



SELINUS UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCES AND LITERATURE

**ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD TRAUMA THROUGH EDUCATION:
A LITERATURE REVIEW OF PRACTICAL STRATEGIES
FOR MAINSTREAM TEACHERS**

By Josephine Moleon

Supervised by
Prof. Salvatore Fava Ph.D.

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DECLARATION

I do hereby attest that I am the sole author of this thesis and that its contents are the result of the readings and research I have done.

Signed: *J. Moleon*

On: 10 July 2025

At: Porto Mantovano, Mantova, Italy

Abstract

Childhood trauma significantly hinders student success, as it impacts emotional regulation and academic performance. In response, the emergence of trauma-informed education (TIE) can be considered a useful framework that empowers mainstream teachers to meet the needs of traumatized students in inclusive classroom settings. Despite the growing awareness that trauma significantly affects learning, most regular educators do not possess the practical tools, and receive little to no institutional support to address these challenges effectively.

This literature review investigates the effects that trauma has on student development- and behavior, and explores evidence-based strategies applicable to educational settings. It further examines the barriers of a systemic, teacher-specific, and student-centered nature that inhibit the effective implementation of the above strategies. The thesis reviews theoretical and practical approaches to trauma-informed education and supports the development of strategies that enable teachers to create and sustain emotionally safe classrooms. Content from education, psychology, and counseling is gathered through a structured literature review of 50 peer-reviewed sources between the years 2010 and 2024.

Findings are organized into three themes: recognizing signs of trauma, implementing trauma-informed practices (TIP), and supporting teacher resilience. Key insights include the value of social-emotional learning (SEL), the importance of relational trust between teachers and students, and school-wide policies in sustaining trauma-sensitive environments. The review also highlights gaps in teacher preparation programs and advocates for system-level reforms.

This study contributes to the fields of educational psychology and teacher training by offering a guide for mainstream educators to adopt trauma-informed practices. By integrating these strategies, schools can foster inclusive, supportive learning environments that remove barriers, facilitate healing, and propel academic growth for all students.

Keywords: trauma-informed education, mainstream teachers, childhood trauma, teacher training, early intervention, inclusive classrooms, education policy

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Adverse Childhood Trauma
APA	American Psychological Association
ELS	Early Life Stress
MBSR	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
MCE	Multicultural Education
PD	Professional Development
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SEN	Special Needs Education
SLR	Systematic Literature Review
STS	Secondary Traumatic Stress
TIA	Trauma-Informed Approach
TIC	Trauma-Informed Care
TIE	Trauma-Informed Education
TII	Trauma-Informed Instruction
TIP	Trauma-Informed Practice
TIS	Trauma-Informed Strategies
TIT	Trauma-Informed Teaching
TIPE	Trauma-Informed Positive Education

DEFINITION OF TERMS listed in the Literature Review - Chapter 2

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

What is childhood trauma? In their study, Jones et al., (2020) refer to childhood trauma as “any Adverse Childhood Experience (henceforth ACE), which are potentially traumatic events that happen during a person’s childhood- and adolescence such as being physically, emotionally, or sexually abused; witnessing violence in the family; attempted- or committed suicide from a family member; being brought up by a parent engaged in substance abuse, mentally ill or imprisoned; parent separation or divorce” (p.1).

There are several factors that may cause trauma and affect children’s cognitive and social development, such as family instability, emotional abuse, neglect and adverse childhood experiences. Many teachers face these issues head on while they may not have any formal education in Trauma-Informed Practices (henceforth TIPs). So how do mainstream teachers support learners in class who experienced trauma and are challenged to deal with their emotions?

TIP in education, as defined by the National Education Union (2024) involves understanding how trauma affects students’ learning ability and performance in class as well as creating safe environments where students feel supported. With TIP, it is easier for a teacher to notice a change in their students’ behavior as:

- Cognitive functions - attention deficit, memory loss, problem-solving;
- Emotional regulation - difficulty managing stress or anxiety;
- Social skills - withdrawal, difficulty forming or maintaining relationships.

Once a trauma-informed and trained teacher recognizes any of the above changes in a learner, they may take steps to offer guidance and support. Alisic (2012) revealed in her study that most of the teachers were ready to assist children affected by trauma but faced problems in managing their classrooms effectively while doing so. They requested improved job descriptions and effective ways of integrating trauma-focused care into the classroom.

Safety, trust, and cultural responsiveness are principles of Trauma-Informed Care (henceforth TIC) that are very effective in inclusive- and supportive learning environments. Knowing these principles will help teachers to recognize problems related to trauma and adopt corresponding interventions. They can, for example, create predictable routines, develop strong ties with students and apply calming techniques that reduce stress, promoting learning.

Bartlett and Sacks (2019) argue that adverse childhood experiences differ from child trauma, and it's critical to understand why this is so. The table below clearly defines 4 distinct terms which are essential for understanding various types of detrimental childhood experiences.

Table 1: *Harmful Childhood Experiences*

Childhood Adversity ❖ is a wide range of circumstances or events that pose a serious threat to a child's physical or psychological well-being; ❖ <i>For example</i>, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, bullying, serious accidents or injuries, discrimination, extreme poverty, and community violence (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019, para. 2).	Adverse Childhood Experiences: ACE ❖ are a subset of childhood adversities; ❖ <i>For example</i>: categories: physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; living with a parent(s) with substance abuse, incarceration, violence, mental illness- ❖ Current ACE includes parental divorce or separation and emotional and physical neglect (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019, para. 3).
Trauma ❖ is one outcome of exposure to adversity and occurs when one perceives an event or set of circumstances as extremely frightening, harmful, or threatening - either emotionally, physically, or both; ❖ <i>For example</i>: sudden loss of a family member, a natural disaster, a serious car accident (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019, para. 5).	Toxic Stress ❖ occurs when a child experiences adversity that is extreme, long-lasting, and severe without adequate support from a caregiving adult. ❖ <i>For example</i>, chronic neglect, domestic violence, severe economic hardship (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019, para. 6). Created in Word, based upon: Bartlett & Sacks (2019).

The definitions and examples above are interlinked to the core conceptualizations which form the foundation of the research, and show how relevant they are to the challenges encountered by general educators who teach students with trauma.

According to Avery et al., (2021) research on childhood trauma reveals that stress causes changes in the body, leading to negative health effects and affects positive brain growth. In such cases, social institutions like schools may intervene, offering help where children suffer from childhood trauma. In this context, pertinent issues include what type of school support is made available to educators and how it is facilitated within a class set-up? As Sweetman (2022) posits, comprehending what trauma means can be daunting, hence we should see its intricacies, which cause a complete shift towards being informed about it. Therefore, teachers and other staff members must take part in training sessions if at all such transformation is to occur.

Parameswaran, Molloy, and Kuttner (2024) argue that TIC and Multicultural Education (henceforth MCE) are two main constituents that currently propel improved performance in education. The author of this study, as a foreign educator in Italy, had a major transition from high school teacher to that of a primary- and middle school tutor. This change came with new experiences and sparked a keen interest and inquisitiveness about what younger students would require in Social-Emotional Learning (henceforth SEL). For example, for the author, in class situations with 6-year-old students include but are not limited to:

- Anger as intense verbal- and physical abuse and anger, which may be because of the abandonment of the biological parents, and the sudden death of the adopted father;
- Extreme emotional meltdowns either as a reaction to a peer or for no apparent reason
- Obsessive need to clean the desk with disinfectant, and rage when anyone deliberately or coincidentally touches his/her school bag or objects;
- Compulsive scratching of the skin, disabling the ability to work during the lesson
- Complete withdrawal and/or crying.

All the above examples are students from five different countries, none of whom require Special Needs Education (henceforth SEN), and are classified as mainstream students.

The study will delve into the problems faced daily by mainstream teachers in Italian primary- and middle schools when dealing with traumatized pupils. Existing research will be reviewed to merge it into a synthesis which focuses on the challenges faced as well as closing the gaps when assisting pupils who have experienced trauma. This literature review aims at providing practical and successful steps that can enhance teacher's readiness to trauma informed classrooms.

Statement of the Problem

Expanding on the background of the study on trauma-informed practice (henceforth TIP), this section highlights the difficulties encountered by mainstream educators in assisting students impacted by trauma. Complex childhood trauma may be described as exposure of a child to a wide range of different human contacts and systems that are severe and intentionally injurious to the child (NCTSN, 2014 as cited in Brown et al., 2022, p. 1). These and many other factors affect children's development, performance in school, and general outcome in life (Cummings et al., 2017; Mehta et al., 2021; Downey and Crummy, 2022 as quoted in Brown et al., 2022, p. 2).

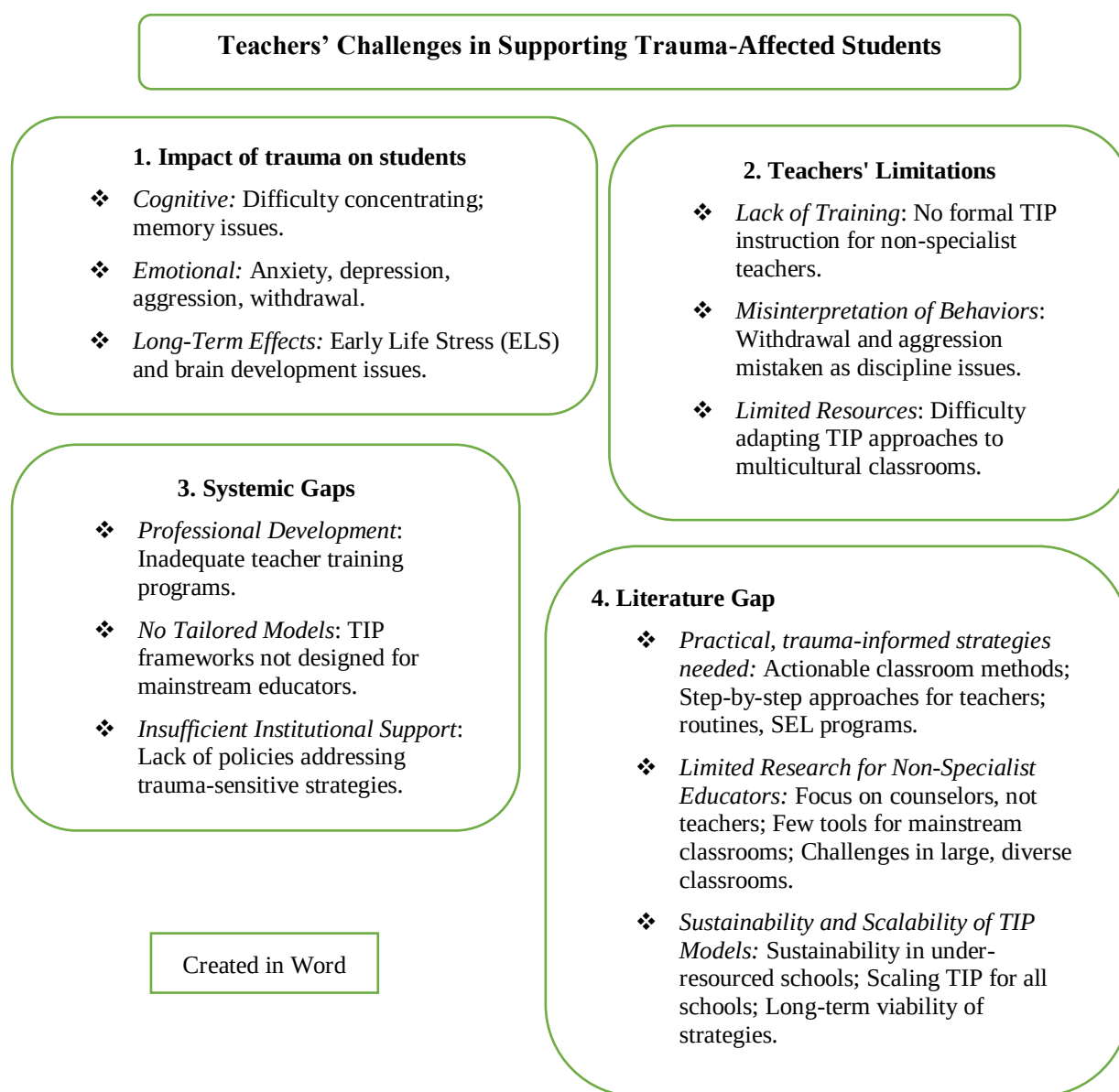
It is widely accepted that trauma experienced during childhood has a critical impact on academic performance and emotions, but most mainstream teachers possess neither the skills nor the TIP training to tackle these issues. With the availability of TIP resources, there still seems to be a lack of exemplary models that are primarily made for non-specialist teachers. When considering primary- or middle school, where a range of students from diverse backgrounds are likely to be found, some teachers may lack the tools to assist their traumatized students. In such cases, where one would expect effective professional development, it is the contrary that renders the situation more complex.

Several studies report that children who have suffered trauma struggle with trusting people and controlling their feelings, which impacts their ability to learn. "Early Life Stress (henceforth ELS) is described to have detrimental effects on the developing brain, with effects continuing into adulthood, as it can affect behavioral, emotional, social, cognitive and physical development" (Remmers et al., 2024, p.6). Although a majority of teachers do work directly with the students daily, they often cannot detect or treat trauma indications among the students. With insufficient training, teachers frequently mistake trauma-inspired behaviors as withdrawal and aggression for behavior problems, which results in the application of punishment rather than support.

