local educational system. In this regard, the identified general system-wide weaknesses included:

- Lack of conceptual clarity and shared vision on 'inclusive education' because of a culture (attitudes, beliefs & mentalities) immersed in 'deficit-thinking';
- Protection of the 'status quo' or fear of high leverage change for 'education for all';

- Neo-liberal market orientations based on competition and excessive demands for higher academic standards that perpetuate one-size-fits-all teaching approaches to accommodate the needs of the 'most affluent learners';
- Governance, leadership and QA deficits that reinforced 'crisis management' and limited strategic planning to address societal and learners' emerging needs;
- Knowledge and competence shortfalls to cope with deficit-thinking, inclusion and multiculturalism, and differentiation; and
- Lack of a proactive and standardized model for additional support services, which focused only on 'fixing' learners' diagnosed deficiencies through statementing procedures and 'class-withdrawal' practices.

The above six system-wide weaknesses generated other more specific challenges at Ministry-Directorate; Departmental; College; School and Class levels, as illustrated in Table 5G.1.

Table 5G.1: Challenges and Barriers at Different System Levels

System Levels	Identified Most Predominant Barriers & Challenges
Ministerial-Directorate	• Weak channels of communication, which facilitated system fragmentation and lack of ownership for inclusive education. • National regulatory framework documents (legislation & policy) lacked a coherent and consistent vision for 'education for all'. • Inability to attract candidates to enter the teaching profession due to low financial packages, rigid career parthways, and increased stress and working demands. • The perceived lack of meritocracy during selection processes reduced educators' trust in the effectiveness of the current recruitment system. • 'Top-Down' approaches with Directorates imposing orders or directives on colleges and schools. • General reform fatigue due to continuous changes. • Lack of targeted financial assistance and resourcing (human and physical) for inclusive education. • Ineffective and disempowering SEN support services. • Weak QA cycles to monitor and review systemic processes. • Ineffective CPD structures (duration, rhythm, format and mode).
Departmental	• Integrative-deficit oriented approaches rather than strategic and/or systemic leadership for inclusive education. • Silo mentalities and lack of collaborative research-based inter-intra departmental approaches.

	• Limited decentralisation, resulting in lack of shared decision-making and lack of school autonomy and networking. • Unrealistic demands and standards on colleges and schools. • Lack of monitoring of the quality of the teaching provision. • Ineffective mentoring structure to support class teachers. • Exam-oriented curricula (LOFs failed to re-address the situation). • Support services not addressing mainstream capacity-building. • Lengthy and unsustainable procedures for additional support. • Statementing practices reinforced the ‘deficit-medical’ model and perpetuated school-class segregation or exclusion.
College	• Lack of college-based holistic vision for inclusion. • Lack of inter and intra collegial ‘joined up’ initiatives because of closed working cultures. • Lack of college networking and QA processes. • Ineffective lines of communication – COH meetings not used as critical mediums to bring about effective change. • Lack of support to CPs to sustain an inclusive vision because of limited expertise on ‘inclusive education’. • College-based training not aligned with college needs. • Lack of synergy between ministerial-directorate-departmental demands and college-school-classroom realities. • Lack of multi-disciplinary work among college-based support specialists, who failed to develop mainstream college capacity for inclusive education.
School	• Lack of school policies or key SDP actions for inclusion. • Over-reliance on specialist services, ‘withdrawal’ practices and compensatory teaching programs. • Emphasis on diagnosing and labelling rather than on mixed-ability teaching practices. • School environments and climate not condusive to inclusive learning. • Limited human, financial and material resources. • Weak IEP processes and rigid disciplinary procedures to control students’ behaviour. • Rigid teaching and assessment techniques. • Sporadic community partnerships and lack of learner engagement and weak school-home liaisons. • Lack of relational trust and collective accountability. • Sporadic monitoring of the teaching process. • Lack of synergy between educators' needs and PD sessions.
Classroom	• Wide spectrum of diversity issues, which affected teachers’ attitudes and willingness for inclusive education. • Rigid disciplinary rules and routines. • Unresponsive class climates.

	• Lack or ineffective use of class resources and limited ethic of care approaches to sustain inclusive teaching. • One-size-fits-all teaching and selective assessment techniques. • Difficulties to plan and implement differentiation. • Protection of the most affluent groups of learners. • Lack of collaboration among teachers and LSEs. • Lack of student engagement during lessons and class decision-making processes as well as limited parental involvement. • Over-reliance on needs identification, statementing procedures and additional support provision.

In addition, data analysis indicated weaknesses in the provision of additional support services, namely:

- An over-reliance on referral procedures, which negatively affected the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of LSE provision.
- Lack of rigid but equitable needs identification and statementing eligibility criteria, which contributed to the continuing rise in numbers of statementing referrals.
- Weak IEP, Transition and Home-School liaison processes, which are delegated to LSEs. The role of the INCO also needs redefinition.
- Lack of multi-disciplinary work and limited coordination among multi-disciplinary teams in colleges and schools. Services did not sustain mainstream school capacity building but aimed to 'fix' and 'fit' minority learners in mainstream schools.

Finally, focus groups also helped to distill other challenges to inclusion, which ranged from *students' academic abilities* to *learners' expectations, attention, behaviour and self-esteem* to *cultural or language barriers* to *bullying, friendship and socialization issues* to *school/homework* to *educators' attitudes* in classrooms.

5G.3 Leadership and Inclusive Education

Research (Sharma, 2014) not only indicated leadership as a crucial component to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' from educational settings but also exposed 'inclusive education' as a key challenge for educational leaders. Leithwood (2000) argued that the transformation of schools into inclusive and culturally responsive settings required all educational settings to augment their internal capacity by promoting *leadership with a moral purpose*; *leadership to understand the change process*; *leadership for relationship building*; *leadership for knowledge creation and sharing*; and *leadership for coherence making* (Fullun, 2001). In this regard, research findings indicated that current leadership practices hindered change for improvement processes. To this effect,

participants viewed leadership as 'behaviour' (the ability to manage people) rather than 'action' (the capacity to enhance proactive ideas) and encouraged *short-medium term administrative-managerial issues* over *long-term vision setting and implementation*. The latter reinforced 'bureaucratic and technical-rational authority' over 'professional authority'. Table 5G.2 below illustrates identified system-wide leadership shortfalls for inclusive education.

Table 5G.2: System-wide Leadership Shortfalls

Identified Leadership Challenges
• *Centralized and bureaucratic leadership* rather than co-participating in decision-making processes. Educators felt as 'implementers' of decisions made at higher system levels.
• *General unwillingness and lack of motivation* to implement decisions taken by top-level managers without consultation with educators.
• *Limited vision for inclusive education,* which is viewed as a mechanical practice through special service provisions rather than as long-termed developmental and transformational process.
• *Lack of systemic and strategic planning* for inclusive education caused by the absence of a national inclusive education framework, policy and strategy.
• *Policy development and implementation weaknesses* due to weak QA processes and lack of ownership and commitment.
• *Lack of accountability* for inclusive education because of lack of structures to support the inclusion philosophy.
• *Silo working mentalities* resulting in lack of system-wide collaboration.
• *Lack of synergy* among the various system sectors leading to lack of relation trust.
• *Unclear roles and boundaries,* which result in conflicting messages, work duplication and lack of time to supervise the implementation of decisions.
• *Lack of knowledge and expertise* to transform schools into PLCs.

More specifically, CPs and SMT members, complained about: *lack of autonomy and executive power*; *lack of trust from National Authorities*; *centralized bureaucracy* (statistical data requests; answering of mails/calls) *and day-to-day school operations* (filling of referral forms), *which reduced contact time with educators for constructive discussions*; *lack of time to focus on the teaching and learning process*; *lack of focused training and mentoring practices*; and *ineffective ELC and CoH structures to enhance shared decision-making*. Moreover, data also revealed weaknesses in: *problem-solving and conflict resolution skills*; *understanding, appreciating and making use of the expertise of others*; and *sustaining supportive relationships with staff*.

Finally, Sergiovanni (1992) argued that strategic planning was essential for the implementation of inclusive education. However, the analysed data indicated shortfalls in the development and implementation process of CDPs and SDPs, mainly because of lack of staff involvement and limited internal and external monitoring and reviewing. Moreover, analysed CDPs and SDPs lacked to clearly indicate: *College and/or School Improvement*; *Staff Development issues*; *Strategies for the better use of school-class resources*; *Management of change issues*; and *Enhancing and enabling approaches*. In turn, the latter identified weaknesses denoted lack of systemic vision and planning for inclusive education.

5G.4 Concluding Remarks

Findings from all data sources revealed that the local educational system needed effective changes at all system levels to offer high quality education to all learners. Hence, the need to re-structure and to re-culture processes and practices to transform all educational settings into PLCs by addressing all identified barriers, i.e.: *Leadership and Governance barriers*; *Operational, Recruitment and Financial barriers*; *Special Support Services barriers*; *Departmental barriers*; *Attitudinal and Training barriers*; and *Teaching and QA barriers*. Moreover, the research study aimed to provide realistic recommendations on how to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' in favour of inclusive schooling. In so doing, the researcher identified seven themes that required addressing to develop colleges, schools and classrooms for all. Hence, the need for:

1. A Proactive, Dynamic and Forward-Looking Education Ministry;
2. Meaningful Leadership and Strong Governance;
3. Engaging Teaching Pedagogies and Balanced Assessment Techniques;
4. Sustainable, Empowering and Equitable Support Services;
5. Productive Partnerships within and beyond educational settings;
6. Ensuring Collective Accountability and High-Quality Standards; and
7. Sustained, Productive and Longitudinal Training Opportunities.

The above themes also formed the basis of the 're-positioning-of-the-self' technique through inclusive leadership, as discussed in the next two chapters (Chapter 6 and 7). The latter not only describe in detail the 'repositioning-of-the-self' technique, but also propose a number of evidence-based recommendations that would help the local system to become more inclusive, democratic, socially just and culturally responsive.

Chapter 6: The ‘Re-Positioning-of-the-Self’ Strategy

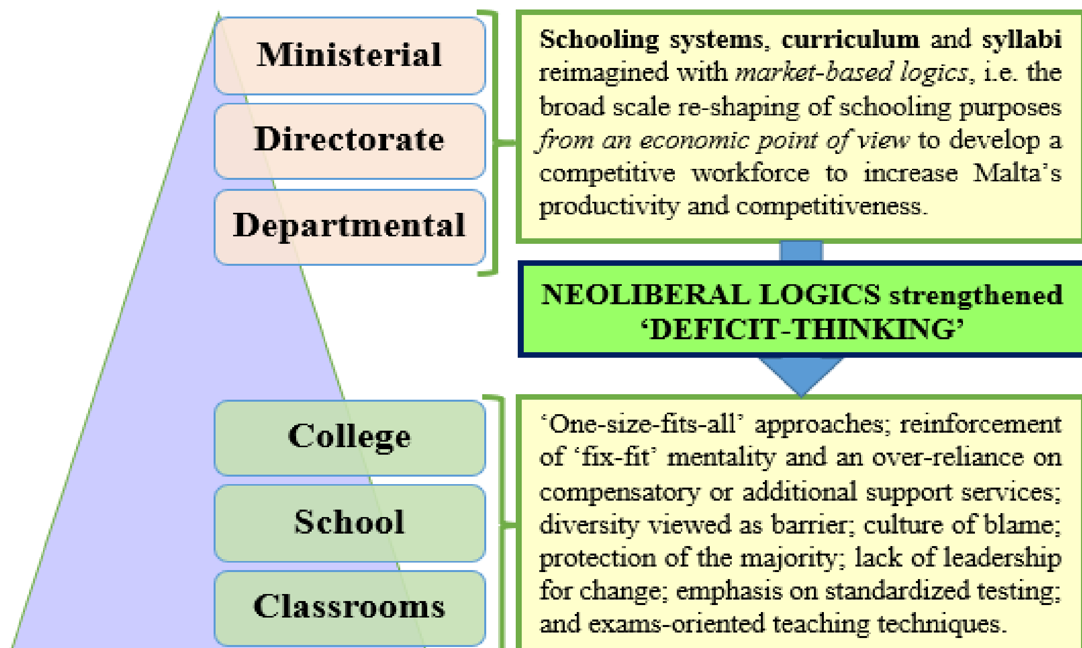
Re-Culturing and Re-Structuring the Maltese Educational System

6.1 Introduction

This chapter utilizes the main research findings that emerged from the different data sources to propose practical and pragmatic alternatives to the ‘deficit’ ideology, in order to support the ‘reculturing’ and ‘restructuring’ process of colleges and schools into equitable, socially just, and inclusive learning communities. The main objective is to improve the quality of the educational provision, by regarding ‘differences’ as a ‘resource’, to foster “profound respect for and encouragement of ‘diversity’, where all differences among educators, learners, and parents are celebrated, rather than seen as ‘problems’ to remedy” (Theoharis, 2010, 10). In essence, this chapter aims: to enhance knowledge, skills, and dispositions to overcome ‘deficit-thinking’ practices; to build a shared vision for success for diverse learners, to ensure that the different perspectives of all educational stakeholders are valued and respected, and to promote collaboration and ‘collective responsibility’ for building systemic capacity for culturally-responsive and inclusive schooling.

Analysed data in Chapter 5 revealed that ‘neoliberal approaches to education’ in MEDE’s top management levels (Ministerial, Directorate, Departmental) helped to sustain and reinforce ‘deficit-thinking’ in colleges, schools, and classrooms (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: ‘Deficit-Thinking’ manifestation in the local Educational System



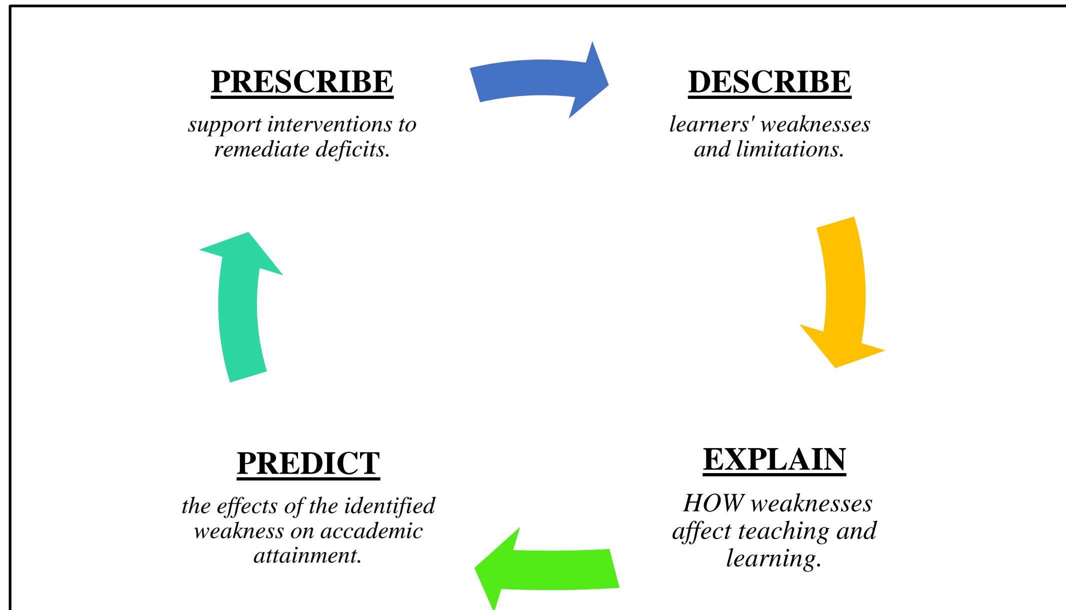
Collected evidence showed that ‘deficit-thinking’ pervaded educational discourse and suffused the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour of educators vis-à-vis the educability of

minority learners. Essentially, ‘deficit-thinking’ negatively influenced the ‘discursive positioning’ of local educators, which, indirectly affected the way educators defined, related to, and interacted with minority learners (Chapter 5: Sub-Section 5B.3). To this effect, minority learners were rountinely: (a) tracked in special educational programmes with low academic expectations or in low-level compensatory classrooms; (b) labelled as ‘dropouts’ and ‘blamed’ for academic failure; and (c) referred for additional support services (Chapter 5: Sub-Sections 5B.3.2 to 5B.3.5). In turn, these practices generated and reinforced a culture of ‘subtractive schooling’, which systematically marginalized minority learners’ language, culture, and academic wellbeing. Moreover, research data revealed system-wide lacunas, which concealed authentic improvement processes for ‘inclusive education’ in colleges or schools. In this regard, lacunas were identified in:

a) *Governance processes* and *practices*, due to ‘top-down’ management approaches, which resulted in lack of college and school autonomy, lack of conceptual clarity on ‘inclusive education’, lack of meritocracy in recruitment procedures, and weak policy development and implementation standards.
b) *Leadership processes*, which lacked shared decision-making practices and a limited vision for the broad view of ‘inclusive education’, because of lack of long-term and strategic planning. The latter resulted in day-to-day crisis management practices to deal with diversity issues.
c) *Teaching pedagogies*, which offered limited opportunities for dialogic interactions with other learners, and *general assessment practices* that resulted as unresponsive to the social, psychological, and academic needs of diverse learners.
d) *Relationships among educators* due to lack of time, space, and relational and faculty trust among educators for constructive dialogue and collaborative practices.
e) *Home-school liaison* and *student engagement*, which resulted mainly from the ‘us vs. them’ mentality. The latter generated lack of learner, parental, and community engagement at college, school, and classroom levels.
f) *Additional support services*, which focused on ‘fixing’ the weaknesses of minority learners to help them ‘fit’ in mainstream schools. This approach limited educators’ ‘collective responsibility’ for all students’ learning.
g) *Quality assurance mechanisms* that lacked consistency and accountability in both internal and external reviewing processes and practices.
h) *CPD provision*, which resulted as sporadic and not prioritised by college and school leadership to improve students’ attainment levels.

In addition, the above-challenges sustained the '*describe-explain-predict-prescribe*' cycle, which led to the over-identification and over-labelling of SEN students and to an over-representation of minority learners in special educational programs. The latter resulted in lowered expectations for minority students and in disparity gaps (Valencia, 1997) (Figure 6.2)

Figure 6.2: The *Describe-Explain-Predict-Prescribe* Cycle



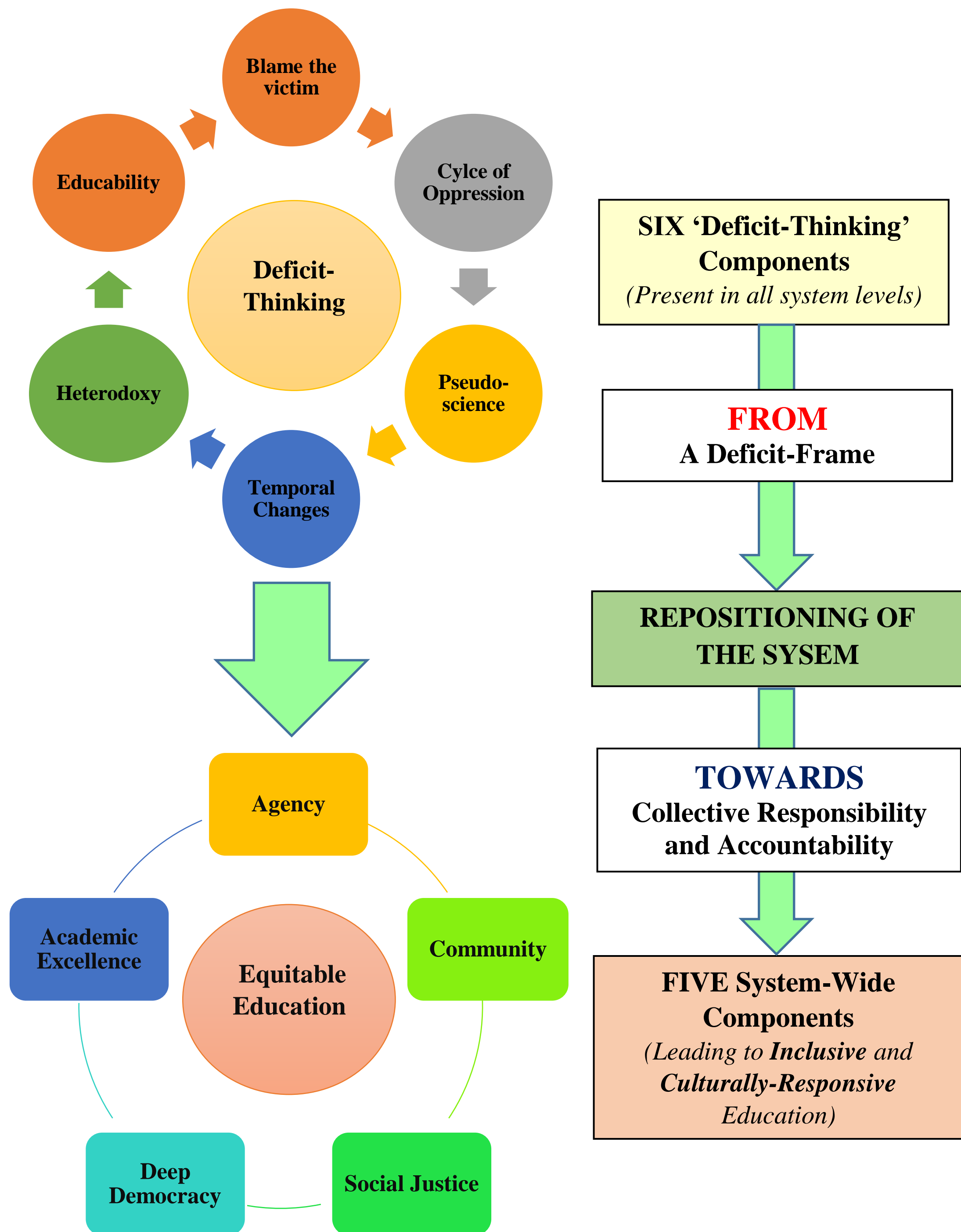
In essence, the presented cycle: (1) reinforced the assumption that not all students can learn and/or experience success; (2) strengthened the 'one-size-fits-all' mentality; and (3) placed the 'blame' for educational failure on minority learners. Ofsted (2010) also concluded that "if school engaged in fully inclusive teaching strategies, many learners would not be labelled as SEN" (54). Hence, to curb the negative effects of 'deficit-thinking', this thesis proposes the 'repositioning-of the-self' concept as: *the basis for the elimination of educational labelling and stereotypes; the medium for the abolition of discrimination and marginalisation;* and *the means for the elimination of exclusion*, to create genuine 'communities of difference' or 'educational settings' that respect all forms of diversity; embrace inclusivity, democracy, and equity; and promote the shared norms of commitment to reflection, critique, dialogue, and understanding of diverse perspectives. More specifically, the development of college and school communities that uphold the notion of "cosmopolitan unity amidst valued diversity", to facilitate the development of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, relationships, and strategies conducive to inclusive education (Green, 2000, 96).

6.2 The 'Repositioning-of-the-Self' Concept

Despite the proliferation of educational reforms for 'school effectiveness' and 'improvement thinking' (to close 'achievement and opportunity gaps' among different learners), dominant policies, structures, and practices in schools continued to reinforce and exacerbate educational inequities, rooted in the deficit-cognitive-frame. Research findings also revealed that barriers to 'inclusive education' emanated from neoliberal views on 'effectiveness' and the narrow perspectives on 'education for all', rather than from the cognitive abilities, cultural backgrounds, and/or lived experiences of minority learner groups. To this effect, Gutierrez (2006) pointed out the, "urgency to develop a new educational discourse and an analytical framework that exposes the persistence of inequity and supremacy in educational policy and practice" (223). Hence, the current study proposes the 'repositioning-of-the-self' technique/strategy to rethink educational goals and discourse as well as re-culture processes and practices with a lens of equity. The ultimate objective is to stimulate 'equitable improvement with attitude' to create inclusive and democratic "contexts for learning", which embrace *high-leverage* change and focus on the 'fairness of learning outcomes' to reduce attainment gaps by curbing 'deficit-thinking' logics (Galloway and Ishimaru, 2015, 9). In this regard, the proposed strategy helps all educators to understand how to exercise social capital to build trust and to promote 'ownership of responsibility' to authentically and intrinsically change instructional practices to meet the needs of all students. Essentially, the recommended technique embeds first (changes in curriculum, changes in schedules, and adaptations of the original process without disturbing equilibrium) and second (contestation of the current collective mental models and core processes of the organisation) order change, to enable a dynamic change process that facilitates the holistic reconceptualisation and transformation of all educational settings. The latter because institutionalized change for 'inclusive education' involves not only the reorganisation of the system but also demands a change in the way educators think and interact within the system.

The 'repositioning-of-the-self' concept presents a solid platform for action that is rooted within an 'ecology of equity' to replace the six 'deficit-thinking' components with the "tools of agency, community, social justice, deep democracy, and academic excellence" (Shields, Bishop, and Mazawi, 2004, 117). The purpose of the proposed repositioning is to increase collective responsibility and accountability for all students' learning to enable *inclusive* and *culturally-responsive* schooling (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3: The Proposed 'Repositioning-of-the-Self' Model



The illustrated conceptual model of the 'repositioning-of-the-self' theory demonstrates the interdependence of 'inclusive education' on 'educational equity'. The latter inter-relationship shows that the elimination of 'deficit-thinking' (in favour of inclusive and culturally-responsive education) treads through the rethinking and restructuring of the educational system on the 'principle of equity'. This is because in the proposed concept 'equity' is defined as an approach to practice that counters 'deficit-framed' systems,

policies, structures, and practices that create and reinforce educational disparities for minority learners. To this effect, the 'repositioning' technique embraces a 'continuum of practice' (or a developmental process) to *raise awareness*, *enhance understanding*, *develop competences*, and *ensure responsiveness* for equitable education. Hence, the proposed concept encourages educational stakeholders to challenge their 'foundations of practice' (beliefs, assumptions, and strategies) to reposition themselves (both collectively and individually) within discourse of 'self-determination' (i.e.: discourse that focuses on the human potential of diverse learners) (Shields and Edwards, 2005).

To summarise, the 'repositioning-of-the-self' technique aims to cultivate and sustain a conceptual shift from a 'system-centered approach' (that promotes teacher-authority) towards '*person-centered processes and practices*' (that embrace diversity, fairness, integrity, and social justice). The latter because the shift towards 'educational equity' required a fair redistribution of 'power' and 'resources' to redress the historical, and moral 'educational debt' owed to minority learners (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

6.2.1 Principal Tenets of the 'Repositioning-of-the-Self' Concept

The proposed concept presents *five* system-wide components, which (together) aim to "challenge the 'status quo' and to move schooling beyond contrived collegiality towards shared responsibility and collective accountability to create and shape ongoing improvement" (Edwards, 2012, 59). Essentially, the 'rethinking' process involves the development of strong interactional practices to foster enhanced constructive dialogue and collaborative learning for continuous professional growth towards equitable and inclusive education. In this regard, high leverage change for equitable education moves through the active engagement of all stakeholders by accepting, prioritizing, valuing, and validating the different voices and experiences of educators, parents and learners in the decision-making process. To this effect, the 'repositioning-of-the-self' strategy creates *space* and *opportunities* for all stakeholders to challenge their cultural-deficit-theorising (beliefs, attitudes, actions, and behaviours) with new understandings and practices for inclusive education. Hence, the five components involved in the pursuit of equity, include:

1) **Agency** as a *tool for balancing power* to promote democratic education and enable a social justice agenda, which is concerned with eliminating 'educational inequities' to raise attainment levels and improve learning opportunities for all students. Within

the educational sphere, issues of 'status'[5] and 'power relations'[6] among educational stakeholders generated 'power imbalances'[7], which resulted in subtractive schooling, pathologizing practices, and persistent academic failure for minority students. Thus, the need for the educational system to grow a sense of agency, commitment, and self-efficacy to (a) embrace diversity; (b) encourage shared responsibility to address educational inequities; and (c) construct new knowledge and practices on the notion of schools as democratic and socially just public spheres (Priestly, 2015). To this effect, '*teacher agency*' plays a crucial role since it is associated with the educators' capacity (individual and collective) to make proactive decisions and to take equitable initiatives to overcome 'power imbalances' to remove educational and structural barriers for inclusive education. Essentially, 'agency' promotes the effective use and coordination of resources, time, structures, and roles to purposefully improve the instructional and organisational capacity of all educators to challenge the status quo, contest the view of teaching as an isolated teacher-classroom activity, question the effectiveness of neoliberal approaches to education, and increase relational agency.

2) **Community** as a *tool for creating inclusive education* by developing 'communities of practice' that cherish 'diversity' and consider 'learning' as a process of social participation, which combines *community* (learning as belonging) and *identity* (learning as becoming) to address *meaning* (learning as experience) and *practice* (learning as doing). The main focus is on building strong relationships, strengthening faculty trust, and maintaining ongoing deliberate dialogue to create 'communities of difference', in which diverse stakeholders (with differing beliefs, values, goals, and assumptions) come together to achieve cohesion through the negotiation of shared purposes and norms of behaviour (Shields, 2005). The aim is to transform educational settings into genuine[8] and authentic[9] 'communities' that promote the values of *inclusivity* and *respect* and the norms of *continuous reflection*, *dialogue*, *constructive critique*, and *understanding of different perspectives*. In this regard, Shields (2005) posited that "cross-difference conversations on the common ground of basic humane values

[5]***Status***: the rank or position one holds in society and the school.
[6]***Power Relations***: the ability of human agency to exert control in the school environment.
[7]***Power Imbalances***: asymmetrical relations of power among teachers, parents and students in schools.
[8]A ***genuine school community*** is one where all stakeholders make a concerted effort to understand each other and to develop positive and inclusive relationships among all participants (not just among those who represent established, dominant, and powerful groups).
[9]An ***authentic school community*** refers to the quality of life experienced by educators, learners, and parents in the school, i.e. lived experiences in the school are respectful, inclusive, and empowering or disrespectful, marginalizing, and disempowering.

lead to tolerant understanding of differing opinions, to deeper respect, to reciprocal exchanges, to areas of agreement and experience-founded trust, and to collaborative projects for mutual benefit" (73). 'Communities of difference' reject the 'blaming the victim' mentality, negotiate with purpose the status quo in colleges and schools to challenge marginalization norms, and articulate a strong vision for inclusive and participative learning settings. Hence, colleges/schools that promote an understanding grounded in explicit, negotiated, and shared beliefs about fundamental principles, processes and values, rather than on just common norms.

3) **Social Justice** as a *tool for validation* to identify and analyse educational injustices (deriving from dominant neoliberal discourses and approaches) and to outline and develop equitable policies and democratic practices. The objective is to provide <u>all</u> students with quality education, which moves beyond benchmarking achievement, standardized measures, diagnostic labelling, and performance indicators to quantify the social, academic, and economic outcomes of schooling (Ball, 2016; Connel, 2013). Hence, an educational system that fosters a '*counter-hegemonic discourse*'[10] that promotes care for others, collegiality, respect, and mutual support, as opposed to the current neoliberal principles of "winning at all costs, ruthless competitiveness and the cult of individualism" (Hager and Davis, 2018, 201). In this regard, focus is on the provision of high quality curricular and pedagogical practices that validate the experiences and voices all students (especially those of minority learners) to address 'deficit' beliefs and marginalization issues. Hence, the educational system needs to: (1) nurture commitment to social justice as part of educators' *sense of purpose*; (2) support educators to develop *competencies* in inclusive pedagogical approaches; (3) empower educators with more *autonomy* to enable transformational change; and (4) improve educators' *reflexivity* to enable critical reflection of teaching processes and practices in relation to student diversity (Pantic, 2015). Altogether, the latter aspects enable educators to continuously focus on the *integral* value of education as the greatest 'human equalizer'.

4) **Deep Democracy** as a *tool to build a shared understanding* for inclusive education, where all voices (the voice of the majority and that of the minority) are heard and validated. To this effect, the concept of 'deep democracy' is intrinsically connected

[10]***<u>Counter-hegemonic discourse</u>*** refers to discourse that is grounded in the principles of democracy; freedom to exercise one's full humanity; fairness; and equity. The latter discourse rejects the neoliberal view of students as future 'human capital' to the capitalist and corporate job-market.

with the notion of 'community', i.e. the development of a 'community of practice' that embraces diversity, enables collaboration, and enhances dialogue. Essentially, 'deep democracy' encapsulates the key principles of agency, equity, social justice, diversity, and inclusivity to transform schools into 'communities of difference' that embrace UNESCO's four pillars of learning (i.e. *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to live together*; *learning to be*). In this regard, 'deep democracy' serves as a platform for colleges and schools to engage all stakeholders in constructive conversations and meaningful dialogue to critically and collectively reflect upon current educational policies, processes, and practices for greater social equity and justice. The latter self-examination enables schools, as democratic institutions of learning, to reposition themselves in favour of a more humanist vision of education. In essence, the deliberation and the validation of diverse voices (afforded by 'deep democracy') recognizes the diversity of lived realities, re-affirms a common core of universal values, and creates opportunities for positive change to redress current educational gaps. To summarise, 'deep democracy' promotes the active engagement of all educational stakeholders (educators, parents and learners) to enable a new and shared understanding of schooling based on dialogue and collegiality.

5) **Academic Excellence** as a *tool for systemic change* in favour of equitable, socially just, and inclusive education. In this regard, Shields (2004) contended that academic excellence could only be achieved and sustained if all educators repositioned their discourse, attitudes, beliefs, relational and faculty agency, and teaching approaches towards democratic and socially just educational agendas, that are concerned with: (1) educational inequities and disparities; (2) raising educational attainment; and (c) improving outcomes for all learners (Ballard, 2012). In this regard, emphasis is on the reculturing of the current educational system, rather than on pretending learners to change or adapt to the system. Essentially, the aim is to transform all educational settings into PLCs that champion collective accountability for academic excellence, by (a) articulating a vision of learning that is shared by all stakeholders; (b) nurturing instructional programs that are conducive to student learning and staff growth; (c) ensuring effective management of the organisation (including use of resources); (d) promoting collaboration; and (e) engaging in critical reflections for equity.

The above-five components of the 'repositioning-of-the-self' theory serve as a vehicle to develop a vision-based, communication-oriented, value-driven, and person-centered educational system. More specifically, a system that is:

a) **Socially Just** and based on the notion of 'egalitarianism'. In this regard, educators cease to see the world through an 'us vs. them' lens but uphold a 'we' mentality to redress educational challenges. The provision of equal learning opportunities helps to assign learners to the academic and social positions that best correspond to their talents, aptitudes, and motivation. *Critical analysis* of educational processes and practices and *reflective assessment* of educators' beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions are two essential requisites for this process.
b) **Democratic** both as educational goal and as method of instruction to facilitate the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes. The aim is to foster learner-centredness, collaborative, participatory, and interactive approaches, which help to address and/or assuage fears of change. Democratic education encourages a 'connected-school approach' that acknowledges the interdependence of measurable public outcomes and an inclusive emphasis on social justice and care.
c) **Emphatic** to enable educators, parents, and learners to experience the world through the eyes of the most disadvantaged. In this regard, empathy enables 'change' in all aspect of schooling, i.e.: "the hierarchical structures of leadership; time allocation; size of classrooms; kind of relationships encouraged; goals of instruction; modes of evaluation; patterns of interaction; and selection of content" (Noddings, 2010, 221).
d) **Optimistic** to enable all learners (including minority ones) to develop the necessary skills and attitudes to actively engage in the teaching and learning process. In this regard, educators shoulder collective responsibility for all students' learning.

The above values help to sustain the *dignity*, *wellbeing*, and *capacity* of all educational stakeholders through dynamic initiatives and productive relations that increase: *social participation*, *self-esteem*, *self-awareness*, *social skills*, *self-confidence*, and *friendship*. To summarise, the five components of the 'repositioning-of-the-self' concept and the emanating four values, promote 'inclusive education' as the best-placed philosophy, process, and practice to address 'deficit-thinking' issues in colleges and schools, by: (a) enabling a shift in-thinking from surface-level, quick-fix responses towards deeper change processes based on shared decision-making; (b) enhancing a sense of wellbeing and belonging by actively engaging all educational actors in the reshaping process of the educational system; and (c) reducing the tension between 'inclusion as a learning opportunity' and 'inclusion as placement' by replacing discourse on 'deficiency' with 'diversity'. To this effect, change and diversity are no longer viewed as problems but as opportunities, that are central to organisational survival and success.

6.2.2 Systemic Tools for the 'Repositioning-of-the-self' Concept

By adopting a human-rights approach and utilizing a 'critical equity lens', the presented repositioning concept allows participants to understand:

1) How disparity problems and intervention actions are enacted – *from* deficit-framed practices (which aim to 'fix' minority learners) *towards* equity-framed strategies (that target systemic changes);
2) How governance and leadership are practiced – *from* governing through traditional and role-based hierarchy *towards* leadership through collaborative work; and
3) How inquiry is integrated with the organizational culture – *from* engaging in narrow inquiry *towards* continuous and systemic critical reflections.

Hence, the proposed concept rests on three intertwined systemic tools, i.e.: (1) ***good governance***; (2) ***inclusive leadership***; and (3) ***critical reflection for evaluation***. Apart from facilitating the implementation of the 'repositioning-of-the-self' theory, the latter three tools help to nurture and sustain a culture of high-leverage change for inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all learners.

6.2.2.1 Good and Strategic Education Governance

Research (Steer and Smith, 2015; Burns, 2015; OECD, 2015; 2016) refers to 'educational governance' as the process by which governments make and implement policy decisions, that influence the finance and delivery of high quality education for all learners. The rampant increase in neoliberal approaches to education, diversity, and multiculturalism generated new educational challenges, which necessitate responsive and innovative policies, processes, and strategies to develop flexible governing systems that respond effectively to change. To this effect, the concept of 'good, coherent, and multilateral governance' progressed as a fundamental requisite to counteract forces that produce educational inequity or disparity. The latter because 'good governance' acts like "a receptacle to ensure: full respect of human rights, participation of stakeholders in decision-making, transparency and accountability, access to knowledge and/or data, equity, resource management, and the likes that foster responsibility for the realization of goals and objectives to nurture and sustain inclusive educational growth" (Fazekas and Burns, 2012, 153). Similarly, Steer and Smith (2015) remarked that, "the capacity to implement 'inclusive education' depends on the ability of governance mechanisms to permit effective collaboration, clearly define accountability issues and foster strategic behaviours for meaningful change" (32).

In order to enable the successful implementation and operationalisation of the 'repositioning-of-the-self' concept for 'inclusive education', the current research study advocates the use of '*strategic governance*' to create highly democratic and responsive schools. To this effect, research data led to the development of a 'Strategic Educational Governance Framework', which presents six interrelated domains (Figure 6.4). The ultimate aim of the proposed framework is to stimulate critical reflection and to guide strategic decision-making for equitable and inclusive education.

Figure 6.4: The Six Domains in the Governance Framework

(Adapted from: Strategic Education Governance, OECD, 2018, 5).

Each domain in the 'Strategic Educational Governance Framework' includes a set of key operational elements, which target the educational system's efficacy (Table 6.1), by focusing on systemic processes (rather than structures) to pursue a whole-of-system approach for meaningful change. In essence, the key developmental elements facilitate the operationalisation of both the strategic framework and the 'repositioning-of-the-self' theory.

Table 6.1: Framework Domains and Key Developmental Elements

Accountability	Capacity
• Limit system fragmentation. • Set strong procedural boundaries. • Promote a culture of collective learning and improvement. • Strive for policy effectiveness, resource efficiency, increased professionalism and financing sustainability. • Ensure a meritocratic selection process. • Reduce bureaucracy.	• Ensure capacity for policy development, implementation and reviewing. • Stimulate horizontal capacity building to drive high leverage change. • Develop effective CPD for educators. • Maximise knowledge expertise capacity. • Secure the right balance between working experience and qualifications in eligibility criteria.
Knowledge Governance	**Stakeholder Involvement**
• Ensure data-informed decision-making. • Facilitate access to data and knowledge. • Promote a culture of using rich data and knowledge for policy development. • Invest in 'pilot' projects to ensure successful implementation of policies.	• Integrate knowledge & perspectives of all stakeholders in policy-making. • Foster a culture of shared responsibility, support, ownership, and trust. • Mobilise consultation and open dialogue. • Encourage a 'bottom-up' approach.
Strategic Thinking & Planning	**Whole-of-System Perspective**
• Craft, share, and consolidate a systemic vision. • Adapting to changing contexts. • Balance short-term priorities with long-term system vision. • Challenge the 'status quo'. • Encourage forward-looking planning.	• Overcome system inertia. • Develop synergies to moderate tensions. • Ensure upward, downward and horizontal communication. • Promote inclusive leadership. • Encourage internal and external QA. • Ensure sustainability of support services.

(Adapted from: Strategic Education Governance, OECD, 2018, 9)

Apart from regulating and strengthening formal systemic educational institutions and structures, the proposed framework for 'Strategic Educational Governance' lays down the foundations for high-leverage change through the elimination of 'deficit-thinking' processes and practices. In essence, this framework demands managing the complexity and dynamism of the educational system, while steering a clear course towards common goals, by: providing *legitimacy and voice* for broad participation, giving *clear direction*

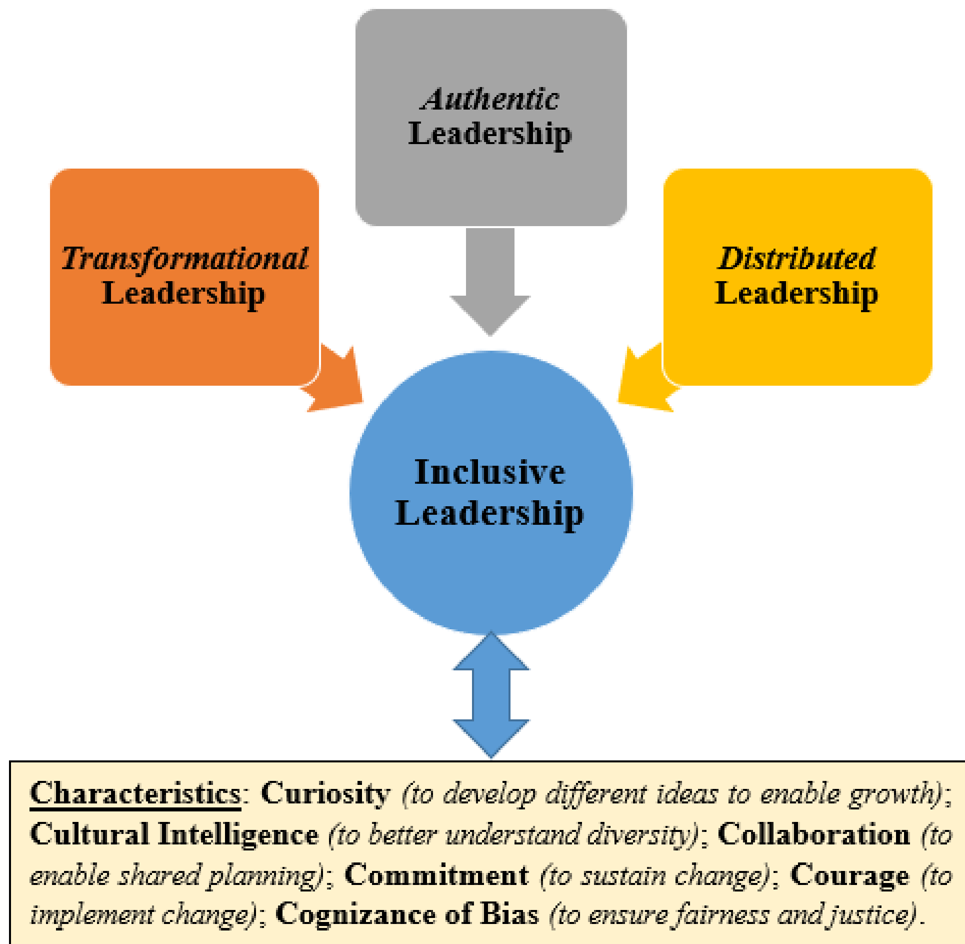
through strategic vision, ensuring *fairness* by promoting equity and rule of law, raising *accountability* for all students' learning, enhancing *performance* by increasing efficacy, and enabling *transparency* through meritocratic practices, openness, and clear channels of communication. In pursuing inclusive policies and practices, both 'efficiency' and 'equity' are not viewed as exclusive elements, rather 'inclusiveness' becomes a key dimension of 'effectiveness' to help colleges and schools respond to the ever-changing educational demands of learners and society.

6.2.2.2 The 'Inclusive Leadership' Style

Another highly important tool for the 'repositioning-of-the-self' strategy is the 'inclusive leadership' style, which acts as a major driving force for 'good and strategic education governance' to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' in favour of equitable education. The latter because the proposed leadership style *guides* "…the interpretation of events for followers; the choice of objectives; the organisation of activities to accomplish the objectives" and *influences* "…the motivation of followers to achieve objectives; the maintenance of cooperative relationships; and the enlistment of support from people outside the organisation" (Maclean, 2017, 13). Essentially, the 'inclusive leadership' style constructed distributed leadership structures for organisational ways of working, and enabled clarity of vision to: (a) enact socially just teaching practices and policies; (b) promote full inclusion; and (c) enhance equity for all students (Mullick, 2013). In essence, the proposed leadership style allows educators, especially educational leaders, to guide meaningful change (by promoting effective planning to overcome resistance and building shared vision) and to acquire the political savvy to maneuver through a static system (which organizationally rewards status quo), while leading a critical mass into and through second order change – reculturing.

However, collected data shows that general leadership practices strived mainly for 'system stability' (through effective management) rather than for 'whole-of-system improvement' (through visionary leadership) for inclusive teaching. To this effect, this study views 'inclusive leadership' as an essential precursor for organizational change, founded on 'collective efforts', rather than on 'positional authority' (Berkovich, 2014). In this regard, the proposed style merges the characteristics of authentic, distributed, and transformational leaderships under 'one style' to enhance strong commitment for equitable education (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5: The 'Inclusive Leadership' Style



To this effect, 'inclusive leadership' homes three core practices:

1) **Setting Direction** or "*Visioning Strategies*" (Conger et. al., 1998, 53), which entails charting a strategic course of action to develop shared understanding. This practice includes (a) promoting an evidence-based vision; (c) establishing high expectations for all learners; and (d) monitoring performance to track progress.
2) **Developing People** or "*Efficacy-Building Strategies*" (Conger et. al., 1998, 56) to provide educational stakeholders with responsive training on "the technical core" of schooling (Fullan, 2014, 6). Equally important are also the provision of personal support and attention to increase optimism and reduce fragmentation.
3) **Redesigning Organizations** or "*Context changing strategies*" (Conger et. al., 1998, 78) to support equitable teaching practices. Emphasis is on collective accountability and responsibility for an 'inclusion-oriented' improvement agenda.

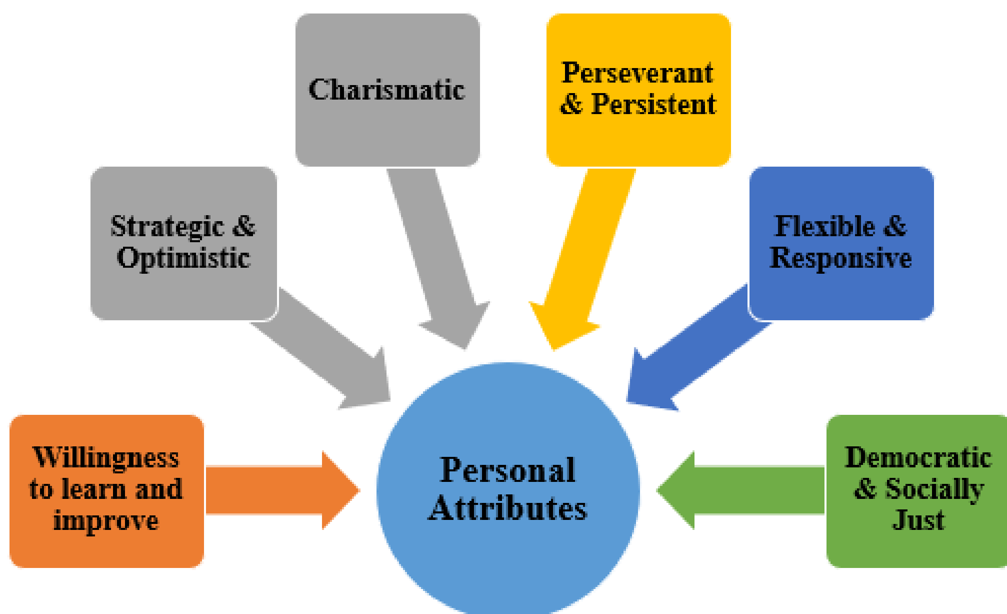
Directly emerging from the above practices, are five key leadership levers, which help to shape a sense of professional community in favour of 'education for all' (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Five Levers of 'Inclusive Leadership'

Key Levers	Leadership Behaviours
Facilitate ***shared understanding*** for inclusive education.	• Develop shared ideas and values. • Valuing personal experiences. • Adhere to equity and democratic values.
Facilitate ***a participatory culture*** for inclusive education.	• Ongoing interactions. • Active questioning and engagement. • Strong Communicate.
Enabling institutional structures that support inclusive leadership.	• Spread leadership opportunities. • Create productive relations. • Enhance leadership skills in stakeholders.
Develop ***open social environments*** in favour of inclusive education.	• Foster respect for all. • Develop a sense of trust and belonging. • Foster co-operative attitudes.
Evaluate and share the impact of inclusive education.	• Prioritize holistic learning. • Evaluate practices and processes. • Review actions collaboratively.

Moreover, the presented five key levers highlight the need for educational leaders with strong attributes to successfully address the challenges of an inclusion-oriented agenda, by helping all educators move from a posture of defensive resistance to change to a re-framed sense of pride and empowerment (Figure 6.6). In this regard, inclusive leaders act as 'moral stewards', 'teachers', and 'community builders' (Senge, 1990).

Figure 6.6: Personal Attributes for Inclusive Leadership

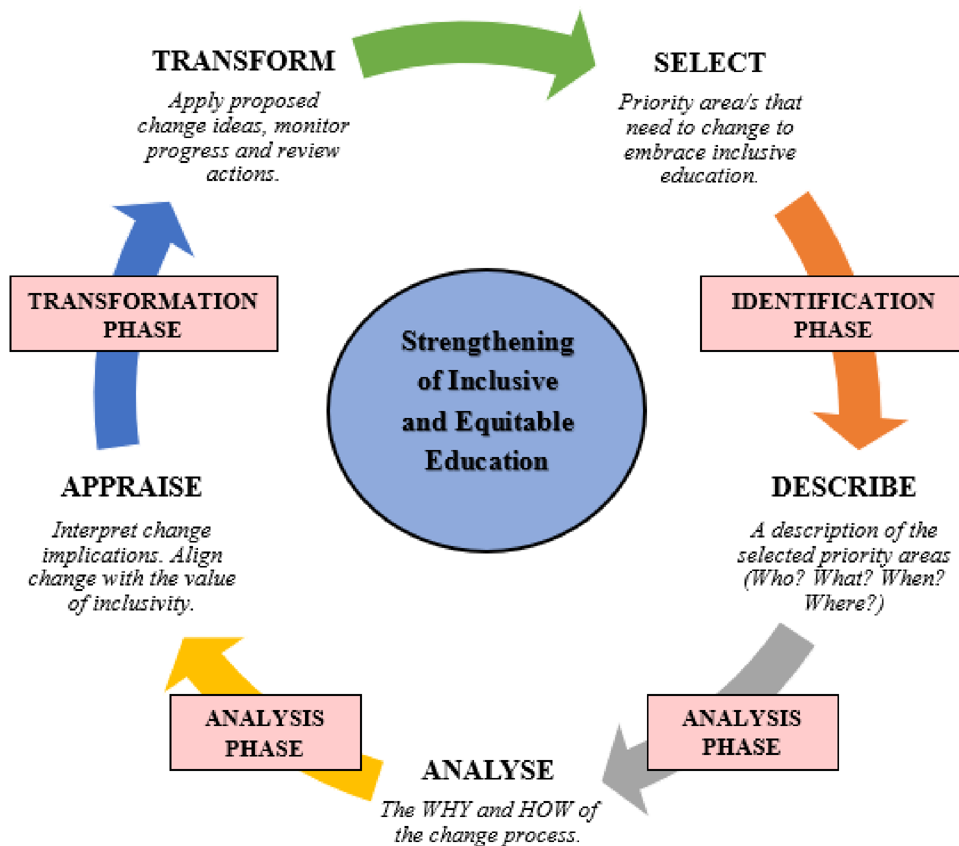


Essentially, inclusive leaders commit themselves to 'equity of outcome', by creating caring and inclusive environments that help to increase the likelihood for students to become successful learners.

6.2.2.3 Critical Reflection for Evaluation

The 'critical reflection' tool strives to create a culture of profound deliberation across all system levels to not only identify but also address challenges for inclusive education. In this regard, this tool is intrinsically linked with 'good governance' and 'inclusive leadership', since critical reflection lies at the heart of strategic governance and inclusive leadership for inclusive education. Hence, the proposed tool presents a consolidated **cycle for deep reflection** to provide colleges and schools the necessary flexibility and knowledge to design and deliver socially just teaching (Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.7: The 'Critical Reflection Cycle' for System Repositioning



The cycle presents three main phases, i.e.: the *identification* phase; the *analysis* phase; and the *transformation* phase, to reculture specific and general educational processes and practices. To this effect, the tool adopts the 'whole-of-community approach' and the 'critical lens for equity and democracy' to:

a) Identify priority change areas and set SMART[11] evidence-based **goals** to improve minority learners' performance, in terms of participation in education (absenteeism, truancy, and retention rates; uptake and effectiveness of additional support services; performance in national and international assessments);
b) Examine the state-of-play of students' educational **experiences** by focusing on their identity as learners and on their levels of participation and engagement in college, school and classroom activities;
c) Challenge neoliberal-deficit-reasoning by prioritizing 'teacher agency' to promote responsive discourse and **agentic positioning** for inclusive and equitable teaching;
d) Develop strong **relationships** or a *pedagogy of relations* based on an 'ethic of care' approach that targets three main 'caring' levels, namely: *caring for the wellbeing of minority learners*; *caring for and having high expectations of minority learners' academic abilities and achievements*; and *caring for the provision of well-managed learning environments*;
e) Enable productive **interactions** between educators and minority learners in schools and classrooms, by balancing the use of discursive and transmission pedagogies to best cater for varied learners' needs and cultural background experiences;
f) Devise an increased range of discursive, cooperative, and interactive **strategies** to create conducive learning environments that prioritise different ways of teaching to provide learners with differential learning opportunities; and
g) Enhance strategic **planning** to facilitate the implementation of discursive strategies that help to change educators' interactions with students, students' interactions with each other, and students' interactions with the curriculum.

In this regard, the 'critical reflection' cycle challenges educators' negative positioning (with regards to minority learners' abilities) and prospects to foster positive schooling, with the aim of raising achievement for all learners.

To summarize, the proposed 'respositioning-of-the-self' concept embraces the responsibility for fashioning an improved educational system, by focusing on 'school improvement', 'social justice', and 'collaborative professional communities', through constructive dialogue to enable in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by educators to facilitate a smooth transition towards the 'broad view of inclusive education'.

[11]***Specific***, ***Measurable***, ***Attainable***, ***Realistic***, ***Time-Bound*** goals help to reduce complacency.

6.3 The 'Repositioning' of the Maltese Educational System

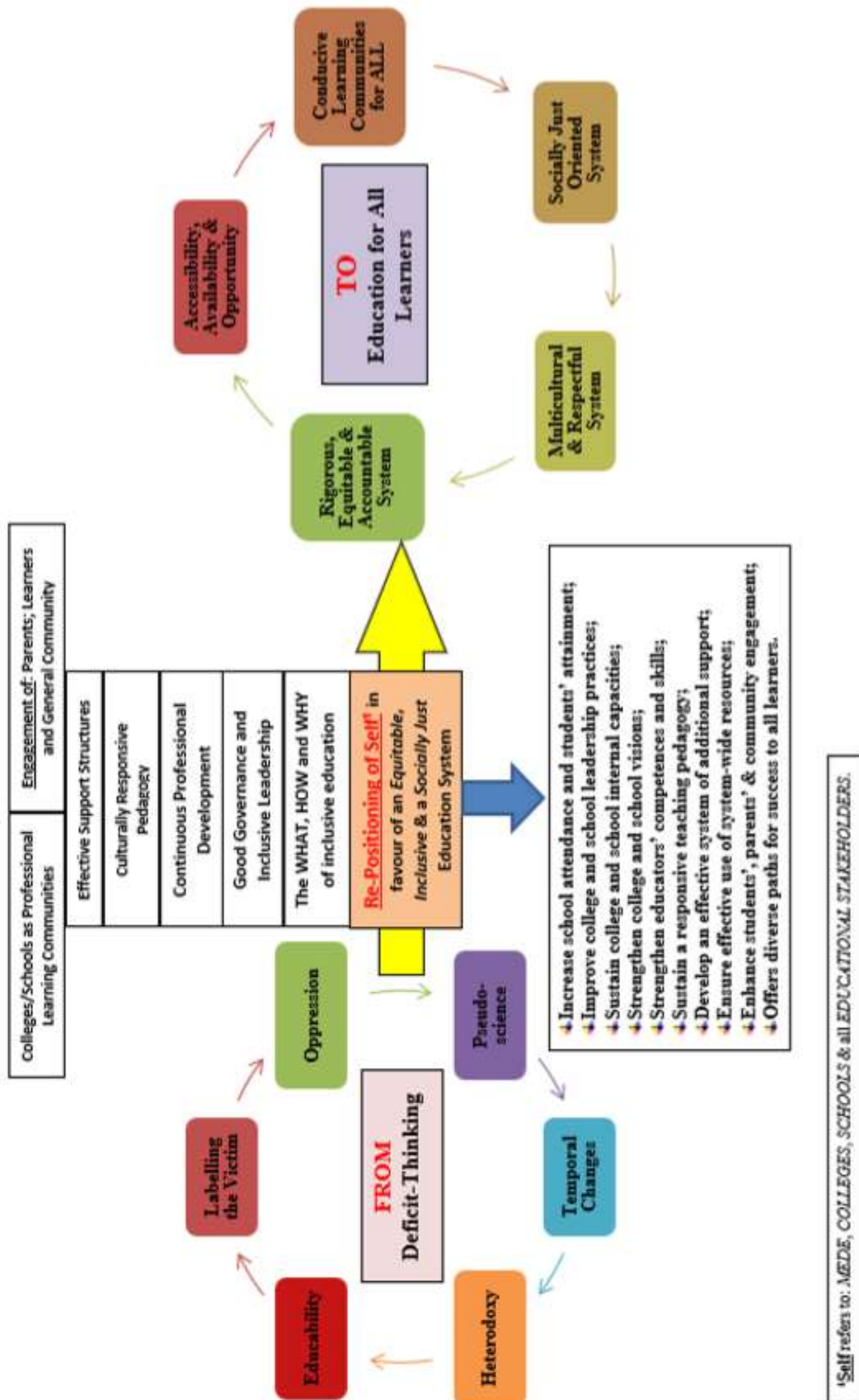
Collected evidence highlighted regulatory, leadership, operational, attitudinal, environmental, and teaching challenges, dilemmas, and pressures, which emanated from 'top-down' fast paced change reforms, that focused on improving national educational outcomes, without building college-school capacity and resilience for inclusive and culturally-responsive schooling. Hence, the need for a strategic developmental process that sustains the 'repositioning' of the local educational system towards a more socially just, equitable, and inclusive culture (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3: Systemic Repositioning

Moving From… A Deficit-Laden Culture	Towards… Inclusive and Equitable Culture
Systemic focus on disability issues.	Responding to student diversity.
Viewing diversity as a challenge.	Perceiving diversity as an opportunity.
Students adapting to the system.	System adapting to students' needs.
One-size-fits-all approaches.	Responsive learning approaches.
Crisis management processes.	Inclusive and strategic leadership.
Piecemeal planning for inclusion.	Strategic planning for inclusion.
Neoliberal-market-based principles and outcomes for schooling.	Equitable, democratic, and socially just principles and outcomes.
Shifting of Responsibility and lack of accountability.	Collective accountability for all students' learning.
Lack of trust and a silo-mentality.	Relational trust and shared ownership.
Protecting the 'status quo'.	Innovative and continuous change.
'Top-down' change reforms leading to resistance or fear of change.	'Bottom-up' approaches that increase capacity or resilience for change.
An over-reliance on additional support services to 'fix-fit' minority learners.	Sustainable multidisciplinary services that empower educators and learners.
Teaching and learning in isolation (Static Process).	Collaborative teaching and learning (Dynamic Process).
Rigid syllabi, teaching and assessment.	Responsive syllabi, teaching and assessment.
Planning for some students and class withdrawal practices (Tracking, Setting and/or Banding).	Planning for all students and targeted in-class support for all learners (Mixed-ability planning and teaching).

To enable the above-proposed 'systemic repositioning', the research study utilized the 'repositioning-of-the-self' concept (Section 6.2) to develop a 'model for strategic action' to facilitate the elimination of 'deficit-thinking' for equitable education (Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.8: The 'Model for Strategic Action' for Equitable Education



Essentially, the 'model for strategic action' adopts the five components (agency, social justice, community, deep democracy, academic excellence) and utilizes the three systemic tools (good governance, inclusive leadership, critical reflection for evaluation) of the 'repositioning-of-the-self' concept to instil a sense of 'professional community' in the local educational system to: (a) increase accessibility, availability, and opportunity for success; (b) create conducive learning settings for all stakeholders; (c) promote a social justice orientation; (d) embrace diversity, multiculturalism, and respect; and (e) strengthen sustainability, rigor, and accountability. To this effect, the proposed model adopts a 'developmental approach' to strategically address issues of 'power imbalances' in local colleges and schools (which reinforced 'deficit-thinking') by: promoting a participatory culture for shared understanding; developing flexible and enabling institutional structures to transform colleges and schools in open social learning environments; and enhancing the practice of continuous sharing, reflecting, and evaluating. In this regard, the model focuses on seven main identified 'areas of concern'[12], namely, the need to:

1) Increase conceptual clarity on inclusive education (what, why, how of inclusion);
2) Strengthen good and strategic governance through inclusive leadership;
3) Reduce knowledge gaps through effective CPD for all educators;
4) Endorse responsive teaching pedagogies;
5) Create and sustain colleges and schools as PLCs;
6) Engage more students, parents, and the general community in decision-making; and
7) Develop a sustainable system for the provision of additional support services.

To address the above seven 'areas of concern', this research study developed specific recommendations[13], which homed the main tenets and values of the 'repositioning-of-the-self' concept, to enable the 'strategic repositioning' of the local educational system in favour of inclusive education. Moreover, the developed recommendations led to the development of a comprehensive framework[14] to help the educational system respond to the kaleidoscope of 'cultural complexity' and 'socio-economic diversity' in Maltese colleges and schools. Hence, the 'model for strategic action' and the 'framework-for-strategic-repositioning' aim to: reduce achievement gaps; increase school attendance; develop a shared vision for inclusive education; strengthen collaboration and shared accountability; augment educators' competences and knowledge; ensure effective use

[12]The seven 'areas of concern' emerged from the voluminous data analysis process in Chapter 5.
[13]For the specific recommendations refer to Section 6.4.
[14]For the diversity framework refer to Section 6.5.

of system-wide resources and services; sustain responsiveness and equity in teaching; and enhance student engagement, parental involvement, and community partnerships. In essence, the proposed model and diversity framework strive to develop sustainable and inclusive learning communities, that move away from structural and superficial change towards organizational change, nested in profound rethinking and redesigning processes across and throughout the educational system.

6.4 Specific Recommendations for 'Strategic Repositioning'

6.4.1 Creating Conceptual Clarity on Inclusive Education

Collected evidence indicated a rather blurred and narrow vision of 'inclusion', which generated an ideological rift among educators on how to define, institutionalize, and operationalise 'inclusive education'. The latter because the majority of participants associated 'inclusion' with 'special education' or 'disability services'. Hence, the need to move inclusive education away from the field of disability into the realm of diversity – a terrain that incorporates a broad spectrum of concerns and discourse (Thomas, 2013). To facilitate the latter repositioning, this thesis proposes the development of a '*national framework for inclusive education*' to address the *why*, *what*, and *how* issues of the broad view of 'inclusive education'. To this effect, the study recommends a framework with a tripartite structure, i.e.:

1) The development of a '*national policy for inclusive education*' based on a human-rights philosophical stance to institutionalize a clear vision for diversity, equity, and social justice.
2) The development of a '*national strategy for inclusive education*' to facilitate and enable organisational coherence and consistency in actions and discourse across the different educational levels or sectors.
3) The development of clear '*national procedures for inclusive education*' to validate the operationalisation or the implementation of the policy and strategy on inclusive education in the Maltese educational system.

In this regard, the proposed framework (policy, strategy, and procedures) serves as a 'repositioning guide' to support colleges and schools to shift from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach towards an equitable, socially just, and sustainable educational system, that fits, nurtures, and supports the cultural, educational, social, physical, behavioural, and emotional needs of all students. In essence, the recommended framework for inclusive

education acts as a vehicle for positive change to "redress educational disparities" by promoting the values of "...fellowship, active participation, respect, quality, balancing of unity and diversity, quality, and democratization" (Sharma, 2014, 69).

6.4.2 Strengthening Governance of the College System

The college system sought to 'reposition' the Maltese educational system from a 'top-down' culture towards a 'bottom-up' management approach by providing more freedom of governance to colleges and schools. However, collected evidence indicated that the college system did not yield the desired decentralisation outcomes. Hence, the need to re-engineer the college system to redress 'power imbalances', by setting up a consultative College board (one per College) to ensure organisational and operational coherence for inclusive education. Essentially, College boards would:

- Provide strategic governance and direction to guarantee the smooth running of all services in colleges and schools;
- Reduce bureaucracy to enable CPs and HoS to focus more on the effectiveness of educational programmes;
- Guide CPs in the implementation of college-based plans to uphold the delivery of quality, sustainable and inclusive services;
- Challenge the 'status quo' by proposing inclusive initiatives to improve the current state-of-play of the teaching and learning process; and
- Create productive partnerships with the external general community and to develop strong networking opportunities amongst colleges and schools.

Moreover, the strengthening of the 'college system' depends also on the ELC, CCP, and CoH structures, which promote a bottom-up approach to increase collective accountability. However, collected data indicated that these structures followed a 'top-down' approach with prescriptive agendas and limited time for shared planning. These findings exposed the need to review the operational procedures of the three mentioned governance structures, by providing participants with more space and opportunity for deep discussions, to examine their own mental models and to identify their blind spots, to facilitate collaborative planning and shared decision-making for a new shared vision for equitable, socially just, and inclusive education. To this effect, educators no longer work in isolation, but embrace shared accountability to collegially design and implement a 'developmental improvement agenda' for sustainable inclusive education.

6.4.3 Colleges and Schools as 'Professional Learning Communities'

This thesis study puts forward the PLC model as the most effective vehicle for organisational change in favour of inclusive education. DuFour (2011) described PLC as an "ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collaborative inquiry and action research" to develop "reflective, inclusive and growth-promoting learning settings" (11). Similarly, Ainscow (2014) also highlighted the need for colleges and schools to "...promote and value learning as an ongoing, constructive, engaging, and collaborative process that embraces dialogue to improve the quality of life and learning" of all students (18). To this effect, the research study identified three key characteristics for the transformation of local colleges and schools into PLCs, i.e.:

a) A shared vision to enable a sense of efficacy and unity to balance and align national goals on inclusive education with college and school-based priorities and outcomes through deep reflection and constructive dialogue (Capper and Young, 2014).
b) Reflective professional inquiry to identify and address systemic barriers to inclusive education through the development of focused and inclusion-oriented CDPs and SDPs. This process enables colleges and schools to strengthen their internal capacity for inclusive education.
c) Collaboration to enhance and encourage a sense of commitment and accountability towards the provision of equitable education. Relational trust and networking (intra-departmental, cross-college and school, and inter-disciplinary collaborative arrangements) are two essential components of collaboration.

In this regard, the 'inclusive leadership' style is crucial to develop the right structural, cultural, financial, and environmental conditions for the above-three characteristics to flourish. The latter because the PLC model and 'inclusive leadership' strive to enable:

1) *Multilevel learning* by focusing on improving pedagogical issues and on building strong group dynamics through authentic relationships.
2) *Leadership decentralization* by delegating 'power' fairly and justly among all staff members to increase ownership and commitment towards organisational change.
3) *Consistent human empowerment* by strengthening the internal capacity of colleges and schools to avoid educational inequities.
4) *Effectice management and coordination* by giving teachers the necessary *autonomy* (power to take decisions); *time* (scheduled contact time for educators to meet); and *space* (physical space where educators can work together).

5) *Relational trust and support* to create democratic learning environments, where all educators engage actively in college and school life (Gleddie and Robinson, 2017).

Hence, research data shows that the transformation of local colleges and schools into inclusive PLCs depends mainly on leadership processes and practices that nurture and sustain '*collective responsibility*', '*relational trust*' and '*strategic planning*'.

A) 'Collective Responsibility' for Student Learning

Collected evidence highlights a culture of blame, finger-pointing and 'shifting-of-responsibility', which resulted from systemic organisational fragmentation and lack of teacher accountability, trust, and efficacy. Hence, the need for the local educational system to embed a culture of 'collective responsibility' to sustain equitable education for all students. In this regard, the current study urges all educational leaders to focus on five interconnected dimensions, i.e.:

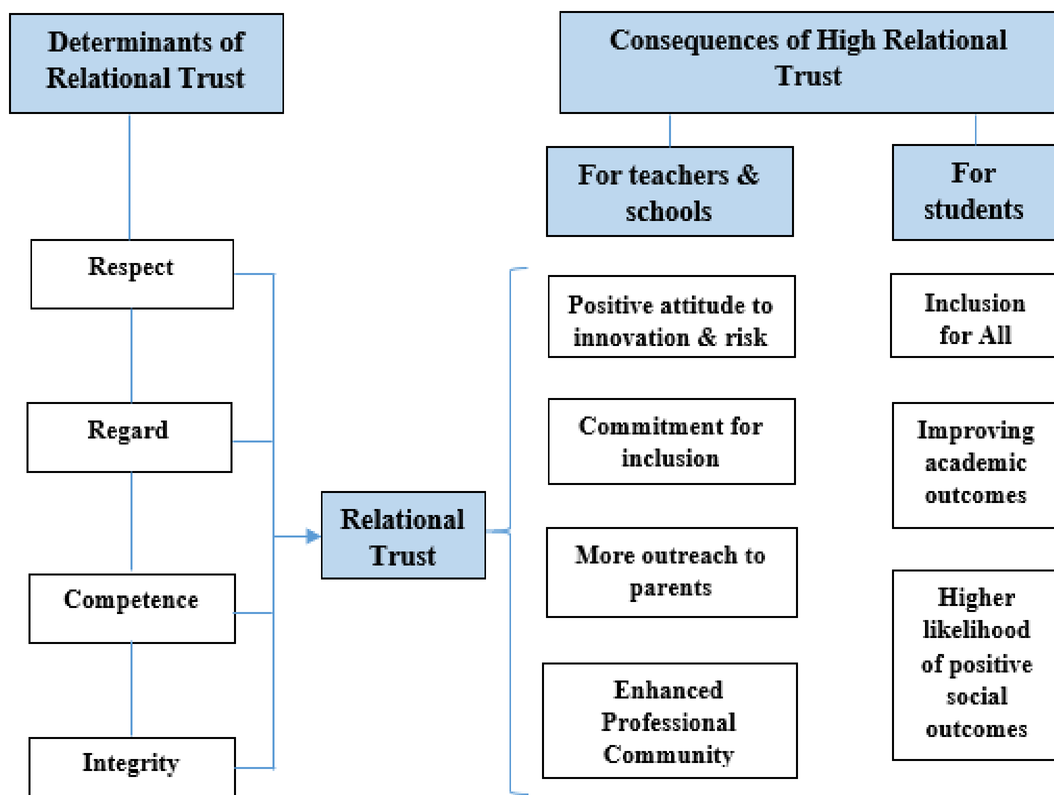
- Professional Community: to develop flexible learning organisations, by connecting professional interdependence with joint problem solving to effectively respond to students' diversity.
- Professional Development: to enhance educators' competences to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about schooling and minority learners. This process entails the development of shared expectations and strategies to enable whole-of-college or school improvement.
- Collective Struggle: to instill in all educators a sense of commitment and collective effort to change current 'deficit beliefs', stereotypical assumptions, and neoliberal approaches to education, in favour of more socially just, culturally-responsive, and inclusive processes and practices.
- Relational Trust: to develop, nurture, and sustain strong relational ties within the learning community to enable productive collaborative practices. Critical attributes for relational trust include: respect, empathy, and personal regard for others.
- Professional Accountability: to foster shared responsibility for student learning by instilling in educators a strong desire for change to make teaching more inclusive.

To this effect, schooling becomes "more than just the endeavour of individual teachers in professionally isolated classrooms, but it emerges as a collective enterprise or effort" for improved school efficacy within a collaborative culture. All this clearly shows that 'collective responsibility' enables 'systemic repositioning', that is founded on critical reflection, constructive dialogue, and true collegiality.

B) 'Relational Trust' for 'Collective Responsibility'

Whalan (2012) contended that 'relational trust' depends on three main aspects, i.e.: the "degree of teacher-willingness to give their colleagues unconditional support"; the "level of consistency on agreed standards for teaching"; and the "level of attention given to pre-set shared educational objectives" (109). Furthermore, Ainscow (2014) argued that, "establishing trust over time is a necessary antecedent to teacher learning, so that new meaning can be co-created" (125). Hence, to sustain the development of 'relational trust' in colleges and schools, this research study presents a 'relational trust model', which integrates four critical personal and organisational attributes (*respect*, *personal regard for others*, *competence in role*, and *integrity*), to create conducive and democratic learning settings for educators and learners to initiate and sustain inclusion-oriented improvement activities (Figure 6.9).

Figure 6.9: Relational Trust Model



(Adapted from: Robinson, 2009)

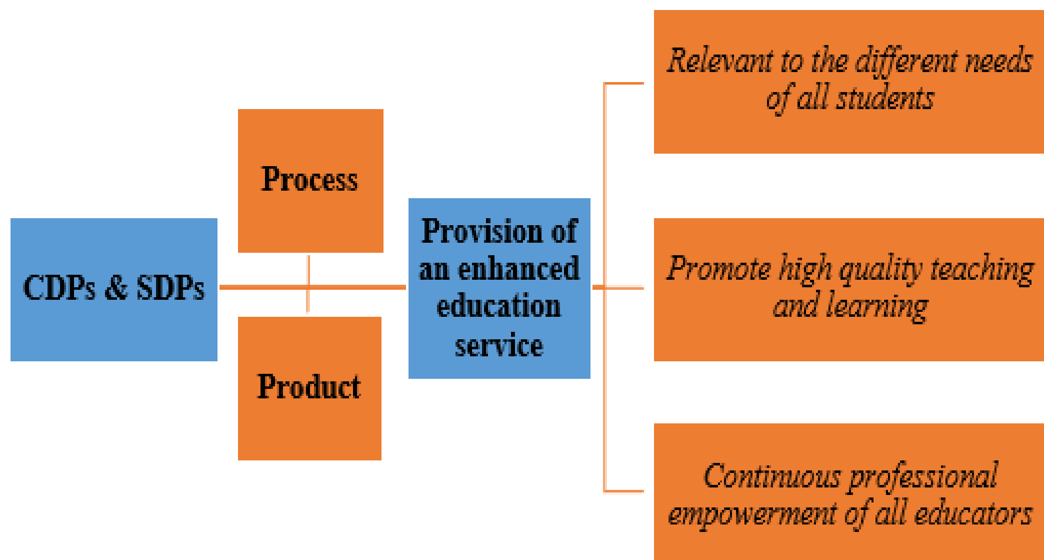
To summarize, the above model: supports a moral imperative for school improvement; facilitates accountability for shared standards, while allowing educators to experience autonomy and mutual support for both individual and collective efforts; reduces the

sense of vulnerability that educators feel when dealing with educational reforms; and promotes a sense of confidence to implement equitable practices. Hence, trust, across a wide range of sociopolitical contexts in colleges and schools, helps to surface both individual and collective mental models to develop a sense of urgency and commitment to support the development of genuine inclusive learning communities.

C) Strategic Planning and Programming

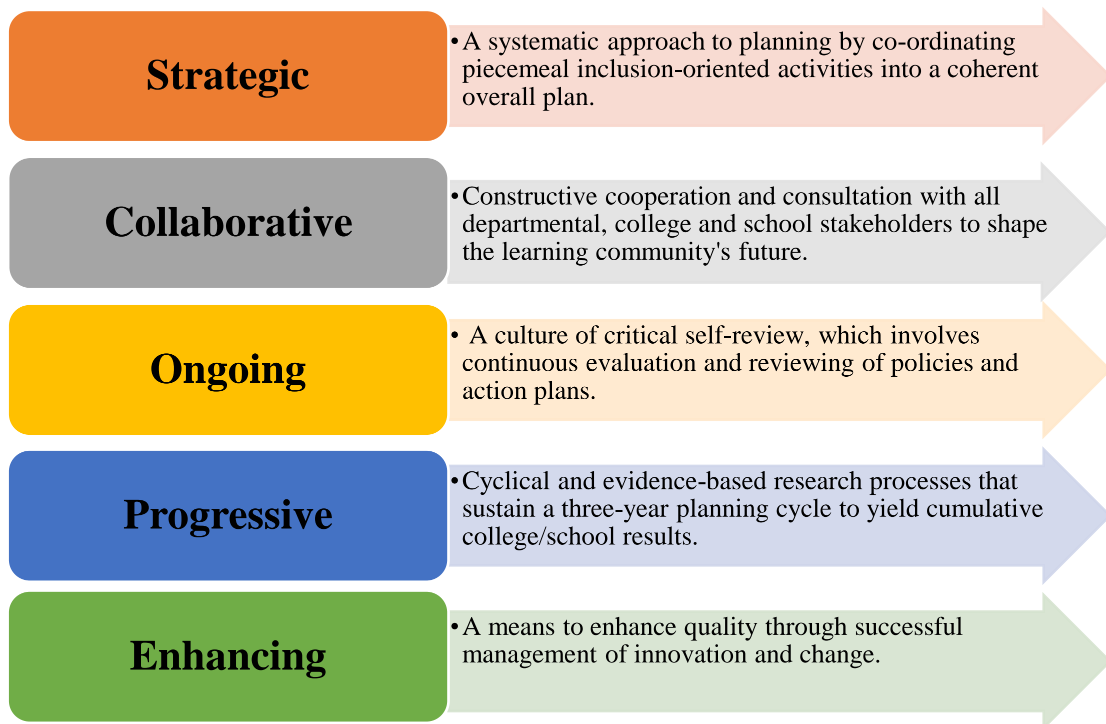
The transformation of local colleges and schools into PLCs depends on strategic planning and programming through the development of inclusive-oriented CDPs and SDPs. The latter serve as reference documents to: (a) guide college and school actions for improvement; (b) facilitate monitoring and reviewing practices; and (c) enable self-evaluation for inclusive education (Figure 6.10).

Figure 6.10: Aims of CDP and SDP



However, collected evidence revealed a lack of strategic planning for the 'broad view of inclusive education', which limited the internal capacity of colleges and schools to respond effectively to diversity. In this regard, Ainscow (2014) contended that, "...the pathway from the deliberate exclusion of individuals towards acknowledging diversity to ultimately valuing difference", depends on a rigorous and a meticulous college and school development planning process (19). To this effect, the research study proposes the development of ***strategic***, ***collaborative***, ***ongoing***, ***progressive***, and ***enhancing*** CDPs and SDPs, that promote 'collective responsibility and accountability' to reduce the resistance to enacting socially just practices for all students' learning (Figure 6.11).

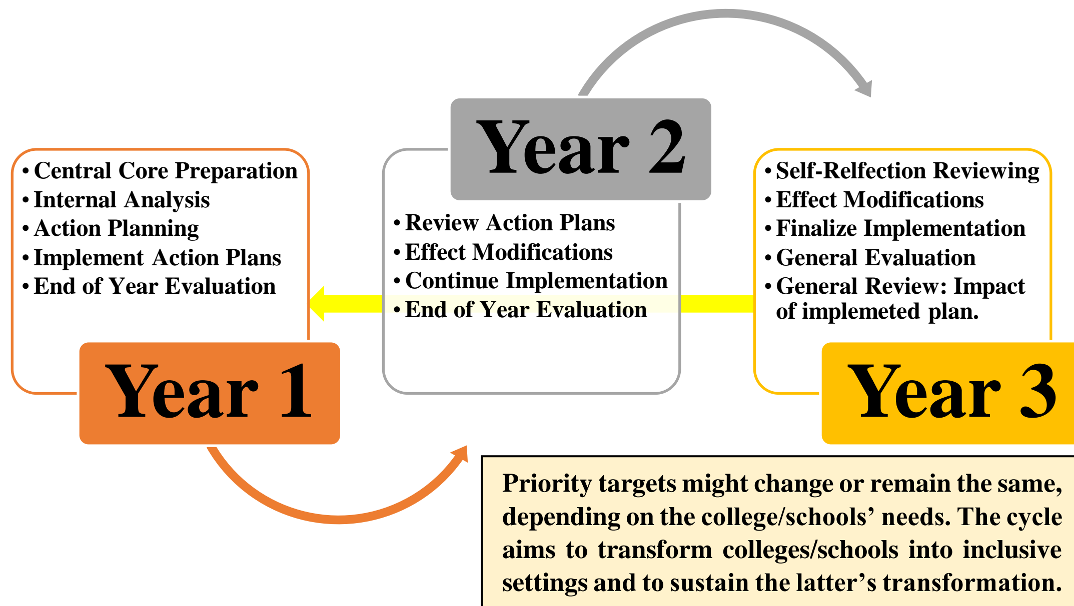
Figure 6.11: Characteristics of CDPs and SDPs



The proposed CDPs and SDPs focus on: *effectiveness*; *improvement*; *staff development*; *quality enhancement*; *partnerships*; *effective deployment of resources*; *management of change*; and *furtherance of national aims.* Hence, the need for development plans that cover all aspects and needs of the college and school life to enable meaningful change for equitable education (Appendix O).

In addition, this thesis study recommends a *three-year strategic planning cycle* for both CDPs and SDPs, which revolves around a **central core** (college and school-based aims and vision) and comprises **six cyclical operations** (namely: *preparation*; *internal analysis*; *action planning*; *implementation*; *implementation evaluation*; and *implementation reviewing*) to provoke active dialogue and collaborative solutions for "higher student attainment and significantly greater achievement gains" (Reeves, 2008, 286). Essentially, the latter operational structure capitalizes on the strengths of colleges and schools to improve identified priority areas, through: (a) *monitoring of the plan* (analysis of student performance; instructional practices; and leadership processes); *evaluation of the plan* (all the developed initiatives in CDPs and SDPs are scrutinized to discontinue ineffective practices); and *development of high expectations* (the belief that high quality teaching and learning impacts student achievement more than student characteristics or demographies) (Figure 6.12).