Collier (2022) argues that in trauma- and education research, there is a gap in teacher distress, while there is an adequate amount of literature exploring teacher burnout and the promotion of educator well-being. This literature review seeks to fill the gap in practical, trauma-informed strategies for mainstream teachers by identifying ways they can effectively support students experiencing trauma.

The following concept map synthesizes the main challenges discussed in this section, underlining the need for trauma-informed strategies that should be addressed to teachers.

Diagram 1: *Challenges of Addressing Childhood Trauma in Mainstream Classrooms*



Given that the challenges depicted in **Diagram 1** require a systematic approach to identifying practical, evidence-based strategies, this literature review is purposed to achieve that goal.

Research Question

The following research question will serve as a guide to this literature review, namely:
What are some actionable, trauma-sensitive approaches that can be put into practice by conventional primary- and middle school instructors in order to best serve traumatized children in their classrooms?

Research Aim

The primary goal of this research is to identify and describe practical measures which classroom teachers can adopt for children dealing with trauma. This study intends to fill critical shortfalls in TIPs and to provide educators the information they need to make primary- and middle school classrooms more inclusive and supportive of all learners. New findings from this study may be used for further research, teacher-training and pre-service education.

Research Objectives

The objectives are designed for the context of primary- and middle school teachers in Italy:

1. To *assess* how trauma affects pupils' social and emotional engagement in the classroom.
2. To *analyze* the impact of trauma on the academic performance of children in primary- and middle school.
3. To *compare and contrast* previous studies on trauma-informed care in educational settings from different perspectives.
4. To *present* the results of the analysis on the reported experiences of teachers in using trauma-informed practices.
5. To *suggest* implementable measures for primary- and middle school teachers in Italy to deal with the practical realities of trauma in the classroom.

Significance of the Study

This study is pertinent to the discussion of a paramount obstacle in education: mainstream teachers of traumatized students direly need additional support. Making sense of the trauma a student went through will help the teacher understand how to meet the student's academic and emotional needs. Garay et al. (2024) propose the concepts of 'trauma-aware' and 'trauma-informed' education approaches to support children who have experienced adverse experiences. By offering evidence-based practices, this research not only closes significant gaps in teacher preparation, but it also plays a crucial role in creating more inclusive environments.

We may now state that traumatized students have special needs, and this research attempts to give teachers new tools to help boost their confidence and become self-assured educators in trauma-informed teaching (henceforth TIT). According to Brunzell et al. (2016) teachers may benefit from integrating trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE) with positive psychology to support students who have experienced complex trauma. The authors propose a dual-continua model of mental health: Trauma-Informed Positive Education (henceforth TIPE), which focuses on repairing deficits and enhancing strengths of trauma-affected students. Practical implications for the TIPE model would be to provide a framework for educators to implement strategies that address both the emotional and academic needs of trauma-affected students, ultimately aiming to improve their educational outcomes and well-being.

The application of the strategies that will be outlined in this study will have the potential to enhance student engagement in the classroom, reduce instances of disruptive behavior, and foster a sense of security and belonging among students who have experienced trauma. This research assembles multiple educational studies into a coherent collection, aiming to bridge the gap between educational theory and practice. In the article by Honsinger and Brown (2019), the authors discuss the prevalence of trauma among school-aged children and its significant impact on their cognitive, behavioral, and social functioning. They highlight the need for teaching institutes to prepare future teachers to recognize and respond to trauma effectively, fostering resilience in affected students. They list the implications for *counseling psychology* as:

- It is crucial for counselors working in schools to understand trauma's impact on children;
- Counselors need to train teachers and support TIP within schools and-
- Contribute to better mental health outcomes for students.

Further, Honsinger and Brown (2019) emphasize the importance of TIE practices to not only support students affected by trauma, but also to enhance the overall learning environment for all students. Hence, they advocate for a shift from traditional punitive discipline methods to more supportive approaches that recognize the underlying causes of student behavior.

This study can guide the training of educators and advance inclusive education policies. It may significantly influence employment strategies and policies concerning professional development training, enabling teachers to more effectively assist traumatized students.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

Scope: The purpose of this study is based upon a personal- and professional interest in TIC, TIP and ACE in educational settings. Therefore, this research focuses on the development, application, and implications of trauma-informed, context-sensitive practices to be used by teachers working with learners in primary- and middle school classes. In particular, the review of the literature analyzes how teachers may assist children suffering from trauma with practical ideas.

Along with this, trauma-informed approaches are examined, considering their effectiveness in fostering the emotional- and cognitive potential of learners and their performance in academic activities. While focusing deeply on detailed teacher practices, this research is grounded in a comprehensive literature review of the existing theories and studies which cause the recognition of childhood trauma that exists in the classroom.

Delimitations: Primary focus and limitations of the research.

- ❖ *Focus:* This research is restricted to trauma-informed methods and techniques for mainstream teachers of primary- and middle school. Teaching methods tailored for high school teachers, counselors, or other specialists are not included in the bounds of this study.
- ❖ *Cultural Context:* This paper mainly focuses on the educational system of Northern Italy along with its cultural- and institutional specifics. While some results may have a wider relevance, these are not meant to serve all educational systems as universal advice.
- ❖ *Methodology:* Since this is a literature-based study, there is no primary data collection, such as taking surveys or interviewing. Rather, it builds conclusive information from peer-reviewed articles, books, and reports.
- ❖ *Literature Timeframe:* Contemporary practice of education suggests the last 5 to 7 years of literature should be focused on, along with the requisite history, such as the 1998 ACE study. A need for these studies is highlighted because of its historical importance.
- ❖ *Language:* The review may exclude many potentially relevant works in various languages because of the sole use of English sources.
- ❖ *Therapeutic Interventions:* This study does not cover therapeutic interventions, nor does it address clinical approaches to trauma. Its primary concern lies with classroom strategies that can be used by regular teachers.

Organization of the Study

This research comprises five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and discussions, conclusion with recommendations, and references with appendices.

The first chapter- Introduction, provides a concise account of the topic under research, followed by the aim of the research and the relevance thereof. Special emphasis is placed on the educational gaps that need trauma-informed practices, and this focuses on elementary- and middle school teachers in Italy who teach students affected by trauma.

The second chapter- Literature Review, analyzes the different sources of literature that pertain to trauma-informed education. It delineates the progress made in devising authentic- and reliable techniques that teachers can use and reports what remains problematic in the literature. It details the theories, models, and case studies which are pertinent to the research and justifies these.

The third chapter- Methodology, will be a literature review method. It shall collect data from scholarly articles, books, and reports in order to develop a comprehensive guide to trauma-based teaching. This chapter will cover the search strategy used in the literature review, describe the selection criteria, and the analysis techniques to be adopted. Ethics will also form part of this method to ensure the validity of the study.

The fourth chapter- Findings and Discussion - consolidates the main areas of concern derived in the literature and will evaluate them under the set objectives of the research. Strategies for educators and their possibilities for the classroom will be explored, and literature referenced to substantiate the topic and the focus of the discussion.

Chapter five- Conclusion and Recommendations, will present a summary of the general findings of the study and their interpretation. It will present practical recommendations to educators on how to assist students who have been subjected to trauma.

As for goals and constraints of the study, recommendations for additional research will also be made, which aim at expanding the knowledge in the field. Last, a reference list in alphabetical order and appendices are included.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review was to inquire about the repercussions of childhood trauma on students' learning, and to analyze efficient trauma-informed techniques for non-specialist teachers within the context of primary- and middle schools. It is crucial to note that, in various schools, mainstream teachers have no additional training to respond to trauma-affected learners with efficiency. The result is that when a student suffers an emotional meltdown, the entire lesson needs to stop, to allow the teacher to attend to the pupil in need. All students are affected by these situations, and hence, all participants need support.

So, what are the implications of childhood trauma? Berger and Martin (2022) reveal that “early life stress (ELS) and adversity augment memory problems, learning difficulties, school-change problems, behavior regulation and emotional issues, and a higher risk of antisocial activities” (para. 2). What, then, are the signs that a learner has experienced trauma? The latter may appear in various ways, such as behavioral, cognitive, social, or emotional challenges. In a school setting, a child who has been exposed to trauma may present trauma through:

- Hesitancy to attend school, to avoid possibly interacting with teachers or peers;
- Unwillingness to leave school and distress about returning home after school;
- Avoiding questions about their home and family;
- Younger children may play out violent themes or stories during play;
- Changes in behavior such as withdrawal, aggression, anxiety, impulsiveness, lack of attention, and/or mood swings (Berger & Martin, 2022, para. 5).

More than often, the above signs are misinterpreted by teachers and school staff as defiance, lack of respect, trouble-maker and so on. These accusations are attributed to the fact that teachers have none- or not ample information about the student's background and/or current personal situation. A combination of relevant information about the student and TIP may lay a sound foundation for a positive direction in balanced, harmonious, and safe classrooms for learning. Students may learn how to manage their emotions during difficult situations.

World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that “400 million children- under 5 years of age suffer physical punishment and/or psychological violence regularly, at the hands of parents and caregivers” (WHO, 2024, para. 1). Based upon this statistic, we find it is only one example of the

numerous aspects that lead to childhood trauma. In the previous chapter (p. 2: Background of the Study), we listed other reasons and examples, such as- adversity, ACE, and toxic stress that likewise contribute to injurious childhood experiences.

Given the consistent interaction teachers have with students, they can perceive elements of trauma and implement supportive methods. For example, trauma-informed care (TIC) techniques may help both traumatized and other students, ensuring an inclusive and positive classroom environment. Collier (2022) asserts that extensive research exists that supports the relational approach of TIP to ease the effects of risk factors in the lives of children with developmental trauma. She further contends that TIP emphasizes the adults' interpersonal skills instead of focusing on the knowledge and behavioral capabilities of the young learner (p. 2).

Thus, trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE) deserves a thorough analysis to understand current practices and ways forward to support students and teachers. Today, the role of teachers is expansive, and includes the safety and security of all students, their academic achievement, welfare-, social-, emotional, and physical wellbeing. This all-round liability has constrained educators to prioritize some results to the disadvantage of others, and keep curricula, testing, governance and pedagogy standards as the primary aim (Stevenson et al., 2020).

To make distinctions about TIP challenges, provide evidence and solutions, this literature review is organized into three key themes to provide a structured analysis of the research relevant to TIE.

- ❖ *Theme One- explores the effects of trauma on children's cognitive and social development, emphasizing the impact on academic performance and classroom behavior.*
- ❖ *Theme Two- examines the barriers faced by teachers in implementing trauma-informed practices, including systemic limitations, lack of training, and resource constraints.*
- ❖ *Theme Three- focuses on evidence-based strategies for teachers, highlighting practical approaches that can be integrated into daily classroom practices.*

By structuring the review of these themes, this section aligns with the study's aim of identifying actionable, trauma-informed strategies for mainstream educators. Preceding the three themes, we review some theoretical frameworks and definitions, which serve as a basis for the study.

Definitions and Theoretical Frameworks

The following information highlights important aspects of TIE, including some information on ACE, life stressors, and examples of TIP. It also covers attachment theory, self-determination theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs in trust, empowerment and safety - fundamental components of trauma-informed education.

Key Terms and Definitions

- ❖ *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)* which may include abuse, mental health issues within the family, or substance use, are traumatic. Toxic stress from ACEs can change brain development and affect how the body responds to stress (CDC Vital Signs, 2023).
- ❖ *Early Life Stress (ELS)*, is when a child experiences any physical and/or psychological event that goes beyond their capacity to cope successfully (Gunnar & Quevedo, 2007).
- ❖ *Multicultural Education (MCE)* advocates the belief that students, their life histories and experiences should be placed at the center of teaching and learning and that pedagogy should occur in a context that is familiar to them and that addresses multiple ways of thinking (NAME, 2025).
- ❖ *Special Needs Education (SEN)*, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) is needed when a child has difficulty in learning because of temporary- or permanent developmental functioning from various health factors and hence the need for special individualized education (Enel, 2021).
- ❖ *Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)* is a process where all participants in an organization such as school engage in universal precaution for trauma, and TIC understands and considers the pervasive nature of trauma and promotes environments of healing and recovery rather than practices and services that may re-traumatize those affected (University at Buffalo, 2024).
- ❖ *Trauma-Informed Education (TIE)* engages the child comprehensively, by taking into consideration all the influences and impacts- physical, social, and emotional- on each child at any time and how those may further or constrain the acute sense of safety that upholds any learning potential (NAPCS, n.d.).
- ❖ *Trauma-Informed Practices (TIP)* address the impact of trauma by creating a caring and safe environment and classroom, school culture, build relationships, and support students' self-efficacy (NEA, 2023).