Figure 6.12: Three-Year Planning Cycle for inclusive CDPs and SDPs



6.4.4 Accountable Quality Assurance Mechanisms

The process towards the development of 'inclusive education' in local colleges and schools depends also on rigorous, accountable and supportive QA mechanisms, which systematically review educational processes to maintain and improve equity and efficiency. Within the Maltese educational system, QA includes an "*internal reviewing system*, consisting of self-evaluations, following ongoing school-based monitoring and reviewing practices", and an "*external reviewing system*, that evaluates and celebrates consistent school change efforts, while indicating ways how to improve change efforts at classroom levels" (MEDE, 2014, 23). Collected evidence clearly indicates the need for greater coherence and synergy between the aforementioned two QA approaches to ensure consistency in college and school development for inclusive education. In this regard, collected data pointed out that the current QA system: lacked effective internal monitoring processes; focuses on administrative processes rather than on competence or skill development; and lacked support mechanisms to implement inclusive practices in colleges and schools. To this effect, the research study promotes QA mechanisms that balance vertical and horizontal, and internal and external accountability, to help colleges and schools to adapt to the changing needs of all learners. Hence, the proposed QA system rests on two interconnected approaches, namely:

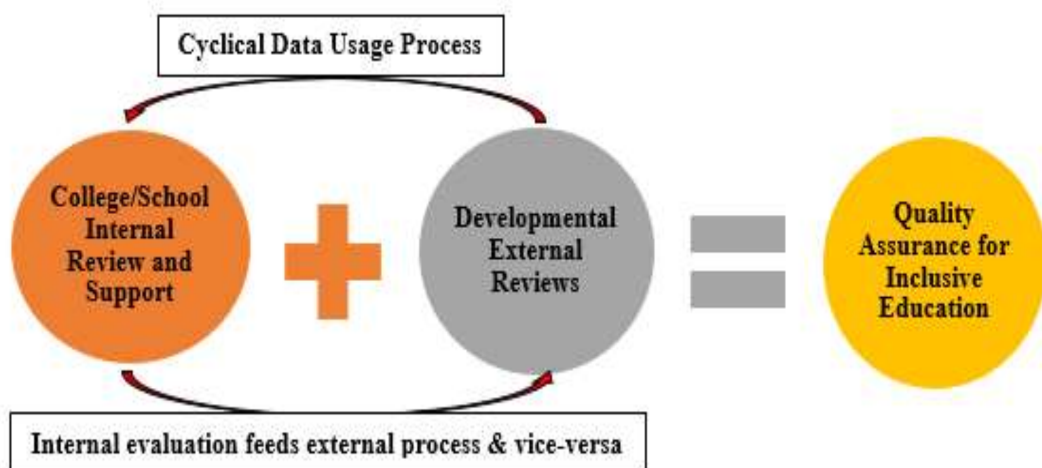
a) An effective **Internal Review and Support** process to help schools "build capacity for change...the readiness to change and the internal capacity to manage the change

process" for inclusive education (Sharma, 2014, 3). In essence, this process involves monitoring and reviewing SDP actions, while embracing "...on the ground practical assistance" before, during, and after the planning process (Leithwood, 2016, 506). Moreover, this process enables a focused and critical school-based self-evaluation to foster a culture of strategic change for inclusive education.

b) A rigorous **External Review** process to evaluate how colleges and schools manage the change process in favour of inclusive and culturally-responsive education. This is because "effective evaluation of schools is central to the continuous improvement of student learning: schools need feedback on their actions and performance to help them identify how to improve their practices; and schools should be accountable for their performance" (OECD, 2013, 384).

Despite having distinct functions, the two reviewing approaches serve complementary purposes and form part of an integrated system, with different mechanisms supporting, reinforcing, and feeding each other (Figure 6.13). To this effect, Fullan (2012) argued that, "external accountability cannot work properly, if it is not accompanied by internal accountability" (60).

Figure 6.13: Quality Assurance for Inclusive Education



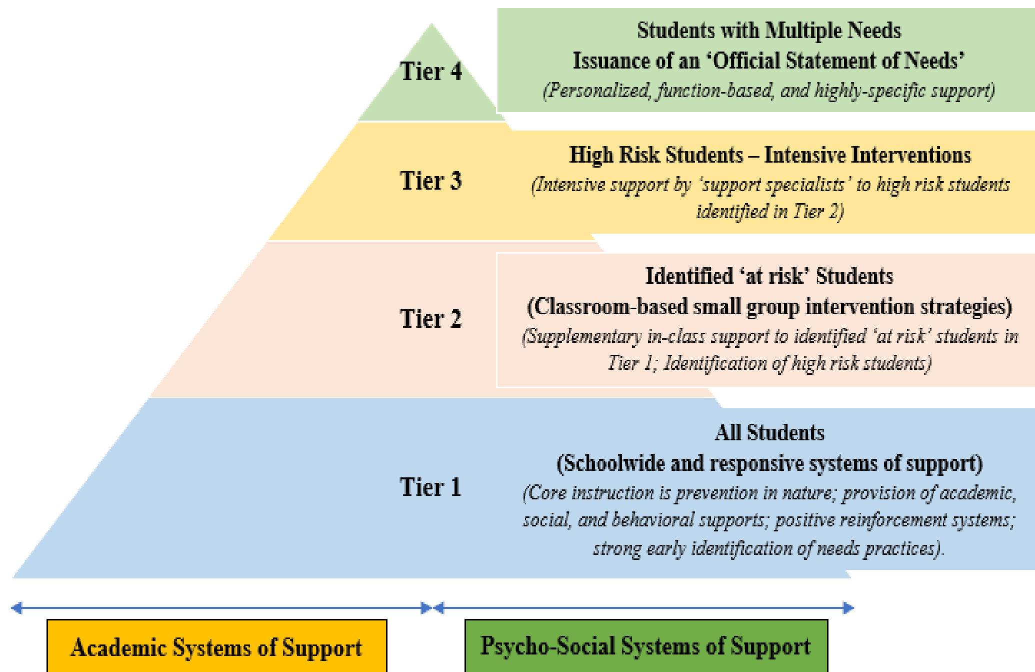
In essence, the above-proposed QA system embraces eight main principles, namely: *coherence* (to achieve balance and consistency in meeting national expectations); *trust and shared accountability between and among internal and external actors* (to ensure effective evaluation and shared development); *professional learning communities* (to ensure the best of QA data for effective development); *support for innovation* (to encourage change and risk-taking); *constructive dialogue and shared understanding*

(to ensure that all QA actors convey a common message for whole-of-college/school development); *networks* (to build social and intellectual capital, and enable new synergies); *different data for a balanced view* (to expose best practices); and *capacity for data* (to promote evidence-based processes and practices). Hence, focus is not only on 'syllabi coverage', but also on the effectiveness and responsiveness of pedagogical strategies to facilitate the elimination of 'deficit-thinking'.

6.4.5 Effective Additional Support Structures

In the Maltese educational system, 'additional support' includes a wide range of specialized services, which aim to address a multitude of factors (physical, mental, sensorial, social, academic, communicative and psychological) that lead to a learning or developmental breakdown. Collected evidence indicated that current processes for the operationalisation of 'additional support services': *reinforced the deficit ideology*; *sustained the 'describe-assess-diagnose-prescribe-modify' cycle*; *reduced 'collective responsibility' and encouraged a 'culture of blame'*; *lacked sustainability because of a systemic increase in service 'waiting lists'*; *supported unresponsive and inequitable funding mechanisms*; and *increased service fragmentation* (lacked service coodination and collaboration). These findings advocate for a comprehensive transformation of the current system of support to develop flexible 'support services' to address all students' needs and increase schools' internal capacity for inclusive education. In essence, the latter transformation entails shifting the 'system of support' from the current 'curative and compensatory approach' towards a more equitable, socially just, sustainable, and adaptable support provision. In this regard, the thesis study proposes the 'multi-tiered systems of support' approach (MTSS) to move support provision away from the current 'diagnosis-referral' system towards 'support allocation' based on the profiled needs of colleges and schools (Figure 6.14). Essentially, the MTSS approach aims to develop multi-and transdisciplinary learning environments that recognise and accommodate all forms of diversity by strategically coordinating responsive *prevention strategies*, *early identification*, and *early intervention* practices, to address academic needs and social-emotional, behavioural, and psychological concerns. Hence, this approach presents a structured method for providing both universal and individualized support for learners, as an alternative to suspension, marginalization, and/or exclusion. To this effect, the proposed strategy involves: *strong leadership*; *effective engagement*; *evidence-based instructional practices*; *data-based decision-making*; and *layered continuum of support*.

Figure 6.14: The 'Multi-Tiered Systems of Support' Approach



The implementation of the proposed MTSS system depends on a number of variables, namely: (a) the *reculturing of NSSS directorate* to facilitate the proposed re-organisation of 'support services'; (b) the *development of strong early identification processes* to identify as early as possible learners' needs through rigorous assessment practices (such as early screening); (c) the *restructuring of the SMP* to ensure a human rights approach to meeting individual needs while assuring long-term sustainability of the system; (d) the *enhancing of transition opportunities* to facilitate the progression of all learners throughout compulsory schooling; and (e) the *transformation of the role of the INCO* to oversee the transformation process in favour of inclusive and culturally-responsive schooling. Apart from the latter re-structuring, this research study proposes also systemic changes in three other broad domains, i.e.:

Strengthening Multi/Transdisciplinary Teaming: to develop productive 'networks of support' among different 'support specialits' (psychologists, social workers, special education teachers, guidance teachers, councellors, INCOs, and health professionals) from within and beyond schools to empower mainstream educatos to facilitate the academic, physical, behavioural, psychological, and socio-emotional development of all learners. Hence, the need to *reduce service fragmentation*, *encourage cooperation between support specialists* and *class educators*, and *facilitate shared understanding*

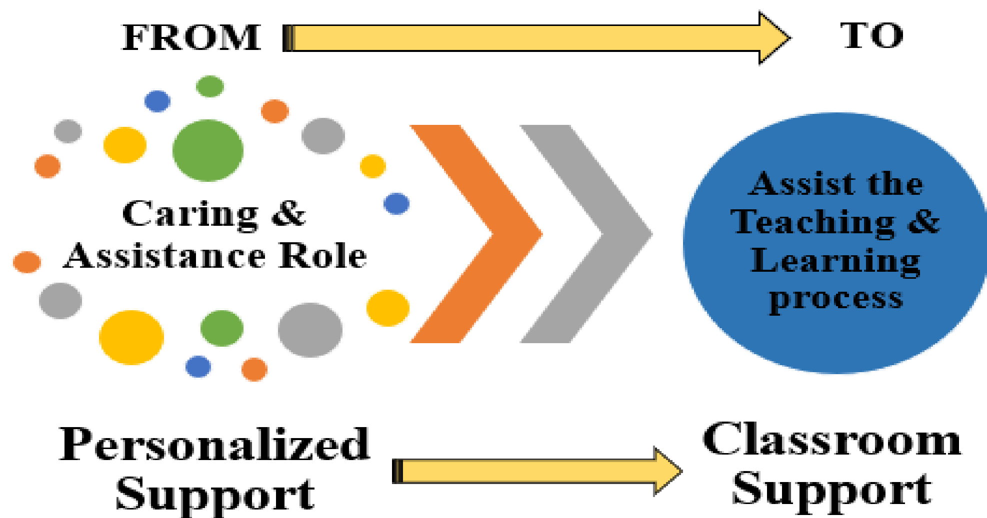
to maximise the overall academic and psychosocial wellbeing of all students. To this effect, the research study recommends the strengthening of current multidisciplinary teams in colleges and schools to enable timely support and facilitate the development of coherent prevention strategies (to nurture strong inter-/intra personal skills to foster resilience in all learners) and culturally-responsive intervention practices (to respond effectively to student diversity). In essence, multidisciplinary teaming helps to reduce ‘waiting-lists’, labelling, stereotypical beliefs, and segregation practices by promoting an integrated approach to additional support provision, which focuses on ‘prevention measures’, ‘early identification of needs’ and ‘early intervention’ practices. The latter entails a shift from the traditional ‘describe-explain-predict-prescribe cycle’ towards a ‘whole-of-school collaborative approach’ to develop responsive intervention resources and pedagogical strategies. In the latter scenario, CPs and HoS play a fundamental role to provide sufficient time and space for educators to collaborate with multidisciplinary team members to: weave ‘deficit-thinking’ practices to foster positive psychological, emotional, academic, physical, and social development; develop more effective and responsive learning programmes; and form productive synergies and collaborations. Hence, the strengthening of multidisciplinary teaming enables the effective use of both college and school-based resources and allows learners to experience timely access to support, rather than having to await professional assessment outcomes, which involve lengthly waiting lists.

Sustainable and Equitable Additional Support Allocation: to ensure that the system meets the rights and needs of all learners in a socially just manner. In this regards, the Maltese educational system presents a wide range of support services to help educators “transform learning environments to ‘fit’ all learners’ needs and abilities” (NCF, 2012, vii). However, collected evidence questioned the effectiveness and sustainability of the current support system, which adopted a ‘curative-compensatory’ approach. Hence, the need for *resource allocations based on the profiled need of each college or school* to reduce ESL rates; increase school attendance; and address the socio-cultural-economic needs of all learners.

Within the Maltese educational system, the provision of in-class personalized support to SEN learners resulted as the most preferred support option to facilitate the inclusion of statemented SEN students in mainstream schools and classrooms. In turn,

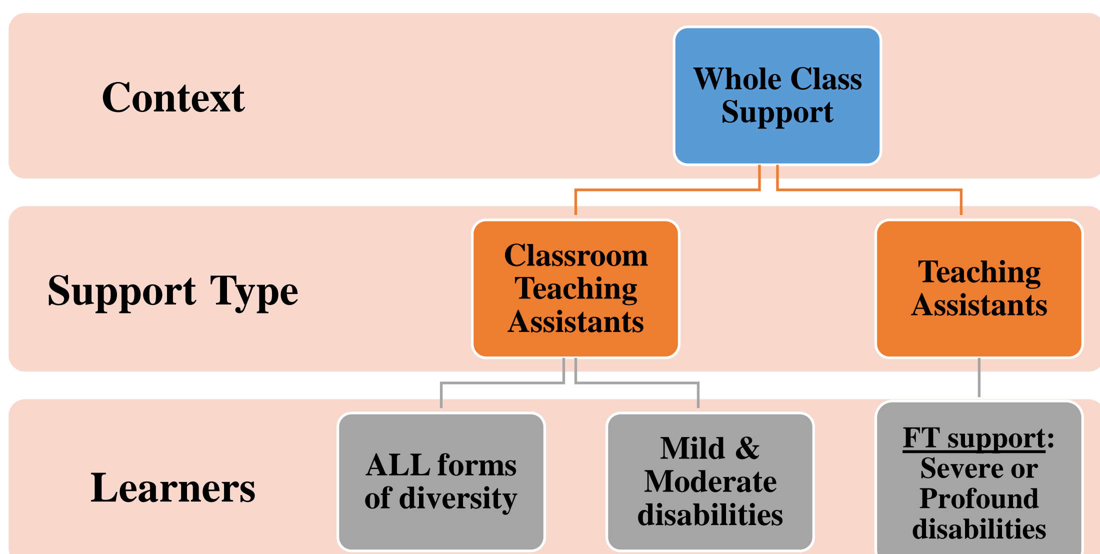
the latter practice resulted in a never-ending demand to recruit LSEs, which practice posed challenges to the sustainability of the system and increased an over-reliance on statementing procedures to secure additional support. Hence, the need for a paradigm shift in the LSE system to enable long-term sustainability (Figure 6.15).

Figure 6.15: The Paradigm Shift in the LSE Provision System



Essentially, this thesis proposes the shift from personalized support to class support, through the introduction of '*Class Teaching Assistants*' to assist the teaching process, and the recruitment of '*Teaching Assistants*' to provide FT 1-1 support to learners with severe and/or profound disabilities (Figure 6.16).

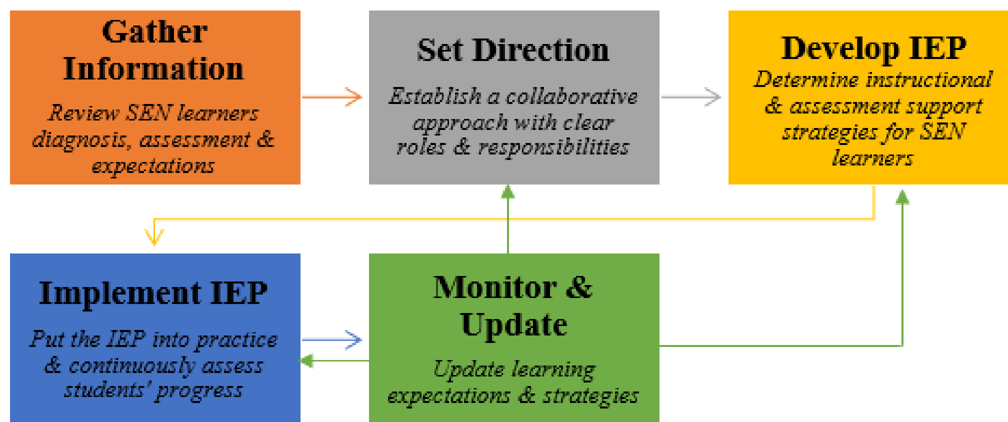
Figure 6.16: The Two-Pronged In-Class Support System



To summarize, the recommended system *ensures that all students benefit from in-class support*; *enables the active engagement of support assistants in the teaching process*; and *allows structured and collaborative support interventions*. Moreover, the above structure benefits teachers (to reduce workload stress and improve class behaviour); paraprofessionals (to feel more valued) and learners (to receive timely support).

Development and Implementation of Productive IEPs: to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching process and the efficacy of support services; help SEN learners become more involved in the teaching and learning process; promote a multi/transdisciplinary approach; and enhance parental collaboration (Watkins, 2007). However, collected evidence shows that IEP documents followed prescriptive procedures, which negatively influenced: (a) *educators' perceptions on IEPs* (the majority of participants described the IEP process as an 'additional bureaucratic burden'); and (b) the *IEP development and implementation process* (participants viewed this process as, "a time-consuming, and an ineffective exercise" that lacked coherence, coordination and responsiveness). Hence, the study proposes a 'team-based approach' to develop flexible and responsive 'plans of action' to support SEN learners. The proposed approach involves five main stages: *gathering of relevant information from MAP sessions*; *setting direction by identifying 'targets', 'outcomes', and 'expectations'*; *developing the IEP document*; *implementing the IEP by making effective use of all support services*; and *monitoring and updating IEPs* (Figure 6.17).

Figure 6.17: The IEP Five-Staged 'Team-Based Approach'



The above approach highlights the importance of MAP sessions in order to gather and categorize important information on SEN learners in preparation for IEP development. The latter because productive IEPs focus on the following fives issues:

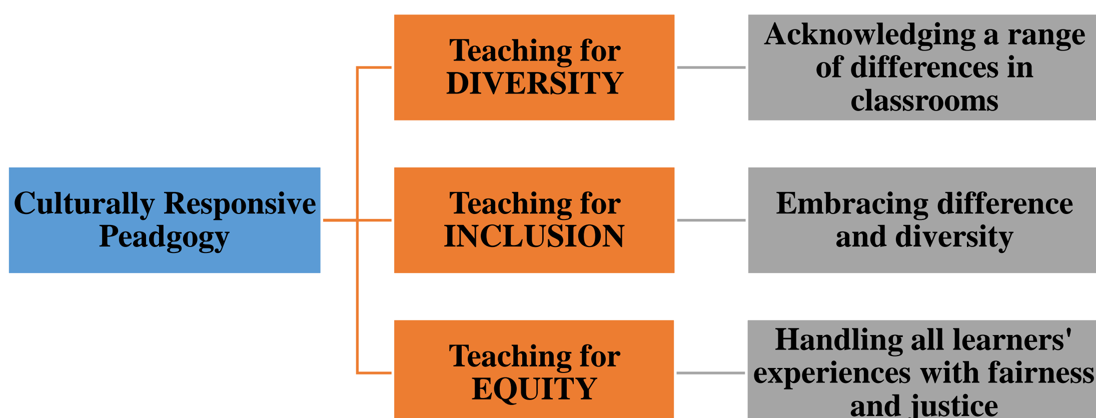
1. A clear outline of the main reasons for the IEP;
2. The presentation of long and short-term targets for SEN learners;
3. Description of instructional and assessment strategies to be used to achieve targets;
4. An clear indication of the personnel involved in supporting SEN learners; and
5. Monitoring and reviewing arrangements to evaluate SEN learners' progress.

Finally, the proposed approach rests also on two main pillars: 'active collaboration' and 'collective responsibility' among all stakeholders.

6.4.6 Culturally-Responsive Teaching

Collected evidence shows that Maltese schools and classrooms are increasingly becoming more multicultural and heterogeneous in nature. This broad diversity posed severe challenges to mainstream teachers to create inclusive environments and develop responsive teaching pedagogies. Essentially, research data shows that teaching practices in local schools followed traditional pedagogical methods based on rigid syllabi, strict discipline, and high stakes assessment. Hence, the need for local educators to employ theoretically sound and culturally responsive pedagogies to address the instructional needs of diverse learners. In this regard, the reseach study integrates Ladson-Billings' (1994) and Nieto's (1999) principles on inclusive education to propose the 'Culturally Responsive Pedagogy' framework (CRP), which rests on three teaching imperatives as illustrated in Figure 6.18.

Figure 6.18: The 3 Teaching Imperatives of 'Culturally Responsive Pedagogy'



In essence, CRP recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning and rejects the inevitability of failure for minority learners by repositioning 'difference' not as a deficit, weakness or a problem but as an 'ordinary'

aspect of human development and a valuable resource for teaching. To this effect, CRP presents three key credentials, i.e.:

1) *Learners are all different*: every student is unique with multiple overlapping skills, identities, needs, and experiences.
2) *Transformability of learners' capacity to learn*: all students can learn if teachers meet their diverse needs by enhancing participation to address achievement gaps.
3) *Proactive and productive working processes*: all educators work together to explore ways how specialist expertise can enhance learning without marginalising minority learners.

Hence, CRP not only acknowledges the learners' diverse 'home-community' culture, but also integrates the latter cultural experiences, values and understandings into the teaching process. In so doing, learners "experience academic success; develop and/or maintain cultural competences; and develop a critical consciousness to challenge the status quo" in culturally-supported, learner-centred classrooms, "...whereby learners' strengths are identified, nurtured and utilized to raise achievement" (Florian and Black Hawkins, 2011, 160). Collected evidence also suggests that quality teaching occurs when all educators:

- Establish strong relationships with learners and parents through productive two-way dialogue;
- Create supportive learning environments, which reflect the linguistic, cultural and social experiences or needs of all learners;
- Encourage reflective thought and actions by re-shaping current curricula and syllabi to facilitate higher-order thinking, knowledge and skills;
- Enhance the relevance of new learning by integrating diverse ways of representing, understanding and interpreting information;
- Facilitate shared learning by adopting a student-centred instructional approach, where all learners work collaboratively and cooperatively together;
- Make connections to prior learning and experiences to help learners connect new knowledge with what they already know;
- Provide challenging learning initiatives to help learners realize their full potential;
- Inquire into the teaching-learning relationship to ensure success by communicating high expectations; setting realistic but rigorous goals; providing activities that have differentiated entry and exit points; and giving constructive feedback.

Wrigley (2006) stressed that "despite the official rhetoric of 'raising standards', education is trivialized [...] and knowledge passed on as a set of inert facts which are sensed to be of very limited consequence to the individual" (9). The research study also shows that in the local educational system rigid content-based syllabi sustained high-stakes assessment practices, that demotivated teachers and framed learners as passive recipients of centralised imposed knowledge. Hence, "the need for progressive change to re-thinking schooling practices" in favour of "social justice, democratic citizenship, and social responsibility" (Wrigley, 2012, 6). The proposed CRP framework presents three inter-connected dimensions, (i.e.: the personal; institutional; and instructional dimensions), which interact with the teaching and learning process. Figure 6.19 below provides a conceptual definition to the three CRP dimensions and the way the proposed strategy could be implemented within the local educational system.

Figure 6.19: Implementing CRP in Maltese Schools

The Institutional Dimension — ***The administration, policies, values and the implementation of syllabi in schools.***

- Develop a flexible, care-oriented and intellectually challenging curriculum;
- Create less rigid and content-oriented subject syllabi (LOF);
- Facilitate the implementation and the use of the LOF;
- Develop and implement inclusive policies and practices in schools;
- Create inclusive classroom environments to respond to all learners' needs.

The Personal Dimension — ***The cognitive and emotional processes teachers engage in to become culturally responsive.***

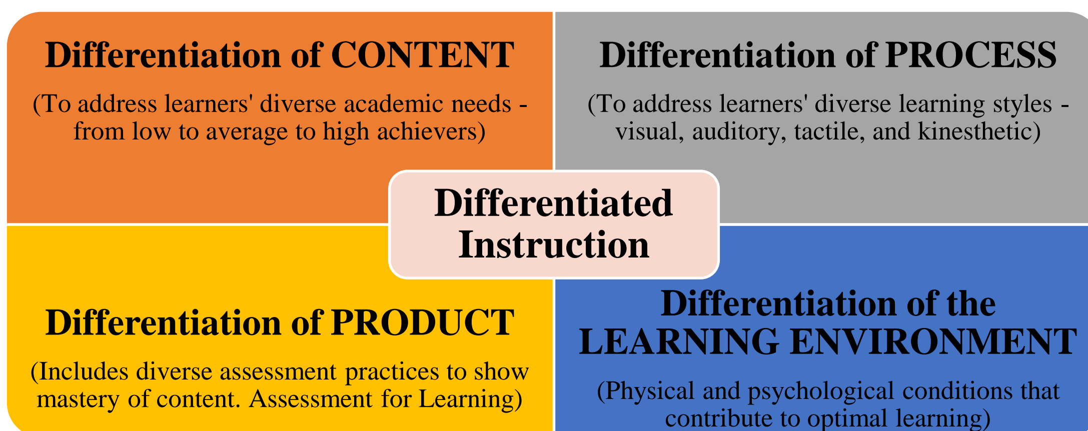
- Confront teachers' biases by questioning traditional norms, policies and practices;
- Awaken teachers' social consciousness to enable equitable processes;
- Strenghten relationships to develop trust and social capital among all stakeholders;
- Engage in reflective thinking to develop a strong ownership of the change process;
- Promote equity and mutual respect among learners, parents and educators.

The Instructional Dimension — ***The strategies, activities, materials, and resources that form the basis of instruction.***

- Motivate learners' to become active participants in their learning;
- Encourage learners to think critically and set clear and high expectations;
- Differentiate the classroom programme and adapt the learning supports;
- Vary teaching and assessment strategies to promote teaching as inquiry;
- Share responsibility of instruction and use an 'ethic of care' approach.

Apart from promoting responsive syllabi, the proposed CRP framework encourages educators to become 'adaptive experts' rather than 'routine experts', by homing in the four pillars of 'Differentiated Instruction' (Tomlinson, 2017) (Figure 6.20).

Figure 6.20: The Four Pillars of Differentiated Instruction



Finally, CRP considers assessment as "...an ongoing process for making the learning of all students visible" (The New Zealand Curriculum, 2007, 39). The latter implies a shift in emphasis from assessment of learning (summative) to *assessment for learning* (formative). However, collected evidence shows that summative assessment practices are deeply embedded in the Maltese educational system. Hence, the study proposes a model for educational assessment that focuses on the learning process to: (a) *motivate learning* (by empowering learners' self-efficacy); (b) *help teachers and learners plan together* (by valorizing learners' prior knowledge and by providing quality feedback about progress); (c) *help learners learn how to learn* (by fostering self-regulation skills and metacognitive awareness); and (d) *enable learners to judge their own learning* (by evaluating, consolidating, and reinforcing new learning). All this suggests that CRP is a way of thinking, whereby educators value all experiences, cultural norms, and beliefs of students to adapt the curriculum to 'fit' learners needs, aspirations, and expectations.

6.4.7 Engagement of Learners, Parents, and General Community

The 'repositioning' process of the Maltese educational system required also the active engagement of *learners*, *parents*, and the *general community* in college - school decision-making processes and practices, to develop safe, conducive, democratic, and positive 'learning communities'. According to Portelli (2017) 'student engagement', 'parental involvement', and 'school-community partnerships' help to "make learning a more enjoyable experience, to reduce 'student apathy', and to increase retention rates and attainment levels" (18). However, research findings evidenced lack of networking, involvement, and engagement, due to lack of trust and the proliferation of the 'us vs them' mentality throughout the educational system. Hence, the need to:

Enhance Learners' Engagement in School Life

'Student engagement' is generally described as the "meaningful involvement of all learners throughout the learning environment, i.e. the relation between "learners and the school community, adults at school, peers, instruction, and the curriculum" (Ashwin and McVitty, 2015, 89). To this effect, the research study proposes the 'ethic-of-care approach' as a whole-of-school strategy to strengthen students' *behavioural engagement* (or level of participation in academic, social, and co-curricular activities), which directly impacts on students' *emotional engagement* (or feelings, attitudes, and beliefs on teachers, classmates, and schooling) and *cognitive engagement* (or the level of motivation and investiment in learning). The latter process implies a shift from an 'attitude of caring about' to a 'practice of caring for', by: *building supportive school environments* (school culture and climate where all students feel safe to take risks); *nurturing socio-emotional wellbeing* (feeling of belonging in all learners); *addressing student dependent factors* (students take reponisibility of their own learning, voice their opinions, and engage in leadership roles); *enhancing students' learning* (the students' aspirations and expectations are recognized and accepted); *developing responsive and supportive teaching processes* (culturally-responsive teaching methods, which enable collaboration); *promoting formative assessment* (assessment for learning practices to help students better display their abilities and competences); and *encouraging active participation* (including all students during lessons and school-based initiatives). In essence, the latter transformative approach involves pedagogical reciprocity, where all educators and students learn together and from each other. Furthermore, the research study highlights the importance of setting up 'Student Councils' in all local schools, while ensuring the involvement of diverse cohorts of learners. This is because 'Student Councils' promote participatory democracy; serve as an arena for personal development; and encourage learners to shoulder responsibility for all the decisions taken.

Meaningful Parent-Family Engagement

'Parental engagement' occurs when educators commit themselves to listening and providing space for collaboration with parents, and parents commit to prioritizing educational goals. However, collected evidence indicates 'relational tensions' and lack of 'relational trust' between educators and parents, which enhanced an 'us vs them' mentality. The latter findings highlight the need to develop a culture that optimizes a sense of 'positive and unconditional regard' towards all parents, by: *empathizing* with

the parents' needs and difficulties; *understanding* parents' expectations; and *engaging* parents in the teaching and learning process. In this regard, the research study proposes four specific strategies to enable parental engagement, namely:

- Organizing informal (open days, school productions, and outings) and formal (parents days or teacher-parent meetings) school-based activities to enhance contact with parents;
- Sustaining written and technology communication methods (newsletters, progress reports, and e-mailing) to strengthen home-school-classroom liaison;
- Acknowleding parents' rights to participate in their children's education, since "no school can work well for learners, if parents and teachers do not act in partnership on behalf of the children's best interest" (Cohen, 2012, 65); and
- Enhancing collaborative practices through Parents' Councils to enhance productive parental engagement in school decision-making processes and practices.

Furthermore, the research study also proposes the reduction of bureaucratic red-tape in schools to fully accommodate parents' needs and exigencies in order to reach out to those parents that feel distant from the school environment. In this regard, the research study also suggests a better use of the 'educational social work service' to strengthen the home-school liaison. Despite all the latter recommendations, the research study also acknowledges the fact that total parental engagement would remain a panacea.

Productive School-Community Partnerships

The research study evidenced the concern about widespread fragmentation in attempts to evolve a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated continuum of school-community partnerships. To this effect, the study proposes a cultural shift away from "previously isolated and entrenched modes of working" towards "more inclusive and holistic" multiagency partnerships in education (Case and Hadfield, 2016, 3). Ainscow (2014) also contended that, "efforts to improve student performance must focus on the community as a whole including the university as a community organisation, not just on the school" (89). Hence, the need to: (a) set up dynamic collaborative agreements with community agencies or organisations; (b) involve local citizens and personalities in the teaching and learning process; (c) develop working-relationships with local businesses to enable community-based learning through the development of vocational or applied learning programmes; and (d) make better use of school facilities/resources for community services. Essentially, school-community partnerships that: account for diveristy; ensure shared governance and accountability; and build on strengths.

6.4.8 Continuous Professional Development

Research data clearly indicates that colleges and schools necessitate culturally-responsive teachers to be able to respond effectively to student diversity. To this effect, the Faculty of Education at the UoM plays a crucial role to provide prospective teachers with appropriate training on diversity and inclusion. Hence, the need to rethink initial-teacher-training courses to enable future teachers to: *integrate theoretical knowledge with practical skills* (Watkins, 2011); *develop an inclusive pedagogy* (Florian, 2011); *enhance collaborative attitudes* (Frost, 2012); *recognise the importance of the home environment and of working with diverse families* (Hornby, 2010); *develop a broader understanding of change* (Slee, 2010); *nurture a capacity for 'critical reflection' and inquiry* (Pantic and Wubbels, 2012); and *sustain a commitment for 'education for all'* (Kim and Rouse, 2011). In this regard, Watkins (2011) also argued that intitial-teacher training courses must prepare educators to address "issues of poverty, racism, sexism, demographic diversity, ethnocentrism, language differences, homophobia, and their intersections within educational policies and practices" (270). Apart from the UoM, the Education Department also organizes CPD training courses for educators, which resulted as ineffective and sporadic. Essentially, the latter findings reinforced the belief to: (a) *revisit the purpose of CPD*; (b) *widen the spectrum for CPD*; and (c) *review CPD format and modality*. This is because educators need to learn about the predictable stages of change, and how deficit-thinking views change as a cost, and a 'fix' to a problem. As such, the research study proposes six main standards for effective CPD training for all eductors (Figure 6.21).

Figure 6.21: The Six Standards for Effective CPD

The ultimate objective of the above-presented six standards is to empower all educators to facilitate the elimination of 'deficit-thinking' to create responsive learning settings.

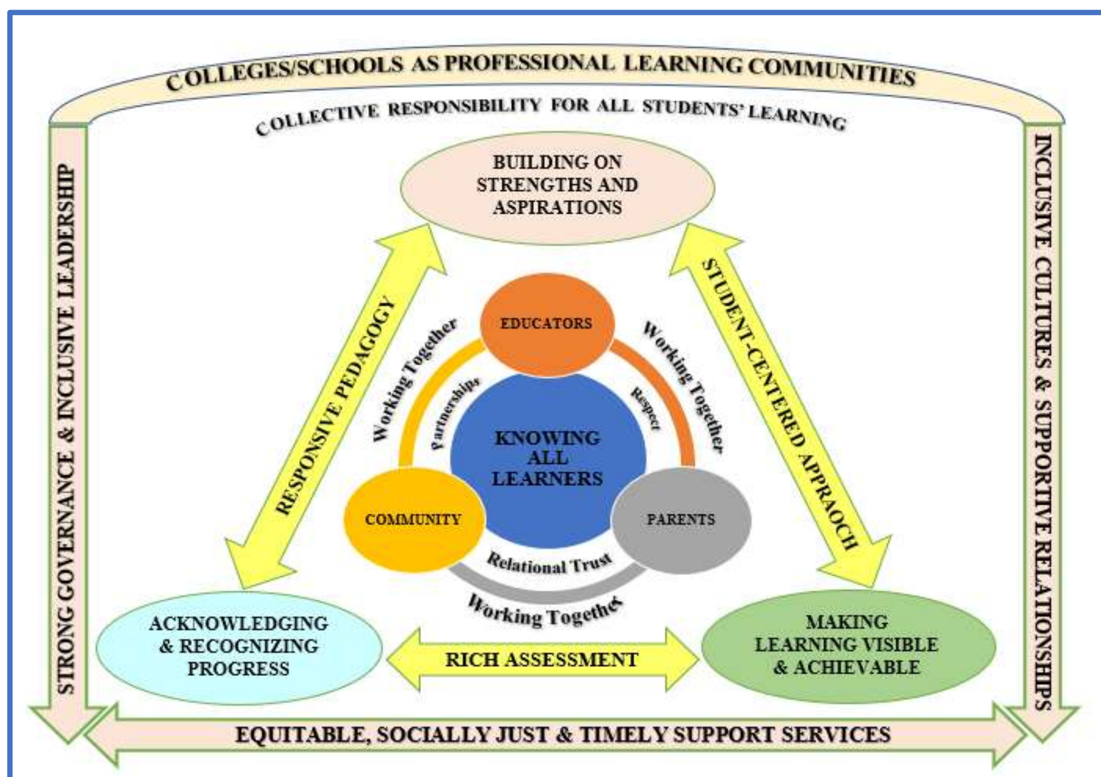
6.5 Diversity Framework for Strategic 'Repositioning'

The 'model for strategic action' (Figure 6.8) illustrates the need for 'whole-of-system' repositioning, by placing onus on educators to become agents of pro-positive change, by maximising the 'talents' of all educational stakeholders. The latter because,

> "schooling has a highly significant role in either reproducing ideologies of sub-ordination or to provide resources and habits to question and to move beyond the 'status quo'. School structures and culture, as well as patterns of classroom language and learning, can either reinforce social inequality or challenge it" (Freire, 1972, cited in Wrigley et. al., 2012, 13).

To this effect, the study integrates all the proposed specific recommendations (outlined in Section 6.4) for the seven 'areas of concern' (in the presented 'model for strategic action') into a comprehensive 'framework-for-action' to enable strategic and systemic 'repositioning' in favour of equitable and inclusive education (Figure 6.22).

Figure 6.22: Framework for 'Repositioning of the Self'



(Adapted from: New Zealand Ministry for Education, 2016).

The ultimate objective of the proposed framework is to transform and sustain colleges and schools into PLCs by enhancing 'collective responsibility' for students' learning. To this effect, the framework rests on three key pillars (i.e.: '*strong governance and inclusive leadership*'; '*equitable, socially just, and timely support services*'; '*inclusive*

cultures and supportive relationships'), which enable educators to work systematically together to collectively ensure equitable and socially just education. In this regard, the framework places the **'learner'** at the centre of the educational provision and takes pride with teachers, parents, and the general community to build rich knowledge on all learners (i.e. identity; culture; traditions; prior knowledge; likes and dislikes; strengths; passions; familial situations; talents; expectations; and aspirations) to enable inclusive and culturally-responsive schooling. To support the latter core process, the framework promotes 'responsive pedagogy'; 'learner-centered approaches'; and 'rich assessment practices', which together help to *embrace all learners' aspirations*; to *make learning more visible, achievable and measurable*; and to *acknowledge and recognize progress*. To summarize, this framework enables colleges and schools to develop an inclusive and positive climate in favour of inclusive education.

6.6 Conclusion

The proposed 'repositioning-of-the-self' theory together with the 'model-for-strategic action', the specific recommendations, and the 'framework for strategic and systemic repositioning' helped to deconstruct 'deficit-thinking' practices to develop democratic, inclusive and culturally-responsive colleges and schools. Essentially, the proposed recommendations focused on seven main 'areas of concern', i.e.:

- Governance issues;
- Leadership for inclusive education;
- Re-structuring of additional support services;
- Rigorous and accountable QA mechanisms;
- Responsive teaching practices and strategies;
- Learners', parents' and community engagement; and
- Effective training practices.

The ultimate aim was to help educators to validate the lived experiences of all students, with special focus on students, who do not 'fit' within the traditional schooling mode. Also, given the universality of the concepts involved in the designed 'repositioning-of-the-self' concept, the 'model-for-strategic-action', and the 'framework for systemic repositioning', the latter tools could be easily applied in other international educational contexts, rather than confining them to the Maltese context only. The next and final chapter (Chapter 7) presents a general conclusion, which summarizes the main findings and recommendations of the research study.

Chapter 7: General Conclusion

7.1 Moving Beyond the 'Deficit' Paradigm

The current research study sought to investigate the effects of 'deficit-thinking' and 'neoliberalism' on the Maltese educational system. More specifically, this thesis tried to uproot the invisible strength of 'deficit-thinking' to understand how the latter, in conjunction with 'neoliberal approaches to education', influenced local educational processes and practices in the quest for inclusive, culturally-responsive, and equitable education. In this regard, the research study adopted a pragmatic approach and utilized the 'mixed-methods approach to research', to address 'WHY', 'WHAT', and 'HOW' questions on 'deficit-thinking', 'inclusive education', and 'diversity'. The ultimate aim was to develop a valid alternative to the 'deficit' paradigm and to present practical and pragmatic recommendations that facilitate the development of inclusive, socially just, and culturally-responsive learning settings.

Collected evidence (from questionnaires, sociometric tests, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, class participant observations, job-shadowing sessions with HoS, and document analysis) highlighted organisational and operational dilemmas, barriers, and challenges on the implementation of the broad view of 'inclusive education' across all sectors and personnel of the educational system. In essence, barriers[15] to 'inclusive education' derived from the lack of conceptual clarity on the broad view of 'inclusion', which reinforced the 'competitive-integrative-deficit-medical' mentality[16] (referred to as 'one-size-fits-all' mentality), that negatively influenced the beliefs, attitudes, and/or practices of educational policymakers, leaders, teachers, and LSEs on the academic abilities and behavioural and social skills of minority learners[17]. Apart from generating issues of 'power imbalances', the exposed six components of the 'deficit ideology'[18]

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[15]The research study unveiled systemic barriers in: governance and leadership processes and practices; policy planning and implementation; teaching pedagogy and assessment techniques; the provision of CPD to all educators; the provision of additional support services; and in QA mechanisms.
[16]The exposed 'integrative-deficit-medical' mentality limited access to critical dialogue and increased resistance to change; created a culture of blame or 'shifting-of-responsibility'; located responsibility for school failure in the lived experiences of minority learners; increased over-reliance on additional support services to 'fix' minority learners' deficits; increased labelling and strengthened stereotypical beliefs, attitudes, and habits; and reinforced compensatory class-withdrawal teaching practices.
[17]Collected data earmarked the following minority cohorts of learners (in descending order*):* learners with diverse physical disabilities or psychological conditions; learners with diverse learning skills or abilities; learners with diverse aptitudes; learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds; learners from diverse socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds; learners with communication difficulties; learners with diverse religious and/or faith backgrounds; and learners with gender and/or sexual orientation differences.
[18]Six 'deficit-thinking' components include: blaming the victim; pseudoscientific; cycle of oppression; temporal changes; model of educability; and heterodoxic discourse.

created severe difficulties to local colleges and schools to respond effectively to the complexity and fluidity of the ever-increasing societal changes and diversity issues. The latter because educators viewed 'diversity' as a 'problem to remedy', and regarded 'inclusion' as a 'bureaucratic and unrealistic additional responsibility or burden'.

The research study's original contribution consisted in the development of the 'repositioning-of-the-self' concept, which served as the main philosophical vehicle for positive change to redress educational disparities and inequities, by moving the system from a 'deficit-frame' towards 'collective responsibility and accountability' in favour of inclusive, equitable, and culturally-responsive schooling. In this regard, the proposed concept presents a coordinated and strategic whole-of-system[19] reculturing and restructuring process[20] to transform local colleges and schools into accountable, sustainable, democratic, socially just, accessible, and inclusive learning communities. To facilitate the latter transformation and enable a smooth transition towards equitable education, the 'repositioning-of-the-self' technique promotes three essential tools, i.e.: good and strategic educational governance; inclusive leadership; and critical reflection for evaluation. Altogether, the latter three tools enable a dynamic change process[21] that positively effects the way educational stakeholders think and interact within the system to accomplish the reconceptualization of local colleges and schools, whereby "diversity is no longer viewed as a 'problem', but rather as an 'opportunity' for enhanced student learning" (Sharma, 2012, 23).

7.2 The 'Repositioning' Process for Inclusive Communities

Directly emanating from the 'repositioning-of-the-self' theory are the 'model-for-strategic-action'[22] and the 'diversity framework for strategic repositioning'[23]. In essence, the proposed model and framework encourage a developmental process for strategic and systemic change (based on equity, social justice, deep democracy, active engagement, and inclusiveness) to instil in colleges/schools a sense of 'professional

[19]Whole-of-system refers to Directorate, College, School, and Classroom levels.
[20]The reculturing and restructuring process rests on five main tenets, namely: *agency*; *community*; *deep democracy*; *social justice*; and *academic excellence*.
[21]The process involves addressing both first and second order change to "enable a fundamental break with past and current deficit-oriented practices" (Ainscow, 2014, 76).
[22]The 'model-for-strategic-action' presents seven areas of concern with specific recommendations to facilitate the elimination of 'deficit-thinking' for equitable education.
[23]The 'diversity framework' supports the developmental repositioning process by enhancing 'collective responsibility' for all students' learning to transform colleges and schools into PLCs.

community' to: *increase accessibility, availability, and opportunity for success for all learners*; *create conducive, socially just, and highly democratic learning environments to address issues of 'power imbalance'*; *embrace diversity respectfully*; and *to sustain sustainability, rigor, and accountability* in the quality of instruction and the degree of access to, and participation of, all students' in the colleges' or schools' academic and social activities. Essentially, the latter structures placed the onus on educators (mainly Directors, CPs, and HoS) to "reculture the educational field" in favour of 'inclusive education', by addressing: the attitudes and beliefs of stakeholders inside and outside colleges/schools; the existent cultural norms; and the relationships among and between different stakeholders within the educational system. The main objective of the 'repositioning' process is to build a compelling vision[24], that increases the focus on core instructional outcomes by improving faculty and relational capacity through constructive and deliberate dialogue, to enable an epistemological shift towards "a new moral order that bonds both leaders and followers to a set of shared values and beliefs" on social justice and equity for effective 'college and school improvement' (Ainscow, 2014, 89).

Essentially, the proposed 'repositioning-of-the-self' process strives for real and strategic change in the 'professional culture' of the educational system to, "re-culture and re-think the purposes of schooling, through a 'critical and reflective lens', and to understand how this cannot be detached from the broader social and political context" (Sharma, 2014, 59). Similarly, Wrigley (2012) encouraged all educators, "to find new ways of re-building supportive and inclusive systems of public education, which work democratically to actively engage with community needs to support civic aspirations" (18). Given that colleges and schools are micro-learning organisations within a nested macro-educational system (rather than isolated systems), the proposed 'repositioning' mechanism recognizes "the *thisness* of each [college and] school", by acknowledging the unique identity, social experiences, cultural needs, and "path of development" of all colleges and schools, to create a "commonly shared pedagogical and social vision" for 'inclusive education' (Wrigley, 2012, 23). Hence, a vision that: (a) enables '*content*

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[24]The proposed vision rotates on the need *to create conceptual clarity on 'inclusion'*; *to strengthen the college system's governance*; *to transform colleges and schools into inclusive and sustainable PLCs*; *to develop accountable QA mechanisms*; *to provide effective and timely additional support services*; *to encourage culturally-responsive teaching; to promote effective CPD*; and *to encourage the active engagement of learners, parents, and the general community*.

integration' (the expansion of the curriculum and syllabi to acknowledge the different 'funds of knowledge' and experiences of all stakeholders); (b) facilitates '*knowledge construction*' (educators' 'collective responsibility' to help students understand how individuals' beliefs are based upon their cultural capital and experiences); (c) builds on '*responsive pedagogy*' (instructional strategies that include minority learners, and which strives to increase attainment levels for all students); (d) reduces and eliminates '*prejudice*' (learners develop positive attitudes and beliefs towards minority learners by reducing labelling and marginalisation); and (e) empowers '*equitable and socially just culture*' (critical analysis of system-wide policy-documents, processes, discourse, and interactions to develop inclusive practices). Apart from giving an ecological view of schooling, these characteristics recommend the pragmatic 're-positioning' of the educational system through the 're-modelling' of organisational processes, operational procedures, and teaching modalities to enhance greater coherence and accountability for a shared mission to eliminate 'deficit-thinking'.

7.3 'Inclusive Leadership' to Eliminate 'Deficit-Thinking'

The elimination of 'deficit-thinking' in favour of inclusive, socially just, and culturally-responsive schooling depends on the ability of educators (mainly Directors, CPs, and SMT members) to transform colleges and schools into sustainable, authentic, and inclusive 'professional learning communities'. The intention of the latter proposed transformation is to enable a systemic change in mindsets, that invites all educational stakeholders to come together collaboratively to learn and work in settings, where they feel welcome, respected, and challenged to improve the technical core of schooling. Hence, the central focus of inclusive, and authentic PLCs is on collaborative learning, critical inquiry, and reflective practice to:

a) Instil a 'sense of professionalism'[25] in all educators;
b) Foster 'shared responsibility and accountability' in decision-making and leadership;
c) Build a strong sense of collective belonging and mutual respect among educators, parents, and students;
d) Sustain improved teaching and learning for all members of the community;
e) Address proactively the learning needs of all community members; and

[25]'Sense of professionalism' through the development of a learning-oriented culture and participatory decision-making structures and processes, that empower educators to take responsibility for their own choices and decisions, with educational leaders providing consistent, explicit, and visible support to all educators.

f) Consider diversity as an asset or resource for effective college/school improvement. To this effect, strategic governance through inclusive leadership plays a crucial role, since 'inclusive leadership' inspires democratic-oriented actions to address significant resistance to 'change', guides and supports all educators to redress stereotypical beliefs on minority learners, and envisions a more equitable educational future by addressing "structures of power imbalances, oppression, and privilege" in colleges and schools (Crow, 2006, 233). To summarize, 'inclusive leadership' and 'good governance' foster a sense of urgency for positive and meaningful change, by supporting all educators to challenge mental models, which serve as barriers to 'change efforts' to provide high levels of instruction, support, and expectation for every student.

7.4 Recommendations

In order to facilitate the 'repositioning-of-the-self' process of Maltese colleges and schools in favour of inclusive and culturally-responsive education, this research study identified a set of specific and practical practices that would help the educational system to eliminate 'deficit-thinking'. Based on these findings, this thesis developed several recommendations to enable effective change at ministerial, directorate, college, school, and classroom levels, to provide all learners with the access and opportunities to improve their quality educational experiences.

A) Recommendations for Change at Ministerial level (Policy Level)

At Ministerial level, this thesis presents four specific recommendations to successfully commence a holistic and targeted reconceptualization of the Maltese education system. These recommendations include:

- The need for coherence and clarity on the concept of 'inclusion', to ensure that all educational stakeholders (policymakers, educators, learner, and parents) understand 'inclusive education' as an approach for all learners. Hence, this thesis recommends the development of a 'national inclusive education' framework[26], that is tailored to the Maltese context and consistent with a *rights-based approach* to meet the needs of all students. Apart from ensuring clarity on 'inclusive education', the policy also needs to shed more light on key operational concepts, such as 'diversity', 'equity'; 'democracy'; 'social justice' and 'quality' to ensure clear guidance to departments,

[26]The framework necessitates the development of a national policy, strategy and procedural documents to support the development and implementation of a common vision for 'diversity' and 'inclusion' in a dynamic and flexible manner.

colleges, and schools to develop and implement their unique context-based policies for 'inclusive education'.

- A shift in policy-making from a reactive approach to a longer-term developmental approach, which promotes the engagement and collaboration of all stakeholders to reduce systemic fragmentation. With regards to policy implementation, the research study recommends a participatory approach to move from 'crisis management' to collaborative planning, based on realistic implementation timescales; consistent and reflective monitoring; and critical evaluations and reviewing.
- Good and strategic governance[27] to enhance adaptiveness and flexibility for systemic high-leverage change for 'inclusive education'. The research study proposes also the development of more meritocratic and transparent recruitment processes, which integrate knowledge and experience, and morale and ability together, to ensure the right choice of candidates for headship positions.
- Funding mechanisms that support equity and effectiveness to address the tensions between increasing academic outputs and meeting individual learning needs. Hence, the need to ensure sustainability in the distribution of resources (both financial and human) in the short, medium and long term, to enable effective use of the existent resources for the provision of high-quality education for all students. In addition, this thesis recommends the creation of financial incentives to encourage all colleges and schools to address accessibility and placement issues.

B) Recommendations for Change at Departmental and Directorate Levels

The recommendations at departmental and directorate levels focus on creating the right ambience for the provision of 'inclusive and equitable education', by enhancing skills, knowledge, and dispositions to overcome 'deficit-thinking'.

- Enhancing processes for more decentralisation of power to colleges and schools. To facilitate the latter process, this thesis recommends the setting up of a 'College Board'[28] in the ten State college, to enhance a 'bottom-up' approach and effectively manage the 'repositioning' of colleges and schools towards inclusive and equitable education.

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[27]Good governance entails the strengthening of six inter-related domains, i.e.: *accountability*; *capacity*; *knowledge governance*; *stakeholder involvement*; *strategic thinking and planning*; *a whole-of-system perspective*.

[28]The 'college boards' should not exceed the amont of eight members and should include experienced and committed representatives from educators, parents, Industry, Unions, and Civil Society.

- Re-thinking of all the operational procedures of ELC, CCP, and CoH structures, to give Directors, CPs, and HoS more space and autonomy for deliberate dialogue to enhance productive relationships and interconnectedness, rather than concentrating on schedules and materials. The latter 're-thinking' strengthens system flexibility to encourage innovation, and support the active engagement of all stakeholders.
- Re-culturing NSSS from a State Department to an autonomous 'National Agency for School Support Services'[29], to address the dichotomy surrounding ESS provision, i.e. moving support services from compensatory practices towards prevention and capacity-building approaches to provide effective and well co-ordinated continuum of support. Strong early identification processes and practices (such as early baby screening) and constructive needs assessment help to link the level of additional support for SEN learners to their actual level of need, rather than to the category of disability. Furthermore, this thesis recommends re-designing the role of the INCO to provide strategic direction on the broad view of 'inclusive education' to CPs and HoS.
- Re-structuring of the SMP[30] to ensure statementing procedures that assure long-term sustainability. Thus, the need to set up an autonomous 'Statementing Authority', with organisational structures and operational procedures similar to the 'Education Authority' in Northern Ireland. Essentially, the statementing process focuses upon learners' educational needs and not solely on the need for support services.
- Ensuring sustainable and equitable additional support allocation by moving away from the current 'diagnosis-referral' approach towards resource allocation based on the profiled need of each college. The thesis recommends the provision of a 'Class Teaching Assistant' (to support the teaching and learning process), and a 'Teaching Assistant' (to provide 1-1 support to learners with severe-multiple disabilities).
- Embedding coherent monitoring and evaluation processes in colleges and schools, services, and Ministry level work, to ensure quality educational provision across

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[29]The proposed agency promotes an **advisory approach** to support college and schools to identify and remove structural, attitudinal, and curricular barriers to enable change for inclusion. Focus is on system development; a **preventive approach** to support colleges and schools to avert potential learning and developmental risks, and effective **intervention strategies** to provide timely support for learners facing severe difficulties; **internal monitoring and evaluation processes** to verify the effectiveness, adequacy and quality of support service provision.

[30]SMP falls within the remit of the Directorate for Educational Services (DES). More specifically, the SMP forms part of the NSSS Department.

the whole system. Hence, the need for the QA Department to develop clear quality assurance standards on 'equity' and 'inclusive education', and to embed the latter within a coherent 'framework-for-action', which integrates internal and external-reviewing processes. Moreover, external reviewing needs to be sustained over time and supportive in nature to help educators further develop their understandings and skills (rather than promoting punitive practices).

- Strengthening the 'Institute for Education' to ensure a coherent system of training and leadership development for inclusive education, by: reviewing existing training; developing new approaches to the training of all professionals, and monitoring the long-term effectiveness of training in line with national education quality assurance standards and frameworks. Hence, general and specialist training is made available for all educators to ensure that all staff members can respond positively to diversity.
- Embedding the Learning Outcomes Framework in the proposed national inclusive education framework to reduce fragmentation. The research study recommends also the development of a specialised training programme on how educators can utilize the learning outcomes framework, to ensure conceptual and operational clarity.

C) Recommendations for Change at College and School Levels

The below recommendations aim to support the 'repositioning' of all State colleges and schools into inclusive, authentic, and sustainable PLCs.

- Developing a positive and responsive culture and climate in colleges and schools to include all students irrespective of their 'difference'. The latter process includes four main actions, namely: (a) valuing the cultural baggage of each stakeholder in the college or school[31]; (b) establishing a supportive and respectful atmosphere[32]; (c) taking a community approach and celebrating success[33]; and (d) ensuring the active participation and engagement of all stakeholders in the college/school life[34].
- Creating cultures of empowerment for organisational change to transform colleges and schools into 'inclusive communities' by: (a) building productive relationships;

[31]Understanding identity, culture, and language; knowing all staff members and learners; validating prior knowledge and expertise.
[32]Learning about diversity and equity together; holding high expectations; supporting leadership; and strengthening collaboration.
[33]Building productive partnerships; using community assets; bringing the community into the classroom and taking the classroom out to the community.
[34]Creating flexible learning environments; focusing on strengths; seeking feedback and planning proactively; engaging stakeholders in decision-making.

(b) showing an ethic of care for others by nurturing a spirit of respect, trust, and care towards all stakeholders; (c) promoting teacher effectiveness by demonstrating leadership and upholding accountability, responsibility, integrity, authenticity, and a strong advocacy to challenge the 'status quo'; (d) fostering an ethic of bonding through networking, collaboration, and cooperation to enable unity; and (e) creating opportunities for teachers to air their views or concerns as they engage in their daily endeavours, thus ensuring that the values of an inclusive philosophy can be truly nurtured.

- Developing supportive relations to eliminate 'deficit-based' practices and discourse, by validating expertise, sharing decision-making processes, celebrating strengths and accomplishments, and providing individual support.
- Ensuring that family and community perspectives are at the heart of the college or school to build democratic communities that support the development of productive partnerships with the 'general community' and active parental involvement in the teaching and learning process.
- Ensuring strategic planning and programming for inclusive education through the development of inclusion-oriented CDPs and SDPs to strategically address issues related to 'deficit-thinking', by presenting detailed action plans that clearly describe how national-level policies on inclusive education can be implemented to remove all barriers to learning and participation. Both the college and school community work collectively together to minimise all forms of discrimination and stereotyping.
- Distributing college and school-based resources in an equitable or socially just way to support inclusive education. Clear procedures for monitoring the achievements of learners, who are at risk of exclusion, are also in place. To this effect, support services are regularly audited to maintain effectiveness and sustainability.
- Reculturing also needs adequate restructuring and thus colleges/schools need to be given the leeway to structure their day so that such collaborative endeavours and networked learning opportunities are created.

D) Recommendations for Change at Classroom Level

These recommendations focus on classroom teaching strategies to effectively address the instructional and academic needs of diverse learners. The ultimate aim is to raise achievement for all students.

- Developing positive teacher-learner relationships by believing in learners' abilities and focusing on strengths; setting high expectations for all learners; being empathic, positive and energetic; validating success to build relational trust; and using positive discourse to avoid putting learners down.
- Strengthening teacher networking for productive collaboration between and among all educators to enable shared planning and resource development, increase faculty and relational trust, and enhance deliberate dialogue.
- Embedding a culturally-responsive pedagogy to make all lessons accessible to all learners, by utilizing the 'Universal Design for Learning' approach in conjunction with 'Differentiated Instruction' practices. Class teachers also use a wide range of assessment procedures to allow all learners to display their skills, competences, and abilities. All learners are involved in self-assessment and recording of their own learning progress.
- Ensuring the development and implementation of constructive and productive IEPs through a 'team-based' approach, in which teachers, LSEs, and support specialists work together to develop the appropriate accommodations and/or modifications to effectively include SEN learners in mainstream classrooms.
- Enhancing transition opportunities to facilitate learners' smooth progression across compulsory schooling. Moreover, teachers feel consistently supported to monitor the effectiveness of their strategies to adjust teaching practices accordingly.
- Re-visiting tracking, banding, and/or setting issues to afford students an education filled with meaningful conversations that lend themselves to building empathy and understanding of other's social and cultural backgrounds.

Apart from enriching knowledge on how to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' from Maltese educational settings, these recommendations also aimed to ameliorate the operational and organisational structures of the Maltese educational system to enable high quality education for all students.

7.5 Conclusive Remarks and Recommendations for Further Study

This research study should also serve as a basis for further studies in the fields of 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education'. Hence, it would be highly beneficial if in the future similar studies are conducted in the Church and Independent educational sectors. The latter studies, together with the current one, would provide a more holistic picture of the state-of-play of 'deficit-thinking' and 'inclusive education' in Malta. In

addition, the researcher recommends also in-depth research studies on the seven main areas of concern in the repositioning process, i.e.:

- Research on the broad view of 'inclusive education' to better address 'why', 'what' and 'how' issues on the latter concept;
- Research to explore how the epistemology of 'inclusion' varies across the different schooling contexts and constituencies.
- Research on good educational governance and 'inclusive leadership' to identify how the latter concept could influence teachers' collective efficacy to develop inclusive learning communities.
- Research on what leadership strategies and practices are mostly needed to increase a sense of belonging in all educators for 'education for all'.
- Research to identify what CPD is mostly required to meet the evolving needs of all stakeholders, particularly changing demographics, high stakes accountability, and the achievement gap.
- Research on how to militate against stakeholders resistance to change for inclusive learning communities and on how educational leaders can build social capital in all educators to influence change.
- Research on 'culture' and how this impacts the teaching and learning process, with special focus on culturally-responsive pedagogy.
- Research to further develop the concept of the 'multi-tiered systems of support' to ensure effective support services and provision.
- Research focusing explicitly on the development of inclusive learning communities, through learner engagement, and parental and the community involvement.

7.6 Concluding Remarks

The research study's original contribution resulted in the 'repositioning-of-the-self' technique, which serves as an effective vehicle to create deliberate dialogue about the intentional or unintentional assumptions and beliefs that educators bring to their daily interactions with students. Furthermore, the 'model-for-strategic-action' and the 'diversity framework for strategic repositioning' provided practical recommendations and pragmatic strategies to all educational stakeholders to commence a comprehensive 'rethinking' process of the local educational system to replace 'deficit-thinking' with inclusive and culturally-responsive schooling. Furthermore, this thesis contributed to identify cohorts of minority learners in the local educational system; to highlight the

main challenges of minority learners in colleges and schools as well as to outline the major barriers for inclusive education; to earmark ‘inclusive leadership’ as an essential requisite for equitable education; and to point out ‘seven main areas of concern’ that necessitate deep repositioning to transform local colleges and schools into sustainable, authentic, and inclusive professional learning communities. My hope for the future is that educational authorities utilize this research study to shed more light on the effects of ‘deficit-thinking’, to engage in constructive dialogue, and to initiate a focused and comprehensive ‘repositioning’ process to redress educational inequities.

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Appendix

Appendix A

The Questionnaires

Questionnaire Information Letter[35]

Dear Participant:

This questionnaire forms part of a study that I am conducting as part fulfilment of the PhD degree at the School of Education within the University of Lincoln. The research title is 'Education for All learners: Eliminating 'deficit thinking' in favour of inclusive and culturally responsive schooling in Malta'. It aims to understand what 'deficit thinking' is; how it is constituted and in what ways it is being eliminated from colleges and schools. In this project, the term 'deficit thinking' refers to "the notion that learners fail in school because such students and their families experience deficiencies that obstruct the learning process (e.g.: limited intelligence and lack of motivation) (Valencia, 1997, pg. 34).

Your participation is completely voluntary and it should not take you more that fifteen to twenty minutes to complete the following questionnaire. The questions do not deal with private or personal matters that might put you at risk. While completing the questionnaire, I appreciate your total sincerity and honesty to ensure valid and reliable results. On the other hand you may also decline to answer any question/s in the questionnaire.

Participation will be highly confidential. All questionnaires will be collected by the researcher himself, i.e. the undersigned. The information will be stored in a secure place and accessible only to the researcher. In order to remove all indentifying information all questions are coded, hence anonymity, confidentiality and secrecy are guaranteed. Published results of this questionnaire will not refer to the actual name of your school or specific individuals participating in this study. Your participation will not disadvantage you in any way and will not affect your relationship with the school's staff. On completing the study a copy of all findings will be given to all participant schools for further reference.

Results will be compared with other data to develop a number of non-utopian recommendations on how the Maltese educational system can be ameliorated by eradicating 'deficit-thinking'.

If you **DO** wish to participate, tick the box "I agree to complete this questionnaire".

☐ **I agree to complete the questionnaire**. (For my records)

I thank you in advance for your support, cooperation and dedicated time.

Mr. Sean Zammit
(PhD Candidate University of Lincoln, UK)

[35]This information letter was sent to all participants (HoS and Middle leaders; Teachers; and LSEs).

Questionnaire for Heads of School

Section A: General Information

- **Sex/Gender**: □ Male □ Female □ Other

- **School**: □ Primary School □ Secondary School

- **For how many years have you been in the teaching profession?**

  □ Less than 5 years □ Between 5 and 10 years

  □ Between 11 and 15 years □ Between 16 and 20 years

  □ More than 20 years

- **How many years of experience do you have as a Head of school?**

  □ Between 1 and 4 years □ Between 5 and 10 years

  □ More than 10 years

- **From where did you receive your training?**

  □ Teachers' College □ University of Malta

  □ Course for 'Supplementary Teachers' □ MCAST

  □ Other: Please Specify: ____

- **Do you think you received enough training on 'deficit thinking', 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education'?**

  □ Yes □ No

- **As a class teacher, prior to becoming Head of school, have you ever taught 'minority' learners (migrants, students with disabilities)?**

  □ Yes □ No

  If YES, how do you describe your experience?

  □ Pleasant □ Not so Pleasant □ Frustrating

- **In your school population do you have 'minority' learners?**

  □ Yes □ No

  If YES, how do you describe your experience?

  □ Pleasant □ Not so Pleasant □ Frustrating

- **What is your general understanding of the term 'inclusive education'?**

  ____

- **What do you understand by the term 'minority learners'?**

  ____

- **What is your personal understanding of the term 'marginalized learners'?**

  ____

- **In your school, is there a policy on inclusion?**

  □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

  If YES, how was this policy developed?

  ____

- **Does inclusion feature as a priority area in the School's Development Plan?**

  □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

- **Do you rate your school as an inclusive and culturally responsive one?**

  □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

  Why do you rate it so?

  ____

  ____

Section B: School Population and Composition

- **What is your school's population?** ________ **students**
- **How many teachers do you have in your school?** ________ **teachers**
- **How many learning support educators do you have?** ________ **LSAs**
- **Who are the minority learners in your school?** (Rate the below categories from 1 to 5. 1 being the MOST COMMON and 5 the LEAST COMMON)

  Students with diverse educational learning skills and abilities □

  Students with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds □

  Students with diverse religious and faith backgrounds □

  Students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds □

  Students with gender diversities □

  Students with physical and/or psychological disabilities □

  Students with language or communication difficulties □

  Students with diverse aptitudes towards schooling □

  Others: Please Specify: ________________________________ □

- **What is these students' general behaviour and attitude?**

  □ Well □ Not so well □ Bad

- **How do these students perform academically?**

  □ Well □ Not so well □ Bad

- **What are the main problems encountered by these students?**

  Behavioural & Emotional Problems □

  Socializing Problems □

  Financial Problems □

  Language & Other Communication Problems □

  Don't Know □

  Others: Specify: ____ □

- **Do these students receive any kind of additional support at school?**

  □ Yes □ No

  If YES, what kind of support do they receive? (List any services the learner may benefit from).

  ____

- **How do you try to include these students?** (List some strategies you use)

  ____

- **What barriers/challenges do you encounter when trying to include these students?** (List problems you encounter at school level to include these learners)

  ____

Section C: Leadership for Inclusive Education

- **To what extent do you feel that** (Tick the most appropriate ANSWER)**:**

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
Your staff is adequately addressing the learning needs of EVERY student.	□	□	□	□
The College Principal provides all the necessary help and support.	□	□	□	□
You are being supported and helped from the 3 directorates of education (DES; DQSE; Operations).	□	□	□	□
You have enough power and autonomy to perform changes in your school's policies, practices and procedures.	□	□	□	□
You are valued and trusted by superiors.	□	□	□	□
Every student has the opportunity to succeed in the current educational system despite differences and diversities.	□	□	□	□
The current educational structure needs to reinvent itself to better cater for the needs of all learners present in schools.	□	□	□	□

- **As a Head of School, to what extent, do you:**

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
Foster a positive relationship with *learners* – clear vision on how to include and give voice to students'.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Foster a positive relationship with *parents* – parental involvement is regarded a fundamental aspect.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Foster positive relationships with the *general community* – clear vision on how to involve the general community (NGOs).	☐	☐	☐	☐
Foster a positive relationship with staff based on mutual trust – you empower staff members through distributed leadership.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Listen, discuss and evaluate feedback with all the staff before taking a final decision.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Engage conversations with staff members on the situation of 'minority' learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Encourage teachers to take leadership roles.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Distribute leadership tasks among your staff members.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Make full use of the teachers' expertise and experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Keep teaching and learning as the PRIMARY focus of your mission.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Encourage collaboration among teachers – your school can be defined as: *Professional Learning Community* (PLC).	☐	☐	☐	☐
Perform regular monitory and observation visits in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Make your presence felt within the class by avoiding staying for long periods in the office.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sustain the professional development of all teachers through targeted in-house/school training.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Try to mentor staff members whenever faced with a particular problem or challenge.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Work in synergy with educational stakeholders, i.e. staff members, parents, learners, general community, support services.	☐	☐	☐	☐

- **On average, how many hours of professional development did you receive on how to eliminate 'deficit-thinking' through inclusive leadership?**

  □ 0-1 hours □ 4-5hours □ More than 5 hours

  Who was responsible for this training? ________________________________

- **Overall, I received enough training on how to deal with 'deficit-thinking' and on how to create inclusive and culturally responsive schools?**

  □ Yes □ No

  If YES, what kind of training did you receive?

  ____

  ____

  If NO, what kind of training do you require?

  ____

  ____

- **Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	Agree	**Disagree**
Throughout the years the training received improved my leadership skills and helped me to create an inclusive school.	□	□
The received training influenced positively the way I perceive inclusive education.	□	□
Training at school level is offered after administering a Training Needs Analysis (TDA) to identify the weaknesses of my staff in inclusive education and deficit thinking.	□	□
Training offered to staff, at school level, does not complement their teaching needs.	□	□
Training in my school is not occasional but sustained and consistently focused on how to deal with deficit thinking in favour of inclusive education.	□	□
Most school-based professional training helps to advance a co-ordinated focus on the schools' targets on inclusion.	□	□
Teachers in my school prefer to work individually rather than as a group. This reinforces deficit thinking, shifting of responsibilities and instigates a blaming culture.	□	□

- **Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	Agree	Disagree
The school's staff shares a common belief on the school's goal.	☐	☐
The school's goals and priorities on inclusive education and deficit thinking are clear to me.	☐	☐
The school's teachers and senior management team are in close agreement on what constitutes deficit thinking and the basic difference between inclusion and integration.	☐	☐
The school's vision on deficit thinking and inclusive education are all evidence based and data informed.	☐	☐
I make a conscious effort to promote more synergy amongst teaching staff, including support paraprofessionals and other external agencies.	☐	☐
At this school teachers focus on how well students are learning rather than on what they are learning: Quality vs. Content.	☐	☐
Student learning is based on the capabilities and strengths approach rather than on identifying deficits and weaknesses.	☐	☐
The school rarely presents cases to the Statementing Moderating Panel for an official statement of needs as the learner's needs are tackled successful at school.	☐	☐
The school regularly invests in educational resources to support the inclusion of all learners.	☐	☐
All teaching staff makes use of inclusive pedagogies, i.e. Personalized Teaching or the Universal Design for Learning.	☐	☐

- **Please mark the following statements appropriately:**

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
General Attitudes and Beliefs				
It is important to acknowledge and show empathy with the challenges minority learners bring to their educational experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is important to acknowledge and show empathy with the challenges minority learners bring to their educational experience but should *not* be addressed during teaching.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I recognise that norms associated with minority groups impact their educational experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I recognize that norms associated with minority groups impact their educational experience, should *not* be addressed at school level.	☐	☐	☐	☐
An ethic of care is consistent throughout the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The school holds high expectations for all its learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐

I believe that every student should be granted access to the most rigorous courses.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The attitudes and habits students bring to school greatly reduce their chances for success.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Success or failure in teaching students is due primarily to factors beyond the school's control.	☐	☐	☐	☐
If students fail the SMT does not feel responsible - school did its very best to help these students – nothing else could be done.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Many of the students in my school are not capable of learning the material presented to them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
If expected learning outcomes are not met, school assumes the responsibility. It blames the teaching methods for lack of success.	☐	☐	☐	☐
To Include or not to Include?				
I believe tracking/ability grouping is essential.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe tracking into lower level classes limits the opportunities for minority learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe streaming is the best solution.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Streaming makes the brightest children brighter but does little to help the rest to catch up.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Streaming can help all ability groups by tailoring lesson content to their ability.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I prefer mixed ability teaching rather than streaming, banding, setting or tracking.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Behaviour is associated with learning and should be a criterion in the placement decision.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Some students are simply not 'fit' to attend mainstream classes.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Inclusion is de-motivating and hindering the performance of high achievers.	☐	☐	☐	☐
More support services; resources; programmes; and schools are needed.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working within a Team				
Teachers and LSEs work, support and consult with each other.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The IEP is an essential document for the learners' success.	☐	☐	☐	☐

I participate and keep myself updated on the development and implementation of the IEP.	☐	☐	☐	☐
All teachers support the LSE in the development and implementation of Individual Educational Plans.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I make sure that teachers refer to the IEP by monitoring teaching files and material.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The school finances all resources required by the LSEs.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The IEP is reviewed constantly throughout the year.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The SMT feels the need to report to the SMP when learners register progress so that their statement of needs is reviewed downwards.	☐	☐	☐	☐
LSEs are a valuable resource in the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
‘Other’ children hold a negative attitude towards minority learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐
‘Other’ parents hold a negative attitude towards minority learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other School Dynamics				
The school has a clear policy on inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The SDP is focused and centred round inclusive practices and procedures.	☐	☐	☐	☐
INCO supports SMT members to develop, implement and monitor phases of the inclusive policy or SDP.	☐	☐	☐	☐
INCO provides consultative expertise on inclusive practices, policies and procedures at school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
INCO organizes training on inclusion for all staff members.	☐	☐	☐	☐
INCO visits school regularly.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The school has an Assistant Head in charge of inclusive education.		☐		
Time and finance work against inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Syllabus is too vast and rigid.	☐	☐	☐	☐
More professionalism is needed to improve inclusive practices.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learners attend or receive SEN programs or services regularly.	☐	☐	☐	☐
ALP and CCP are essential programs.	☐	☐	☐	☐
ALP needs to be incorporated within the same school setting and not provided in another school.	☐	☐	☐	☐

ALP and CCP are a means of segregating learners.	□	□	□	□
ALP and CCP need to be introduced at primary level too.	□	□	□	□
Different assessment forms are needed.	□	□	□	□
My school provides special papers for SEN learners.	□	□	□	□
Special Papers are developed.	□	□	□	□
Parents do not value work done at school.	□	□	□	□
Most children are not succeeding because of their parents' laissez affair attitude.	□	□	□	□

- **In summary, in this school do teachers:**

	Always	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Feel responsible if students fail?	□	□	□	□
Feel responsible to help each other do their best?	□	□	□	□
Take responsibility to make the school more inclusive?	□	□	□	□
Feel responsible for helping students develop holisitically?	□	□	□	□
Set high standards for themselves and their students?	□	□	□	□
Feel responsible that all students learn?	□	□	□	□
Feel responsible of all the students irrespective of the presence of the learning support assistant?	□	□	□	□
Have high expectations for their students' achievements?	□	□	□	□
Really care about each other?	□	□	□	□
Trust each other?	□	□	□	□
Discuss feelings, and frustrations with other teachers or SMT?	□	□	□	□
Feels comfortable to include all parents?	□	□	□	□
Respect other teachers who take the lead in the school?	□	□	□	□

- **What future actions should be taken to provide high quality education to all learners and ensure full inclusion in the school?**

____

____

____

Questionnaire for Middle Leaders and Teachers

Section A: General Information

- **Sex/Gender**: □ Male □ Female □ Other

- **School**: □ Primary School □ Secondary School

- **How many years have you been teaching?**

  □ Less than 5 years □ Between 5 & 10 years □ Between 11 & 15 years
  □ Between 16 & 20 years □ More than 20 years

- **How many years of experience do you have as a teacher in this school?**

  □ Between 1 & 4 years □ Between 5 & 10 years □ More than 10 years

- **From where did you receive your training?**

  □ Teachers' College □ University of Malta
  □ Course for 'supplementary teachers' □ MCAST
  □ Other: Please Specify: ______________________________

- **Do you think you received enough training on 'deficit thinking', 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education'?** □ Yes □ No

- **Have you ever taught 'minority' learners?** □ Yes □ No

  If YES, how do you describe your experience?

  □ Pleasant □ Not so Pleasant □ Frustrating

- **What do you understand by the term 'inclusive education'?**

  ____

- **What is your personal understanding of the term 'minority learners'?**

  ____

- **In your school, is there a policy on inclusion?**

  □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

- **Does inclusion feature as a priority area in the SDP?**

  □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

- **Do you rate your school as an inclusive and culturally responsive one?**

  □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

<u>Section B</u>: <u>Class Population and Composition</u>

- **How many students do you have in class?** **________ students**
- **Do you have a learning support educator in class?** □ Yes □ No
- **Who are the minority learners in your classroom?** (Rate the below from 1 to 5. 1 being the most common and 5 the least common)

  Students with diverse educational learning skills and abilities □

  Students with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds □

  Students with diverse religious and faith backgrounds □

  Students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds □

  Students with gender diversities □

  Students with physical and/or psychological disabilities □

  Students with language or communication difficulties □

  Students with diverse aptitudes towards schooling □

  Others: Please Specify: ____

- **How do these students perform academically?**

  □ Well □ Not so well □ Bad

- **What are the main problems encountered by these students in class?**

  Behavioural & Emotional Problems □

  Socializing Problems □

  Financial Problems □

  Communication Problems □

  Don't Know □

  Others: Specify: ________________________________ □

- **Do these students receive any kind of additional support at school?**

  □ Yes □ No

  If YES, what kind of support do they receive? (List any services)

  ____

- **How do you include these students in class?** (List only some the strategies)

  ____

- **What challenges do you encounter when you try to include these students?**

  ____

  ____

Section C: Leadership for Inclusive Education

- **Think of a learner who is not succeeding. List reasons this lack of success.**

  ____

  ____

  ____

- **To what extent do you feel that** (Tick the answer most appropriate)**:**

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
You address the learning needs of EVERY student in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐
You receive useful feedback on your performance from your superiors (SMT).	☐	☐	☐	☐
You receive useful suggestions on curricular material from colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐
You receive useful suggestions for teaching practices or activities from colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐
You are empowered and supported by the various support services present such as the INCO; SEBD; complementary teacher.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Specific learning strategies are the result of regular discussions among colleagues and additional support professionals such as INCO, SEBD Specialist; LSA.	☐	☐	☐	☐
You receive suggestions on how to diversify assessment material that includes ALL the learners' abilities and skills present in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Every student has the opportunity to succeed in the current educational system despite diversity.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The current educational structure needs to reinvent itself to better cater for the needs of all learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐

- **To what extent does your Head of School** (Tick the most appropriate answer)**:**

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
Foster a positive relationship with *learners* – has a clear vision on how to give active voice to students.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Foster a positive relationship with *parents* – views effective parental involvement as essential.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Foster positive relationships with the *general community* – has a clear vision on how to involve the general community (NGOs).	☐	☐	☐	☐
Foster a positive relation with staff based on trust. The Head of school delegates and empowers staff by using distributed leadership.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Listen, discuss, and evaluate all the feedback given with staff members before taking a final decision.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Engage in conversations with staff members on 'minority' learners.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Encourage all teachers and LSEs to assume leadership roles.	◻	◻	◻	◻
The teaching and learning process is the PRIMARY mission of the HoS.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Enable dialogue and collaboration. The school can be defined as a PLC.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Perform regular observation visits to empower the teachers.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Sustain the continuous professional development of all teachers through targeted PD sessions.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Work in synergy with educational stakeholders, i.e.: teachers, LSEs, parents, learners, community.	◻	◻	◻	◻

- **Overall, I feel, I received enough training on how to deal effectively with 'deficit-thinking' and on how to create inclusive and responsive classrooms?**

◻ Yes ◻ No

If YES, what kind of training did you receive?

___

If NO, what kind of training do you require?

___

- **Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	Agree	**Disagree**
Throughout the years the received professional training (at school and during INSET courses) helped to improve the way I deal with 'deficit-thinking'.	◻	◻
The received training has influenced the way I plan inclusive assessment tasks for my students.	◻	◻
Training does not complement my teaching needs.	◻	◻
Training at school level complements my needs.	◻	◻
Training in my school is focused on how to deal with inclusive education.	◻	◻
Most school-based professional training helps to advance a co-ordinated focus on inclusion.	◻	◻
There exists little coordination in the school, which reinforces and instigates a blaming culture.	◻	◻

- **Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	Agree	**Disagree**
The school's staff shares a common belief on the school's central goal.	☐	☐
The school's goals and priorities on inclusive education and 'deficit-thinking' are clear to me.	☐	☐
The school's teachers and SMT are in agreement on what constitutes deficit thinking and the basic difference between inclusion and integration.	☐	☐
The vision of the school on inclusive education is evidence based and data informed.	☐	☐
I make a conscious effort to coordinate lessons' content with other teachers to include all learners.	☐	☐
At this school teachers focus on how well students are learning rather than on what they are learning: Quality vs. Content.	☐	☐
Learning is based on the capability approach rather than on identifying deficits and weaknesses.	☐	☐

- **Please mark the following statements appropriately:**

	Always	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
General Attitudes and Beliefs				
It is important to acknowledge and show empathy with the challenges minority learners bring to their educational experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is important to empathise with minority learners' challenges, but it is *not* my responsibility to address them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I recognise that minority learners' norms impact on their educational experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I recognize minority learners' norms, but it is *not* my responsibility to address the way these impact their educational experiences.	☐	☐	☐	☐
An ethic of care is used.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I provide hold same expectations for all the students.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Every student should be granted access to rigorous courses.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The attitudes and habits students bring to my class greatly reduce their chances for success.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Success or failure is due primarily to factors beyond my control rather than to my own efforts.	☐	☐	☐	☐

If some students fail in class I do not feel responsible for their failure.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Many students are not capable of learning the material present in the curriculum.	☐	☐	☐	☐
When learners do not meet the expected learning outcomes, I take most of the responsibility - I blame myself and my teaching methods.	☐	☐	☐	☐
To Include or not to Include?				
I believe tracking/ability grouping is essential.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe tracking/ability grouping limits learning opportunities for minority learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe streaming is the best solution.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Streaming makes the brightest children brighter but does little to help the rest to catch up.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Streaming can help all ability groups by tailoring lesson content to their ability.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I prefer mixed ability teaching.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Some students are simply not ‘fit’ to attend mainstream schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Inclusion is de-motivating and hindering the performance of high achievers in our schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
More special support services; programs and schools are needed.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working within a Team				
I constantly work, support and consult with the LSE in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I support LSE in the development and implementation of the IEP.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I incorporate all goals, objectives and strategies present in the IEP in my year, term and lesson planning.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I help and advice the LSE on the type of intervention needed.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Together with the LSE, I review the IEP constantly throughout the year.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strategies and goals in the IEP are modified according to the learner’s needs and progress.	☐	☐	☐	☐
LSAs are a valuable resource.	☐	☐	☐	☐
‘Other’ children hold a negative attitude towards minority learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐
‘Other’ parents hold a negative attitude towards minority learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other School Dynamics				
The school lacks a clear policy on inclusion.	□	□	□	□
Time in class is lacking to support all learners individually.	□	□	□	□
The syllabus is too vast to support full inclusion.	□	□	□	□
SEN learners attend additional support programs and/or receive support services regularly.	□	□	□	□
I lack adequate training on how to deal effectively with diversity.	□	□	□	□
Parents do not value the work done in class.	□	□	□	□
Most children are not succeeding because of their parents' laissez affair attitude.	□	□	□	□

- **From your perspective, in this school do teachers:**

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
Feel responsible when students fail?	□	□	□	□
Feel responsible to help each other?	□	□	□	□
Feel responsible to help students develop holistically?	□	□	□	□
Set high standards for themselves and their students?	□	□	□	□
Feel responsible for all students to learn?	□	□	□	□
Feel responsible of all the students irrespective of the LSE?	□	□	□	□
Have high expectations of their students?	□	□	□	□
Really care about each other?	□	□	□	□
Trust each other?	□	□	□	□
Feel that it is fine to discuss feelings, worries and frustrations with other teachers?	□	□	□	□
Feel comfortable to include all parents?	□	□	□	□
Respect other teachers who take the lead in the school?	□	□	□	□

- **What future actions should be taken to provide high quality education to all learners and ensure full inclusion in the school?**

The Questionnaire for Learning Support Educators

Section A: General Information

- **Sex/Gender**: □ Male □ Female □ Other

- **School**: □ Primary School □ Secondary School

- **For how many years have you served as learning support assistant?**

  □ Less than 5 years □ Between 5 and 10 years
  □ Between 11 and 15 years □ Between 16 and 20 years
  □ More than 20 years

- **I worked as a: ____________________________ before becoming a learning support educator (LSE).**

- **What was your highest accreditation?** (Level of education prior to becoming LSA)

  □ Secondary Level (Secondary Education Certificate)

  □ Post-Secondary Level (Matriculation Certificate)

  □ Tertiary Level**:** □ MCAST: Indicate Name of course: ____________________

  □ University: Indicate Name of course: _________________

  □ Other: Please Specify: ____

- **As an LSA, from where did you receive your training?**

  □ MCAST (20 and 30-week courses)

  □ University of Malta (Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education)

  □ Student Services Department (10 and 20-week courses)

  □ Certification from a foreign university (Certificate, Diploma, Degree or Masters)

  □ Other: Please Specify: ____

- **Did you receive the training before or after you started working as a learning support assistant?** □ Before □ After

In my opinion the ideal would be to receive training:

□ BEFORE employment □ AFTER employment

- **Do you think you received enough training in this area?** □ Yes □ No
- **Do you think that the learner you are supporting can be considered as a 'minority learner'[36] in class?** □ Yes □ No

  How would you describe your experience with this learner?