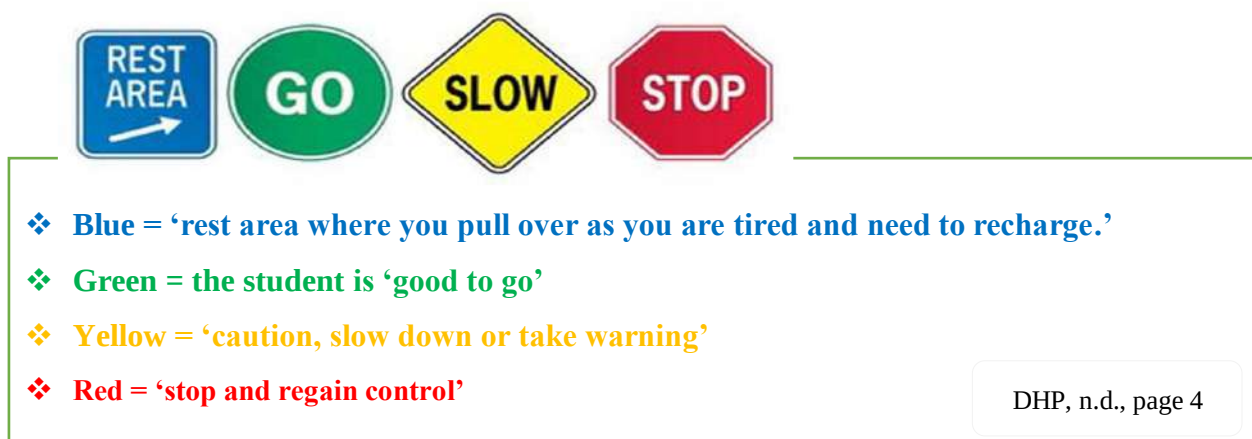
- ❖ *Trauma-Informed Positive Education (TIPE)* is a whole-school approach practice model for teachers to learn to support trauma-affected students and is predicated on three domains: (i) increasing self-regulatory abilities, (ii) increasing relational capacities, and (iii) increasing psychological resources for student wellbeing (Stokes & Brunzell, 2019).
- ❖ *Trauma-Informed Teaching (TIT)* begins with an understanding of how trauma can impact learning and behavior. With this approach, teachers think about what student behavior may tell them, and they reflect on their practices to better support students who may experience trauma (Kaufmann, n.d.).

Theoretical Models

- *Attachment Theory* supposes that infants between about 1 year and 3 years of age have an instinct to form social attachments to one or more caregivers with whom the child attempts to maintain and control proximity and that this instinct has had marked survival (Matsumoto, 2009).
- *Cognitive Load* is the relative demand imposed by a particular task, in terms of the required mental resources. *Cognitive overload*, however, is the situation in which the demands placed on a person by mental work (the cognitive load) are higher than the person's mental abilities can cope with (VandenBos for APA, 2015).
- *Ecological Systems Bronfenbrenner's Theory* looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment and defines complex "layers" of environment, with each having an effect on a child's development (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).
- *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* suggests that our motivation stems from a hierarchy of five fundamental categories namely: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. As we progress through these needs, we experience a greater sense of fulfillment and motivation (Hopper, 2024, para. 1).
- *Neuroplasticity* refers to the lifelong capacity of the brain to change and rewire itself in response to the stimulation of learning and experience. It is believed that every experience alters the brain's organization at some level (Physiopedia, 2025, para. 8).

- *Resilience* is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and change to external and internal demands (VandenBos for APA, 2015).
- *Self-Determination Theory (SDT)* explains that autonomy, competence and relatedness must be fulfilled- as innate psychological needs- in order to function optimally (Deci & Ryan 2012).
- *Social-Learning Theory (SLT)* states that social behavior is learned by copying others and in response to observation, imitation, and modeling, learning can occur even without changing behavior (Albert Bandura, 1965, as cited in Sutton, 2021).
- *Trauma Theory* is defined as psychological trauma when individuals encounter events that are overwhelming, threatening life or safety, and trigger feelings of inability. Psychological trauma may result from events such as accidents, natural disasters, severe neglect or violence (Shane, 2024).
- *The Zones of Regulation Framework* is based on the use of four colors to help children self-identify how they are feeling and categorize their emotion based on the color. This framework supports children in better understanding their emotions, sensory needs, thinking patterns, and actions (DHP, n.d.). The following figure illustrates how students may use the framework as traffic lights to express the state of their emotions.

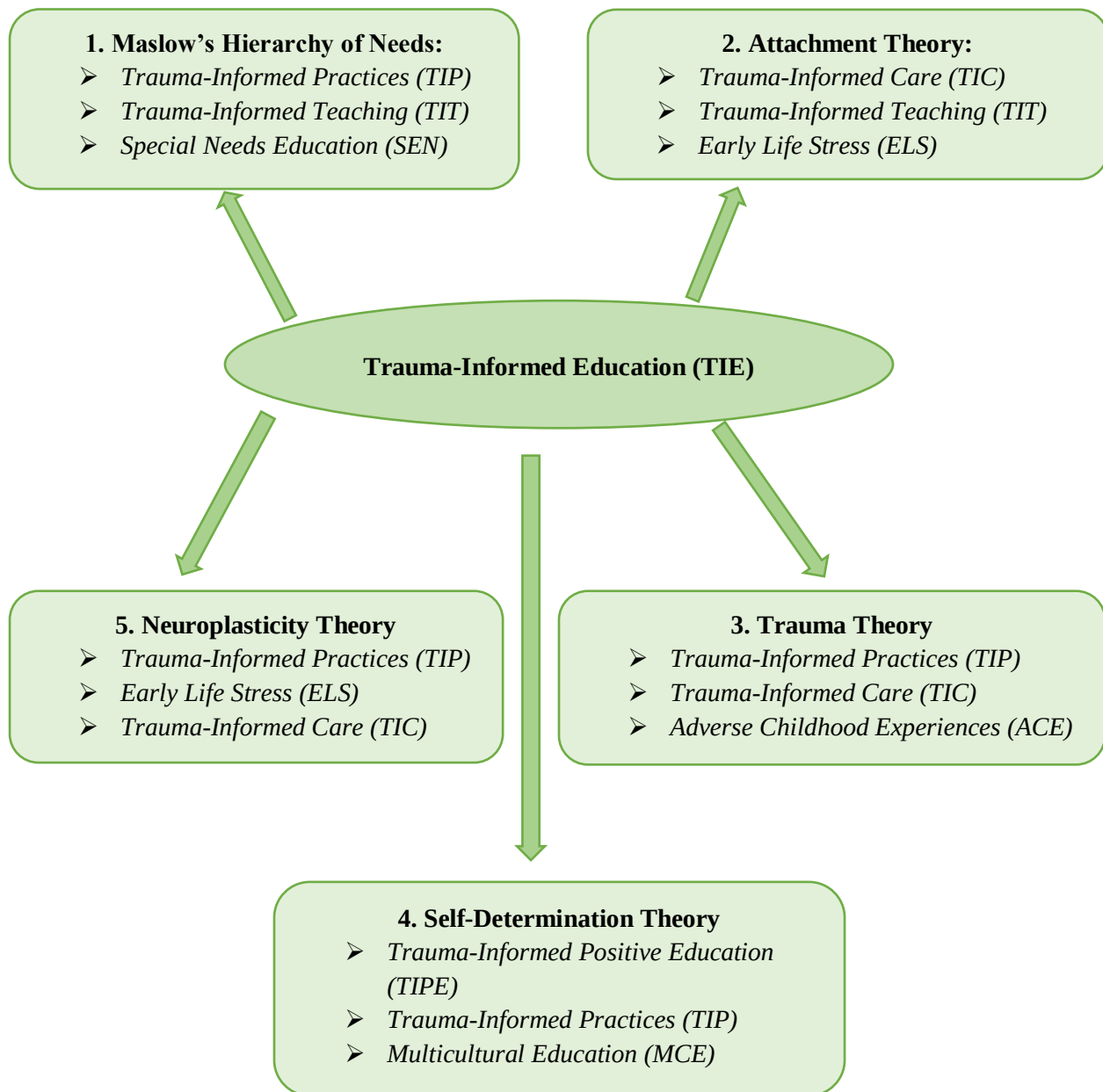
Figure 1: Based upon: *The Zones of Regulation*



Synthesis

The following diagram illustrates the five main theories, defined above, and highlights how each theory informs trauma-informed education.

Diagram 2: *Theories that inform TIE*



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Theme One: Cause and Effect of Trauma

The term adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) was first coined by Felitti and Anda in their 1998 study. They divided ACEs into three categories of abuse such as physical, sexual, and psychological, and four categories of household dysfunction: use of drugs or excessive use of alcohol by someone in the home, mental illness or suicide attempt of someone in the home, witnessing violence against the mother, and arrest of a family member (Felitti et al., 1998). All the ACE examples have a profound effect on the cognitive development of children, and these may be observed by teachers in the classroom. For students, three main areas that are impacted by trauma are: (i) cognitive (ii) behavioral, and (iii) social- with each area now discussed in detail.

Cognitive Effects

According to Meister (2019), the effects of trauma on the growing brain are major, and can have lasting effects. When people face arduous stress, their flight, fright, or freeze' reaction sets in, which leads to the brain being on guard consistently. This may cause a shift in the lower part of the brain that is linked with survival, and reduces the brain's capacity to decide whether the perceived threats are real and may lead to difficulties with wellbeing and learning (Meister, 2019).

The biological effects trauma can have on our health, is lingering. When children have adverse experiences, their body changes from worrying stress, which lead to bad health effects in adulthood. For example, they run a higher risk of depression, heart disease, sleep- (insomnia) and weight issues or self-harm afflictions and/or attempts. Meister (2019) further contends that during childhood, worrying stress may lead to long-term health issues which may deeply and lastingly affect the developing brain. Children then, have difficulties in learning, self-regulation, and emotional well-being, all of which form the basis of this research.

Stokes and Brunzell, (2019, p. 1) quote several scholars in describing the consequences of ACE when left untreated- such as trauma negatively impacting child development (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010), language, memory and cognitive capacity (Downey, 2007), and the child's ability to make and sustain strong attached relationships within the classroom (Wolpow et al., 2009). All the above causes also have immense consequences on the mental and physical health outcomes for both children and grown-ups.

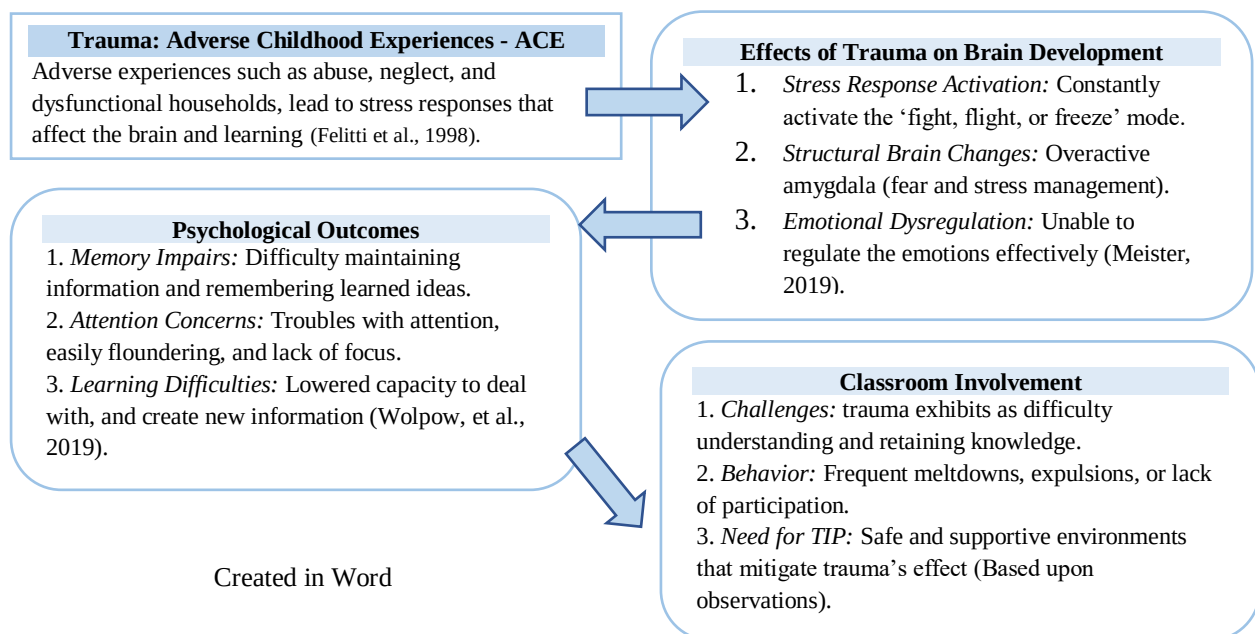
Comparative Analysis: Cognitive Effects of Trauma

Meister (2019) and Stokes and Brunzell (2019) closely refer to the neurological impact of trauma, mostly touching on its profound influence on brain development and cognitive functions. Meister (2019) goes further to elaborate on how stress responses change structures of the brain, leading to problems in learning, memory, and decision-making. Similarly, Stokes and Brunzell (2019) refer to multiple scholars noting that trauma impedes language development, cognitive capacity, and attachment formation, which further supports the claim by Meister (2019) that trauma reconfigures the functioning of the brain.