  □ Pleasant □ Not so Pleasant □ Frustrating

  Are there any other 'minority learners' in the classroom?

  □ Yes □ No

- **What do you understand by the term 'inclusive education'?**

  ____

- **What is your personal understanding of the term 'marginalized learners'?**

  ____

- **In your school, is there a policy on inclusion?**

  □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

- **Does inclusion feature as a priority area in the SDP?**

  □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

- **Do you rate your school as inclusive and responsive?**

  □ Yes □ No □ Don't Know

[36]Minority Learners: A category of learners, who differentiate from the majority because of observable physical characteristics; ethnicity; race; religion; socio-economic background; age; sexual orientation.

<u>Section B</u>: <u>Class Population and Composition</u>

- **How many students are there in class?** ________ **students**
- **How many students do you support?** ________ **students**
- **On what basis do you support the learner:**

  □ Full Time 1-1 basis □ Shared in the same class basis □ Shared basis

- **Who are the minority learners?** (Rate: 1 for most common and 5 for least common)

  Students with diverse learning difficulties □

  Students with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds □

  Students with diverse religious and faith backgrounds □

  Students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds □

  Students with gender/sexual diversities □

  Students with physical and/or psychological disabilities □

  Students with language or communication difficulties □

- **How do these students perform academically?**

  □ Well □ Not so well □ Bad

- **What are the main problems encountered by these students in class?**

  Behavioural & Emotional Problems □

  Socializing Problems □

  Financial Problems □

  Communication Problems □

  Others: Specify: ______________________________________ □

- **Do these students receive any kind of additional support at school?**

  □ Yes □ No

If YES, what support do they receive? (List services the learner benefits from)

____

- **How do you and the class teacher try to include these students in class?** (List only some strategies you may use)

____

- **What challenges do you encounter?** (List problems you meet in class and at school)

____

Section C: Leadership for Inclusive Education

- **To what extent do you feel that** (Tick the answer most appropriate)**:**

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
Teachers address the learning needs of ALL students in class.	◻	◻	◻	◻
You provide the correct intervention to help the learner improve.	◻	◻	◻	◻
The SMT supports me whenever I encounter difficulties in class.	◻	◻	◻	◻
The INCO supports me to effectively help the learner in class.	◻	◻	◻	◻
You receive useful suggestions on pedagogy from the INCO or teacher.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Intervention strategies result from regular discussions the with INCO.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Every student has the opportunity to succeed his or her despite diversity.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Current system needs restructuring.	◻	◻	◻	◻

- **To what extent does your Head of School:**

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
Foster a positive relationship with *learners* – has a clear vision on how to give voice to all students.	◻	◻	◻	◻

Foster a positive relationship with *parents* – views effective parental involvement as essential.	□	□	□	□
Foster positive relationships with the *general community* – has a clear vision on how to involve the general community (NGOs).	□	□	□	□
Foster a positive relationship with staff based on mutual trust.	□	□	□	□
Listen, discuss and evaluate feedback before taking a decision.	□	□	□	□
Encourage staff to take leadership roles in the learning of all students.	□	□	□	□
Teaching is the PRIMARY focus of the HoS.	□	□	□	□
Encourage collaboration - school can be described as a Professional Learning Community (PLC).	□	□	□	□
Sustain the development of all staff members through targeted training during PD sessions.	□	□	□	□

- **During the years, I feel, I received enough training on how to deal effectively with 'deficit thinking'; how to implement an IEP and on how to cater for the needs of 'minority learners' in class?** □ Yes □ No

If YES, what kind of training did you receive?

____

If NO, what kind of training do you require?

____

- **Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	Agree	**Disagree**
Professional training (at school and during INSET courses) improved the way I deal with deficit thinking.	□	□
Training has influenced the way I plan, develop and implement intervention strategies for my students.	□	□
The received training influenced the way I coordinate, and develop IEPs.	□	□
Training at school does not complement my needs.	□	□
Training in my school is consistent and focused on how to deal with deficit thinking.	□	□
There is very little coordination of curriculum, teaching and learning materials across teachers and LSAs at my school. This reinforces deficit thinking, shifting of responsibilities and instigates a blaming culture.	□	□

- **Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	Agree	**Disagree**
The school's staff shares a common belief on the school's central goal.	◻	◻
The school's goals and priorities on inclusive education are clear to me.	◻	◻
SMT and staff agree on the main difference between inclusion and integration.	◻	◻
The school's vision on inclusive education is evidence based and data informed.	◻	◻
I make a conscious effort to coordinate lessons' content with the teacher's scheme of work to enhance synergy.	◻	◻
Teachers tend to shift responsibility of statemented learners on LSEs.	◻	◻
Teachers focus on how well students are learning rather than on what they are learning: Quality vs. Content.	◻	◻
Teachers try to include all learners including those supported by LSEs.	◻	◻
All teachers feel comfortable with my presence in class.	◻	◻
Student learning is based on the capability approach rather than on identifying deficits and weaknesses.	◻	◻

- **Please mark the following statements appropriately:**

	Always	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
General Attitudes and Beliefs				
It is important to empathise with the challenges minority learners bring to their educational experience.	◻	◻	◻	◻
It is important to empathise with the challenges of minority learners, but it is *not* my responsibility to address them.	◻	◻	◻	◻
I recognise that norms have an impact educational experience.	◻	◻	◻	◻
I recognize minority learners' norms, but do *not* assume the responsibility to address them.	◻	◻	◻	◻
An ethic of care is consistent.	◻	◻	◻	◻
I hold the same expectations for my student/s.	◻	◻	◻	◻
I believe that every student should be granted access to the most rigorous courses.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Attitudes and habits students bring in the class greatly reduce chances for success.	◻	◻	◻	◻
Failure is due to factors beyond the schools' control rather than to my own efforts and ability.	◻	◻	◻	◻

The teaching team does not feel responsible when students fail at school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The students I support are not capable of learning the material being taught to them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
To Include or not to Include?				
I believe in tracking and ability grouping.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tracking limits opportunities for minority learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe streaming is the best solution.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Streaming makes the brightest children brighter but does little to help the rest to catch up.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Streaming can help all ability groups by tailoring lesson content to their ability.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I prefer mixed ability teaching.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Some students are not 'fit' to attend mainstream schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Inclusion is de-motivating and hindering the performance of high achievers in our schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
More special support services; programs; resources & schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The SMT is keen on inclusion so much so that it invests a lot on new and adequate resources to help learners be included.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The school is equipped with a multi-purpose or multi-sensory room.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Resources are sponsored from the school's fund – photocopies and laminations.	☐	☐	☐	☐
School has a well-functioning multi-disciplinary team.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working within a Team				
I constantly work, support and consult with the class teacher.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Class teachers take an active role in the IEP development.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I incorporate all the goals, objectives and strategies in the IEP in my year, term and lesson planning.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers constantly make use of the IEP in their planning.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teacher/s help/s the LSE on the type of intervention needed to support the learner.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Together with the class teacher, I review the IEP constantly.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strategies and goals in the IEP are modified according to the learner's needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Class teachers allow me to use different strategies in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐
INCO provides me with advice and support.	☐	☐	☐	☐
INCO is easily approachable.	☐	☐	☐	☐
'Other' children hold a negative attitude towards minority learners in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐
'Other' parents hold a negative attitude towards minority learners in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other School Dynamics				
The school lacks a clear policy on inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Time in class is lacking.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The syllabus is too vast.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I lack adequate training to deal with diversity.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parents do not value work done in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Most children do not succeed because of their parents.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel I am prepared to take the role of Class Assistant.	☐	☐	☐	☐

- **From your perspective, in this school do teachers:**

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never
Feel responsible if student fail?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Help members of staff?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Take responsibility to make the school more inclusive ?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Set high standards?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hold high expectations?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Really care about each other?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trust each other?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feel fine to discuss feelings with other teachers?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feels comfortable to include all parents?	☐	☐	☐	☐

- **What future actions should be taken to provide high quality education to all learners and ensure full inclusion in the school?**

____

Appendix B

The Learners' Short Questionnaire

Primary School Learners' Short Questionnaire

Inclusion is about feeling that you belong in your school and that you have the same opportunities to learn and to join in as all the other students do.

Learners' Information:

I am ____________ years old.

I attend ___________________ Primary School and am in Year ___________.

I think ALL children feel happy and included in OUR school:

YES	**DON'T KNOW**	**NO**
☐	☐	☐

A. If **YES**, write one sentence to show why ALL children are happy.

B. If **NO**, write one sentence to show why children are not happy.

Secondary School Learners' Short Questionnaire

Inclusion is about feeling that you belong in your school and that you have the same opportunities to learn and to join in as all the other students do.

Learners' Information:

I am _____________ years old.

I attend _________________ Secondary School and am in Form ____________.

I think that ALL children feel included in OUR school:

YES	DON'T KNOW	NO
☐	☐	☐

State why you think so:

____

____

Please indicate:

A. The things that make ALL students feel included in this school:

____

____

B. The things that make some students feel they are not included:

____

____

Appendix C

The Sociometric Test Questions

Question 1:

Suppose you were to move class and you were asked to choose **1 classmate** to come with you. Whom would you choose? List the NAME in the space below.

- ______________________________

Give a reason why you chose this classmate:

- ______________________________

Tick the correct box below if you would opt to:

□ ***Not to choose a friend from your current classroom***

Reason for your answer: ______________________________

□ ***Choose a friend who is in another classroom in the school***

Please Specify Year Group of your friend: __________________

Reason for your answer: ______________________________

□ ***Not to choose anyone to come with you***

Reason for your answer: ______________________________

Question 2:

With whom do you like to play most during breaks? List **NAME** in the space:

____

The chosen friend: (Tick from the below possible answers)

□ ***Is of the same age group and attends my same class at school***;

□ ***Is of a different age group and is in a different class at school***.

Give a reason why you opted to choose this friend: ______________________

____

Question 3:

What do you like doing best at school? Think of an **activity** and write about it:

____

Write the name of **TWO** friends with whom you would like to do this activity:

1) ____________________________ 2) ____________________________

State why you chose these **TWO** friends: Give a reason for each name:

1) **Name of Student:** ______________________________
   Reason:____
   ____

2) **Name of Student:** ______________________________
   Reason:____
   ____

Question 4:

What do you like doing best outside school? Write about this activity:

____

Write the names of **TWO** classmates you would like to do this activity with:

1) __________________________ 2) ____________________________

State the reason why you chose these **TWO** friends:

1) **Name of Student:** ______________________________
   Reason:____
   ____

2) **Name of Student:** ______________________________
   Reason:____
   ____

Question 5

Choose the correct statement by ticking the correct box:

□ ***I feel extremely happy and always look forward to go to my school***

□ ***I do not feel comfortable and hate going to my school***

□ ***I have mixed feeling on my school***

Give a **REASON** or **DRAW** to express your feelings on your school:

Choose the correct answer by ticking the correct box:

□ ***I feel extremely happy in my present classroom***

□ ***I do not feel comfortable in my present classroom***

□ ***I have mixed feeling on my classroom***

Give a **REASON** or **DRAW** to express your feeling on your classroom:

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interviews Guide and Questions

<u>Interview Guide</u>: *Minister for Education and Employment*

- In your opinion what challenges is the Maltese educational system facing?
- How can these challenges be overcome?
- Every year millions of euro are dedicated to support education. Moreover, within our system one finds all type of support services and resources. So, why in your opinion is the Maltese educational system not producing the desired outcomes?
- In the educational sphere the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is constantly used. Many researchers feel that this concept has been plagued by deficit ideologies based on the medical approach. Do you think 'deficit thinking' is present within the local educational system?
- In your opinion, in what ways can 'deficit thinking' be eradicated?
- The 'Education for All' external audit report describes the Maltese educational system as still anchored with integrative practices and procedures. Do you agree with this statement and why?
- How do you define 'inclusive education'?
- How relevant do you see the 'Education for All' audit report? In what ways do you envisage to implement the recommendations put forward in the audit report?
- Research shows that an education system based on social justice and inclusivity needs strong, committed and knowledgeable leaders at all levels and areas. Do you think that the current selection process (interview only) and eligibility criteria are allowing the best people to apply for the most sensitive posts? How satisfied are you with the present recruitment system?
- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising learners' potential? Why do you think so?
- Your ministry has already promoted a lot of initiatives to provide quality education to all learners. These have brought about a decrease in absenteeism and early school leaver rates. In your opinion what future changes are needed to guarantee quality education for ALL learners in our schools?
- Finally, Colleges were meant to decentralize as much as possible the education provision. Do you think that this happened? Do you think that the 'top-down' approach mentality has changed?

<u>Interview Guide</u>: *President of the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT)*

- What is the union's mission and vision statement? In real terms how does this vision impact on the education sector?
- Every year Malta spends millions of euro on the education sector but still some people would say that this is not producing the desired outcomes. What is your opinion? And why do you think this is happening?
- What are in your opinion the main challenges that the Maltese educational system is facing? How can these be overcome?
- How is your union helping in overcoming such challenges?
- Do you think that 'deficit thinking' mentalities are present in schools?
- Don't you believe that on certain occasions the union re-enforces 'deficit thinking' mentalities within educational professionals?
- What do you understand by the term 'inclusive education'?
- What are your views on 'streaming'; 'banding' and 'mixed ability teaching'? Which of the three educational systems would, the union prefer best? Why?
- What is the main difference between 'inclusion' and 'integration'?
- The 'Education for All' external audit posits that our educational system is based on a medical-deficit approach. What are your views on such a statement?
- Do you believe that colleges, schools and teachers are being supported enough by the Education Division? Why?
- Colleges were meant to decentralize educational provision. Do you think that the 'top-down' approach mentality has changed?
- Many times, teachers complain from lack of participation and communication. Do you agree with such a belief?
- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising the potential of every learner? Why do you think so?
- What needs to change to guarantee quality education to ALL learners?

Interview Guide: *Director General – Educational Services*

- In your opinion what are the main challenges of the Maltese educational system?
- How can these challenges be overcome?
- Every year Malta dedicates millions of euro in its annual budgets to support education. Moreover, within our system one finds all type of support services and resources. So, why is our system not producing the desired outcomes?
- In the educational sphere the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is constantly used. Many researchers feel that this concept has been plagued by deficit ideologies based on the medical-integrative approaches. What is your general understanding of the term 'deficit thinking'?
- Do you think 'deficit thinking' is present within the local educational system?
- In your opinion, in what ways can 'deficit thinking' be eradicated?
- The Education for All external audit report describes the Maltese educational system as still anchored in integrative practices and procedures. Do you agree with this statement and why?
- How do you define 'inclusive education'?
- Research on inclusive education posits that LEADERSHIP plays a fundamental role in not only bringing about change but also in creating inclusive schools, policies, practices and procedures. What are your views on this statement?
- Colleges were meant to decentralize decision-making process. Do you think that this occurred? Do you think that the 'top-down' approach mentality has changed?
- What kind of support is provided to leaders at college, school and class level? How are our educational leaders empowered?
- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising learners' potential? Why do you think so?
- In your opinion what changes need to be made to guarantee quality education to ALL learners in our schools?

Director General: ***Quality and Standards in Education***

- In your opinion what are the main challenges of the Maltese educational system?
- How can these challenges be overcome?
- Every year Malta dedicates millions of euro in its annual budgets to support education. Moreover, within our system one finds all type of support services and resources. Why in your opinion is our system not producing the desired outcomes?
- In the educational sphere the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is constantly used. Many researchers feel that this concept has been plagued by deficit ideologies based on the medical-integrative approaches. What is your general understanding of the term 'deficit thinking'?
- Do you think 'deficit thinking' is present within the local educational system?
- In your opinion, in what ways can 'deficit thinking' be eradicated?
- The Education for All external audit report describes the Maltese educational system as still anchored with integrative practices and procedures. Do you agree with this statement and why?
- How do you define 'inclusive education'?
- Research on inclusive education posits that LEADERSHIP plays a fundamental role in not only bringing about change but also in creating inclusive schools, policies, practices and procedures. What are your views on this statement?
- Colleges were meant to decentralize decision-making process. Do you think that this occurred? Do you think that the 'top-down' approach mentality has changed?
- What kind of support is provided to educational leaders at college, school and class level to achieve? How are our educational leaders empowered?
- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising learners' potential? Why do you think so?
- In your opinion what changes need to be made to guarantee quality education to ALL learners in our schools?

<u>Interview Guide</u>: *Quality Assurance Director (QAD)*

- Briefly describe what your department is in charge of.
- What is the department's mission statement? In real terms what does this mean?
- What are the main challenges for this department?
- In your opinion what are the main challenges in the Maltese educational system? And how can these be overcome?
- Every year Malta dedicates millions of euro in its annual budgets to support education. Moreover, within our system one finds all type of support services and resources. So, why in your opinion is our system not producing the desired outcomes?
- In the educational sphere the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is constantly used. Many researchers feel that this concept has been plagued by deficit ideologies based on the medical-integrative approaches. What is your general understanding of the term 'deficit thinking'?
- Do you think 'deficit thinking' is present within the local educational system?
- In your opinion, in what ways can 'deficit thinking' be eradicated?
- How can your department help in this process?
- How do you define 'inclusive education'?
- In your opinion is our educational system an inclusive or integrative one? Why?
- Do you find the ELC meeting useful? Why? Should there be any changes in it?
- Colleges were meant to decentralize as much as possible the education provision. Do you think that this happened? Do you think that the 'top-down' approach mentality has changed?
- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising learners' potential? Why do you think so?
- In your opinion what changes need to be done to guarantee quality education to ALL learners in our schools?
- How is your department contributing to bring about this change?

<u>Interview Guide</u>: *Curriculum Director*

- Briefly describe what your department is in charge of.
- What is the department's mission statement? In real terms what does this mean?
- What are the main challenges for this department?
- In your opinion what are the main challenges in the Maltese educational system? And how can these be overcome?
- Every year Malta dedicates millions of euro in its annual budgets to support education. Moreover, within our system one finds all type of support services and resources. So, why in your opinion is our system not producing the desired outcomes?
- In the educational sphere the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is constantly used. Many researchers feel that this concept has been plagued by deficit ideologies based on the medical-integrative approaches. What is your general understanding of the term 'deficit thinking'?
- Do you think 'deficit thinking' is present within the local educational system?
- In your opinion, in what ways can 'deficit thinking' be eradicated?
- How can your department help in this process?
- How do you define 'inclusive education'?
- In your opinion is our educational system an inclusive or integrative one? Why?
- Do you find the ELC meeting useful? Why? Should there be any changes in it?
- Colleges were meant to decentralize as much as possible the education provision. Do you think that this happened? Do you think that the 'top-down' approach mentality has changed?
- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising learners' potential? Why do you think so?
- In your opinion what changes need to be done to guarantee quality education?
- How is your department contributing to bring about this change?

<u>Interview Guide</u>: *NSSS Director*

- Briefly describe what your department is in charge of.
- What is the department's mission statement? In real terms what does this mean?
- What are the main challenges for this department?
- In your opinion what are the main challenges in the Maltese educational system? And how can these be overcome?
- Every year Malta dedicates millions of euro in its annual budgets to support education. Moreover, within our system one finds all type of support services and resources. So, why in your opinion is our system not producing the desired outcomes?
- In the educational sphere the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is constantly used. Many researchers feel that this concept has been plagued by deficit ideologies based on the medical-integrative approaches. What is your general understanding of the term 'deficit thinking'?
- Do you think 'deficit thinking' is present within the local educational system?
- In your opinion, in what ways can 'deficit thinking' be eradicated?
- How can your department help in this process?
- How do you define 'inclusive education'?
- In your opinion is our educational system an inclusive or integrative one? Why?
- Do you find the ELC meeting useful? Why? Should there be any changes in it?
- Colleges were meant to decentralize as much as possible the education provision. Do you think that this happened? Do you think that the 'top-down' approach mentality has changed?
- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising the potential of each and every learner? Why do you think so?
- In your opinion what changes need to be done to guarantee quality education to ALL learners in our schools?
- How is your department contributing to bring about this change?

<u>Interview Guide</u>: ***Archbishop's Delegate***

- Briefly can you describe your sector?

- In your opinion what are the main challenges faced by your sector?

- In your opinion what challenges is the Maltese educational system facing?

- How can these challenges be overcome?

- Every year Malta dedicates millions of euro in its annual budgets to support education. Moreover, within our system one finds all type of support services and resources. So, why in your opinion is our system not producing the desired outcomes?

- In the educational sphere the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is constantly used. Many researchers feel that this concept has been plagued by deficit ideologies based on the medical-integrative approaches. What is your general understanding of the term 'deficit thinking'?

- Do you think 'deficit thinking' is present within your sector?

- In your opinion, in what ways can 'deficit thinking' be eradicated?

- The Education for All external audit report describes the Maltese educational system as still anchored with integrative practices and procedures. Do you rate church schools as inclusive or integrative ones? Why?

- How do you define 'inclusive education'?

- Research on inclusive education posits that LEADERSHIP plays a fundamental role in not only bringing about change but also in creating inclusive schools, policies, practices and procedures. What are your views on this statement?

- How does your sector support educational leaders at college, school and class level to achieve all this?

- Do you think that the current education system is maximising learners' potential? Why do you think so?

- In your opinion what changes need to be made to guarantee quality education to ALL learners in our schools?

Interview Guide: *Heads of College Network*

- Briefly describe your college.
- What is your college's mission statement? In real terms what does this mean?
- What are the main challenges and barriers in your college?
- Do you think this college is achieving the aims of its mission statement?
- How would you describe your leadership style? Give reasons for your answer.
- In the educational sphere the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is constantly used. Many researchers feel that this concept has been plagued by deficit ideologies based on the medical-integrative approaches. What is your general understanding of the term 'deficit thinking'?
- Do you think that 'deficit thinking' is present in your college?
- What strategies do you employ to address 'deficit thinking' in your college?
- What role do you think Heads of school play in promoting/perpetuating 'deficit thinking'?
- What role do you think Heads play in helping to eliminate 'deficit thinking'?
- What challenges do you face when addressing 'deficit thinking'?
- What do you understand by the term 'inclusive education'?
- Do you think that 'inclusive education' is 'harming' high achievers? Why do you think this?
- What are your views on 'streaming'; 'banding' and 'mixed ability teaching'? Which one do you prefer best and why?
- In your opinion what is the difference between 'inclusion' and 'integration'?
- Do you rate your college as an inclusive or integrative one? Why?
- Does your college have a policy on inclusion?
- Does inclusion feature as a key area in your College Development Plan?

- What challenges is inclusion bringing to your college?
- Do you find support from the Education Department? Please elaborate.
- What kind of support do you receive?
- Do you find the ELC meeting useful? What is your role in the ELC?
- Do you think that the Council of Heads meeting is useful? Why do you think so?
- Colleges were meant to decentralize as much as possible the education provision. Do you think that this happened? Do you think that the 'top-down' approach mentality has changed?
- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising the potential of every learner? Why do you think so?
- In your opinion what needs to be done to guarantee quality education to ALL learners in our schools?

<u>Interview Guide</u>: *HoS Church Sector*

- Briefly describe your current school (Include a few words on the professionals working within the school as well as student demographics)
- What is your school's mission and vision statement? What does this mean?
- Is the school is achieving the aims and objectives of its mission statement?
- How would you describe your leadership style? Give reasons for your answer.
- How would you define 'deficit thinking'?
- Do you think that 'deficit thinking' mentalities are present in your school?
- How would you identify elements of 'deficit thinking' within your school's staff?
- What strategies do you employ to address 'deficit thinking' with your staff?
- How often do you use these strategies?
- What role do teachers play in promoting/perpetuating 'deficit thinking'?
- What role do teachers play in helping to eliminate 'deficit thinking'?
- What challenges do you face when addressing 'deficit thinking'?
- What do you understand by the term 'inclusive education'? What are your views on 'streaming'; 'banding' and 'mixed ability teaching'? Which one do you prefer best and why?
- What is the main difference between 'inclusion' and 'integration'?
- Do you believe that 'inclusion' is beneficial? Why?
- Does your school have a policy on inclusion?
- Does inclusion feature as a dominant key area in your School Development Plan?
- What challenges does inclusion bring with it? What difficulties do you encounter to change your school into an inclusive one?

- Do you have a person within the school that is in charge of inclusion? What are his/her duties?

- Do you involve the staff in decision-making processes? And how much do you try to empower your staff on inclusive education? How do you do so?

- Do you find support from the Church Secretariat? If Yes what type of help?

- Do you as Head of school meet other Heads in the Church sector?

- Many argue that the Church sector is more autonomous and decentralized that the State sector. Do you agree with this statement and why?

- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising the potential of every learner? Why do you think so?

- In your opinion what needs to be made to guarantee quality education to ALL learners in our schools?

<u>Interview Guide</u>: *HoS State Sector*

- Briefly describe your current school (Include a few words on the professionals working within the school as well as student demographics)

- What is your school's mission and vision statement? What does this mean?

- Is the school is achieving the aims and objectives of its mission statement?

- How would you describe your leadership style? Give reasons for your answer.

- How would you define 'deficit thinking'?

- Do you think that 'deficit thinking' mentalities are present in your school?

- How would you identify elements of 'deficit thinking' within your school's staff?

- What strategies do you employ to address 'deficit thinking' with your staff?

- How often do you use these strategies?

- What role do teachers play in promoting/perpetuating 'deficit thinking'?

- What role do teachers play in helping to eliminate 'deficit thinking'?

- What challenges do you face when addressing 'deficit thinking'?

- What do you understand by the term 'inclusive education'? What are your views on 'streaming'; 'banding' and 'mixed ability teaching'? Which one do you prefer best and why?

- What is the main difference between 'inclusion' and 'integration'?

- Do you believe that 'inclusion' is beneficial? Why?

- Does your school have a policy on inclusion?

- Does inclusion feature as a dominant key area in your School Development Plan?

- What challenges does inclusion bring with it? What difficulties do you encounter to change your school into an inclusive one?

- Do you have a person within the school that is in charge of inclusion? What are his/her duties?

- Do you involve the staff in decision-making processes? And how much do you try to empower your staff on inclusive education? How do you do so?

- Do you find support from the Department for Education? If Yes what type of help?

- Do you as Head of school find the Council of Heads useful?

- The college reform was meant to bring about more autonomy and decentralization. Do you think that this reform was a success and why?

- Do you think that the current educational system is maximising the potential of every learner? Why do you think so?

- In your opinion what needs to be made to guarantee quality education to ALL learners in our schools?

Appendix E

Job-Shadowing Observational Checklist

Some General Information on the School

- The school is situated in the:

  □ Northern Part □ Central Part □ Southern Part

- The school has a population of: ________ students.
- In the school there are __________ assistant Heads.
- In the school there are __________ teachers.
- In the school there are __________ learning support assistants.
- In the school there are __________ students with an official statement of needs.
- In the school there are _______ students awaiting an official statement of needs.

- School has an official policy on Inclusion with clear procedures and guidelines:

  □ Yes □ No

- SDP tackles inclusion as a key area for development:

  □ Yes □ No

- The school has clear guidelines on how to develop Individual Education Plan:

  □ Yes □ No

- School coordinates MAP sessions before IEP conferences:

  □ Yes □ No

- IEPs are reviewed regularly in this school:

  □ Yes □ No

- The school has an Assistant Head in charge of inclusion:

  □ Yes □ No

  Describe the duties related to the Assistant Head of Inclusion in the school:

  ____

  ____

- INCO visits regularly the school:

  □ Yes □ No

What is the role of the INCO in the school?

___

___

- Report the actions of the Head of school until the FIRST break:

___

___

- Report the actions of the Head of school in BETWEEN breaks:

___

___

- Report the actions of the Head of school AFTER the second break:

___

___

- Report the actions of the Head of school DURING the break:

___

___

- Record the number of times the Head of school visited classes or went round the school's corridors to make his presence felt:

___

___

- State what the Head of school did in his office:

___

___

- How much of the Head's work is directly related to teaching and learning?

___

___

- What is the predominant leadership style of this Head of school?

___

___

Appendix F

Participant Observations Checklist

Class Participant Observations Checklist

General Information on the Classroom:

- Year Group: **Year 4**; **Year 5**; **Form 3**; **Form 4**.
  (Circle the correct year group)

- Number of Students in the classroom: _________ students.

- Number of adults (teachers & LSAs) in the classroom: _______ adults.
  (In class there are _____ Learning Support Educators).

- Number of students **with** an official statement of needs: ______ students.

- Number of student/s **awaiting** a statement of needs: ______ students.

- The learning support assistant is on:

  □ Full Time basis □ Shared in the same class basis

  □ Shared basis

- The learners with a statement of needs have been diagnosed with:

  □ Intellectual Disability (Learning difficulties; GDD; Downs Syndrome)
  □ Specific Learning Difficulty (Dyslexia, Dyscalculia)
  □ Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD, ADHD, ADD)
  □ Communication Difficulties (Autism, Speech and language delay)
  □ Sensory Difficulties (Hearing or Visual Impairments)
  □ Physical Difficulties (Physical Disabilities)
  □ Multiple Disability (Dandy Walker)

- There are also students with (Rank from 1 to 5 – 1 being highest):

  □ Students with diverse educational learning skills and abilities
  □ Students with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds
  □ Students with diverse religious and faith backgrounds

  □ Students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds
  □ Students with gender diversities
  □ Students with physical and/or psychological disabilities
  □ Students with language or communication difficulties

  □ Students with diverse aptitudes towards schooling
  □ Others: Please Specify: ________________________________

- The LSE helps students without a statement of need: □ Yes □ No

- A general overview of the students' *academic* achievement and *behaviour*:

  ____

  ____

- Describe the classroom *Setting* and *Atmosphere*:

  ____

  ____

- Diagram of the Classroom Setting

- **Lesson Observation**:

  - How did the class teacher begin the lesson?

    ____

    ____

  - Describe the main activities in the lesson (Development of Lesson)

    ____

    ____

  - Describe the closure of the lesson.

    ____

    ____

  - What assessment strategies were used during the lesson?

    ____

    ____

  - Did the lesson include modifications/accommodations for SEN learners?

    ____

    ____

- How did the class teacher try to include all learners in the lesson?

  ____

  ____

- What was the role of the LSA during the whole lesson?

  ____

  ____

General Reflection on the Lesson:

Council of Heads of College Network Observational Checklist

- Where did the Council of Council of College Principal meeting take place?

- Who was present for this meeting?

- What was the main objective of this meeting?

- When is this meeting held?

- Who coordinates this meeting?

- What was the agenda of this meeting?

- Describe the atmosphere during the meeting?

- What role did the College Principals take during the meeting?

- Did all College Principals participate in the discussion and How?

- How many and what decisions were reached at the end of the meeting?

  ____

  ____

- How many of the decisions taken were related to the teaching processes?

  ____

  ____

- Was the discussion characterised by a ‘deficit-thinking’ mentality:

  ____

  ____

- In what ways did the meeting coordinator counter balance this mentality? How did inclusion feature in the discussion?

  ____

  ____

<u>General Reflection on the Meeting</u>:

Council of Heads Observational Checklist

- Where did the Council of Heads meeting take place?

  ____

  ____

- Who was present for this meeting?

  ____

  ____

- What was the main objective of the meeting?

  ____

  ____

- When is this meeting held?

  ____

  ____

- Who coordinates the meeting?

  ____

  ____

- What was the agenda of the meeting?

  ____

  ____

- Describe the atmosphere during the meeting?

  ____

  ____

- What was the role of the College Principal during the meeting?

  ____

  ____

- Did Heads of school participate in the discussion and How?

  ____

  ____

  ____

- How many decisions were reached at the end of the meeting?

____

____

- How many of the decisions related to the teaching and learning processes?

____

____

- Were discussions characterised by a deficit thinking mentality:

____

____

- In what ways did the College Principal counterbalance this mentality? How did inclusion feature in the discussion?

____

____

General Reflection on the Meeting:

Appendix G

Learners' Focus Groups Story and Guidelist

The Story of Wedeb
An Ethiopian Student Living in Malta

Part from Wedeb's Diary:

"I have been living in Malta for the past nine months. Malta is a beautiful place and I like it a lot. In my country there is a lot of poverty. At least here in Malta we find something to eat. My father started working as a handy man in a local company. He earns quite a good wage. In Ethiopia both my parents were unemployed and didn't have enough money to live a proper life. We left Ethiopia empty handed and spent one month travelling to arrive in Malta. It was long and hard journey! I still do not want to remember those two weeks that we spent travelling on an old boat to arrive in Malta. It was very frightening. Today I decided to start keeping a diary since it was my first day at school. At first, I was very frightened to go since in Ethiopia I never attended school. I never heard about it until I arrived in Malta! My class is very beautiful. There are about twenty students in it. All of them look helpful and friendly! But I think that the best one is Katrina. In class she is near my desk and during break she stays with me all the time. Moreover, when I encounter difficulties in class, she helps me out immediately! I think that we are going to become very good friends. Katrina reminds me of Winta, my Ethiopian best friend. Who knows where is she now? I am really missing her! Now I must leave you to go to sleep. I hope that tomorrow I have a wonderful day at school like today".

(Soon after reading Wedeb's story, the researcher explains the meaning of DIVERSITY and the importance of having an INCLUSIVE school and society) (After the explanation, the researcher asks the questions below to initiate a healthy discussion)

1. What are your general impressions on Wedeb's journey to Malta?
2. Would you like to go through a similar experience? Why?
3. What are your feelings towards this student?
4. Do you have friends, who are *different* from you? What is your relation with them?
5. At school are there children who need support? Can you mention some of them?
6. Are you happy that you have similar children in your school or classroom? Why?
7. Do you think that Katrina made the right choice to play with Wedeb?
8. Would you do the same thing as Katrina? Why?
9. Katrina also helped Wedeb in class. Do you think that Katrina did the right thing?
10. Would help students, who encounter difficulties in class?
11. Draw or write a few sentences to describe your school and class.

SCHOOL	**CLASS**

12. At school, do you do lessons or activities, which teach you about ethnicity?
13. If so what sort of activities do you do? Do you enjoy these activities? Why?
14. Do you rate your school as inclusive? Why do you rate it so?
15. Do teachers include all learners during lessons? How?
16. 'Blind Side' short clip: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8Ey0GCSs90**. Researcher asks students some questions:
    - *Do you ever feel like Michael Oher in class? Why do you feel so?*
    - *What does the teacher do when you feel like Michael Oher in class?*
    - *Not at all, I really enjoy all lessons done in class – the teacher uses a variety of methods to make lessons interesting and hands-on?*

17. Show another short video clip from the 'Blind Side':
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVbSQpoFDb0&ebc=ANyPxKpnvHnxR2bAHTZg5BgfO2f8YNZq7lvtqlIpMFitA5HZt9449qk_SfCzSaBowy4L5nqjt27NxWKc12UnspTEevSb3BtQ.
Researcher asks students the following questions:

- Teachers pay attention to our aspirations: YES NO
- Teachers develop lessons based on our strengths: YES NO
- Teachers mention syllabus and exams all the time: YES NO
- Teachers use a variety of teaching techniques: YES NO
- Teachers constantly provide individual attention: YES NO
- Teachers use encouraging language in class: YES NO
- Teachers give us a lot of class work and home work: YES NO
- Teachers give us useful feedback: YES NO
- Teachers love to celebrate our success: YES NO
- Teachers are very caring, comprehensive and loving: YES NO
- Teachers give all learners a chance to succeed in class: YES NO

18. Do you have a LSE in class? Does the LSE help you in class?

19. Show the trailer of the movie 'The Blind Side':
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyqj_Tk_kuM.
The researcher explains that just like Wedeb, Michael Oher is also passing through difficult moments. However, through love, care, empathy and with the help of his teachers he maximises his potential and abilities. So much so that he becomes a famous football player. *Do you wish to experience the same success as Michael Oher? Do you think that this school will help you to reach success?*

20. In your opinion, what can be done to help the school become more inclusive?
____
____
____
____
____

Appendix H

Information Letter, Procedures & Consent Forms

Doctoral Degree Research Project:

Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling in Malta

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***Minister*; *DGs; MUT President; Archbishop's Delegate; Directors; CPs*.**

Dear ________________________________,

My name is Sean Zammit and I currently work at the Ministry for Education and Employment within the 'Education for All' Project Team. The research project, entitled 'Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling in Malta', is being carried out as part fulfilment of the PhD degree that I am reading with the University of Lincoln, School of Education. This project aims to identify how leaders in our educational system try to eliminate 'deficit thinking' in order to create more inclusive policies, practices and procedures in colleges and schools. This general idea supported the development of the sub-research questions listed below, which will guide the whole study:

1. What are the views of the different stakeholders in the educational field on 'deficit thinking'; 'all learners' and 'minority groups'; 'inclusion' and 'cultural responsive pedagogies'?
2. Who are the 'students at risk' in the Maltese educational system?
3. What changes are taking place at ministerial and department level to eliminate deficit thinking? And What challenges are being met in this re-structuring and re-culturing process?
4. How College Principals, Heads of school and teachers are trying to eliminate deficit thinking from their educational setting in favour of inclusion?
5. What challenges are College Principals, Heads of school and Class teachers encountering in trying to transform their colleges and schools into inclusive ones?

The ________________________________ College has been chosen, together with other 3 colleges, to take part in this research. Colleges, from the Northern, Central and Southern parts of Malta, were randomly selected so that the study has a proper representation of the Maltese islands. From each college one primary and one secondary school were then selected, a total of 8 State schools (4 primary and 4 secondary) will take part in the study. The selected schools in your College are: __________________________ and ____________________________. The necessary data will be collected using the following research methods:

- **Questionnaires** with all the Heads of school in your college as well as with the teachers and learning support assistants in the above-mentioned schools.
- **Interviews** with the Heads of school of the above selected school as well as with you in your capacity as College Principal.
- **Participant Observations** of 4 different lessons – 2 at primary and 2 at secondary level.

- **Job Shadowing** of the 2 Heads of school selected for the study. These Heads will be job shadowed for 2 whole days at primary and another 2 whole days at secondary level.
- **Socio-metric test** in a Year 4 or Year 5 and in a Form 3 or Form 4 class depending on the college and school. Please note that not all selected schools will take part in this test.
- **Focus groups** in each selected schools within the college. This group will be composed from students in Years 4 and 5 or Form 3 and 4 (if in a secondary school). Consent forms will also be sent to the randomly selected students and their parents.

The collected data will be aggregated and used to present findings in relation to the research questions. This data will also form the basis of my research project. The aim is to develop a paradigm shift from 'deficit thinking' mentality to a more equitable and inclusive education, which, it is proposed, will benefit all learners and transcend all members of society. Non-utopian suggestions and recommendation will therefore be developed. On completion of the research project the college as well as the participating schools will be given a copy of the findings and recommendations for future reference. All raw data will be stored for a period of 5 years on an external hard-disk and secured with a password. It will not be possible to identify any participants in this study, all data will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used throughout. Finally, no information or data will be passed on to third parties.

I would therefore like to inquire whether you would accept this invitation to take part in this research study. If yes please tick in the box underneath:

□ **Yes College will participate** □ **No College will not participate**

If YES, the researcher will begin to contact the selected primary and secondary schools so that all participants can be informed of the research project.

I thank you for your support, cooperation and understanding, if you have any further queries about this research project do not hesitate to contact me on either 99042080/25982753 or zammitsean@hotmail.com OR my supervisor on CCallinan@lincoln.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

____

SEAN ZAMMIT (142682M)
PhD Candidate University of Lincoln.

Doctoral Degree Research Project:

Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling in Malta

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Heads of School.

(Sent only once College principals grants his permission to undertake the study)

Dear Heads of school,

My name is Sean Zammit and I currently work at the Ministry for Education and Employment within the 'Education for All' Project Team. The research project, entitled 'Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling in Malta', is being carried out as part fulfilment of the PhD degree that I am reading with the University of Lincoln, School of Education. This project aims to identify how leaders in our educational system try to eliminate 'deficit thinking' in order to create more inclusive policies, practices and procedures in colleges and schools. This general idea supported the development of the sub-research questions listed below, which will guide the whole study:

1. What are the views of the different stakeholders in the educational field on 'deficit thinking'; 'all learners' and 'minority groups'; 'inclusion' and 'cultural responsive pedagogies'?
2. Who are the 'students at risk' in the Maltese educational system?
3. What changes are taking place at ministerial and department level to eliminate deficit thinking? And What challenges are being met in this re-structuring and re-culturing process?
4. How College Principals, Heads of school and teachers are trying to eliminate deficit thinking from their educational setting in favour of inclusion?
5. What challenges are College Principals, Heads of school and Class teachers encountering in trying to transform their colleges and schools into inclusive ones?

The ________________________________ College has been chosen, together with other 3 colleges, to take part in this research. Colleges, from the Northern, Central and Southern parts of Malta, were randomly selected so that the study has a proper representation of the Maltese islands. From each college one primary and one secondary school were then selected, a total of 8 State schools (4 primary and 4 secondary) will take part in the study. The College Principal has already been contacted and granted permission to undertake the research study within the college. I am therefore informing you that your school ______________________________ has been chosen to take part in the study. The necessary data will be collected using the following research methods:

- **Questionnaires** with you as Head of school as well as with the teachers and learning support assistants in your school.
- **Interviews** with you in your capacity of Head of school.

- **Participant Observations** of 2 different lessons.
- **Job Shadowing** you as Head of school for 2 times. The job shadowing sessions will last for a whole day. This is to enable the researcher to have a clear idea of what a day in the life of a head of school looks like.
- **Socio-metric test** in a Year 4 or Year 5 and in a Form 3 or Form 4 class depending on the college and school. Please note that not all selected schools will take part in this test.
- **Focus groups** in each selected school. This means that in your school a focus group will be set up. It will be composed from students in Years 4 and 5 or Form 3 and 4. Consent forms will also be sent to the selected students and parents.