Stokes and Brunzell (2019) expand on educational implications such as observing trauma-affected children in classroom situations, and witness them exhibit difficulties with classroom engagement, whereas Meister (2019) spoke about biological stress responses. Though the focus may slightly differ, the two authors are at an agreement on adverse effects of trauma on cognition, and the importance of early interventions.

The flow diagram below illustrates the effects of trauma on the brain's development, as well as the consequences on cognition, all of which are significant.

Diagram 3: *The Cognitive Ripple: The impact of trauma on learning*



This layered perspective suggests that trauma-infused education should be implemented to address the causes of learning and behavioral issues in children.

Emotional and Behavioral Effects

Students who experienced trauma have problems with emotional self-regulation, and behavior. However, as Wolpow et al., (2009) warn, we need to note that not only students who act out or show aggression experienced trauma but also the quiet withdrawn learners, “while their behavior may not be disruptive in class, they too deserve the teacher’s unconditional attention and skills to support them in processing their trauma” (Wolpow et al., 2009, p. 93). Children who experienced trauma rarely feel safe and/or connected to others (Leeuwestein et al., 2024). Teachers play a vital role in teaching trauma-affected learners self-regulating skills, to increase their stability- and ability to withstand adversity, and cultivate their capacity to alter, reflect on, and share stressful situations as a means of protection against ACE.

This brings us to emotions. Parke & Gauvain, (2009) clearly state that emotions such as joy, anger, and fear, have several important aspects: They are (a) subjective reactions to the environment, (b) usually experienced cognitively as either pleasant or unpleasant, (c) accompanied by some form of physiological arousal, and (d) often communicated to others by some behavior or action (p.180). For example, when a learner experienced trauma, any situation that is a reminder of their negative experience will trigger an emotion. More importantly, a trauma-informed teacher will support a student and help them express and interpret their emotions, which is just as vital as the ability to solve a cognitive problem.

Often, teachers are not aware of the difficult circumstances some students live in. They come to school with their trauma, and their behavior reflects what they are experiencing. Gottman et al. (1996) further contend that even children raised in ‘normal’ homes may suffer impaired physical health when they are exposed to emotional hostility between their parents. Thus, emotions have a wide range of effects on children’s development (p. 180).

For teachers to help their learners, they first need to understand the *what* and *why* behind a student’s behavior before developing the *how* strategies to help the student regulate their emotions and cope with the impact trauma has on their lives. These scenarios will be absent in a trauma-informed classroom, where an educator will be informed about the student’s background and know-how to respond to their emotional needs. Ahmaddiya (2024) implies that a lack of trauma-informed instruction (henceforth TII) can affect student attendance, disciplinary referrals, learning, and suspension rates and is connected to adverse social-emotional and behavioral outcomes.

Comparative Analysis: Emotional and Behavioral Effects of Trauma

The behavior extremes associated with trauma, according to Wolpow et al. (2009) and Leeuwestein et al. (2024), are acting out or withdrawal. Teachers must note that quiet, reserved students too may be affected by trauma, as highlighted by Wolpow et al. (2009); however, self-regulation is more stressed by Leeuwestein et al. (2024) in helping the student adapt. Parke and Gauvain (2009) discuss the development and regulation of emotions, while Gottman et al. (1996) describe that even in what seems like a relatively stable environment, children may suffer from emotional disturbances because of family conflicts. Ahmaddiya (2024) continues this notion by linking emotional hardship with low academic success, and claims that the absence of trauma-informed pedagogy increases disciplinary referral and the level of dropping out.

Although these authors approach trauma from different angles (emotional and academic), they all agree that trauma disrupts self-regulation.

The table below focuses on common trauma-related behaviors among students that are contrasted with teacher misconceptions and trauma-based perspectives.

Table 2: *Trauma-Related Behaviors vs. Common Teacher Misinterpretations*

Trauma-Related Behavior	Common Teacher Misinterpretation: “She/he...”	Trauma-Informed Perspective: <i>The student may...</i>
Avoiding eye contact or social withdrawal	is disengaged and unmotivated.	be experiencing anxiety or hypervigilance.
Constantly moving or fidgeting	refuses to sit still and focus.	be in a heightened stress response, seeking sensory regulation.
Difficulty following instructions	is lazy	have difficulty with memory and concentration.
Frequent emotional outbursts	is defiant and disrespectful.	lack of emotional regulation because of past trauma.
Overreacting to minor corrections	is overly sensitive or dramatic.	be hyperaware of perceived criticism.
Shutting down or refusing to speak	is being oppositional.	be in ‘freeze’ mode as a coping mechanism.
Sudden aggression towards peers	is a bully or has anger-issues	be in ‘fight’ mode because of a perceived threat.

Created in Word based upon the Researcher’s Personal Experience and Observations (2024).

Through a trauma-infused lens, educators can recognize these behaviors and respond with sympathy instead of punishment. This will lead to a more supportive learning environment- one that is needed for all students to flourish emotionally and academically.

Social Effects

From the work of Dods (2013), we learn that trust, communication, and teamwork are described as problematic areas when impacted by trauma, which may create barriers against the construction of good relationships and the attainment of good social skills. Where youth have undergone some trauma, they may also suffer from a lack of role-models and relationship skills, particularly when the perpetrator is the adult they trusted, yet who violated their trust. Dods (2013), further outlines that these challenges do not stop at individual psychological impact but may have a strong influence on the failures of healthy peer relationships.

Problems with trust, communication, and teamwork are within the core areas of self, and highly impacted by trauma. With this, it is assumed that students who have undergone trauma will (a) demonstrate trust issues in their relationship with peers, (b) find it difficult to share information effectively, and (c) have obstacles to the prospect of working together (Dods, 2013). These may lead to social loneliness and hindrance in social development.

One interesting paper is the one by Ross (2020). The author analyzed two story books in which she describes the impact of trauma on the social relationships of each character.

Book One: “Finding Perfect,” by Elly Swartz. Difficulties befall Molly, whose father is absent. Her mom battles with alcoholism and they struggle financially. These circumstances inhibit her relationships with others and Molly finds it hard to relate to her peers. Her trauma forms barriers to sharing deep feelings and thoughts with friends, and she is constantly filled with doubt.

Book Two: “The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade,” by Jordan Sonnenblick. Similar to Molly, a young boy Maverick is facing his mom’s drinking problem, her mean partners, and the family’s money issues. These make it hard for him to be social and connect with others. The evidence shows that Maverick’s trauma impairs his ability to trust people and make substantial friendships. For Maverick, trusting relationships are hard to form, thus making friends at school becomes a daunting task because of the family situation he finds himself in (Ross, 2020).

Both stories are fictional, yet perfectly depict real-world situations about students who may have experienced trauma, and teachers witness these situations daily in their classrooms.

Comparative Analysis: Social Effects of Trauma

One of the lead narratives is from Dods (2013) with a second by Ross (2020) to the effect that trauma seriously hampers social development, especially trust formation and communication. Early on, the same author had cited trauma as an attribute that thwarts healthy peer relationships where, based on past betrayals or lapses of steadiness, learners can find social teamwork and general friendship difficult. The role that fictional narratives have played in reflecting the social repercussions of real-life trauma is elaborated on by Ross (2020). Children typically distance themselves from friends and develop trust issues when adversity comes into play.

Van der Kolk (2014, as cited in Adams, 2021) and Brunzell, Stokes and Waters (2019, as cited in Karris, 2022) also found these results from a neuroscientific point of view. They describe how chronic trauma changes the nervous system, leading children to avoid social interaction. Children do this because it is their survival strategy. Brunzell et al. (2019) put it differently; they posit students misread social cues because of previous neglect. Van der Kolk (2014) states that children have learned to survive rather than form attachments.

Though placed in a different emphasis, Dods (2013) and Ross (2020) look at social outcomes, whereas Brunzell et al. (2019) and Van der Kolk (2014) look at neurological underpinnings. All of them agree the child is different socially, and in their trust after trauma. The case study that follows, describe how these effects show themselves in a school setting, and the tough times that students like Anette, who have been through trauma, have to handle.

Case Study Box 1: Meet Anette: A Trauma-Affected Student

Anette is ten years old and in sixth grade. She is a very good student and quite shy. Unlike the other children, she spends both lunch- and break times reading quietly to herself. She does not look at anyone, never starts a conversation, and barely answers when spoken to. Teachers have also noticed that she hardly ever asks questions, even when she does not understand something.

Anette's withdrawal is not limited to recess time. In group activities, she is hesitant to get involved and awaits guidance rather than taking the initiative. If someone accidentally brushes past her or speaks loudly, she goes tense and appears visibly upset. Although successful academically, she seems emotionally removed from her environment. What could be at the root of her social withdrawal? (Created by the Researcher based upon a real situation)

From a trauma-informed perspective, Anette's actions might reflect past adversities that shaped her capacity to trust, and relate to people. It is established that children who have experienced neglect or emotional trauma struggle to read social cues and therefore avoid interactions with peers (Brunzell, Stokes & Waters, 2019, as cited in Karris, 2022). Studies show that children with trauma histories develop self-protective behaviors by which they can reduce perceived threats in the social environment. Chronic stress and emotional neglect experienced by a child wire the nervous system to prioritize self-reliance over connection because, to that child, social engagement becomes seemingly unsafe (Van der Kolk, 2014, as cited in Adams, 2021).

Anette may choose isolation, as social interactions may evoke feelings of vulnerability and unease. With no intervention, Anette may become more and more isolated, further reinforcing the tendencies of mistrust and emotional engagement. What Anette goes through shows how important it is to identify social problems related to trauma in students. Trauma-informed approaches (henceforth TIA) can help educators support children like Anette to rebuild trust relationships, confidence in being social, and feel safe in their learning environment.

Theme One: Conclusion

The research outlined in this theme shows the impact of trauma on cognitive function, emotional regulation, and social development (Meister, 2019; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019; Wolpow et al., 2009; Leeuwestein et al., 2024; Dods, 2013; Ross, 2020). As a matter of fact, it seems to support the idea that childhood trauma does not merely delay learning, but profoundly affects learning and behavior in the long run. Emotional dysregulation leads to students acting out or withdraw. This social difficulty is shared by children with trauma histories, struggling with trust, communication, and relationships; this, further isolates and distresses them (Wolpow et al., 2009; Leeuwestein et al., 2024; Dods, 2013; Ross, 2020).

Faced with these difficulties, there is a strong need for TIE. If the research indeed underlines the relationship between trauma, academic, and social issues, one may ask: (a) Why is it that not all schools have supportive policies regarding trauma? (b) What are the challenges that latch onto the impediments to equipping teachers with training in trauma-sensitive approaches? (c) What structures require changing in school for an education system to bring TIE in more effectively? The second theme now identifies barriers that stand in the way of ensuring trauma-informed strategies are a general reality in education.

Theme Two: Barriers to Trauma-Informed Education

Trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE) has been positioned as possibly the most promising means of transforming the learning environment to support students who have experienced adversity. Martin et al. (2024) recently observed that “Recognition in schools to respond to children who are impacted by adversity and trauma is growing internationally- however, consensus regarding the components of a trauma-informed school is lacking” (p. 2). Schools often find it difficult to put any trauma-sensitive approach in place, as there are systemic levels of limitation, institutional constraints, and teachers are not trained. Until these are resolved, there would be no opportunity for educators to support students vulnerable in their trauma and thus exposed to academic and social challenges.

This section sets forth the major barriers to implementing TIE. It will first consider the systemic challenges that school settings as members of the broader society face. Inadequate funding, lack of policies, and lack of professional development will also be highlighted. By investigating these challenges, the aim is to pinpoint what areas the systemic adjustments should be directed toward to remove obstacles that stand in the way of successful implementation of TIE.

Systemic Challenges

The following hurdles include, but are not limited to TIE:

(i) *Insufficient Funding:* O’Toole (2022) posits that most schools do not have the monetary means to put forward an investment in trauma-informed training, mental health professionals, and classroom interventions. A lack of finance hampers not only teacher-training but also stops the hiring- and keeping of mental health workers, which then impedes the support that can be given to students facing trauma issues. Thus, lack of funding is a big hindrance to implementing TIP effectively in schools. So, how would insufficiency of funding for trauma-related support in schools affect students’ long-term welfare and academic results, and what measures can be taken to address this significant issue?

(ii) *Policy Gaps and Inconsistent Implementation:* Haynes (2022) argues, that as awareness of TIE grows, it remains mostly without a unifying policy to guide its implementation in schools. This, creates the lack of a standard policy framework to steer the incorporation of practices that are trauma-informed across all schools. In this way, it forms barriers and disparities in policy implementation on issues concerning TIE. Haynes (2022) reveals that there is a need to

overcome the specific obstacles that stand in place when trying to form a single, coherent policy framework to support TIE initiatives in educational institutions. This leaves us to pose the question: What is the state of well-being and academic success without a policy on TIE and how can this critical gap be filled by academic institutions?

(iii) *Limited Access to Professional Development and Training*: Underscored by the absence of standardized teacher training on TIP, most educators are ill-equipped to support their students who may be victims of trauma (Alisic, 2012). This section underlines the dearth of standardized teacher training in practices that inform trauma, most often leaving a teacher unprepared to meet the needs of a child enduring trauma. As an outcome, this also leaves the teachers with doubts about whether they can provide meaningful help to address the needs of trauma-affected students. A direct corollary of the above is the urgent need for programs of professional development and training that would help the teachers gain the required knowledge and skills to help traumatized students. Thus, in what ways would the lack of standardized training in TIP impact overall well-being and academic outcomes of trauma-impacted students, and what steps should be taken by schools to bridge this gap?

In sum, Meister (2019) delves into the actual impacts of systemic failures on schools, bringing out the challenges and outcomes of implementing TIP. The author underlines the imperative nature of school fit, signifying that systemic changes have to adapt to what school- and student population needs. Meister (2019) mentions research in which teacher acceptability of TIP was influenced by how they saw the strategies would fit into their present school and placement. This clearly states the approach that has to be taken between strategies, and for the school setting to gain teacher buy-in. Since schools differ, and there is no standard trauma-informed program, implementation could prove problematic. Flexibility in programs are needed to suit the specific needs of a school and its students, underscoring the challenges of application.

Comparative Analysis: Systemic Challenges

Two of the authors, O'Toole (2022) and Haynes (2022), agreed that one of the greatest challenges in implementing TIE is the absence of coherent policy. In the study by O'Toole (2022), other systemic challenges showed a lack of proper funding, with O'Toole (2022) arguing that not having sufficient funds makes implementation of training for trauma-informed and mental health-related issues difficult. Haynes (2022) felt that the primary constraint is the absence of a

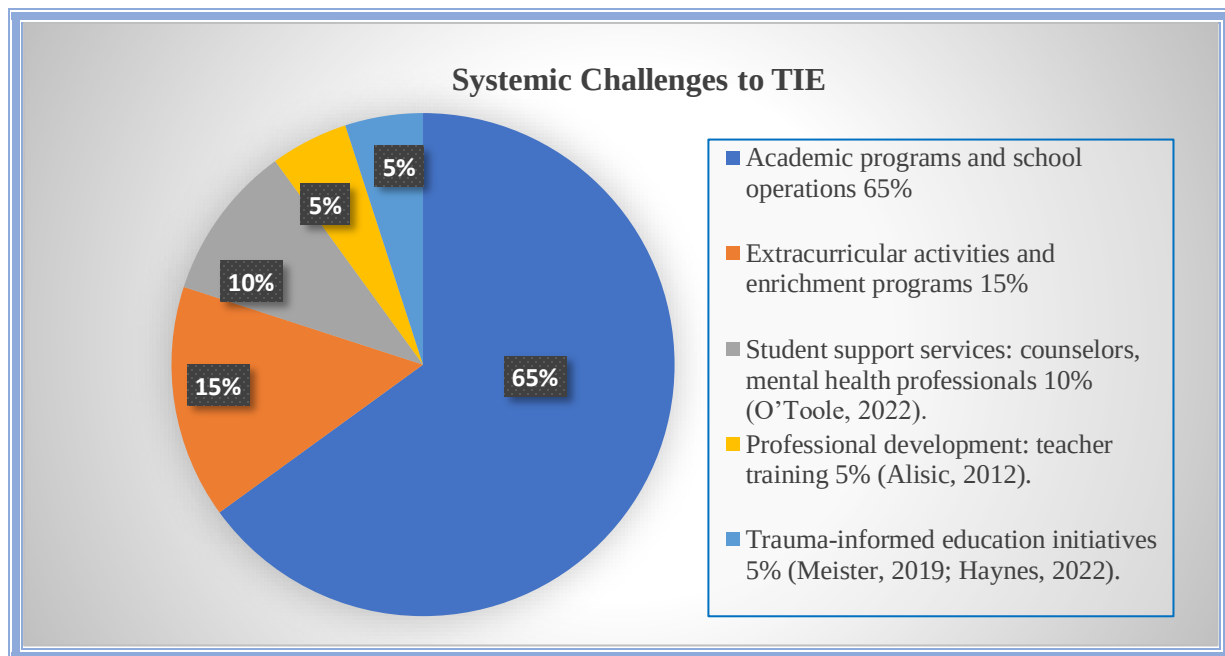
standardized policy at the national level. The author added that this leads to the disparities in the levels of implementation observed in different schools.

Alisic (2012) and Meister (2019) take this a step further and typically view teacher training deficits as a systemic issue. In the former case, it is said that very few teachers or educators, if at all, receive any formal training on trauma-informed strategies. The two authors suggest, that even where training is offered, it is hardly specific to the site conditions, and hence much less effective.

All four authors agree that systemic constraints-funding gaps, policy disparities, and weak training- constrain the quick appropriation of TIE in schools.

The chart below depicts key systemic barriers to TIE, with gaps in policy, low funding, and limits in professional development.

Diagram 4: *A Systemic Uphill Battle: Barriers to Trauma-Informed Practices*



This data shows various sides that systemic barriers have in TIE, underlining that reform is needed in funding allocation, policy development and teacher-training to support trauma-affected learners.

Teacher-Specific Barriers

Growing acknowledgement of trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE) exists amidst a reality that massive impediments stand in the way of operationalizing trauma-sensitive practices. Wilson et al. (2023) claim that this is because many teachers do not have formal TIE training and wear out under the emotional strain of working with traumatized students. Where educators are not equipped with proper training to read interventions, learners are likely to receive disciplinary action instead of support (Taylor et al., 2023). This section addresses three primary barriers concerning the urgency for reforming systemic changes in professional development- and education programs.

(i) Lack of TIP Training

As highlighted by Taylor et al. (2023) most teacher education programs do not provide intensive instruction in identifying and addressing behaviors related to trauma. The authors describe the absence of such content in methodology courses, an issue that also presents specific challenges to educators working, for example, with immigrant students who have experienced trauma. More specifically, they show the knowledge gap and the misinterpretation of such behaviors because of lack of training, which adds to the difficulty that educators face in rendering appropriate support to affected students (Taylor et al., 2023).

Without adequate preparation, educators will grapple with differentiating between behaviors provoked by trauma and those resulting from deliberate defiance. Trubavina et al. (2021) note the importance of taking-into-account stress, work in extreme conditions, and organizing the entire community to ensure children's security in schools. Considering this, to what extent can teacher education programs be redesigned to better prepare educators with the competences required to work in conflict zones, especially understanding behaviors related to trauma and handling cases of stress and burnout?

Research shows that incorporating trauma-informed training in the process of teacher education provides better abilities for educators to promote emotional resilience among students. As noted by Page et al. (2021), trauma-informed training enhances the preparation of teachers in psycho-social aspects and links to other sectors when planning and responding to emergencies. An area where there is little or no writing in coping skills to deal with trauma presents a gap in meeting the psychological needs that surface for students and teachers.

(ii) Stress and Burnout: Educators

The teachers of trauma-affected students commonly develop secondary traumatic stress, which contributes to the incidence of emotional exhaustion that leads to burnout (Wilson et al., 2023). Stress levels are described as having a debilitating effect on turnover, job satisfaction, and classroom management of teachers; that lead to burnout, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, dissatisfaction with one's work, and poor performance in teaching. In addition, traumatic behaviors are misunderstood, especially by teachers who are in the company of children with adverse childhood experiences (henceforth ACE). This lack of understanding can hinder teachers' ability to support and address the needs of traumatized children under their care.

How then, can trauma-informed training and stress reduction interventions be implemented to positively affect the overall well-being of teachers and the quality of the education provided to the children, especially those who have undergone ACEs? Wilson et al. (2023) also accentuate the necessity of interventions towards stress reduction and psychological well-being of teachers and emphasized that teachers do show interest in such programs that reduce their stress and improve their psychological well-being. They confirm that schools with organized stress-relieving interventions have higher teacher retention and job satisfaction (Wilson et al., 2023).

Work-induced stress, challenging behaviors in managing effects of trauma, and crowded classrooms with poor administrative support, exacerbate mental health challenges in teachers. The discussion by Cole and Wiener (2017) describe the challenges and strategies in the attainment of early intervention goals of the mental health commission, indirectly related to stress and burnout amongst educators. This emphasizes the need for proactive, user-friendly, and practical programs for school psychologists and others to provide primary, secondary, and tertiary consultation and intervention services. Following Cole and Wiener (2017), the question is: How would the integration of TIP into teacher education programs increase the effectiveness of early intervention strategies and the general well-being of educators and students within the school system?

(iii) Misinterpretation of Trauma-Related Behavior: Insufficient Knowledge

In their paper, Taylor et al. (2023) argue that inadequate information and misreading of behaviors related to trauma is due to lack of training, and underpin the problems educators face in offering the right support to affected learners. Examples of behaviors often misinterpreted by teachers include withdrawal, hyperactivity, and aggression, as forms of non-compliance or

defiance. How then, might the absence of adequate training on behaviors related to trauma- impact students' general academic progress and wellness- and what steps need to be inserted into teacher training programs to address this cavity?

Trubavina et al. (2021) claim that where teachers do not have adequate training in trauma-informed care (TIC), they often use traditional disciplinary methods rather than support interventions. Thus, punitive actions are resorted to, rather than detecting the trigger to the behavior. When the teacher is trauma-informed and trained, this can be avoided. Delivering professional development geared toward “behavior as communication” supports educators in reframing their method, therefore resulting in better student outcomes (Page et al., 2021).

Comparative Analysis: Teacher-Specific Barriers

In the studies by Taylor et al. (2023), and Trubavina et al. (2021), both draw attention to the gaps that exist in preparing teachers in TIP. Taylor et al. (2023) mostly dwell on the challenges faced by teachers while working with trauma-affected immigrant students, and this is extended to conflict zones by Trubavina et al. (2021), who underlines the urgent need for more specialized training to deal with such extreme conditions. Despite the differences in the assessments, both share the opinion that teachers cannot support students effectively without proper training.

The major obstacles as outlined by the works of Wilson et al. (2023) and Page et al. (2021) include teacher burnout and emotional strain. According to Wilson et al. (2023), working with trauma-affected students can eventually lead to secondary traumatic stress; therefore, it affects job satisfaction and retention. This interpretation is supported by Page et al. (2021), who emphasize that teachers without the psycho-social training would generate higher stress in their responses to crises in the classroom. Hence, there is a common plea for stress-reduction interventions that lead to facilitation of better well-being for the teachers.

All the before-mentioned authors may pursue varying angles of the same phenomenon, but they all concur about the lack of training and high emotional demands as major obstacles to trauma-informed teaching.

The quotes below show the struggles that educators encounter when attempting to implement trauma-based practices. They also highlight the necessity of receiving support and training in order to do so.

Quote Box 1: *Unprepared and Overwhelmed: Challenges Faced by Teachers*

“I want to support my students, but I was never trained to handle trauma in the classroom. I often feel like I’m failing them” – Elementary School Teacher (aligns with Taylor et al., 2023).

“Sometimes I perceive trauma responses for bad behavior. It’s not intentional, but without proper training, it’s hard to know how to respond appropriately” – Middle School Educator (aligns with Page et al., 2021).

“The emotional toll of working with trauma-affected students is overwhelming. I take their pain home with me, and without adequate support, burnout feels inevitable” – High School Teacher (aligns with Wilson et al., 2023).

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These perspectives highlight a significant issue in education: Without sufficient preparation and institutional support, even experienced teachers may struggle to meet the needs of students.

Student-Specific Barriers: The Silent Struggle

Most trauma-affected learners face barriers that remove or reduce the benefits of the trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE) process. For instance, although the program creates safe and nurturing learning environments, students do not receive full support of the program, because of systemic- and cultural issues. The variation in symptoms of trauma, the associated stigma of mental health, and large student-to-teacher ratios present obstacles.

With these not being inserted, early identification is missed, and as such, students will gradually lag both academically and socially, which calls for changes in school policies and more information on TIE. How, therefore, can a school develop an early intervention system to identify students wrestling with trauma experiences?

(i) Diverse Manifestations of Trauma: An Identification Challenge

Trauma is often manifested through behaviors that many teachers find hard to identify as related to trauma. While some children may show explicit behaviors, such as being aggressive or impulsive, others may manifest more symptoms, such as avoidance, shutdown, or emotional blunting (Palluotto, 2023). Behaviors can be different; hence, two trauma-impacted children in the same classroom may have totally different behaviors. This would lead to cases of misinterpretation and missed support options (Gherardi et al., 2021). The degree of such variation raises a fundamental question: How should teacher training programs be changed to ensure that teachers are perceptible and responsive to different trauma?

Educators rarely have advanced training in identifying trauma beyond extreme cases. This, according to Phung (2022), often results in misdiagnosis or interventions that do not help, as symptoms of trauma often masquerade as disorders, including learning disabilities and behavioral disorders- symptoms, therefore, are misinterpreted to categorize a student, and place them in an inappropriate intervention.

While according to Palluotto (2023), training should focus on the strategies of early identification, caution has been expressed by Young (2024) that too much emphasis on diagnostic labels would lead toward unnecessary interventions- and proposed, therefore, a balanced approach involving both academic and psychological support. A disengaged student may display learned helplessness and emotional numbing as responses to chronic trauma, seeming defiant and lazy.