The collected data will be aggregated and used to present findings in relation to the research questions. This data will also form the basis of my research project. The aim is to develop a paradigm shift from 'deficit thinking' mentality to a more equitable and inclusive education, which, it is proposed, will benefit all learners and transcend all members of society. Non-utopian suggestions and recommendation will therefore be developed. On completion of the research project the college as well as your school will be given a copy of the findings and recommendations for future reference. All raw data will be stored for a period of 5 years on an external hard-disk and secured with a password. It will not be possible to identify any participants in this study, all data will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used throughout. Finally, no information or data will be passed on to third parties.

I would therefore like to inquire whether you would accept this invitation to take part in this research study. If yes please tick in the box underneath:

□ **Yes School will participate** □ **No School will not participate**

If YES, the researcher will be contacting class teachers, LSEs and sending consent forms to the selected students who will form the focus group.

Whilst taking you for your support, cooperation and understanding, if you have any further queries about this research project do not hesitate to contact me on either 99042080/25982753 or zammitsean@hotmail.com OR my supervisor on CCallinan@lincoln.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

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SEAN ZAMMIT (142682M)
PhD Candidate University of Lincoln.

Doctoral Degree Research Project:

Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling in Malta

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***Educators* (Teachers; Support Specialists; LSEs)**

(Sent only once Head of School grants permission to undertake the study)

Dear teacher/s,

My name is Sean Zammit and I am currently working at the Ministry for Education and Employment within the 'Education for All' Project Team. The research project, entitled 'Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling in Malta', is being carried out as part fulfilment of the PhD degree that I am reading with the University of Lincoln, School of Education. This project aims to identify how leaders in our educational system try to eliminate 'deficit thinking' in order to create more inclusive policies, practices and procedures in colleges and schools. This general idea supported the development of the sub-research questions listed below, which will guide the whole study:

1. What are the views of the different stakeholders in the educational field on 'deficit thinking'; 'all learners' and 'minority groups'; 'inclusion' and 'cultural responsive pedagogies'?
2. Who are the 'students at risk' in the Maltese educational system?
3. What changes are taking place at ministerial and department level to eliminate deficit thinking? And What challenges are being met in this re-structuring and re-culturing process?
4. How College Principals, Heads of school and teachers are trying to eliminate deficit thinking from their educational setting in favour of inclusion?
5. What challenges are College Principals, Heads of school and Class teachers encountering in trying to transform their colleges and schools into inclusive one?

The ________________________________ College has been chosen, together with other 3 colleges, to take part in this research. Colleges, from the Northern, Central and Southern parts of Malta, were randomly selected so that the study has a proper representation of the Maltese islands. From each college one primary and one secondary school were then selected, a total of 8 State schools (4 primary and 4 secondary) will take part in the study. The College Principal and the Head of this school has already been contacted and granted permission to undertake the research study within this school. In this project you will be asked to participate by filling in a **Questionnaire**; by granting me permission to conduct 2 **Participant Observations** of 2 different lessons and a **Socio-metric test** in a your class as well as allowing 4 of your students to take part in a **Focus groups**.

The collected data will be used to present finding in relation to the research questions. This data will also form the basis of my research project. The aim is to develop a paradigm shift from 'deficit thinking' mentality to a more equitable and inclusive education, which, it is proposed, will benefit all learners and transcend all members of society. Non-utopian suggestions and recommendation will therefore be developed. On completion of the research project the college as well as your school will be given a copy of the findings and recommendations for future reference. All raw data will be stored for a period of 5 years on an external hard-disk and secured with a password. It will not be possible to identify any participants in this study, all data will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used throughout. Finally, no information or data will be passed on to third parties.

I would therefore like to inquire whether you would accept this invitation to take part in this research study. If yes please tick in the box underneath:

□ **Yes I will participate** □ **No I will not participate**

Whilst taking you for your support, cooperation and understanding, if you have any further queries about this research project do not hesitate to contact me on either 99042080/25982753 or zammitsean@hotmail.com OR my supervisor on CCallinan@lincoln.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

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SEAN ZAMMIT (142682M)
PhD Candidate University of Lincoln.

General Guidelines and Procedures

The guidelines and procedures are to be read aloud by the research before each Interview and Focus Group. These will also be reiterated in the consent forms that the researcher will send to the participants.

<u>Participant's Rights</u>

First, you were under no obligation to accept the invitation to participate in the study and as such you are still in time to withdraw your participation. If you decide to continue participating, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question/s. The researcher will not force you to answer questions which you feel are too sensitive or of confidential nature.
- You can withdraw from the study at any point and time without any consequences.
- Ask any questions you deem fit and pertinent at any time during the research project.
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher.
- Be given access to a summary of the project's findings when this is concluded.
- Ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- Decide not to be audio/video taped at all.

Apart from the above rights, the researcher also guarantees that:

- Your real name will not be used in the study;
- Only the supervisor and the examiners will have access to the data;
- Participants remain free to quit the study at any point and for whatever reason;
- In the case you withdraw from the study, all the records and information collected will be immediately destroyed;
- Deception in the data collection will not be used;
- The researcher will not exercise pressure on the participant;
- Conclusions from the research will be communicated to you either verbally or in writing.

I totally agree with the above guidelines and procedures □

<u>Consent Forms</u>: Educators

Name of Researcher:

Address:

Phone Number:

Supervisor's Mail Address:

<u>Title of the Research Project</u>:

'Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit-Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling in Malta'.

Purpose of the Study: The study aims to analyse how educational leaders, at all system levels are trying to eliminate deficit thinking from the Maltese educational system. The 'deficit thinking' ideology refers to the notion that students fail in school because of personal deficiencies or family problems which obstruct the learning process. Hence it aims to analyse what deficit thinking is; how it is constituted and how educational leaders are challenging this phenomenon to create inclusive and culturally responsive schools.

Guarantees:

I will abide by the following conditions:

- Your real name will not be used in the study;
- All data will be fully confidential;
- Only the supervisor and the examiners will have access to the data;
- Participants remain free to leave the study at any point and without giving a reason for doing so;
- If you choose to withdraw from the study, all the records and information collected will be immediately destroyed;
- No deception will be used in this research;
- The researcher will not exercise pressure on the participant;
- This research is in no way intended harm your reputation;
- Conclusions from the research will be communicated to you.

I agree with the above conditions and wish to take part in the study.

Signature: ______________________________________

I agree with the conditions set,

Researcher's Signature: ______________________________________

Consent Forms: Parents

Researcher: **Phone Number:**

Title of the Research Project:

'Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit-Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling in Malta'.

Purpose of the Study: The study aims to analyse how educational leaders, at all system levels (directorate, colleges, schools and classrooms) are trying to eliminate deficit thinking from the Maltese educational system. The 'deficit thinking' ideology refers to the notion that students fail in school because of personal deficiencies or family problems which obstruct the learning process. Hence it aims to analyse what deficit thinking is; how it is constituted and how educational leaders are challenging this phenomenon to create inclusive and culturally responsive schools. With great pleasure, I would like to inform you that your son/daughter has been selected to take part in this study. His/her participation is of vital importance to this study as it aims to maximise the voice of the learners as much as possible. Your son/daughter will be requested to attend a 60 minute focus group, together with other 7 students so that they can discuss freely and confidentially issues related to inclusive education and how this can benefit all learners. The researcher is also seeking permission to allow your son/daughter to take part in a socio-metric test that will be conducted in the classroom. This test will only take a few minutes to be completed and does not constitute any harm. Your son/daughter will also be asked to fill in a similar consent form.

Guarantees:

- Your son's/daughter's real name will not be used in the study;
- Only the supervisor and the examiners will have access to the data;
- Participants remain free to quit the study at any point and for whatever reason;
- In the case you withdraw from the study, all records will be destroyed;
- The researcher will not exercise pressure on the participant.

I give permission to my son/daughter to take part in the study.

Name of Guardian: ________________________________

Name of son/daughter: ______________________________________

Signature: _______________________

I agree with the conditions set,

Researcher's Signature: _____________________________________

Consent Forms: Learners

Researcher:

Title of the Research Project:

'Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit-Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling in Malta'.

Purpose of the Study: The study aims to analyse how educational leaders, at all system levels (directorate, colleges, schools and classrooms) are trying to eliminate deficit thinking from the Maltese educational system. The 'deficit thinking' ideology refers to the notion that students fail in school because of personal deficiencies or family problems which obstruct the learning process. Hence it aims to analyse what deficit thinking is; how it is constituted and how educational leaders are challenging this phenomenon to create inclusive and culturally responsive schools.

Guarantees:

- Your real name will not be used in the study;
- All data will be fully confidential;
- Only the supervisor and the examiners will have access to the data;
- Participants remain free to leave the study at any point of the study;
- If you choose to withdraw from the study, all the records will be destroyed;
- The researcher will not exercise pressure on the participant;
- This research is in no way to harm your relationship with the staff or friends.

I agree with the above conditions and wish to take part in the study.

Name of Student (Secondary School Students): __________________

Signature: ____

I agree with the conditions set,

Researcher's Signature: ____

Appendix I

Ethical Approval Form (University of Lincoln, School of Education)

EA2

Ethical Approval Form: Human Research Projects

Please word-process this form. Handwritten applications will not be accepted.

This form must be completed for each piece of research activity conducted by academics, graduate students and undergraduates. The completed form must be approved by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee.

Please complete all sections. If a section is not applicable, write N/A.

1 Name of researcher	**Mr. Sean Zammit** Department/School: **University of Lincoln School of Education**
2 Position in the University	**PhD Candidate**
3 Role in relation to this research	Being a candidate for the PhD degree I am the Primary investigator in this research project.
4 Title of the research project	**Education for All Learners: Eliminating 'Deficit Thinking' in Favour of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Schooling.**
5 Brief statement of your main research question	The main research question asks how educational leaders at all system levels try to eliminate 'deficit thinking'. This supported the development of the following sub-questions, which will guide the whole study: 1. What are the views of the different stakeholders in the educational field on 'deficit thinking'; 'all learners' and 'minority groups'; 'inclusion' and 'cultural responsive pedagogy'? 2. Who are the 'students at risk' in the Maltese educational system? 3. At a ministerial and directorate level: What changes are taking place to eliminate 'deficit thinking'? and What challenges are being met? 4. At College and School level: How are College Principals, Heads of school and teachers trying to eliminate 'deficit thinking' in favour of inclusive and culturally responsive practices? 5. What challenges are College Principals, Heads of school and class teachers facing in trying to transform schools into inclusive and culturally responsive ones?
6 Brief description of the project	**ABSTRACT** Over the past years the Maltese educational system experienced several changes and many reforms were waved in the system. The aim was to ameliorate the academic achievements of all students; to provide quality education to all learners and to offer more opportunities so that no child is left behind. More specifically, this study examines the practices, procedures and challenges of educational leaders, at different levels, who work to eliminate 'deficit thinking' with notions of respect for diversity, inclusivity and culturally responsive education. Based on the findings, a number of recommendations to address current governance, leadership, curricular, pedagogical and inclusive issues will be developed. **PROBLEM STATEMENT** Numerous studies have demonstrated that a deficit thinking paradigm, based on the medical model of disability, is highly pervasive in

1

societies, public and non-public schools (Valencia, 1997a). 'Deficit thinking' is the practice of holding lower expectations for students with demographics that do not fit the traditional context of the educational system. Hence it equates the poor achievement of students with physical disabilities or special educational needs and students from low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse communities with factors outside the control of the educational system or school. In essence, deficit thinking posits there is little the educational system or school can do to "fix" these students so it reverts to providing them with interventions or special support services to help them fit the context of the dominant school culture. This phenomenon is also very common in the Maltese educational system as evidenced in the external audit report, 'Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta' (2014), conducted by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

Although the problem of 'deficit thinking' is very evident, there is little research examining the challenges policy makers and school leaders face in addressing this issue in favour of inclusive school environments based on the social and affirmative models of disability (Shields et. al. 2004). Finally literature on educational leadership and effective schools has long held that leadership is the single most important factor in eliminating 'deficit thinking' (Wagstaff & Fusarelli, 1999). It follows, therefore, that transformational and authentic leadership have a tremendous potential in eliminating 'deficit thinking' and in providing at risk students with an equitable and inclusive education.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to understand how Maltese educational leaders aim to eliminate 'deficit thinking' from educational settings, by examining both leadership and inclusive practices and procedures. Specifically, it builds on an understanding of the practices educational leaders employ to challenge and change the beliefs and attitudes of their educators, who succumb to 'deficit thinking'. This is critical since teacher attitudes and relationships are directly related to student achievement rather than funding or facilities (Shields et. al., 2004). Research also highlights that when educators overcome 'deficit thinking' student achievement increases (Bishop, Berryman & Richardson, 2002). Hence, the role of any educational leader in the educational hierarchical system is to be a catalyst of social change.

The study also tries to identify who are the students at risk in the Maltese system; how they are being included or excluded in schools; their impact on class dynamics; the challenges that these students bring to the educational system and to class teachers; how educational authorities and Heads of school are trying to create inclusive school environments and what is actually obstructing them from reaching such a goal. These will help to propose a number of changes at Directorate, College, School and Society levels as well as develop a set of comprehensive standards in favour of an inclusive and culturally responsive educational system. Such sets will target students, educators, schools, curriculum and communities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

My conceptual framework is based on Valencia's (1997a) examination of 'deficit thinking' in education, and Shields' et al. (2004) notion of repositioning of the self to promote inclusive education, which eliminates 'deficit thinking' practices. Together, they build the case for examining the negative impact of 'deficit thinking' in educational settings and construct an understanding that replaces 'deficit thinking'

with an inclusive and equitable education. Also, based on Valencia's work, my intention is to examine the impact of 'deficit thinking' on contemporary education; show how such practices negatively impact on students and demonstrate how educational leaders can challenge the status quo, be catalyst of change and develop inclusive learning environments.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study will make use of Bogdan and Bilken's (2007) five research characteristics, being (a) the research should be natural; (b) it should utilize descriptive data; (c) it should be concerned with the process; (d) it should employ an inductive approach and (e) it should be meaningful. Also this research will follow Lincoln and Guba's (2000) case study structure of addressing the problem; the context; the issues and the lessons learnt. It will allow the researcher to examine and codify who the 'minority students' are, their impact on the educational system and their relationship with other peers; how educational leaders at all levels engage with 'deficit thinking'; the challenges that they face in addressing 'deficit thinking' and the different leadership profiles and professional standards needed for education for all. In so doing, the proposed case study consists of semi-structured interviews; anonymous questionnaires; participant observations; socio-metric tests, focus groups and document analysis.

INVESTIGATIONS

The above-mentioned research questions aim to investigate how the Maltese educational system, at all hierarchical levels, is working towards eliminating 'deficit thinking' in favour of providing high quality education for all its learners. Thus the proposed research study will thoroughly delve into and try to investigate:

1. Issues of Governance within the Maltese educational system that are hindering the process of providing quality education to all learners;
2. Who are the 'minority students' in the Maltese educational system and the challenges they bring with them in the classroom;
3. The social relationship between 'minority students' and their counterparts;
4. Whether all learners, including 'minority students', are participating as active members in the teaching and learning processes;
5. The different leadership profiles and professional standards that enable education for all and inclusive practices, i.e.: raising student achievement at all levels and all stages; promoting equity and excellence; creating and sustaining the conditions under which quality teaching and learning thrive; influencing, developing and delivering on community expectations and government policy and contributing to the development of a twenty-first century education system at local, national and international levels;
6. The challenges educational policy makers, directors, college principals, heads of school and teachers face in transforming the Maltese educational system into a fully inclusive one; and
7. The effects of inclusion and culturally responsive practices and procedures on the whole educational system.

The investigation will help in developing a number of practical non-

utopian recommendations and suggestions that could be easily implemented or waved into the Maltese educational system.

THE MIXED METHOD APPROACH

The mixed approach can be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in a study. This technique attempts to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Giddens (2001) states that "by making use of interviews, observations and questionnaires in a study, is an effective way of producing more reliable empirical data than is available from one single method" (pg.701). Moreover such a case study methodology was chosen since it offers "a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich holistic account of a phenomenon" (Merriam, 1889, pg.41). In this particular case 'deficit thinking' and the role of educational leaders in eliminating such thinking will be thoroughly examined.

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

For the purpose of this study four different colleges in the northern, central and southern regions of Malta will be chosen. Preferably the colleges would be: *Gozo College; Maria Regina College; St. Margeret College* and *St. Claire College*. The choice of these four colleges was characterized by the fact that they enrol a diverse student population from their local communities, and because they would be representative of Malta. From each college one primary and one secondary school will be chosen. As such a total of four primary and four secondary schools will take part in this research study upon acceptance. The participants include not only the Principals of each college but also Heads of selected schools, class teachers, learning support assistants and students in primary schools secondary schools. Learners attending the primary sectors will be between 8 (Year 4) and 10 (Year 6) years while those in the secondary sector between 13 (Form 3) and 15 (Form 5) years old. Finally educational leaders will also be asked to participate in the study. These include: the Minister for Education and Employment; the 3 Director Generals in the education division; the Director for Curriculum; the Quality Assurance Department Director; the Student Services Department Director; the Head of the Education for All Structures and the President of the Malta Union of Teachers.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

THE QUANTITATIVE ASPECT OF THE STUDY

The quantitative aspect of the study is represented with the use of anonymous questionnaires with heads of schools, teachers and learning support assistants. The designed questionnaires consist of three different sections: Section A: General Information; Section B: Class Population and Composition and Section C: Leadership for Inclusion. Each section contains short and straightforward questions and/or statements which participants need to answer by selecting from a serious of closed responses. The purpose of the questionnaire is to identify who the 'minority students' are; how heads of schools and class teachers cope with them and what strategies they use to eliminate 'deficit thinking'. Before the actual distribution, a pilot study of the questionnaire will also be issued so as to "increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire" (Wilson and McLeon, 1994, pg. 47). A sample of

around three hundred participants, consisting of heads, teachers and learning support assistants working at both primary and secondary level in the four selected colleges, will be chosen to administer the questionnaires beforehand. The participants will be selected randomly to guarantee fair distribution among school levels; year groups and regions whilst also reducing bias. Also all Heads in the 4 state colleges indicated below will be requested to participate in the study. The Church and the Independent sectors will be represented by a representative sample of around 100 teachers and learning support assistants.

THE QUALITATIVE ASPECT OF THE STUDY

The study's qualitative aspect is represented by semi-structured interviews; participant observations; socio-metric tests and focus groups and document analysis.

Semi-structured interviews:

Eight semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the Heads of the eight schools taking part in the study. Each Head of school will be asked nine open-ended questions which will focus on the way they operate in order to eliminate 'deficit thinking' from their respective schools. Interviews will also be conducted with the Minister for Education and Employment; the 3 Director Generals in the education division; the Director Curriculum; the 4 College Principals of the identified colleges; the Director Quality Assurance Department; the Director Student Services Department and the President of the Malta Union of Teachers. These will help in investigating governance issues as well as explore changes taking place at national, directorate, college and school level. Is proposed that this approach will enable specific and general information together with a range of insights on 'deficit thinking' and system leavers will also be gained.

Participant Observations:

Eight different observations will also be conducted to gain first hand direct information on how Heads of school and class teachers deal with 'deficit thinking' and how they try to include all learners. The eight observations will be divided as follows:

- 2 class observations at 2 different primary schools;
- 2 class observations at 2 different secondary schools;
- 2 observations (Job Shadowing) of 2 different Primary Heads of school;
- 2 observations (Job Shadowing) of 2 different Secondary Heads of school.

The schools where the class observation and the job showing will take place will be selected randomly using the random sampling method. Also the researcher will conduct participant observations during the Council of Heads meetings in the 4 selected colleges and the Council for the College Principals. Below find a breakdown of the observation visits in these settings:

- Participant Observation in the Gozo, Maria Regina, St. Margaret and St. Claire Council of Heads meetings – 1 participant observation in each college;
- 2 participant observations in the Council of College Principals.

The above observations will help the research to understand better the dynamics taking place during such discussions; to evaluate the level of discussion in these settings as well as understand how change in planned

5

and developed through shared or participatory leadership. All gathered information will be recorded and results compared and contrasted with interviews and questionnaires.

Socio-metric Tests and Focus Groups:

The relatedness and level of relationship between the 'minority group' students and their counterparts will be examined and studied. Four tests (2 at primary level and 2 at secondary level) will be carried out in Year 4 and 5 at primary level and Form 3 and 4 at secondary level since through a socio-metric test, one can "discover, describe and evaluate social status and structure, and can measure the acceptance or rejection felt between peers" (Evans, 2006, pg. 50). Also in order to give voice to learners on the deficit thinking issues, eight student focus groups will be set up in the eight participant schools. Each focus group will consist of six students who will be selected randomly from Years 4 and 5 and Forms 3 and 4. In order to facilitate the discussion a story and a set of questions will be presented. All reactions will be recorded, transcribed and then compared with data results from questionnaires, interviews, participant observations and socio-metric tests.

	Document Analysis: All relevant documents at both school (SDP; IEP; Policies) and national (NCF; National Policies; External Audit and Education Act) level will be examined and analysed thoroughly. **METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS** Data will first be analysed separately and then comparative analysis will be used (cross method comparison and comparison of data from primary and secondary schools). The research study is an inductive approach, meaning that it moves from the specific to the more general. After an in-depth analysis, all the data is to be coded into different "units of meaning". During this process the initial isolated meaning and understandings are to be attached to the interview and focus groups transcript phrases and sentences, observational notes, socio-metric graphs, documentary sources and data from questionnaires. As a result, localized meanings will evolve into more general themes. The goal will be to construct a logical chain of evidence (Scriven, 1974) and to construct a conceptually coherent theory by checking for rival explanations and looking for negative evidence. This is because "comprehension of the phenomenon…requires knowing not only how it works or does not work in general, independent of local conditions, but also how it works under various local conditions" (Stake, 1995). **POSSIBLE CONCLUSIONS** This research will develop a paradigm shift from 'deficit thinking' mentality to more equitable and inclusive education. Weiner (2006) claims that a paradigm shift is not easy and is seldom welcomed by those entrenched in the comfort of status quo. Replacing the traditional mode of deficit with one that promotes equitable education will benefit all learners and transcend all members of society. Educational leaders therefore need to challenge 'deficit thinking' practices and foster an equitable education. **Approximate start date:** May 2016 — **Anticipated end date:** October 2021
7 Name and contact details of the Principal Investigator (if not you) or supervisor (if a student)	**Dr. Carol Callinan** **Email address:** CCallinan@lincoln.ac.uk **Telephone:** 01522 837315

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8 Names of other researchers or student investigators involved	Not Applicable

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9 Location(s) at which this project is to be carried out	The data collection will take in the following 4 Colleges and respective schools: 1. **College A**: *Primary School* and *Secondary School*; 2. **College B**: *Primary School* and *Secondary School*; 3. **College C**: *Primary School* and *Secondary School*; 4. **College D**: *Primary School* and *Seocndary School*. 4 different PRIMARY and SECONDARY schools from different colleges around the Maltese islands will take part in the study. The Quantitative aspect of the study is represented with the use of anonymous **QUESTIONNAIRES** with a cohort of around 400 teachers and 300 learning support assistants in the above mentioned primary and secondary schools. Also all Heads of schools of the above colleges will be asked to take part in this study. This equates to a cohort of 50 Heads of school.

	The Qualitative aspect will be reached through the following data collection methods: 1. Semi-Structured Interviews with the following participants: ➢ The **8 Heads of School** of the above mentioned primary and secondary schools; ➢ The **Minister for Education and Employment** (Malta); ➢ The **Permanent Secretary** within MEDE; ➢ The **3 Director Generals**; ➢ The **4 College Principals** of the aforementioned colleges; ➢ The **QAD Director**; ➢ The **Curriculum Director**; ➢ The **SSD Director**; ➢ The **President of the Malta Union of Teachers**; ➢ Archbishop's Delegate representing **Church Schools Sector**. All interviews will take place in the participants' working place or office upon appointment and acceptance of participation. 2. Participant Observations:4 participant observations in all. 3. Job Shadowing: Job shadowing of Heads of school will be conducted in 4 different schools. 4. Socio-metric Test: 4 socio-metric tests will be conducted throughout the study. 5. Focus Groups: student focus groups will be formed in the 8 above mentioned schools. There will be 8 focus groups in all.
10 Statement of the ethical issues involved and how they are to be addressed, including discussion of the potential risks of harm to both project participants and researchers **This should include:** • **an assessment of the vulnerability of the participants and researchers** • **the manner and extent to which the research might not honour principles of respect, beneficence and justice** • **concerns relating to the relationships of power between the researcher(s) and those participating in or affected by the research**	The proposed study will follow rigorous ethical procedures before, during and after completion of the research project. As such the following issues will be taken into consideration: **a) The place of the researcher** In any research study bias places a very important role. As Bogdan and Biklen (2001) point out "no matter how much you [researcher] try, you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable" (pg. 38). Hence it is of utmost importance to 'lay open' my background, experiences and track record before actually commencing the research since these might directly influence this study. Prior to commencing this PhD degree with the University of Lincoln, I served as a classroom teacher in a range of primary schools around Malta and Gozo, where I had the fortune to teach nearly all primary school grades, except Kindergarten and Year 1. During these years I always tried my best to put into practice inclusive strategies aimed at offering high quality education to all learners. After this wonderful experience, I was appointed as an Inclusive and Special Education Specialist with the Statementing Moderating Panel (SMP) in the Student Services Department. In this particular job I served for 2 years during which I had the opportunity to monitor and review the work being done with various learners with an official statement of needs. Currently I am working within the Education for All Project Team at the Ministry for Education and Employment in Malta. In this position, together with my colleagues, I deficit thinking and integrative mentality which has infiltrated all the structures of the educational system in favour of full inclusion and high quality education for all learners. Also, throughout these years, apart from a first degree in primary education teaching (B.Ed. Hons Primary), I also successfully finished reading a Masters degree in education (M.Ed.) in Responding to Student Diversity as well as a Postgraduate diploma (PGDL) in educational leadership and management. All this shows my great interest in issues related to social justice, human rights issues, inclusive education and education for all. Moreover this study was approached soon after the publication of the 'Education for All External Audit Report on Inclusion and Special Education in Malta' (2013), which consciously presents negative implications associated with research in this area. It also urges local

educational authorities to commence a comprehensive and holistic re-structuring and re-culturing process in favour of full inclusion which should lead to high quality education for all learners in a more social and human rights based system. The urge to transform the current areas of weaknesses within the educational system has also grasped my motivation and determination. Hence the greatest obstacle in this research is to avoid being conditioned by the findings of the external report by remaining neutral at all stages and times. Another big hurdle to avoid falling into the trap of selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others. Being an advocate for the elimination of deficit thinking, the research site and participants in the study will not be jeopardized by my advocacy lens. As a matter of fact different methods aimed at channelling bias will be used since the aim is to deconstruct the meaning of inclusion and education for all, rather than constructing it, and to focus on research *for* minority empowerment rather than research *on* minority students.

Gaining entry into meaningful sites is dependent on the purposeful sampling process. As such, field sites are dependent upon the colleges selected for this study. This raises an ethical consideration. The selected colleges were identified after discussions with educational professionals through a purposeful sampling approach as school leaders who worked to eliminate deficit thinking in their buildings. I stressed the importance of this quality in the selection process as it was critical to the integrity of the study. In my opinion this will prevent participants from falsely purporting to address deficit thinking, and it will deter false data collection.

b) Creating a positive relationship with Participants

Any social science research involves gathering data from people and hence human beings need to be treated with respect, should not be harmed in any way and should be fully informed about what is happening to them or with them as part of the research project (Oliver, 2003). As a matter of fact, from the very beginning the researcher will strive to build a positive, friendly and healthy relationship with each and every participant involved in the study. This underlines "respect for the rights of the individual whose privacy is not invaded and who is not harmed, deceived, betrayed or exploited" (Burgess, 1989, pg. 60). Trust here plays a crucial role. It is important that the researcher trusts his participants, by supporting their requests and dilemmas, but also that participants trust the researcher. Participants need to feel 'safe' and that their interests will be safeguarded by the researcher. This will be done by:

- **Informed and Voluntary Consent** – informed consent is one of the most important aspects of research ethics. It is based on the need for participants to enter research voluntarily, while understanding the nature of the research and any disadvantages or obligations these might encounter. Hence all participants (Heads of schools; teachers; learning support assistants; learners; directors; college principals, director generals, minister and permanent secretary) will be presented with a consent form showing full and open information about what their participation will involve and what will be expected of them. To ensure comprehension this form will be presented in the participants' first language and no technical terms or phrases will be used to avoid misconceptions or if used these will be properly defined in simple language. Also since the study involves children, consent forms will be sent to the children's parents to be granted permission. Where possible, children will be presented with

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consent forms. Finally the researcher will also make sure that there is no convert pressure felt by potential participants and that no invasion in the person's privacy. Participants will also be assured that they can abandon the research study at any point they deem fit and appropriate without any consequences or pressure. Together with these forms participants will also be presented with an interview schedule planner so that they can choose the date, time and place where interviews will take place. In such a way the participants' private space will be respected.

- **Anonymity and Confidentiality** – these are cornerstones in research ethics. The research will guarantee confidentiality and anonymity to all informants. The researcher accepts the fact "that there is inequality in the interviewing situation, but know also that the narrator's immediate and long-range good may not be sacrificed for the researcher's gain" (Wengraf, 2002, pg. 185). Hence in this research study, all names of schools, colleges and participants will be pseudonyms. Moreover attention is to be paid so that no information imparted during interviews, socio-metric tests and observations is disclosed to uninterested third parties during the research project.

  Additionally, the information that will be shared during the study will often have a sensitive nature. Hence during the data collection process I will pay extra attention to this fact and will not probe too deeply by invading personal space. For example, if a Head indicates that he or she feels some policies or practices within the school are ethnically or culturally motivated or knows of some instances involving specific stakeholders that operate under these motives, I will not push for any personally identifiable information like specific stakeholder's job title. I expect that some Heads will want to keep the study relatively quiet depending on the dynamics of the staff and the workings of the school culture.
- **Beneficence** – this principle refers to the need for research to maximise the benefits and minimise any possible harmful effects (Cozby, 2007). Potential harm to participants from participating in the research can include psychological, emotional or physical harm as well as fear of loss of confidentiality. As previously discussed the ultimate beneficences of this research project, particularly, to fill the gap in research in the field of deficit thinking and the creation of a set of proposals and recommendations that will ameliorate the current educational system will be discussed with all participants. Also the research shall only start once permission from the University's research ethics committee and the Department for Research and Policy Development in Malta is granted. The researcher abides himself also to conduct all necessary changes to the current plan as advised and directed by the 2 aforementioned competent bodies. Also at the end of the research project a presentation of all findings and recommendations will be given for the purpose of member-checking. Any participants who appear to be uncomfortable with the project will be free to withdraw and care will be taken to ensure that they are fully debriefed.
- **Permission** – in order to conduct the research permission to access the different sites identified above needs to be granted. Therefore college principals will be contacted first and when they

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give their respective verbal consent, the Department for Research and Policy Development will be contacted so that its official approval is obtained. The study will only embark once permission from the aforementioned department is granted.
- **Data Keeping** – Questionnaires will be saved on an external hard-disk which will be kept in a safe place at home and secured with a password. All interviews and focus groups will be transcribed and then saved on the same external hard-disk. All the other data will be categorized, saved in different folders and kept in safe places where no third parties can have access to it. No data will be released before the publication of this study and participants will be given copies of this research study.

11 Does this research involve children and/or young people?	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐
	If yes, please explain (a) how you have obtained or will obtain the appropriate permissions to work with these people (E.g., DBS check in the UK), and (b) your principles for their ethical engagement. In the case of primary school children consent forms will be sent to their parents and if granted permission the selected children will form part of the focus group. Also children will be explained my role in the whole exercise, what the whole process is all about and why this research is important. The children will be given to option to withdraw if they wish to do so. Secondary school children will also be given consent forms to be given to their respective parents. However in this case, since here I would be dealing with bigger children, these will also be given consent forms themselves to fill in after such forms have been explained to them. The children will be made aware that they have the right to withdraw from the project.
12 Does this research require approval from an external body?	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐
	If yes, please state which body: Research and Policy Development Department within the Ministry for Education and Employment. All necessary forms and documents will be presented together with the request form so that the aforementioned department can grant permission access. This application is currently being developed but can take some time before it is confirmed.
13 Has ethical approval already been obtained from that body? Please note that such approvals must be obtained before the project begins.	**Yes** ☐ **(Please append documentary evidence to this form.)** **No** ☐ **(If no, please explain why below.)** I have collected all the necessary documentation from this department. Once all necessary documents are in hand and completed the whole application will presented. During this period I worked with educational gate keepers in order to identify the correct colleges and schools to participate in the study.

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APPLICANT SIGNATURE

I hereby request that the School of Education Research Ethics Committee review this application for the research as described above, and reply with a decision about its approval on ethical grounds.

I certify that I have read the University's Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Humans and Other Animals (which can be found online here: http://visit.lincoln.ac.uk/C11/C8/ResearchEthicsPolicy/Document%20Library/Research%20Ethics%20Policy.pdf).

SEAN ZAMMIT | **29/03/2016**

Applicant signature | **Date**

MR. SEAN ZAMMIT

Print name

FOR STUDENT APPLICATIONS ONLY
Academic Support for Ethics

Academic support must be sought from your mentor prior to submitting this form to the School of Education Research Ethics Committee.

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught applicants should obtain approval from their tutor or an academic member of staff nominated by the Department.

Postgraduate Research applicants should obtain approval from their Director of Studies.

I (the undersigned) support this application for ethical approval.

5th April 2016

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Academic / Director of Studies signature **Date**

Dr Carol Callinan

Print name

For completion by the Chair of the School of Education Research Ethics Committee

Please select ONE of A, B, C or D below.

☒ **A. The School of Education Research Committee gives ethical approval to this research.**

☐ **B. The School of Education Research Committee gives *conditional* ethical approval to this research.**

14 Please state the condition (including the date by which the condition must be satisfied, if applicable).	

☐ **C. The School of Education Research Committee cannot give ethical approval to this research but refers the application to the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for higher level consideration.**

15 Please state the reason.	

☐ **D. The School of Education Research Committee cannot give ethical approval to this research and recommends that the research should *not* proceed.**

16 Please state the reason.	

Signature of Chair of School of Education Research Committee (or nominee)

10/05/2016

Signed **Date**

Appendix J

Department for Research and Policy Development: Approval Form

MEDE's **RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY AND PROCEDURES GUIDELINES**.

Information Letter and Request for Permission to carry out Research

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Addressed to Head of School, Organisation

Name of the Researcher: ____

Title of Research: ____

Part I: Information Sheet

Introduction *[Briefly state who you are, what is the purpose of your research (for example, a research project as part fulfilment of a degree, from which higher educational institution), and what you are researching. State also who your tutor / supervisor is.]*

Purpose of Research *[Explain the research question in lay terms in a way that will clarify what your research is all about and what you intend to establish]*

Type of Research Intervention/Procedure *[Provide a brief introduction. If your research involves observation, explain briefly what you will be observing and for which reasons. If your research involves focus groups, interviews or questionnaires, explain briefly the type of questions that the participants are likely to be asked, and if the questions may be of a sensitive nature or may potentially cause embarrassment, clarify that the participant will be informed about this. It may be helpful to the Head of School, Organisation or Institute if they know from the very start what the research involves]*

Participant Selection *[Indicate why you have chosen this cohort to participate in the research. The Head of School, Organisation or Institute may wonder why that particular cohort has been chosen and may be concerned]*

Voluntary Participation – Right to Refuse or Withdraw *[Indicate clearly that the prospective participants can choose to participate or not, and that they do not have to take part in the research if they do not wish to. Assure the Head of School, Organisation or Institute that whether the participants choose to participate or not will not affect them adversely in any way. State clearly that the participants may opt to stop participating in the research at any time and without any consequence]*

Duration *[Include a statement about the expected time commitments of the research for the School, Organisation or Institute]*

Risks and Benefits *[Explain and describe any risks that you anticipate or that are possible. Also briefly explain and describe the benefits of the research project from which the individual, the community to which they belong, or society as a whole will benefit]*

Confidentiality *[Explain how the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of data with respect to both information about the participant and information that the participant shares, who has access to the data, and for how long this data will be kept. Explain that, in cases where research is sensitive or involves participants who are vulnerable, extra precautions will be taken to ensure safety and anonymity]*

Sharing the Results *[Your plan for sharing the findings with the participants and the Head of School, Organisation or Institute should be provided. You may also inform the Head of School, Organisation or Institute that the research findings will be shared more broadly]*

Who to Contact *[Provide your contact information, and that of your academic supervisor).*

Part II: Request for Permission to carry out Research

[In this you will need to:
- Request permission to observe, carry out interviews or focus groups, or administer questionnaires. State with whom you intend to carry out the research.
- Clearly state whether you intend to take photographs, or to audio or video record the sessions.
- State that the research project will abide by the General Data Protection Regulations always.
- State that the study has been approved by the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (DRLLE) within the Ministry of Education and Employment.
- Provide your contact information, and that of your academic supervisor]

Name of Researcher　　Signature of Researcher　　Date

Part III: Declaration of Consent

❍ I have been invited to participate in a research titled:

____

❍ I confirm that I have read and understood the above information, or it has been read to me, and that I agree to participate in this study.
❍ I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
❍ I understand that I am free to contact the researcher or the researcher's supervisor to seek further clarification and information.
❍ I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence of any kind.
❍ I understand that all data are anonymous and that there will not be any connection between the personal information provided and the data.
❍ I understand that there are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study.
❍ I consent to being audio-recorded.
❍ I consent to my data being transcribed, and that the data from the transcriptions will be kept (state where they are kept, which security arrangements have been taken, and who has access to this data) until (state a specific relevant period during which the data will be retained).
❍ I understand that my identity will remain anonymous.

Name of Participant　　Signature of Participant　　Date

Appendix K

Duties of Assistant Heads of School (MEDE)

Assistant Head of School Primary Sector – Duties and Responsibilities

3.1 The core responsibility of the Assistant Head of School is to assist and deputise for the Head of School in pursuance of his/her role as the school's Educational and Operational Leader by undertaking such professional and administrative duties as are delegated by the Head of School. As part of the Senior Management Team, the Assistant Head of School is also responsible for the fostering of a climate of genuine collegiality by setting the pace for active engagement in the development of a Community of Professional Educators. The Assistant Head of School is expected to:

i. lead and manage the school in its day-to-day operations in the absence of, or in support to, the Head of School, assist in the school's curriculum by organising and coordinating all activities related to curriculum planning, delivery assessment and development at school level, contributing when given the opportunity at national level;
ii. assume responsibility for ensuring educational and personal entitlement of all learners;
iii. lead and coordinate all initiatives related to meeting the needs of individual students, including children with a statement of needs and those related to Individual Educational Programmes guaranteeing access to learning and assessment, supported by the presence of the HoD (Inclusion);
iv. develop and maintain an emotionally, psychologically and physically safe, as well as orderly, though creative and cognitively stimulating environment that is conducive to learning;
v. collaboratively create and nurture a Community of Professional Educators, leading by example through active participation;
vi. coordinate mentoring duties of Newly Qualified/Recruited Educators.

The overall purpose of the role of an Assistant Head of School is that of:

i. assisting and deputising for the Head of School in the efficient management of the human, physical and financial resources of the school, and of
ii. offering professional leadership in the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework.

The main responsibilities of an Assistant Head of School shall include the following:

i. assisting in managing the school as may be determined by the Head of School;
ii. undertaking any professional duties which may be delegated by the Head of School;
iii. in the absence of the Head of School, undertaking the management and professional duties of the Head of School;
iv. adopting and working towards the implementation of the school development plan;
v. providing professional support to teachers in the proper execution of their pedagogical duties, particularly by mentoring new teaching staff;
vi. co-operating with the Head of School in the evaluation of curriculum innovation and development within the school;
vii. acquiring experience in the management of different levels of the school;
viii. in cases of emergency, taking charge of a class;
ix. encouraging participation in EU projects and other projects in accordance with SDP targets and as agreed with the Senior Management Team;
x. performing any other duties according to the exigencies of the Public Service as directed by the Principal Permanent Secretary.

3.2 An Assistant Head of School may be required to attend courses, locally or abroad, as the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) may deem necessary.

3.3 Furthermore an Assistant Head of School may be deployed within the same cycle applied for according to the exigencies of the service.

Assistant Head of School Secondary Sector – Duties and Responsibilities

3.1 The core responsibility of the Assistant Head of School is to assist and deputise for the Head of School, as the school's Educational and Operational Leader by undertaking such professional and administrative duties as are delegated by the Head of School. As part of the Senior Management Team, led by the Head of School, the Assistant Head of School is also responsible for the fostering of a climate of genuine collegiality amongst community members, setting the pace through active engagement in the development of a Community of Professional Educators, including through School Development Planning. The Assistant Head of School is expected to:

i. lead and manage the school in its day-to-day operations in the absence of, or in support to, the Head of School, assist in the school's curriculum by organising and coordinating all activities related to curriculum planning, delivery assessment and development at school level, contributing when given the opportunity at national level;
ii. assume responsibility for ensuring educational and personal entitlement of all learners;
iii. lead and coordinate all initiatives related to meeting the needs of individual students, including children with a statement of needs and those related to Individual Educational Programmes guaranteeing access to learning and assessment, supported by the presence of the HoD (Inclusion);
iv. develop and maintain an emotionally, psychologically and physically safe, as well as orderly, though creative and cognitively stimulating environment that is conducive to learning;
v. collaboratively create and nurture a Community of Professional Educators, leading by example through active participation;
vi. coordinate mentoring duties of Newly Qualified/Recruited Educators and others experiencing challenges.

The overall purpose of the role of an Assistant Head of School is that of:

i. assisting and deputising for the Head of School in the efficient management and control of the human, physical and financial resources of the school, and of
ii. offering professional leadership in the implementation and development of the National Curriculum Framework.