(ii) Stigma related to Mental Health in Educational Settings

Though conversations on mental health are increasing, most schools still find it problematic to face issues related to trauma. Such problems emerge from the prevailing cultural attitudes, school policies, and peer opinions that dissuade students from discussing their problems and seeking suitable support (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022). In some places, admitting trauma is even considered a weakness, consequently denying students the needed resources (Palluotto, 2023).

An important question to consider then is: What steps may be taken to materialize a culture in school that will promote open talks on trauma and mental health? Phung (2022) contends that students would also avoid being labeled as ‘difficult’ or ‘attention-seeking’ by disclosing their struggles with teachers or counselors.

Gherardi et al. (2021) state that such self-imposed silence makes matters worse, since learners continue struggling with unprocessed trauma in the absence of appropriate care. Whereas Phung (2022) highlighted that stigma is more of a top-down from institutional policies, Dolezal and Gibson (2022) argue that it comes more from peers and society, which shows that multi-tiered interventions might be needed to change the perception. Schools without clear policies of trauma-informed care (TIC) often do not provide safe- and non-judgmental places for students to share their experiences (Young, 2024).

In the absence of openness in culture and support, students will suffer in silence rather than seek help. This is where schools ought to reflect on how the adoption of clear, school-wide policies on mental health can enhance student well-being and reduce stigma. A student who has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may not request classroom accommodation out of fear that peers and teachers will judge them. Often, the same fear is experienced by parents of trauma-affected students and they refrain from informing the school or teachers if their child suffered trauma.

(iii) Low Teacher-Student Ratios: Diminishing Individual Aid

High student-to teacher ratios have been stated in literature as one of the most significant systemic barriers to TIE, as Young (2024) cited earlier. Large classes make it hard for teachers to identify those students who have undergone traumatic experiences and are, therefore, in need of special support. In these situations, children will not have time allocated to them individually, and this will further disadvantage the situation- already lagging because of trauma.

Therefore, do schools create opportunities for the improvement of direct teacher-student interactions where enrollment is high? According to Phung (2022) teachers still face overwhelming work- and time pressures, which leaves little opportunity for meaningful engagement with students. Dolezal and Gibson (2022) confirm that, although teachers may recognize signs of trauma, a highly prescriptive curriculum and administrative demands typically make it impossible for educators to provide individualized interventions.

Whereas Gherardi et al. (2021) propose the demand to reduce the size of the classes as a primary solution, Young (2024) opposes that putting more investments into additional school support staff like counselors and social workers can be a more sustainable approach. Thus, should smaller class sizes be the priority in schools, or should schools invest in more school counselors and support staff to help with traumatized students? A teacher with 25 or more students may not

see when a quiet, underachieving learner is in fact in acute emotional distress. Further, some schools do not have enough mental health professionals like school psychologists and counselors, who can give extra care to students with trauma (Palluotto, 2023). When students do not receive timely support, their academic pathway, and long-term mental health are all affected (Young, 2024). If schools cannot pay for more staff, what other ways, like peer-mentoring programs, could help fill the gap in support services?

Comparative Analysis: Student-Specific Barriers

According to Palluotto (2023) and Gherardi et al. (2021), trauma has a wide range of developmental trajectories, which makes its recognition and identification extremely challenging for teachers. While Palluotto (2023) claims that early diagnostic programs must be conducted, Gherardi et al. (2021) posits that misreading the symptoms often brings forth undeserved disciplinary actions. Though they view the problem from different perspectives, there is an urgent teacher-training need to recognize trauma-associated behavior.

Dolezal and Gibson (2022) focused on the discussion about institutional policies that suppress in-depth conversations about trauma, while Phung (2022) is more about the nuances of the behavior of the students, showing that it is their fear of being seen as ‘difficult’ that hold them back from sharing their struggles. Yet, though different, they agree that cultural- and structural stigma averts students from help.

Young (2024) and Gherardi et al. (2021) relate class size to barriers to implementing trauma-informed pedagogy. Young (2024) calls for smaller classes for a more effective personal approach to each student and teacher, while Gherardi et al. (2021) would prefer the recruitment of more school counselors. Though the directions are diverse, they have something in common - large class sizes hold back effective delivery on trauma-informed interventions.

The table below highlights the systemic shortcomings that students face in silent battles with trauma when the system does not address material barriers to effective learning.

Table 3: *Student Needs vs School Limits*

Student Needs	Common School Limitations
Help with regulating emotions	No proper training for teachers on trauma (Palluotto, 2023).
Safe place to share problems	Stigma on discussion about mental health (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022).
One-on-one time with teacher	There are too many students per teacher (Young, 2024).
Access to school counselors	Not enough staff or money (Gherardi et al., 2021).
A predictable environment	Inconsistent trauma-informed policies (Phung, 2022).

Until these issues are resolved, trauma-affected students will not meet recovery, hence the urgent requirement of a school policy to address comprehensive, trauma-sensitive school policies.

Theme Two: Conclusion

Compared to the evidence presented under this theme, systemic, teacher- and student-specific barriers have shown to make it difficult to implement trauma-informed education (TIE) in schools. In contrast, commitment to change, embodied at various levels, rather than by individual teachers only, has received emphasis as a clear and present truth. On a systemic level, underfunding, policy gaps, and lack of meaningful in-service training of educators are the critical factors that stop schools from incorporating TIE practices effectively (O'Toole, 2022; Meister, 2019). TIE implementation can be feeble without strong financial and institutional backing.

From a teacher's perspective, the absence of trauma-informed training along with emotional stress, hamper their ability to offer support (Wilson et al., 2023; Page et al., 2021). Educators without the proper knowledge and coping mechanisms are at risk of burning out, which results in high rates of staff turnover and reduced classroom effectiveness.

Students face barriers to mental health stigma, and large class sizes hamper support (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022; Young, 2024). Without a trauma-informed culture, students will sit in quiet desperation, and often without counseling staff to provide the much-needed individualized attention. The literature, therefore, not only offers valuable insights into these barriers but also raises critical questions as:

- What would be the desired changes in policy that can make provisions for implementing TIE towards standardization across the spectra of school settings?
- In what ways can schools guarantee that training programs prepare educators effectively for instruction relating to trauma sensitivity?
- How would school cultural changes reduce the stigma around trauma- and mental health?

Uncovering the barriers to TIE paves the way for exploring effective, evidence-based strategies that would enable educators to work more meaningfully with trauma-impacted students. The next (and third) theme is therefore devoted to investigating evidence-based strategies that can surmount these challenges, allowing TIE to take its rightful place, and become a sustainable approach in mainstream education.

Theme 3: Evidence-Based Strategies for Teachers

A Southern Californian school based its implementation on a trauma-informed approach (TIA) and witnessed remarkable changes in the behaviors and academics of students. Wall (2021) describes this school as: rather than implementing a rules-based strategy, it (i) inserted a relationship-centered approach (ii) prescribed emotional regulation in transparent conversations with students (iii) increased student agency and (iv) made available a structured means of support. The research showed changes at the individual level through increased self-advocacy and less emotional dysregulation, with test scores rising after a school-wide change toward TIP. This instance denotes a transformational effect of specific, evidence-based interventions into mainstream classrooms.

With many children of school age experiencing trauma, we need to move beyond the theoretical discussion. We need clear, actionable, evidence-based strategies that can be exerted by teachers who continue to voice frustration over the lack of clarity in helping them integrate TIP into their everyday teaching environments (Wall, 2021). This section will address that gap by looking at some evidenced strategies teachers can use to build emotionally safe classrooms.

This part will include proven methods for *relationship-building*, *emotional regulation techniques*, *structured classroom environments*, and *strength-based learning approaches*. Such discussion empowers educators to create an environment where learning is trauma-sensitive. These strategies have a trickle effect on non-trauma-affected students and have proven to not only improve their general well-being but also improve their success.

Trauma-Informed Classrooms

Bellamy et al. (2022) and Collier (2022) address the urgent need to create a classroom that not only fosters access to regulation practices, but also psychological safety for students who have experienced adversity. Building upon the strategies of *creating routine*, *calming strategies*, and *safe classrooms*, Collier (2022) delves into immediate classroom interventions at a much more practical level, through systemic, and culturally responsive behavior support programs infused with trauma-informed practices - while Bellamy et al. (2022) take a broader approach. Educators can then use these strategies to develop structured yet flexible classroom environments that cater to a diverse student population.

(i) Predictable Routines: Stability in the Classroom

To create a trauma-informed learning environment, predictable routines need to be launched as a stabilizing factor. According to Collier (2022), clear and structured routines help the students feel secure, thus reducing their anxieties regarding uncertainties. With students knowing what to expect, there is less cognitive load on them from unpredictability, and more cognitive resources available for their learning. Such routines can be regular classroom starter activities, transition times, and defined classroom behavior expectations.

In the same way, as stated by Bellamy et al. (2022), predictability serves to increase the sense of safety- not only in individual classrooms, but through the various components of the school system, hence merging expectations. Administrators must embrace the Trauma-Informed Behavior Support (TIBS) program, and speed-up the realization of predictability to ensure that all practices throughout the school are sensitive to trauma. Although the authors (Bellamy et al., 2022; Collier, 2022) agree predictable routines are critical, Bellamy et al. (2022) extend the determination to discourses about systemic strategies that support the child in her/his totality. Thus, how can schools balance a need for structure and predictability with flexibility to meet a wide range of emotional needs among students?

(ii) Calming Strategies: Enhancing Emotional Regulation

The two studies bring out the role that calming techniques, such as mindfulness and breathing exercises, can play in assisting the students in regulating their emotions. Per Collier (2022) the paper enhances the benefits of mindfulness practices led by the teacher, where brief, structured moments for guided breathing or grounding exercises can help in focusing and reducing

emotional distress. Such tools provide self-regulation to develop in students, allowing them to use other strategies out of class to manage stress. Bellamy et al. (2022) propose mindfulness within a broader framework: trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices. The study suggests that strategies to promote calm should be based on the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students so that interventions resonate with different segments of the student population.

While Collier (2022) focuses on teacher-facilitated strategies, Bellamy et al. (2022) point to the need for cooperation with First Nations in integrating alternative healing practices together with mindfulness. Although generic strategies to induce calm could work, those adjustments are more effective when placed in particular cultural- and community contexts.

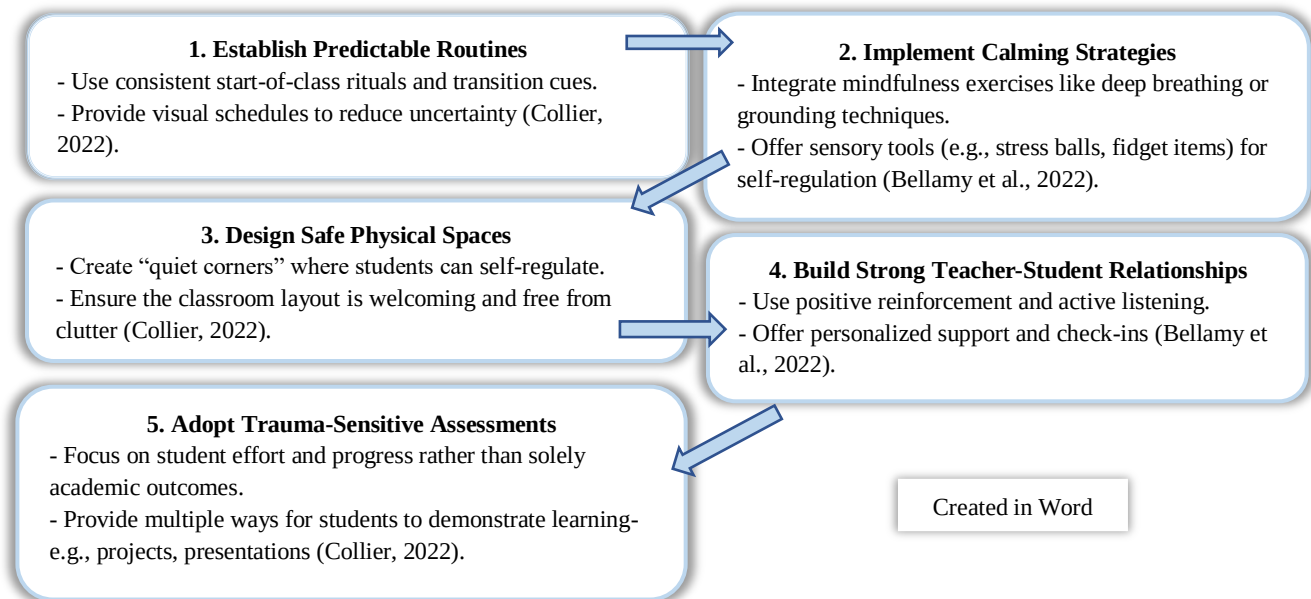
(iii) Classroom Design: Safe and Nurturing Spaces

Physical classroom spaces also influence trauma-informed education. Collier (2022) state that quiet corners, sensory tools, and visual aids give students appropriate spaces to retreat when they feel overwhelmed. The author mentions that such areas may help decompress the learner's 'crisis' to get back into the activity going on in the class. Bellamy et al. (2022) too, promote intentional classroom design but from a more general perspective, asserting that school-wide spaces should be constructed according to trauma-sensitive principles.