The main responsibilities of an Assistant Head of School shall include the following:

i. assisting in managing the school or sections of the school;
ii. undertaking professional duties which may be delegated by the Head of School;
iii. in the absence of the Head of School, undertaking the professional duties of the Head of School;
iv. working towards the implementation of the school development plan (SDP);
v. providing professional support to teachers in their pedagogical duties;
vi. cooperating with the Head of School in the evaluation of curriculum innovation;
vii. acquiring experience in the management of different levels of the school;
viii. in cases of emergency, taking charge of a class;
ix. encouraging participation in EU projects and other projects in accordance with SDP targets and as agreed with the Senior Management Team.

3.2 An Assistant Head of School may be required to attend courses, locally or abroad, as the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) may deem necessary.

3.3 Furthermore an Assistant Head of School may be deployed within the same cycle applied for according to the exigencies of the service.

Appendix L

Duties of Heads of School (MEDE)

Head of School – Duties and Responsibilities

3.1 The core responsibility of the Head of School is to serve as the Educational and Operational Leader of the respective school's community, with the ultimate aim of ensuring a high quality and equitable educational provision which meets the diverse needs of all learners. Together with the other members of the Senior Management Team, the Head of School is also responsible to foster a climate of collegiality among community members, setting the pace through purposeful leadership and active nurturing of a Community of Professional Educators. The core role of the Head of School is to:

(a) promote and pursue the mission of the school in providing an equitable, high quality holistic education for all students, raising and maximising the individual as well as the collective level of attainment whilst narrowing gaps that may persist;
(b) provide strategic leadership and direction to staff and the rest of the school community, as well as the overall day-to-day management of the school;
(c) assume a leading role in organising and coordinating all activities related to curriculum development and delivery;
(d) develop and maintain an emotionally, psychologically and physically safe school, as well as orderly, through creative and cognitively stimulating environment that is conducive to learning;
(e) collaboratively create and nurture a Community of Professional Educators, leading by example through active participation;
(f) lead educational development particularly at the local level, whilst generally contributing at the national level also by serving as a catalyst for positive change.

Overall Purpose

(a) Provide professional leadership and to ensure the implementation and the development of the National Curriculum Framework;
(b) Secure whole-school commitment to the curricular philosophy, values and objectives through the effective school team building, communication and collaborative approach to decision-making;
(c) Promote and further the holistic education of each student in the school;
(d) Organise, manage and control efficiently and effectively the human, physical and financial resources of the school;
(e) Participate in the meetings of the College Council of Heads and to collaborate with other Heads of School in a manner that maximises networking under the leadership of the College Principal and Head of College Network and according to the direction and guidelines established by the competent authorities;
(f) Participate in the design, formulation and implementation of projects that tap EU funding and establish partnerships with other schools in Europe.

Main Duties

(a) Formulate, in a collaborative manner with the school team the school objectives, aims, and policies in conformity with the Education Act and related legal notices and the directives and regulations of the Education Authorities and to lead the school team accordingly;

(b) Facilitate a participatory team building and collegial process leading to the formulation and on-going review of the School Development Plan;
(c) Build and maintain an effective and open channel of communication within the school community, with other schools in the College, with the College Board and its administration, with officials of the Education Directorates/Departments, the local community and other external agencies;
(d) Direct the planning, organisation and co-ordination of curricular and other related initiatives and activities throughout the year and performing duties connected with the School Council in accordance with current legislation;
(e) Keep abreast with on-going professional development in educational and administrative leadership and management and nurture the role of mentors;
(f) Ensure order and discipline, help to resolve conflicts, and promote healthy relationships between students, staff and parents/guardians;
(g) Ensure the timely implementation of established disciplinary procedures;
(h) Ensure that network participants can communicate in an informal but well-structured manner;
(i) Ensure that all policies are being carried out effectively;
(j) Ensure the maintenance of an effective pastoral care system for students;
(k) Ensure that members of the Senior Management Team are regularly assigned focus areas for the better implementation of the school policies and development plan;
(l) Supervise the academic and pedagogical quality of teaching and learning;
(m) Perform any other duties as deemed appropriate by the Education Directorates/Departments;
(n) Perform any other duties according to the exigencies of the Service as directed by the Principal Permanent Secretary;

Curriculum Development

(a) Together with the Senior Management Team and teachers and in consultation with the relevant personnel in the Education Directorates/Departments, as appropriate, to determine strategies for the effective implementation of the National Curriculum, such as teaching and learning strategies, the use of educational resources and services, the selection of textbooks, etc;
(b) Implement quality assurance mechanisms that support high standards of teaching;
(c) Promote the enrichment of the curriculum through activities organised within and outside school;
(d) Ensure that the curriculum includes holistic learning activities that take into account the diverse talents and learning modes, abilities and potential of all students in the school, and into the resources of the local community as well as those of national, European and international organisations;
(e) Motivate and support all categories of staff with the objective of pursuing lifelong learning opportunities, including career development and progression.

Student Matters

(a) Facilitate provision of effective psycho-social services and the effective delivery of pastoral care services for students;
(b) Implement an effective referral policy for students requiring specialised services;

(c) Develop and sustain procedures to facilitate the transition of students coming to and leaving school;
(d) Promote an inclusive school policy;
(e) Facilitate and nurture a safe school environment;
(f) Promote an effective student participation policy.

Teaching Personnel

(a) Nurture the development and maintenance of the professional school team leading to active participation in decision-making, and take timely follow-up action and facilitate school self-evaluation exercises;
(b) Expose the Assistant Heads to the various roles and tasks of headship; directing the induction of new staff and motivating, supporting, developing, monitoring, acting as mentor, and appraising professional and non-professional staff;
(c) Guide management processes, including Performance Management Programmes, to ensure academic and pedagogical quality assurance and standards of teaching;
(d) Manage and mentor other personnel attached to the school on a permanent or temporary basis in order to ensure a high level of motivation and of quality service;
(e) Ensure that the gender perspective is integrated in school initiatives.

Home-School-Community Links

(a) Create and promote links with the local community and its organisations;
(b) Encourage and foster early parental involvement in children's development; while providing staff with a clear direction, encouraging them to seek effective ways of enhancing parental involvement in students' educational development;
(c) Encourage parents/guardians to engage in lifelong learning opportunities leading to personal development. Enhancing involvement in the school community life;
(d) Encourage parents to increasingly become aware of their responsibilities towards their children's well-being and welfare and ensure that they strictly observe the school's rules and regulations, including those related to punctuality.

Administration

(a) Together with the Assistant Head/s, to carry out the annual school classification exercise and ensuring the preparation of timetables, assigning of classes, subjects and responsibilities to teachers;
(b) Ensure that the duty of providing cover for absent teachers is shared equitably among all teachers in the school;
(c) Ensure the compilation and upkeep of school statistics, as well as student and staff records;
(d) Ensure the provision of a functional record keeping and filing system and the timely and correct submission of data and information requested by the regulatory bodies, the College Board and other authorised entities;
(e) Collaborate with relevant agencies and officials, to ensure the proper maintenance and servicing of the school building, facilities and equipment, as well as the cleanliness and the embellishment of the school environment;
(f) Ensure the compilation of an inventory according to prescribed regulations, as well as the efficient management of stores/apparatus, furniture and other material

resources with the assistance of available human resources;

(g) Ensure the timely requisition of utilities and textbooks;
(h) Provide necessary information to ensure adequate school transport;
(i) Take part in EU projects and other projects in accordance with SDP targets.

Finance

(a) With the assistance of competent officials from the Education Directorates/Departments and College to prepare the capital and recurrent school budget estimates within the parameters and priorities set by the competent authority;
(b) Under the direction and guidance of the Education Directorates/Departments, to ensure the effective management and control of funds according to established Government financial regulations and the recording of all transactions according to established practice.

3.2 In the carrying out of his/her duties and functions, a Head of School shall be expected to develop the necessary knowledge, competences and skills to be able to make effective use of Information and Communication Technology.

3.3 A Head of School shall be supported, encouraged and guided by a process of induction and mentoring during the period of probation and at any other time when superiors may deem necessary. Participation in an induction process shall be an integral condition of employment for a Head of School and such an induction programme may be held outside school hours. The induction process generally spans the probation year.

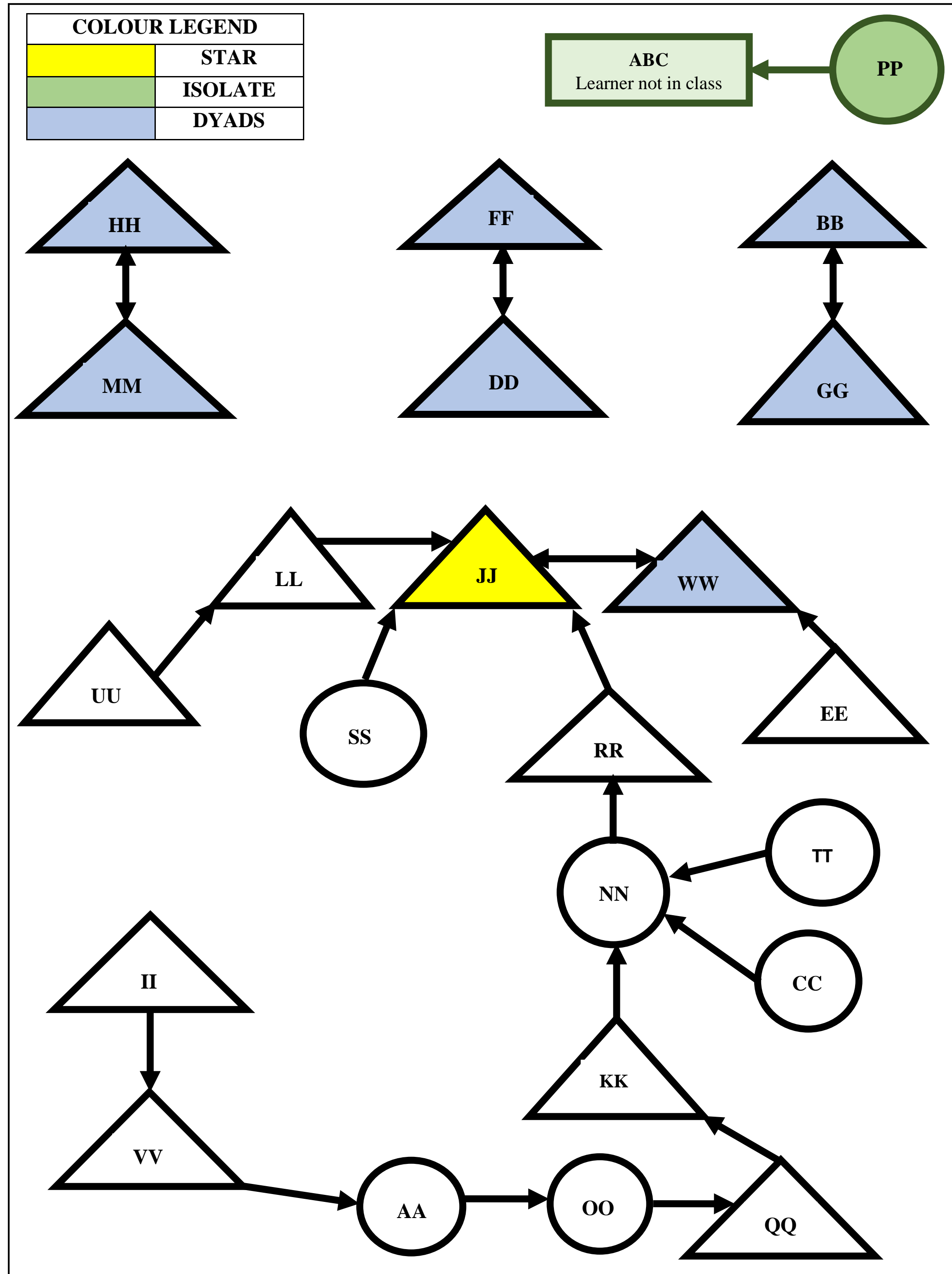
Appendix M

Sociometric Results: Class Sociograms

The Sociograms

Primary A: The Year 4 Classroom

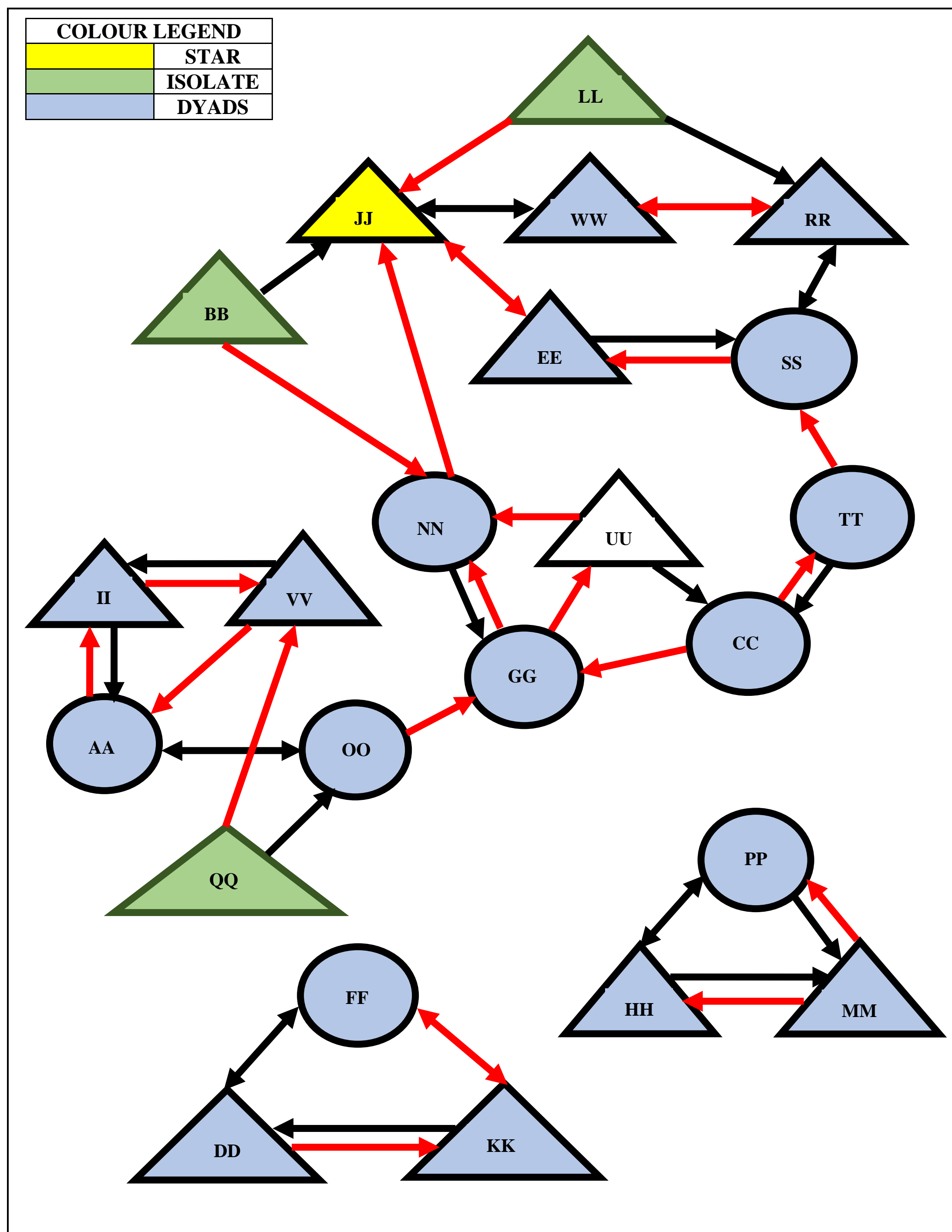
__Question 1__: ***Name of ONE classmate you would take with you in a new class***



Learner JJ, who the teacher described as "the brightest learner in class", resulted to be the star (5 preferences), while the second most popular student was learner NN with 3

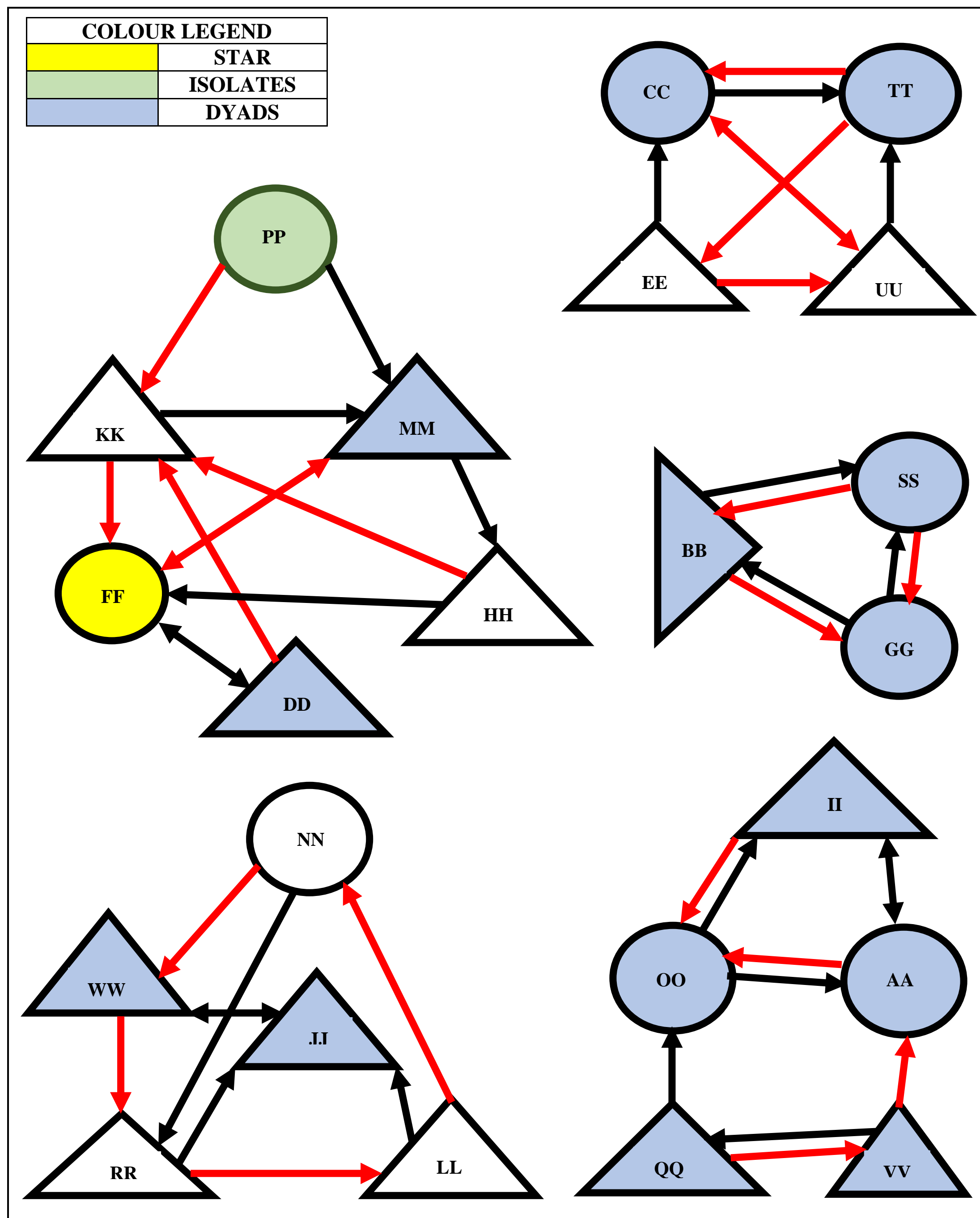
preferences. Moreover, the sociogram demonstrates a clear divide between high (LL, WW, RR, NN) and average (UU, SS, EE, TT, CC) achieving learners and low achievers (II, VV, AA, OO, QQ, KK), since the former nominated each other respectively while low achievers all chained together. Finally, the sociogram presents also dyads composed of high achievers (JJ + WW), SEN learners (FF + DD), ethnic diverse learners (HH + MM) and average achieving learners (BB + GG). Learner PP, who is an ethnic diverse learner, resulted as the isolate.

__Question 2__: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to play most during breaks***



Apart from dyads, squares and triangles, the sociogram presents a chain of learners (learner VV to RR). The latter configurations indicate that during breaks, all learners feel comfortable to socialize and play together. However, ethnic learners (PP, MM, HH), who formed a social triangle, need to be better integrated. Likewise, learners QQ, BB and LL encounter difficulties to be included. Learner JJ emerged as the star (5 preferences).

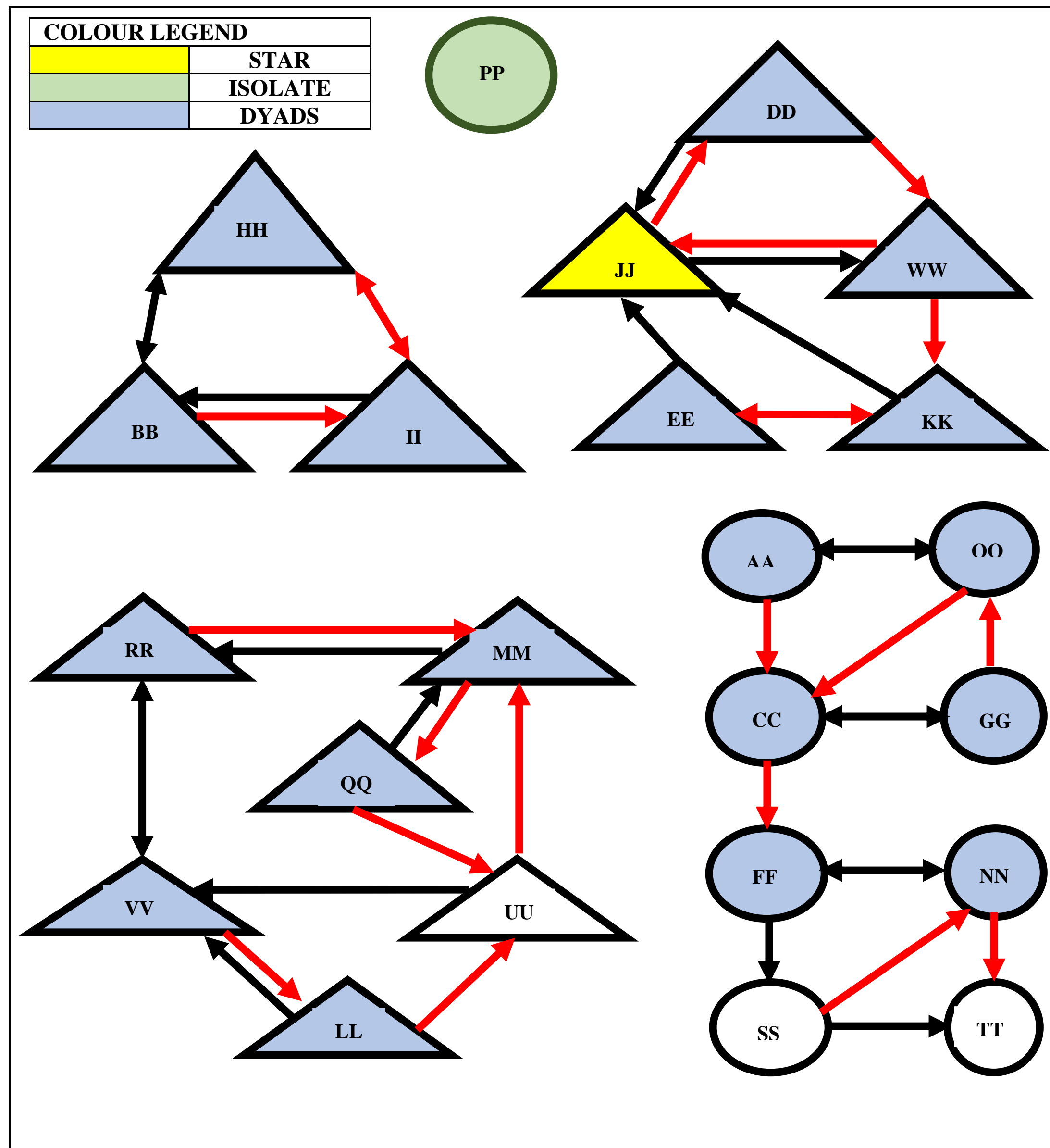
Question 3: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to work most in class***



The 2 groups of low achieving learners (II, OO, AA, QQ, VV & MM, KK, FF, DD, HH, PP); 2 groups of average achievers (BB, SS, GG & CC, TT, EE, UU) and the high achieving

group (NN, WW, JJ, RR, LL) mirrored the classroom seating arrangement. Each group presented dyads (*WW+JJ*, QQ+VV, OO+AA, OO+II, *FF+DD*, FF+MM, BB+SS, *BB+GG*, GG+SS, CC+TT). Learner PP resulted as the isolate (same as in quest. 1 and 2) due to severe language barriers and lack of readiness for grade level. Finally, learner FF, who is a SEN learner benefitting from LSE support, resulted as the star.

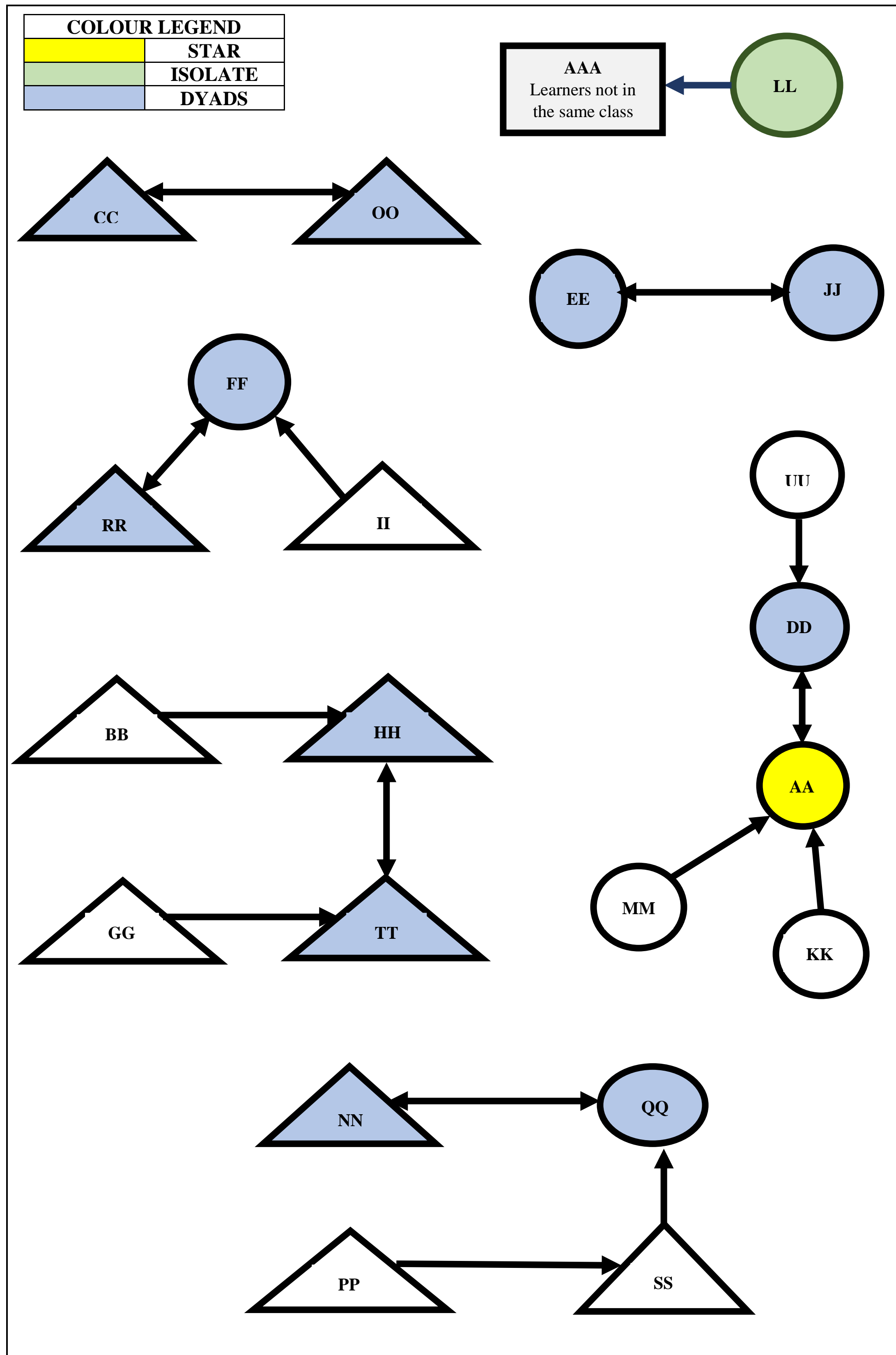
<u>Question 4</u>: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to play after school***



All learners indicated that after school they attended doctrine lessons and participated actively in sport, music and dance extra-curricular activities. Learner JJ emerged as the most sought-after learner in his social group of friends. On the contrary, learner PP was identified as the sociogram's isolate.

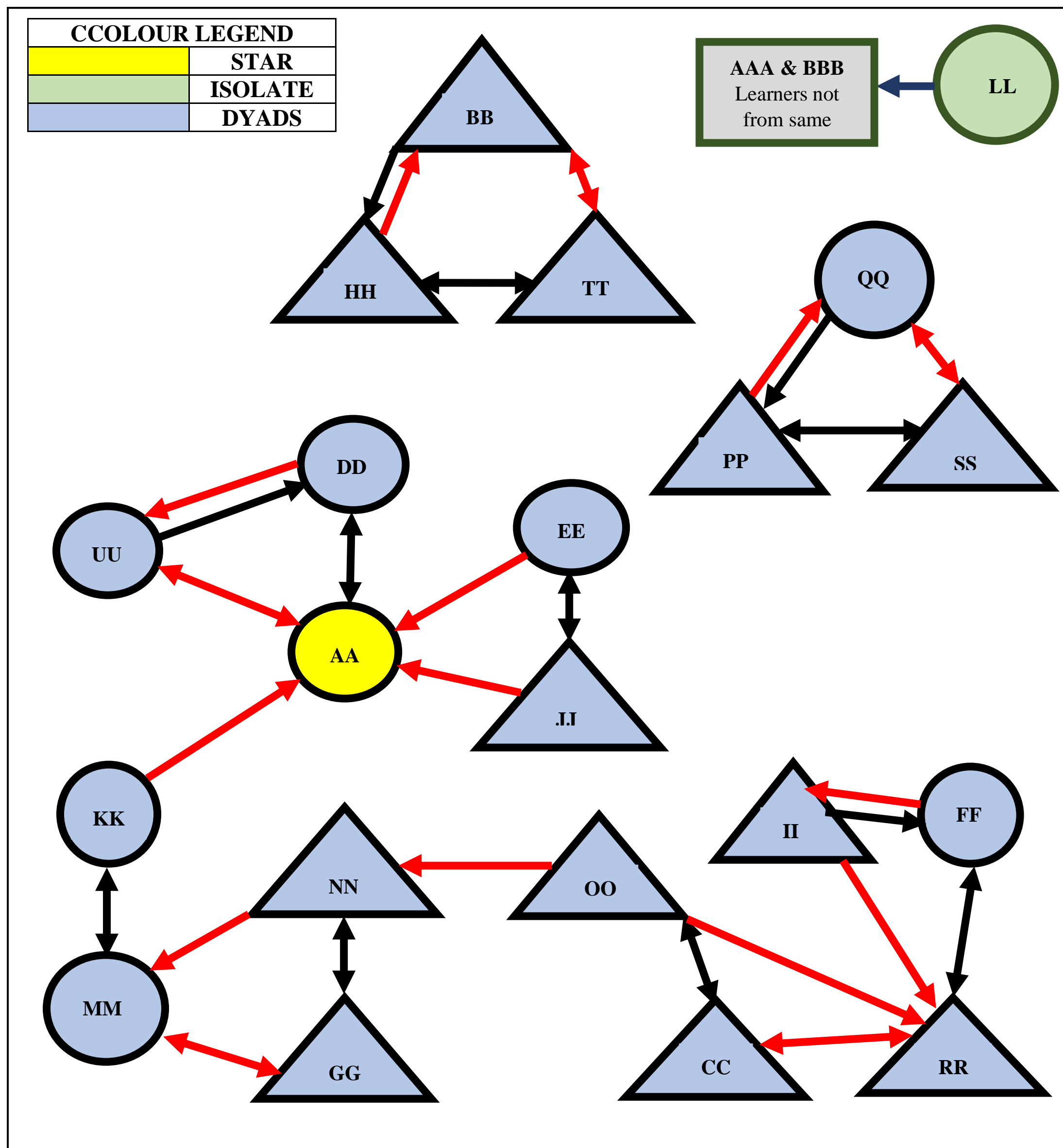
Primary C: The Year 5 Classroom

<u>Question 1</u>: ***Name of ONE classmate you would like to take with you in a new class***



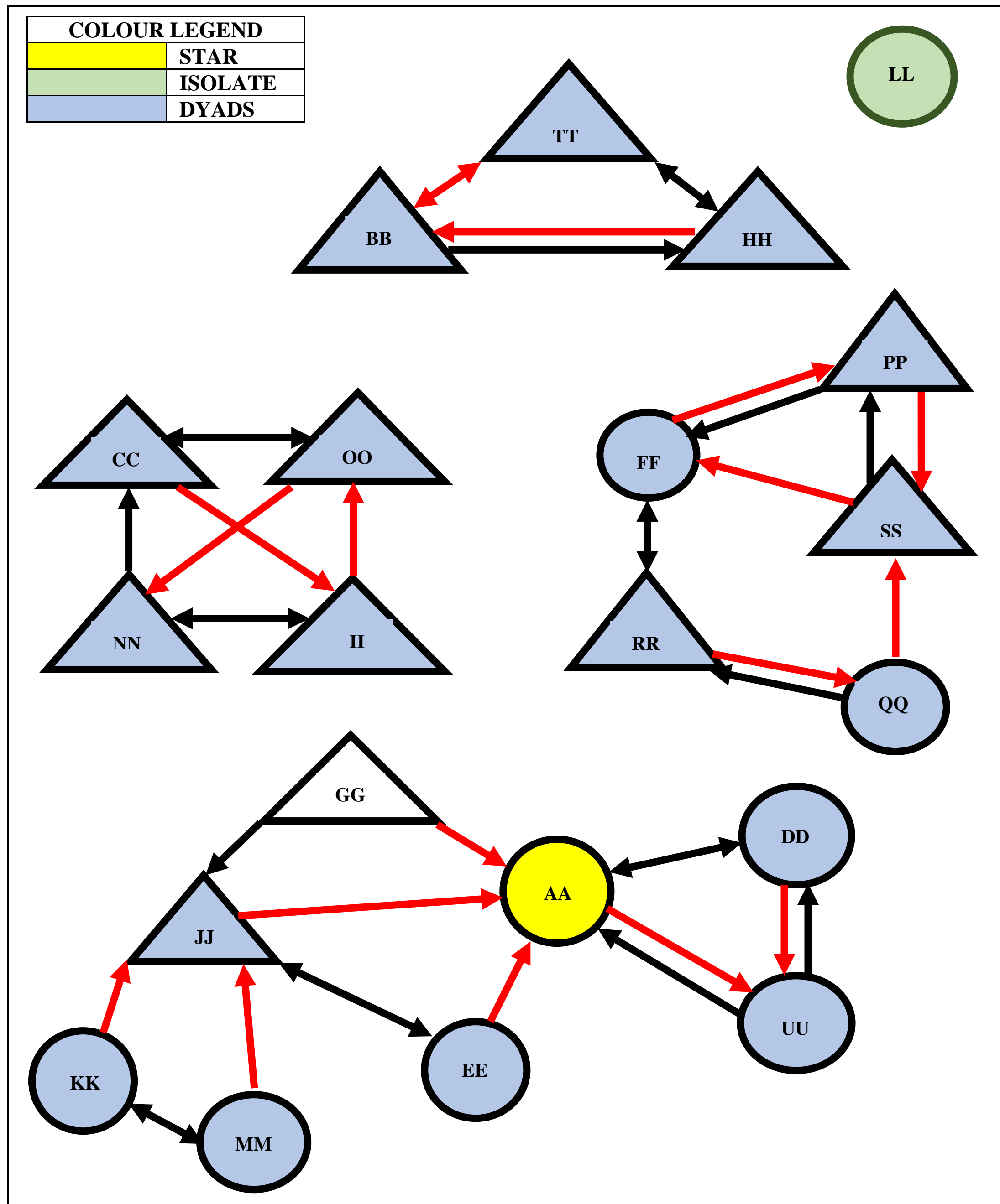
The isolate (Learner LL) is a Somali learner, who lacks Maltese and English language proficiencies. The sociogram indicates also that SEN (CC, OO, FF, RR) and low achieving learners (NN, QQ, SS, PP, II) preferred to nominate one another while high (EE, JJ, AA) and average achievers (TT, GG, BB, HH, KK, MM, DD, UU) chose each other. Finally, the sociogram's star resulted to be learner AA.

<u>Question 2</u>: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to play most during breaks***



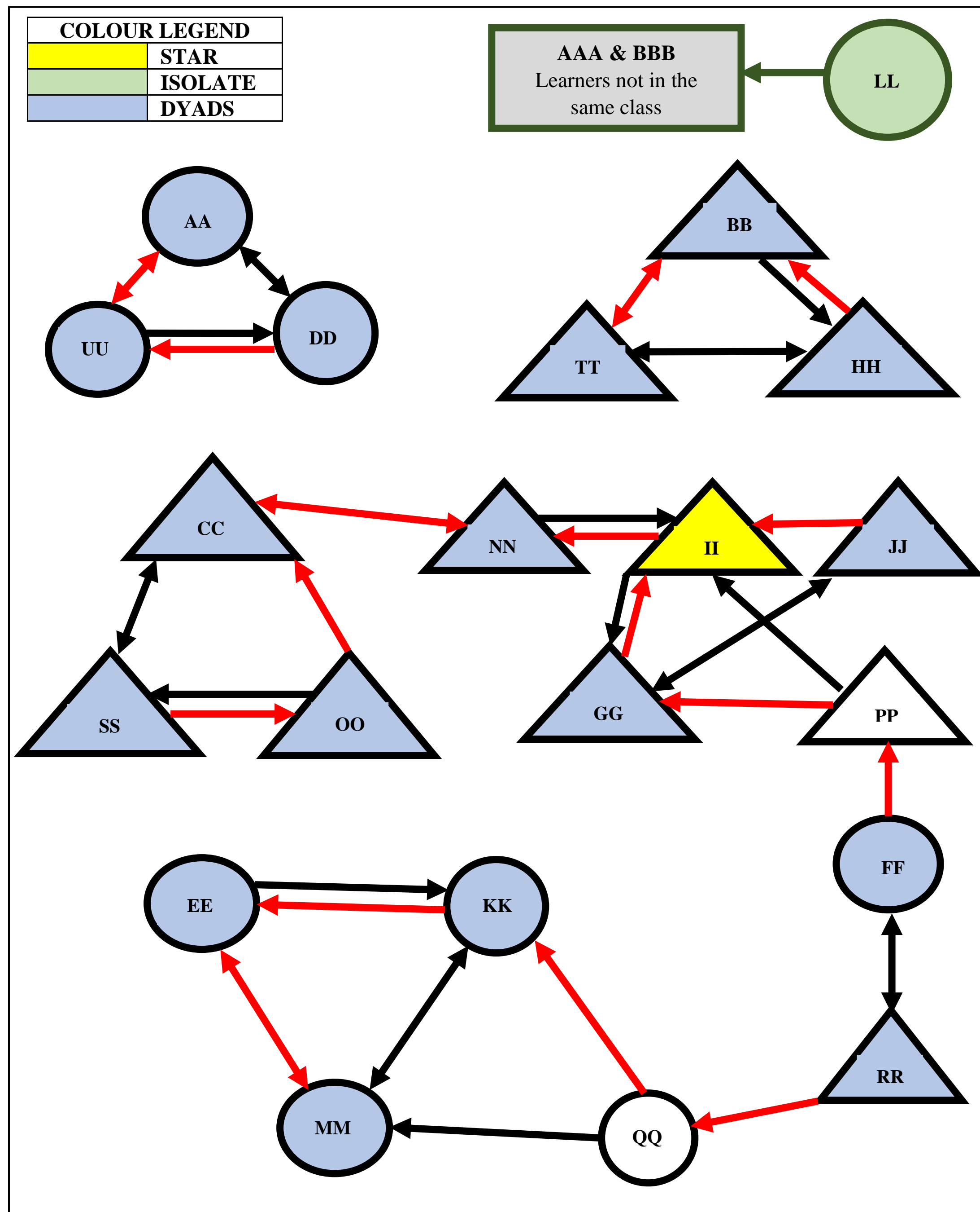
The sociogram indicates that during breaks learners felt comfortable to play with each other, except with learner LL, who is the classroom's isolate. On the other hand, the sociogram's star resulted to be learner AA (5 preferences) and followed by learner RR (4 preferences). Finally, female learners (UU, DD, AA, EE) during breaks need to integrate more with male learners.

<u>Question 3</u>: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to work most in class***



High and average achieving leaners grouped together, with learner AA being the star and learner JJ the second most popular. Low achievers (NN, II, PP, SS, QQ) and SEN learners (CC, OO, FF, RR) grouped together in two separate groups. In each case the LSE supported both SEN and low achieving learners so that the class teacher could concentrate on the rest of the class. Finally, learner LL resulted again as the class isolate.