In their study, they propose that there should be collaborative efforts among teachers, administrators, and mental health professionals to make the environment supportive and consistent across the entire school setting. In what ways, therefore, can teachers assess the effective calming strategies and physical space designs implemented in their classrooms to ensure that it supports the needs of all the students? Based upon the insights of the scholars mentioned in this section, certain steps must be followed to construct and maintain a trauma-sensitive classroom, where all learners can thrive emotionally and academically. The aim should be to design a classroom that exudes safety, warmth and inspiration to engage socially with peers and teachers while making progress academically.

To visualize the key components of a trauma-informed learning environment, the diagram below outlines five essential steps for creating a trauma-sensitive classroom:

Diagram 5: Building Safe Spaces: Creating Trauma-Sensitive Classrooms



By following these strategies, a dynamic learning environment is created, which is structured yet flexible enough for students to feel supported and safe and become involved in their education.

Collier (2022) and Bellamy et al. (2022) agree on the basic premises of TIE. Their differences lie more in perspective than other. Where Collier (2022) focuses on short-term, actionable solutions that teachers can adopt within classrooms, Bellamy et al. (2022) propose a wider, longitudinal approach, based on including an informed best practice of trauma sensitivity at the school- and community levels.

Although the two studies differ, both prove the need for predictable routines, calming strategies, and supportive classroom design. This emphasizes the need for a balanced approach which will harmonize classroom-level interventions, and systemic school-wide frameworks in ensuring safe spaces for all students.

Relationship-Based Strategies in TIE

In trauma-informed education, one cornerstone is the relationship between teachers and students. Research strongly underscores that, in the aftermath of trauma, students typically find trust, emotional regulation, and peer relationships difficult. Consistent teacher-student interaction, active listening and empathy, with structured peer support networks can make the classroom safe and foster a sense of belonging. Implementing the above and the following three key aspects:

- ❖ Positive student-teacher relationships: fundamental for trust;
- ❖ Empathy and active listening in daily interactions;
- ❖ Peer support networks for collaboration and resilience,

will help educators enhance emotional resilience for learners who have experienced trauma and foster academic engagement. To deepen our understanding, we now address each of the above.

(i) Positive Student-Teacher Relationships: Fundamental for Trust

Carello and Butler (2015) and the National Education Association-NEA (2023) underscore the value of persistent teacher-student contact as the foundation of support for learning. When teachers consistently communicate and practice predictability, students, especially the ones with traumas, may feel secure and emotionally safe within the walls of their classrooms. Here, trust will be nurtured by explicit expectations, structured to approach their environment for learning with trust to navigate safely through it. Carello and Butler (2015) argue that issues of trust frequently plague students affected by trauma because of prior experiences. However, through offering what they termed as positive reinforcement, educators can eventually rebuild students' confidence not only in the systems but also in the people in authority.

The NEA (2023) also discussed how classroom-based structured interactions might make students feel cared for, and understood- which will affirm their emotional well-being and academic engagement. Carello and Butler (2015) addressed higher education and clinical training, while the NEA (2023) focuses on K-12 education; both converge on trust-building as a sine qua non in trauma-informed teaching.

(ii) Empathy and Active Listening in Daily Interactions

Both Carello and Butler (2015) and the NEA (2023) expressed that the availability of empathy and active listening can make all the difference in the support that a trauma-affected student is provided. Educators who focus on their students' narratives and express warmth and validation and- consciously or not- they become instrumental in providing a safe environment where students feel respected and heard. Good active listening techniques used by instructors, according to the NEA (2023), involve paraphrasing the assertions of students, keeping eye contact, and patient attitudes towards them.

As confirmed by Carello and Butler (2015), empathy in educational settings has to be more than just verbal; it should entail reading between the lines and varying instructional methods and

maintaining an emotional radar. Such an approach ensures that students who struggle with a verbal articulation of their emotions receive sufficient help.

Though both sources agree concerning the importance of empathy and active listening, the recommendations of the NEA (2023) are more applied to daily classroom interactions, whereas Carello and Butler's (2015) framework extends into broader trauma-informed policies and institutional training. Thus, how can a teacher effectively blend and maintain an academic environment while providing the psychological support the students need?

(iii) Peer Support Networks for Collaboration and Resilience

The second area of agreement is the significance of peer support networks in developing feelings of belonging in students who have experienced trauma. NEA (2023) places particular emphasis on how collaborative learning environments may (a) increase student resilience because they present good opportunities for positive social interactions that (b) lead to cooperation and mutual emotional support as (c) important social skills are developed in this learning environment and (d) students learn conflict resolution strategies and confidence to maneuver group dynamics.

Carello and Butler (2015) maintain that greater attention should be paid to structured supports, such as facilitated peer mentorship programs and trauma-sensitive group activities. They argue such students may otherwise struggle with their relationship to a supportive social environment; therefore, guided peer interactions is needed to ensure students fully participate.

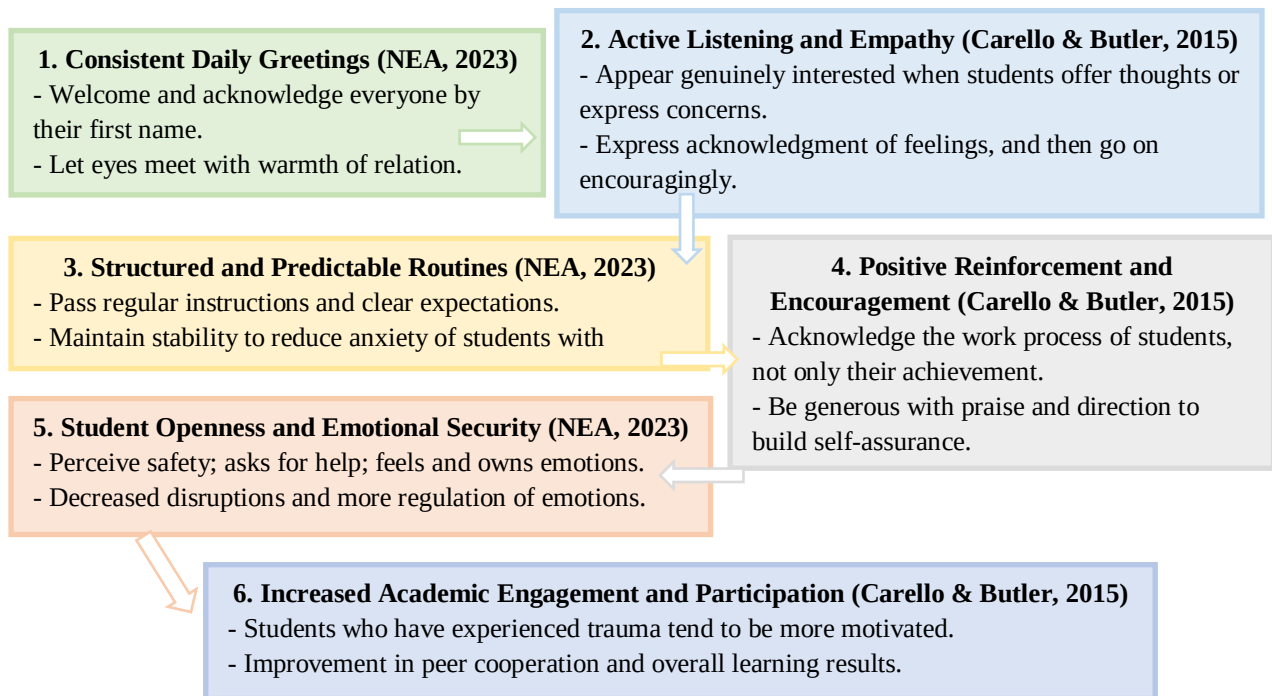
The differences in approaches between the NEA (2023) and Carello and Butler (2015) regarding the natural- and structured forms of peer collaboration, are apparent. While the NEA (2023) solution works in creating natural peer participation, Carello and Butler (2015) highlight the need to have structured peer initiatives in fostering the right support levels for students. Although both advocate for peer-based collaboration, their recommendations differ in the implementation scope.

The NEA (2023) focuses on organic student-led support networks, while Carello and Butler (2015) recommend teacher-facilitated peer support models in order to maximize student engagement and emotional growth. In what exact ways, therefore, can educators improvise strategies to ensure that such peer support networking becomes effective and inclusive for all, most importantly for those who come with diverse trauma backgrounds?

This flowchart illustrates how relationships have very significant impacts on students' trust, emotional security, and academic engagement (Carello & Butler, 2015; NEA, 2023).

Below are some steps through which a teacher could make the commitment to building trust and thus increasing authentic student engagement.

Diagram 6: *Trust and Connection - The Foundation of Trauma-Informed Education*



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These small yet powerful connections form a continuous cycle, strengthening student resilience and ability to succeed in the classroom. A trauma-informed approach, places teacher connections at the core of emotional health and the opportunity to learn (NEA, 2023; Carello & Butler, 2015).

Both Carello and Butler (2015) and NEA (2023) underscore the importance of building and implementing relationships for trauma-informed education. They assert that trust, empathy, and peer support- as teachers understand how to develop emotionally responsive classrooms- are the central components of their implementations. However, the approaches diverge remarkably, grounded in their offers for the educational context and focus of implementation. Carello and Butler (2015) respectively, provide higher education and clinical perspectives and emphasize structured interventions and institutional support mechanisms.

The NEA (2023) provides a K-12 interpreted approach, taking up teacher-led strategies for relationship building, which can be infused as part of daily classroom practices. Although very different in style, both sources share the same view - powerful relationships between educators and students, including learners affected by trauma, are core not only to academic success but also to emotional well-being. Understanding these perspectives will help teachers personalize their strategies under what will be most effective for their student populations, ensuring an environment that is both physically and emotionally safe and inclusive.

Instructional Strategies

Trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE) involves adopting strategies for a demanding population with unique cognitive and behavioral problems that students experience because of trauma. Teachers have to meet academic demands while ensuring the students are offered social-emotional support in meeting their needs to feel safe, valued, and engaged in the learning process (Parker et al., 2020; Razmeh & Salgado, 2024).

The following three core instructional strategies accrete preferably onto the challenging demands of teaching in a TIE setting and these include:

- ❖ Differentiated instruction
- ❖ Social-emotional learning
- ❖ Trauma-informed assessment

To develop resilient learners in diverse populations, teachers can implement evidence-based practices and can support a wide range of learning needs with the right differentiation in practice.

(i) Meeting Diverse Learning Needs: Instructional Differentiation

Differentiated instruction comes under the purview of trauma-sensitive teaching. In it, teachers can adjust content, process, and learning settings to account for differences in students' learning needs. For example, in discussing flexible teaching strategies that promote well-articulated participation of students in the curriculum, Parker et al. (2020) pointed to the need for such teaching methods. Students with histories of trauma may show difficulty with attention, memory, or emotional regulation. To engage these learners, alternative approaches, including scaffolded learning, or multisensory engagement, or an individual support plan, may be more appropriate.

Further building on this discussion, Razmeh and Salgado (2024) highlight the significance of culturally responsive pedagogy in bilingual education. They maintain that trauma-informed

teaching should take-into-account not only cognitive issues but also validate linguistic and cultural identities. By doing so, it would help insure fair opportunities for learning geared toward bilingual students while addressing the stress of cultural acclimatization. While Parker et al. (2020) mainly discuss the general practice of differentiation, Razmeh and Salgado (2024) address the importance of adapting pedagogy to develop a realization of trauma intersecting with linguistic pluralism.

(ii) Incorporating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into Lesson Plans

One significant factor in trauma-informed education is social-emotional learning (henceforth SEL). These SEL skills support the students in a way to understand themselves, control their emotions, and start positive relationships. With this in place, there can be enough room for a supportive classroom climate where students can openly share their feelings, engage in stress management, and build peer-to-peer relationships. This approach is highly imperative for students who have undergone trauma since it becomes a resource for them to gain self-regulation and strength through activities and building relationships in the classroom.

Razmeh and Salgado (2024) recognize the fact that well-established teacher-student relationships are the components that will not only ensure emotional security but also inform various aspects of academic success. One of their strongest claims is that- providing explicit SEL instruction, and applying this within a culturally responsive pedagogy, may enhance the opportunities where students could positively engage with their peers and the educators.

Parker et al. (2020) also voice a stronger opinion regarding that matter. They discover that, besides using a pedagogy that included mindfulness exercises, cooperative learning, and reflection of student actions, SEL has to be mainstreamed in regular teaching. How, then, can educators make an appropriate and effective balance in managing contextual demands for trauma-informed strategies and meeting the requirements of high-stakes testing and curriculum?

(iii) Effort and Growth-Centered Trauma-Informed Assessment Techniques

Conventional assessment models do not appropriately construct assessments that consider challenges faced by a trauma-affected learner. Parker et al. (2020) include a variant of growth-based assessment strategies, during which the process is about of improvement, effort, and introspection by the learner instead of focusing on inflexible outcome-based evaluations. Thus, teachers see the individual learning path for a growth mindset and ease academic stress.

Razmeh and Salgado (2024) argue that alternative assessments that should be imperative in bilingual education. Holistic evaluations that take into consideration language proficiency, self-assessment by students, and flexible grading structures will allow diversity to succeed in the classroom. Educators should make a transition from traditional performance metrics to trauma-informed assessment models to make way for more inclusive educational experiences.