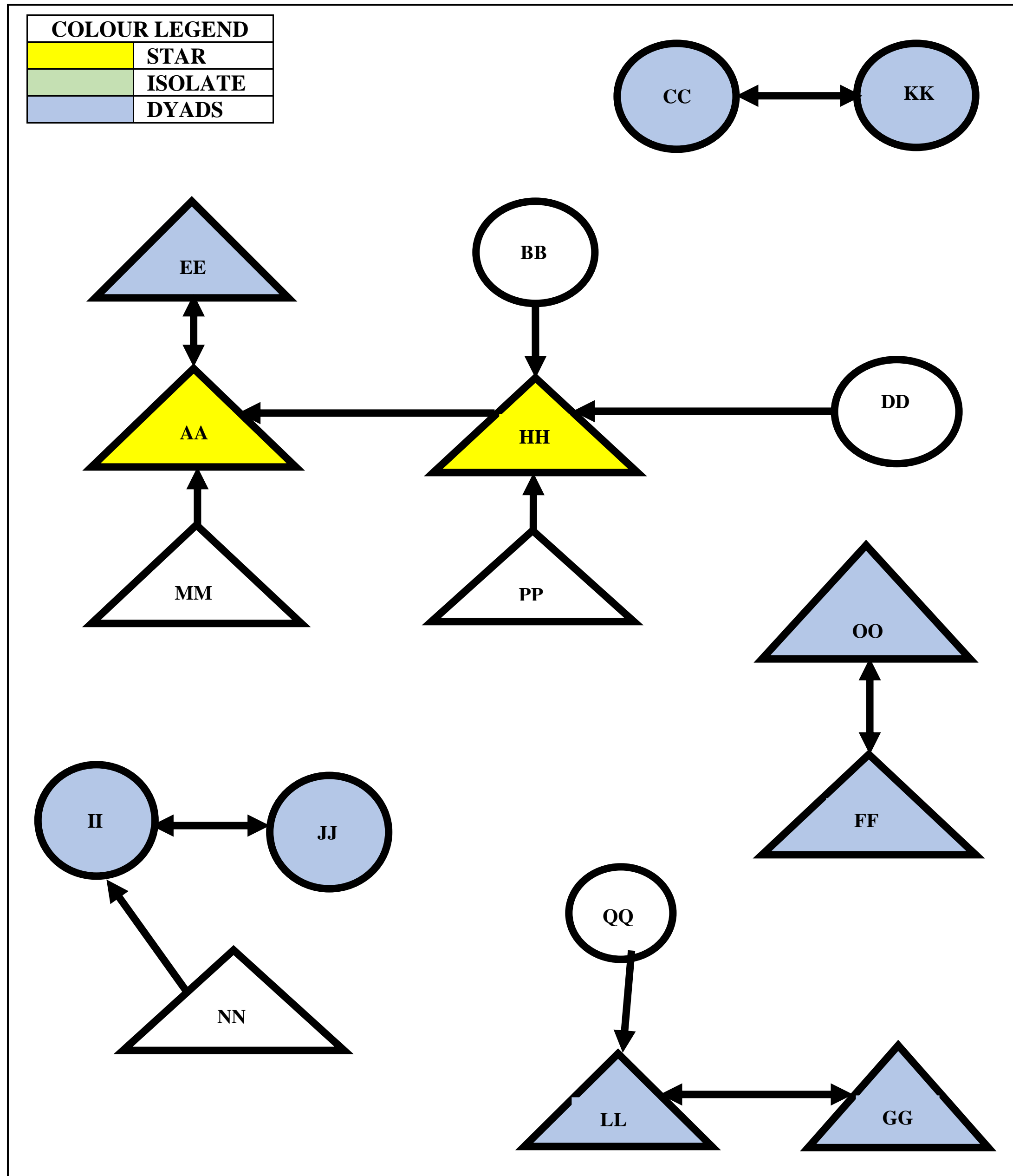
Question 4: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to play after school***



Collected evidence shows that after school extra-curricular activities helped learners to further their relatedness and to strengthen their social bonds as evidenced by the sociogram's dyads, chains and triangles. Learner LL resulted as the isolate. This shows that learner LL was encountering difficulties to integrate in the local community and in class. Trends of ghettoisation are also present since in the four sociometric questions learner LL felt more at ease with her Somali friends. LL's different culture and traditions and her lack of language proficiency acted as a barrier to inclusion.

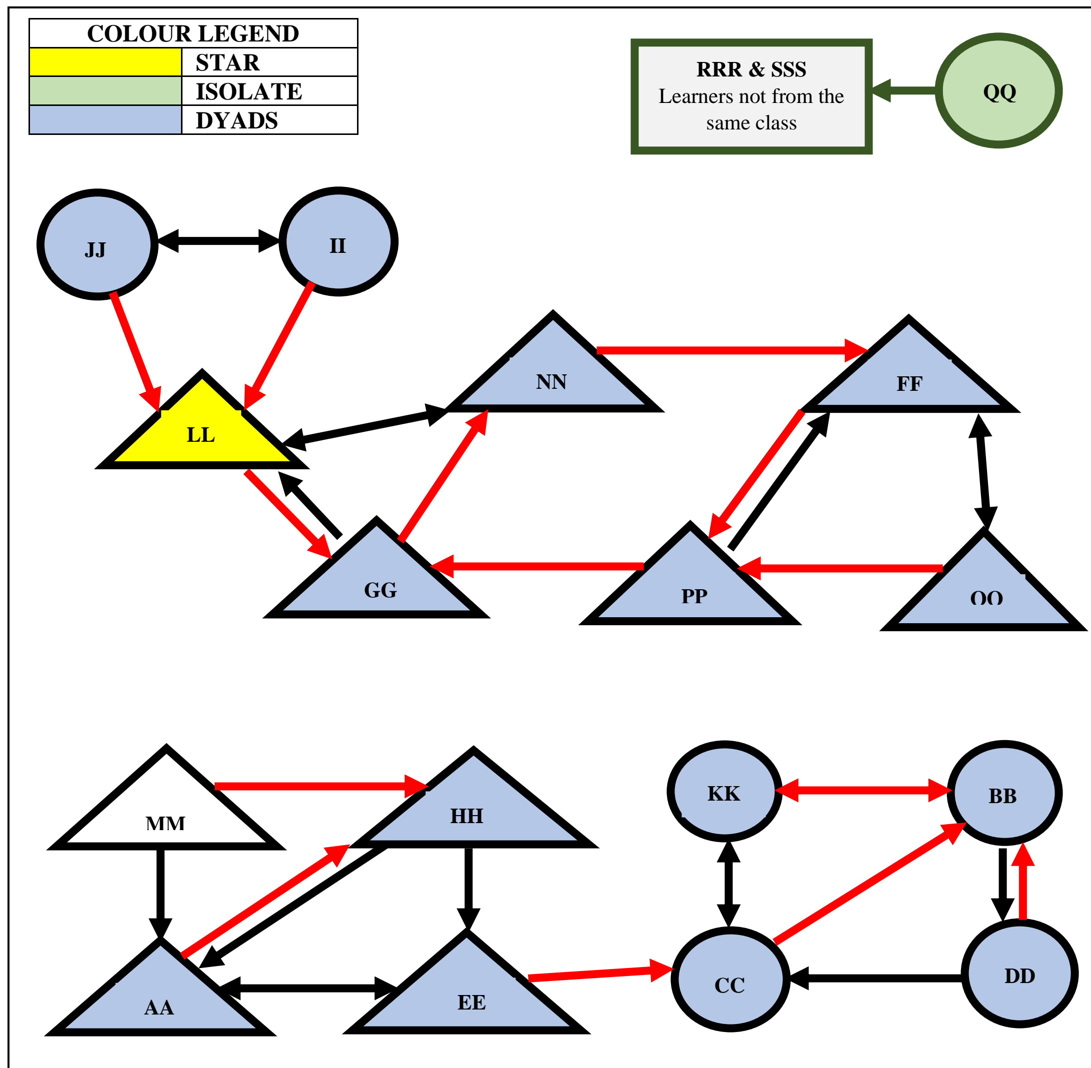
Secondary E: Form 3 Classroom

__Question 1__: ***Name ONE classmate you would like to take with you in a new class***



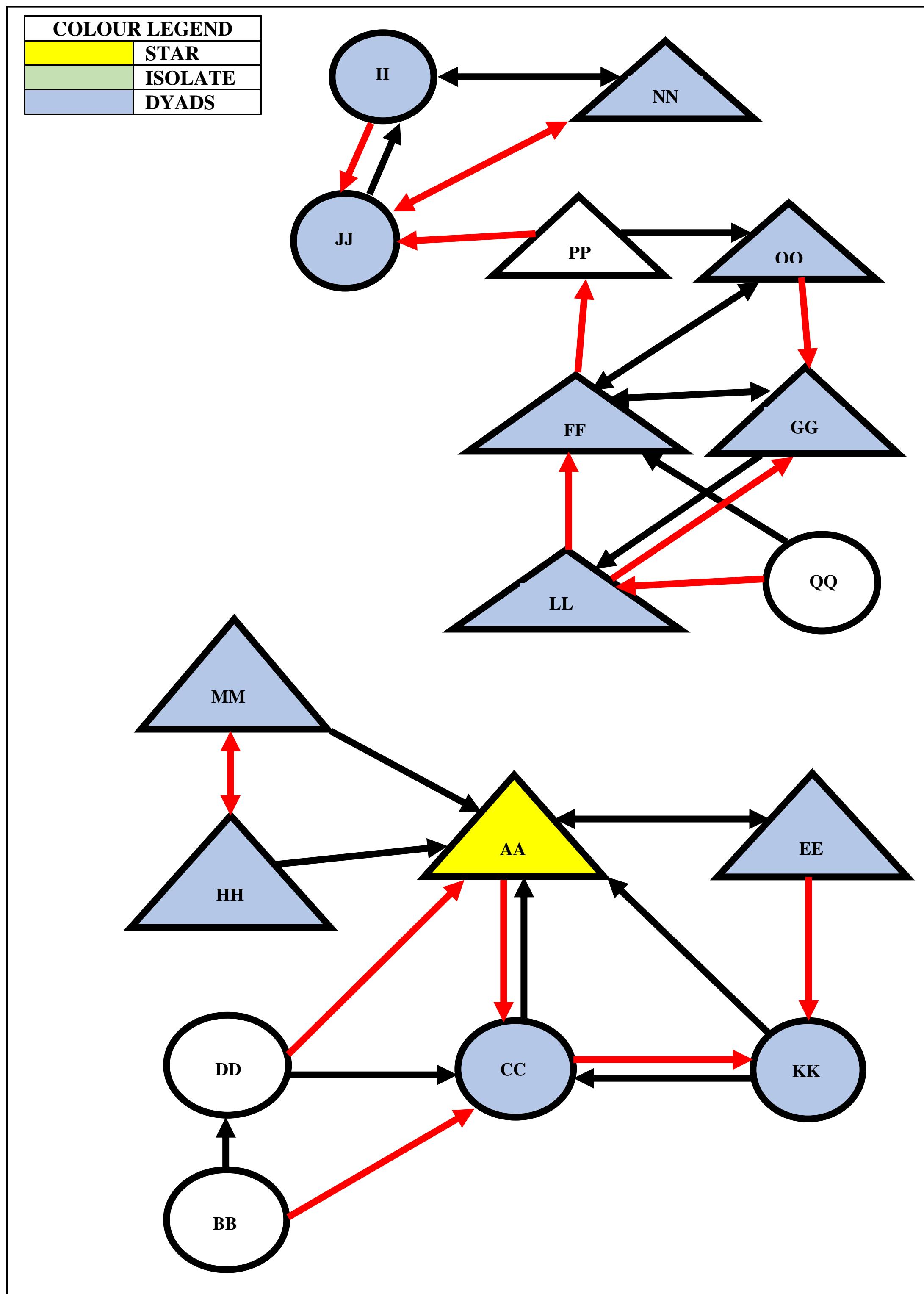
The sociogram presents two stars: learner AA (a high achiever) and learner HH (an average achiever). There are also 5 learners (BB, DD, MM, NN, QQ) not nominated by their class peers, but who in turn indicated their favourite one. In addition, there are also 5 dyads, i.e.: AA + EE (the high achievers dyad); GG + LL (the low achievers dyad); OO + FF (the SEN learners dyad); CC + KK (the high achiever and the average achiever dyad); and II + JJ (the low achievers dyad).

<u>**Question 2**</u>: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to play most during breaks***



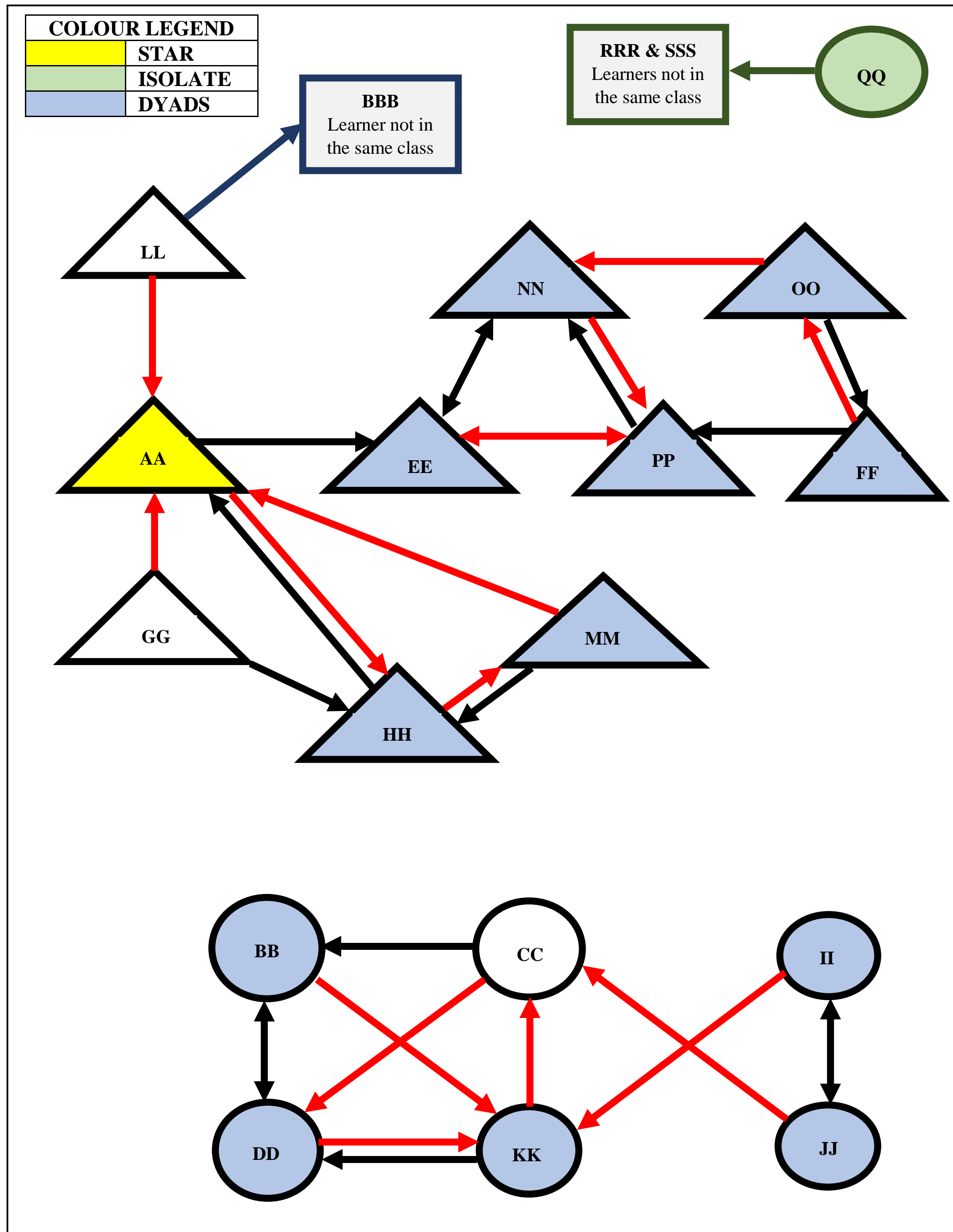
The sociogram presents two groups of learners, who during breaks felt comfortable to socialize and play with each other. The star resulted to be learner LL, a Serbian ethnic diverse learner. Hence, indicating that learner LL finds it easier to interact with peers during breaks (informal setting) than in formal class-lessons. Other popular learners included learners AA, BB, CC and FF, who received 3 nominations respectively. On the contrary, the isolate resulted to be learner QQ, who unlike learner LL, encountered severe difficulties to interact with her class peers. QQ preferred to stay with RRR and SSS, who are two Nigerian learners in Forms 2 and 4. The two statemented SEN learners (FF and OO) also interacted well with each other and with their class peers.

<u>Question 3</u>: *List TWO classmates with whom you like to work most in class*



Results indicate two polarities, namely the group of high-average achievers and the group of SEN learners and low achievers (supported by the LSE). Learner AA (the sociogram's star) was the most sought-after learner in the high-average achievers group. Learners FF and JJ were the most popular learners in the low achievers group.

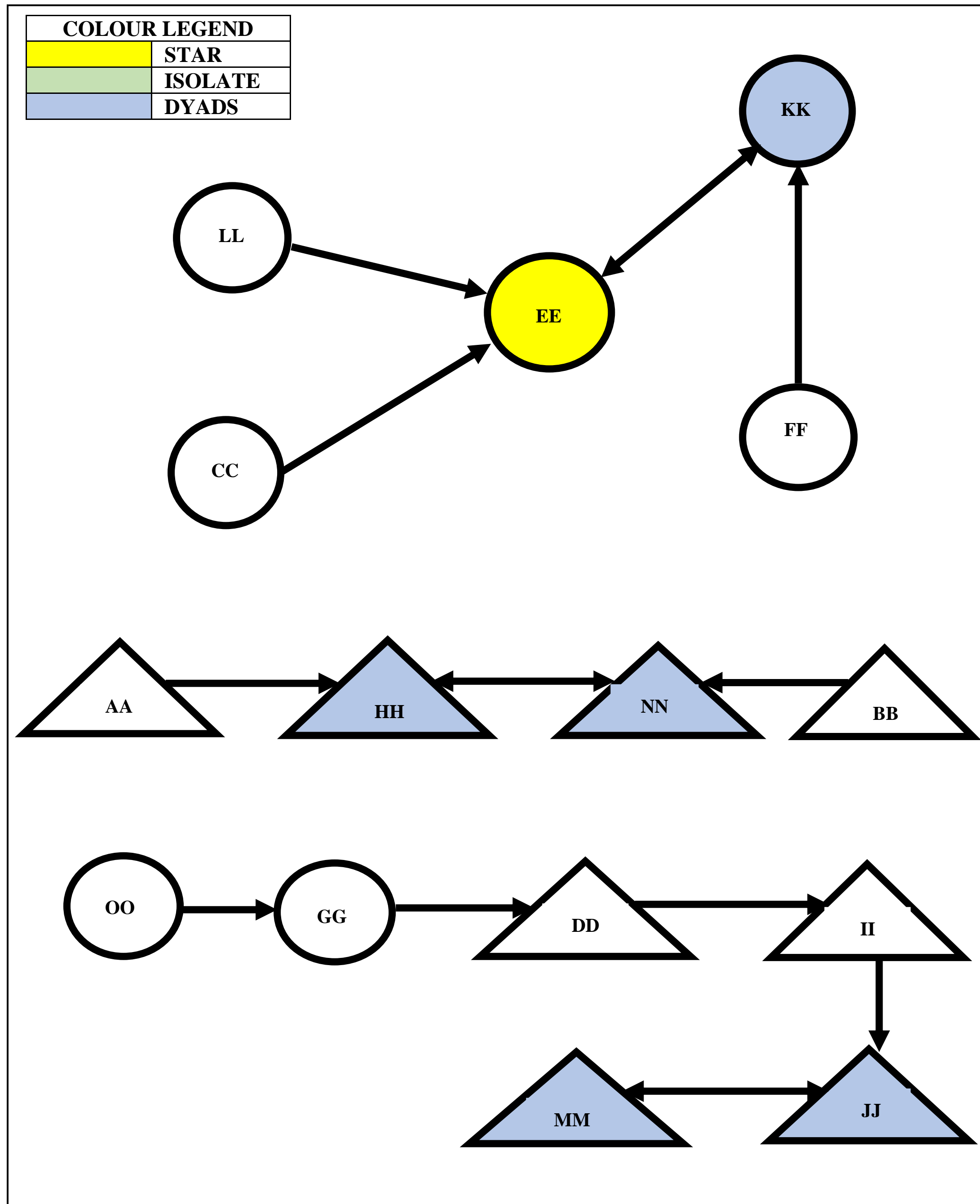
<u>Question 4</u>: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to play after school***



Learner AA resulted as the sociogram's star with 4 nominations, followed by learners EE, PP and HH with 3 preferences each. On the contrary, learners DD and KK were the most popular learners in the females' group with 3 nominations. Gathered evidence shows also that at community level the integration of ethnic minority learners, mainly learners from the Sub-Saharan region, like learner QQ, was quite problematic. QQ felt more at ease to engage with Nigerian friends (RRR & SSS).

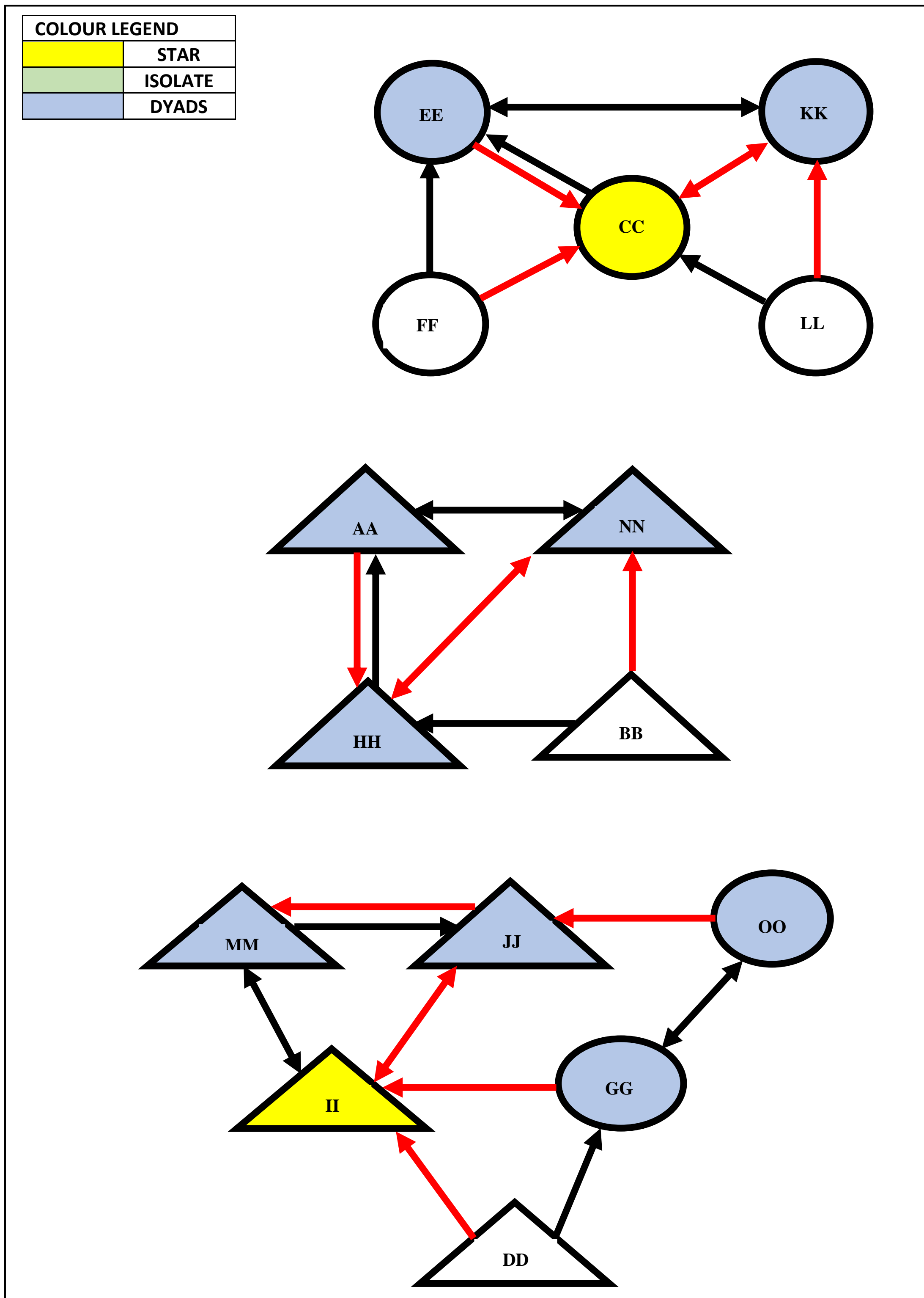
Secondary G: The Form 4 Classroom

<u>Question 1</u>: ***Name ONE classmate you would like to take with you in a new class***



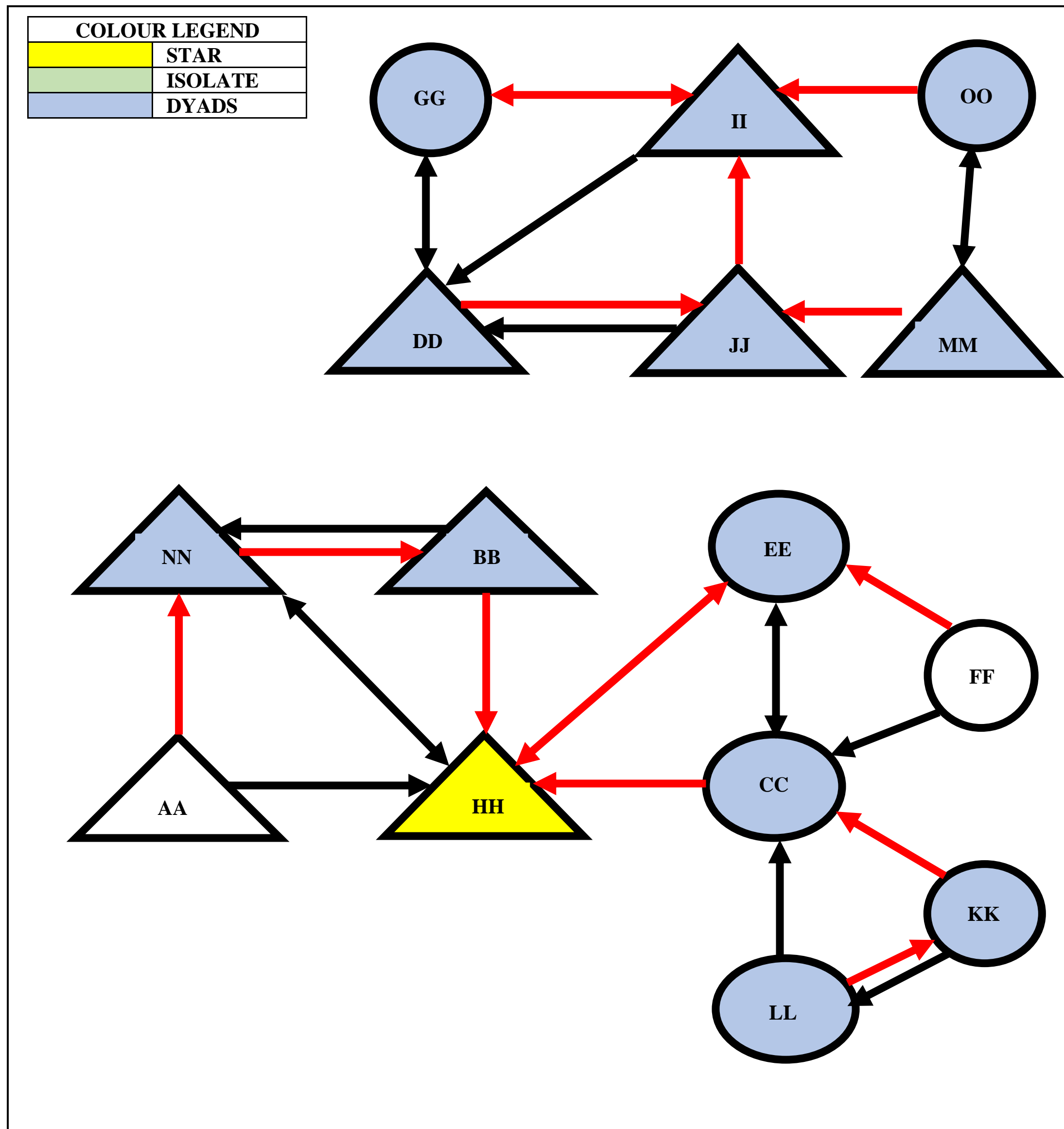
Learner EE, who is a female high achiever, emerged as the sociogram's star while learners HH, JJ, KK and NN are the second most popular learners in class. On the contrary, learners AA, BB, CC, FF, LL and OO resulted as the isolates given that they were not nominated by their peers. Finally, learners N and H, M and J, and E and K were the sociogram's dyads, indicating that they had strong relational ties.

<u>Question 2</u>: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to play most during breaks***



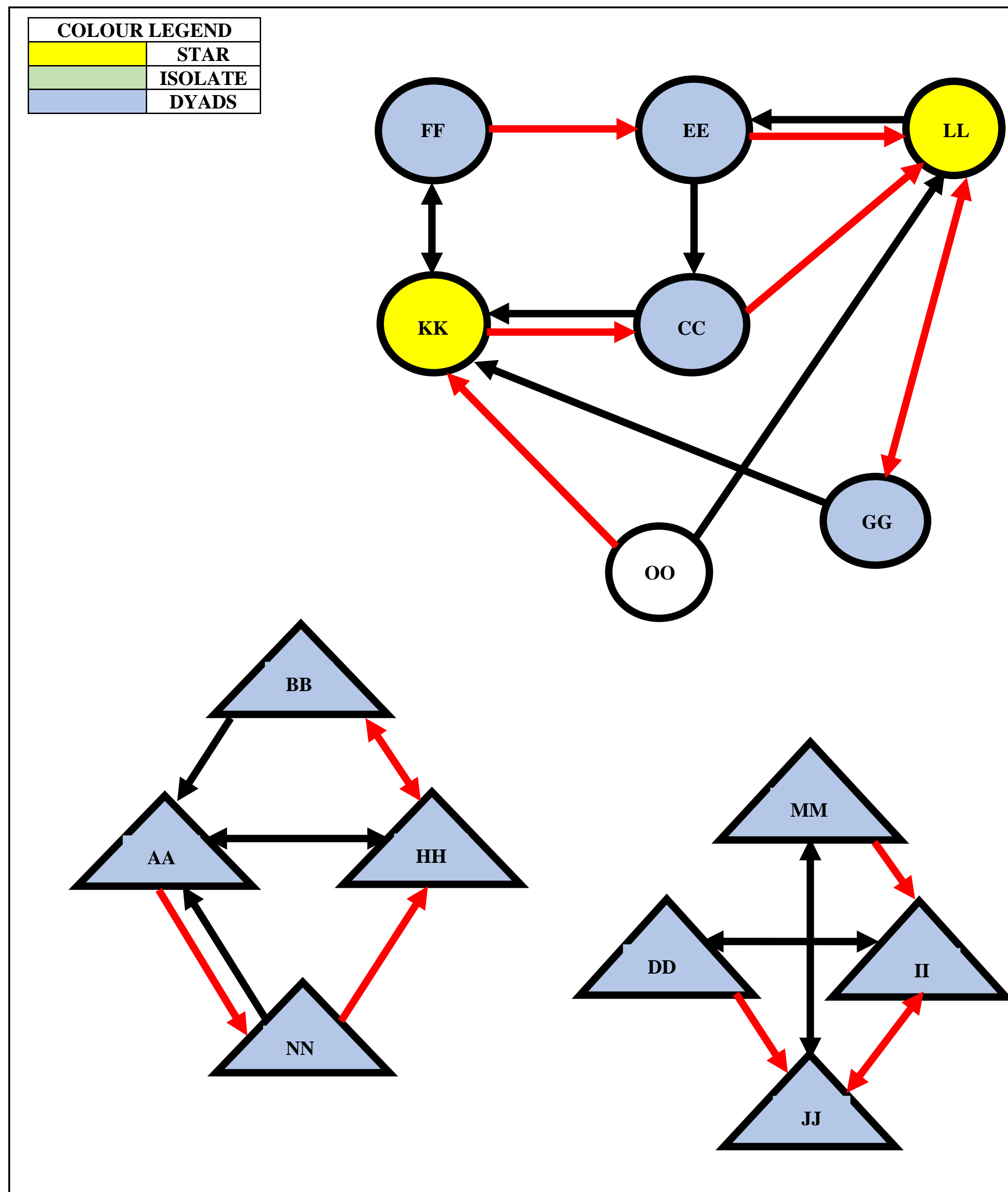
The sociogram illustrates three distinct groups of learners with CC and II emerging as the stars. Following suit in popularity were learners EE, HH, JJ, KK and NN with 3 nominations. Although the sociogram presents no direct isolates, learners BB, DD, FF and LL need to be integrated more in their respective group of friends.

<u>Question 3</u>: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to work most in class***



Learner HH (high achiever), who received 5 nominations, resulted as the sociogram's star. Moreover, learner CC (high achiever), with 4 preferences, followed suit and emerged as the second most popular learner in class. Both learners were described by their classmates as "very intelligent and hard-working". Finally, learners FF (average achiever) and OO (low achiever) need to be better included in their respective groups since they were never nominated by their peers.

Question 4: ***List TWO classmates with whom you like to play after school***



At community level female learners felt comfortable and at ease to engage and interact with each other. On the other hand, male learners split into 2 social groups with learners AA and II emerging as the most popular learners in their respective groups. Moreover, the learners' engagement and participation in after school activities facilitated their social interaction. The sociogram's stars resulted to be learners KK and II with 4 preferences each. Finally, learner OO needs to be better included in the female group of learners.

Appendix N

Duties of Middle Leaders (MEDE)

Role of an *Education Officer (Curriculum)* – Duties and Responsibilities

The qualities sought for the post of Education Officer (Curriculum) are those of an educator with the required vision, knowledge, competences, and drive to form part of a dynamic team committed to improving the Maltese educational system.

MEDE shall provide professional services of support, guidance, monitoring, inspection, evaluation, and reporting on the process of teaching and learning in schools, on the development and implementation of the curriculum, syllabi, pedagogy, resources, the necessary modes of assessment and on the administration, the assurance and auditing of quality and standards in Colleges and schools.

Education Officers - Curriculum under the direction of their superiors, shall generally have the powers and responsibilities for the fulfilment of the functions of the MEDE. The selected candidate may be assigned duties in both the Primary and/or the Secondary Sector. The duties of the Education Officer include:

- Evaluating and reporting on the work of teachers vis-à-vis teaching and learning;
- Evaluating and ensuring the quality and standards of teaching and learning;
- Participating and contributing effectively in educational programmes;
- Contributing towards the organisation and provision of professional development;
- Ensuring that the policies and provisions laid down in the Education Act are adhered to in both the State and non-State sector;
- Providing advice, input, and monitoring on curriculum development, eLearning, quality assurance development, management and implementation at Directorate, College, School, and other educational institution level, in both State and non-State school sector;
- Advising, supporting and monitoring educational programmes in schools and Colleges;
- Integrating the gender perspective in programmes and initiatives of the Directorates;
- Assisting in the professional development of staff;
- Assisting in the preparation of budgets and business planning;
- Collecting and maintaining relevant data and statistics;
- Monitoring the implementation and evaluation of the National Curriculum Framework;
- Participating in the development of curriculum policy for schools and Colleges in line with the NCF, including the development and monitoring of learning outcomes, syllabi and the provision of appropriate curricula, text books and other resource material;
- Advising the choice of textbooks, equipment, teaching aids and other resources;
- Facilitating curriculum teams for the production of suitable teaching materials;
- Assisting in the preparation of budgets for the Departments s/he is assigned to;
- Mentoring Heads of Department and other teaching personnel;
- Gathering, analysing, researching, and evaluating data to plan or manage services, projects, and systems;
- Deputising for the Assistant Director as instructed;
- Ensuring the timely preparation and setting of national assessments, including examinations.

Role of *Head of Department (Curriculum)* – Duties and Responsibilities

A Head of Department is responsible to generally coordinate and support the development of the specific area with which s/he is entrusted, across a number of schools, contributing as may be required, in National coordination of, and initiatives related to, the same field under the direction of MEDE. The Head of Department is expected to collaborate with other educators who may be supporting this endeavour within or beyond the classroom, under the pertinent leadership at the respective level, also by engaging in the development of a Community of Professional Educators, including through School Development Planning (SDP).

The duties of a Head of Department (Curriculum) include:

A) Fulfilling the obligations of a teacher with all its related expectations, but within the agreed adjusted parameters, and to additionally serve as the curricular leader at the local level, specifically at School and College level, under the direction of the Head of School at school level and the Head of College Network at college level, whilst following National direction from the designated authority, typically through the Education Officer/s;
B) Actively assisting the Head of School in ensuring the good professional practice, standards, and quality of the teaching and learning of subject/s/areas through proper dialogue with the class teachers and under the direction of the relative Education Officer while promoting a healthy process of reciprocal informal observation of class teaching practices;
C) Advising and contributing to curriculum development at school and system level;
D) Co-ordinating the learning and teaching of the subject/s/area for which one is responsible;
E) Setting examination papers, co-ordinating marking schemes and moderating examinations and assessment processes at one's school as well as in other schools;
F) Mentoring other teachers in the subject/s/area of their speciality.

Heads of Departments shall be organised across schools. Each college shall gradually have all the Curricular Areas, as established from time to time by the National Curriculum Framework. Heads of Departments may give service in more than one college. Heads of Departments shall be considered as part and parcel of the School Management Team and must be involved in all meetings at school level that involves discussion about curriculum matters. Finally, the Head of Department shall be expected to undergo specialised education and training.

Role of *Head of Department (Inclusion)* – Duties and Responsibilities

a) Acting as the inclusive leader at the local level, specifically at School and College level, under the direction of the Head of School at school level and the Head of College Network at college level, whilst following National direction from the designated authority, typically through the Education Officer/s;
b) Acting as advisor to all Teaching Grades, but shall focus on the quality of support provided by the Learning Support Educators;
c) Participating in the development of a College-wide Inclusion policy and in collaboration with the College Principal, the Senior Management Team (SMT) of the school, school staff, learners and parents;
d) Ensuring the effective implementation and monitoring of this policy and related actions so as to ensure equitable access to a relevant curriculum for learners with IENs;
e) Overseeing the formulation, implementation and review of Individual Educational Programmes (IEPs) for learners with IENs;

f) Ensuring the co-ordination of the provision of access arrangements for learners with IENs;
g) Adopting and working towards the implementation of the school development plan of the particular school/s they are giving service in;
h) Compiling, accessing and regularly monitoring the records of learners with IENs;
i) Advising the Senior Management Team (SMT) on the procurement and management of IEN resources in schools and monitoring their utilisation;
j) Ensuring that Individual Transition Programmes (ITP) are implemented before transition from one school to another or from one sector to another and participating in the development of such programmes, including school-to-work ITPs where applicable;
k) Coordinating all staff assigned to learners with IENs;
l) Liaising with feeder and receiver schools;
m) Facilitating links between Colleges, Learning Centres, Resource Centres and other specialised services through networking activities;
n) Mentoring and supporting other teachers/learning support assistants in their speciality;
o) Ensuring that learners with IENs are encouraged to develop functional skills and where possible to begin taking responsibility of their own learning;
p) Liaising with and providing technical advice to colleagues in schools and professionals, including the College and school multi-disciplinary team, who are in contact with learners with IENs;
q) Under the direction of the Director NSSS and/or his/her delegate, relative College Principal and Head of School, liaising with external agencies involved in supporting learners with IENs;
r) Coordinating professional development opportunities for colleagues and participating in Continuing Professional Development (CPD);
s) Liaising with, guiding and collaborating with parents/guardians of learners with IENs;
t) Encouraging participation in EU projects and other projects in accordance with the SDP targets and as agreed with the Senior Management Team.

Heads of Departments shall be organised across schools. Each college shall gradually have all the Curricular Areas (either at subject or at area level), as established from time to time by the National Curriculum Framework, covered by the services of a team of Head of Department directly accountable to the Head of College Network, or his delegate, in as far as Head of Department duties are concerned. Heads of Departments may give service in more than one college depending on the arising needs.

Heads of Departments shall be considered as part and parcel of the School Management Team and must be involved in all meetings at school level that involves discussion about curriculum matters. The Head of Department shall be expected to undergo specialised education and training sponsored by the Education Authorities.

Appendix O

Themes and Sub-Themes for Whole-of-College Development

Themes and Sub-Themes for Whole-of-School Development

Themes and Sub-Themes for Whole-of-College Development

General Themes	Emerging Sub-Themes
Leadership and Governance	Leadership for Learning; Leadership for Change; Leadership for Social Justice; Overall Schools' Management.
College-Based CPD	Whole-of-college training needs analysis leading to formal PD sessions; Whole-of-college informal PD activities such as job-shadowing and mentoring.
Curriculum Matters	Implementation of LOF; Whole-of-college Teaching Pedagogies; Whole-of-college Assessement Practices; Attainment Progress Charting.
Effective Support Services	Multi-Disciplinary Teams; Efficient Support Referring Systems; Enabling Support Services; Case Management Programming; Individual Educational Planning.
Creating Positive Environments	Whole-of-college development planning; Promotion of inclusive behaviour, values, attitudes and discourse; Professionalism and collaboration; Whole-of-college resourcing; Embellish learning environments.
Well-Being	Fulfilling learners' potential; Fulfilling staff's potential.
Creating Productive Partnerships	Engagement of learners; Engagement of parents; Engagement of general community.
Financing and Budgeting	Financial & Budgeting Plans; Human Resource Plan;
Public Relations	A College Customer Care Policy; Registration Process & Procedures; Whole-of-college Social Initiatives; Enhanced communication policy.
Quality Assurance	Plan the 'Monitor, Evaluate and Review' cycle to sustain development. Routine Administration.

Themes and Sub-Themes for Whole-of-School Development

Priority Target Areas	Emerging Sub-Themes
Leadership	Leadership for Learning; Leadership for Change; Leadership for Inclusive Education.
Whole-of-School Management and Administration	In-School Management Structure; Organisational Climate; Management of Finance and Budgeting; Routine Administration.
Quality Assurance	Internal quality assurance structures; Monitoring procedures; Reviewing and evaluation procedures;
Whole-of-School Inclusive Environment & Well-Being	Care & Management of learners (Pastoral care, personal development); Positive Behaviour Management; Healthy, Safe and Secure schools; Fulfilling educators' expectations, needs, potential and challenges.
Teaching and Learning	Collaborative planning; The Teaching and Learning experience; Support for & Recognistion of Learning; Monitor Progress & Attainment levels; SEN support provisions; Inidividual Educational Planning.
CPD and Staff Organization	School-based Training Needs Analysis; School-based plan for CPD activities; Staff Empowerment.
School-Home-Community Links	Learners' Engagement; Parents' Engagement; Partnerships with General Community; Empower Students' Councils; Empower Parents' Councils.
Public Relations	School-based communication policy; School-based social activities & events; Customer-Care Procedures.