To facilitate the differentiation between conventional pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy, the surface-level comparison of key instructional strategies is made. At the core, the table below illustrates how these trauma-sensitive practices will ensure emotional safety, engagement, and academic success for students whose lives have known such adversity (Parker et al., 2020; Razmeh & Salgado, 2024).

Table 4: *Teaching with Empathy - Instructional Strategies for Trauma-Informed Classrooms*

Traditional Methods	Trauma-Informed Approaches (Parker et al., 2020; Razmeh & Salgado, 2024)
Instruction is benchmarked	Differentiated instruction tailored to diverse student needs
Emphasis on standardized testing	Growth-focused assessment that values effort and progress
Rigid classroom structure	Predictable yet flexible routines that reduce anxiety
Behavior management through discipline	Behavior support through relationship-building and emotional regulation strategies
Teacher-centered instruction	Student-centered learning that fosters autonomy and engagement
Limited integration of social-emotional skills	SEL embedded into daily lessons to support self-regulation and resilience

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Changes in the teaching strategies provide students with an individualized approach that is sensitive to their cognitive needs (Parker et al., 2020; Razmeh & Salgado, 2024).

To sum up this section, we can say that both Parker et al. (2020) and Razmeh and Salgado (2024) call attention to the need for differentiated instruction, SEL integration, and trauma-

sensitive assessments in work with trauma-affected students. Whereas general best practices are the focus of Parker et al. (2020) it is the cultural and linguistic dimensions of trauma-informed teaching, specifically in bilingual education, that is the main emphasis of Razmeh and Salgado (2024). This example is exactly the situation with the researcher.

From these findings, it can be derived that a flexible, student-centered approach, which considers both academic strength and emotional well-being, will promote resilience and learning success in environments that treat sensitivity to trauma as a central principle. The construction of these frameworks will lead teachers to use pedagogies of inclusivity, belongingness, equity, and empowerment for all learners.

Theme 3: Conclusion

The studies discussed in this theme highlight the central position of relationships, teaching, and assessment strategies for supporting trauma-affected students (Bellamy et al., 2022; Collier, 2022; NEA, 2023; Carello & Butler, 2015; Parker et al., 2020; Razmeh & Salgado, 2024). Each section has shown ways in which evidence-based trauma-informed approaches can ensure emotional security, engagement, and resilience for learners in adversity.

Relationships precede learning and this is the essence of TIE. Bellamy et al. (2022) and Collier (2022) explain that responsive interactions between teachers and students must be maintained to keep the trust and cultivate the feelings of belonging and psychological safety that have been promised. When teachers provide students with safe, supportive, predictable communication, students are empowered to take risks - both academically and socially with strengthened outcomes. In this context, the results reinstate the suggestion that trust-building activities precede learning. However, while relationship-building strategies have enormous upside potential, systemic challenges ranging from large class sizes to time-constraints can act as inhibitors for the teacher in forming deep, individual connections with the student.

Instructional strategies that are flexible and support emotional well-being further enhance trauma-informed teaching (TIT). Such strategies unquestionably belong to the strategy recommended by NEA (2023) and Carello and Butler (2015), embedding SEL and differentiated instruction within the usual lessons, as these provisions can support such emotional diversity among students. Such learning practices mean that the teaching is done in such a way that it imbues within a student the habits of self-regulation, mindfulness, and teamwork to develop into an adult

capable of academic and social success. These strategies further build the capacity of educators to not work with trauma merely reactively, but to integrate such measures into the classroom culture. However, without wide-ranging professional development in implementing SEL, the application of these methods will be divergent across educational settings.

Models of assessment must also adjust to the problems that come with students' trauma and there is support for growth-based and flexible assessment models in the works of Parker et al. (2020) and Razmeh and Salgado (2024). This shifts the discussion from outcomes to efforts, progress, and strengths- as traditional high-stakes testing make students feel stressed, thus providing little benefit to those who have been through trauma.

Moving to trauma-sensitive grading practices and self-assessment tools and alternative forms of evaluation will enable educators to support strong confidence, motivation, and meaningful learning outcomes. However, to promote this approach- for flexible assessment models- the support of the institution and changes in the grading system is required. By embedding these evidence-based trauma-informed strategies into daily instruction, teachers will work towards the creation of a learning environment that not only supports students affected by trauma but also fosters inclusive, compassionate, and resilient school communities. While these strategies are very effective, implementation on a large scale requires institutional support, teacher training, and systemic policy integration. The next section identifies research gaps and provides broader implications of integrating TIE within school-wide frameworks.

Synthesis and Gaps in Literature

This literature review presents a critical discussion of empirical and theoretical research into the effects of trauma on students' cognitive and social development. It also addresses barriers to TIE implementation and evidence-based effective strategies for reducing such effects. Existing studies build a solid foundation for trauma-informed practice (TIP), and present limitations hardly take on its scalability, long-term impact, and policy implementation.

Strengths of Current Research

Among the significant strides of the present literature is advanced documentation of the manifestations of trauma that students face in learning, and performing other works. Research from Meister (2019) and Stokes and Brunzell (2019) build a case for evidence that trauma affects brain development, which later on leads to deficits in conditions related to memory, executive function,

and regulation of emotion; and an additional study found that strategies in building relationships, differentiated instruction during teaching, and assessment that are sensitive to trauma positively impact student outcomes (Bellamy et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2020). This information has informed pre-service teacher education programs and school-wide interventions designed to make classrooms more supportive and responsive.

The literature shows diverse agreement on the significant role played by social-emotional learning (SEL) in trauma-informed education. SEL is presented by Razmeh and Salgado (2024) as a method that fosters self-regulation and resilience, hence supporting the ability of the trauma-affected students to reconstruct a sense of control and agency over learning. For its part, NEA (2023) contends that the general student outcome is improved when educators address emotional wellbeing, as well as engagement enhanced. These studies collectively back-up the integration of trauma-sensitive practices at school, and offer strong reasons for the training of teachers in TIE.

Imposed Limitations

Even with the above-listed strengths, this approach to current research in trauma-responsive education reveals several limitations. One of the most compelling issues in this line of research is the lack of large-scale and longitudinal studies that would bear evidence of the long-term validity of the impacts of trauma-informed strategies (Wilson et al., 2023). Most literature available concentrate on small-scale interventions, normally set within well-resourced schools that house trauma-informed programs. This brings into question the possibility of implementing such strategies in schools where resources are minimal or the needs of the students are high.

Another major limitation is that the study centers on perceptions of teachers and not on the outcomes of the students. For example, research by Carello and Butler (2015) and Trubavina et al. (2021) sheds much light on the experience of teacher training on trauma-informed courses but relatively fewer works are available that record tangible student progress within the trauma-informed classroom. This further shows that as much as they feel better placed with the right tools and strategies to support students, there is very limited empirical evidence to prove that such strategies have been successful in ushering meaningful and long-term changes regarding academic performance and emotional well-being.

Policy inconsistencies and systemic barriers, however, still prove as a stumbling block to the attainment of full-scale implementation of TIE. According to O'Toole (2022) and Haynes

(2022), the lack of standardized guidelines has left the implementation of TIE fragmented across schools and districts. In the absence of coherent national or regional policies, TIPs are more a matter of choice and less a matter of principle for several schools.

Literature Gaps

Though much progress has been made in demonstrating the merits of TIE, several areas require further research. An absolutely unexplored piece of the puzzle is the sustainability of the impact of TIP (Parker et al., 2020). A longitudinal study that traces the academic success, emotional development, and behavioral outcomes of students over many more years will reveal whether there is any impact, and if so, how long the impact lasts. There is scarce literature where TIE intersects with the diversity of cultures and social statuses. Most studies were performed in the Western system of education, specifically in urban or suburban schools, where resources for restoration were in plenty (Razmeh & Salgado, 2024). The study should be taken up in schools with fewer resources, rural populations, and cultural diversities to see how TIE can be applied there.

Further research is required into models of school-wide implementation and policy development. To effect individual teacher training- systemic change at the institutional and government levels is needed, to allow TIE to become a standard educational approach (O'Toole, 2022). Exploring ways that schools can integrate trauma-informed frameworks into core curricula, discipline policies, and teacher preparation programs can make the change sustainable. Evidence from the reviewed literature strongly supports the urgency and efficacy of TIE.

Limitations include studies that are small in scale, lack of data on long-term effects, and the lack of consistent policy implementation, which impede the ability to reach its full potential. Longitudinal research and the infusion of cultural adaptation and systemic implementation of TIE are proposed to be undertaken in the future so that every student, no matter what background, will have access to a resilient and supportive learning environment.

Chapter Two: Conclusion

This literature review focused on the effects of trauma on students, barriers to implementing TIE, and evidence-based strategies that support learners affected by trauma (Meister, 2019; Wilson et al., 2023; Parker et al., 2020). A study of systemic and teacher-specific challenges, cognitive, and social effects, and practical instructional approaches, makes a compelling case for changing the status quo with more teaching methodologies conscious of trauma.

Central to all literature is the fact that, in a trauma-informed environment, professional development supports safe, empathetic, and predictable learning environments (NEA, 2023; Razmeh & Salgado, 2024). Study findings consistently support that inclusive assessments can do much to minimize the impacts of trauma in an academic setting (Bellamy et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2020). Such trauma-sensitive practices help students further regulate themselves, trust more, and participate more fully in their academic experience.

O'Toole (2022) and Haynes (2022) describe that systemic and practical barriers are lagging standardized policies, and insufficient funding of schools to develop comprehensive programs for TIC. Wilson et al. (2023) added that it is teacher burnout and lack of professional training which are additionally impeding the effectiveness of these interventions. These challenges require the top level of commitment for long-term professional development and policy reforms to make it sustainable and ensure the effective implementation of TIE.

The results presented in this literature review directly set forth the two objectives of the thesis, which is to uncover some of the practical, research-based strategies available to teachers in mainstream schools involved in conducting teaching and learning activities for students affected by trauma. Gaps identified will shed more light on the continuing debate about how best to bring TIP to work in schools in both curricula and classroom management.

While existing research has provided the author with a comprehensive set of indicators, the next chapter will explain the *methodology* that was used to analyze TIE with an extensive explanation of the approach taken to synthesize research findings and identify effective TIP strategies available for mainstream teachers.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter details the approach used systematically in this study to review trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE) in primary- and middle school classrooms. As the study concentrated on aggregating available research works, and not primary data collection, a systematic literature review was considered the most suitable research methodology. It allowed for a thorough scrutiny of peer-reviewed articles, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies related to trauma-informed practices (henceforth TIP) in education. With a structured review, the study determines best practices, identifies barriers and gauge the gap that exists in literature.

The reason for choosing a systematic literature review is dual. First, it permits the undertaking of intensive exploration of a wide range of studies without the ethical and logistical challenges associated with empirical studies involving humans. Second, it guarantees that the findings are well-informed, drawing from diverse educational contexts to inform applications for mainstream educators. This study's methodology comprises a structured approach involving a research design, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Why a Systematic Literature Review? A systematic literature review (henceforth SLR) differs from a traditional review as it implements a rigorous, transparent, and replicable process of gathering, assessing, and synthesizing available research works. With TIE rapidly developing, it enabled an in-depth aggregation of works dealing with how teachers can support students who have been traumatized. A systematic approach ensures that only high-quality, peer-reviewed literature sources inform the study's conclusions, to reduce bias and increase reliability (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006 as cited in Mohd, 2009).

Since TIE is a field that covers the disciplines of education, psychology, and social work, an SLR facilitates the review of insights from these different disciplines. Stokes and Brunzell (2019) confirm that this forms the basis for strengthening the findings through the consideration of different perspectives on childhood trauma, cognitive development, and instructional strategies.

Research Objectives: Alignment

This research used a broad yet rigorous search for relevant sources to address the study's objectives. The study collected data systematically through thematic analysis to make some contribution to the following critical research goals:

- Identifying effective trauma-informed strategies for mainstream teachers.
- Examining barriers that hinder TIE implementation.
- Synthesizing best practices that improve teacher-preparedness and lead to better student support.

Methodology: Scope and Limitations

A systematic review of the literature provides a comprehensive and structured approach, but is not free from certain limitations, namely:

- *Lack of primary data:* Because no primary data was collected in this study, the scope of the findings is confined to the breadth of the studies.
- *Publication bias:* As common in studies, those with striking positive results are more readily published; this systematically affects the database that is available for analysis.
- *Contextual Variability:* Results from different school systems may not apply in all school settings (Moher et al., 2009 as cited in Niedlich et al., 2021).

However, such limitations do not take away the fact that an SLR is one of the most valuable methodologies for finding trends, gaps, and practical recommendations in TIE.

A rigorous selection was done based on the scholarly merit, currency, and pertinence of the study to TIE in classrooms. For details on source selection, see ‘Inclusion - Exclusion Criteria’ under Data Collection. Studies related to clinical- or therapeutic interventions, but non-educational setting, were omitted as it keeps the review within the practical strategies relevant to teachers. This forms the basis for the selection of studies, as outlined in the criteria defined in the data collection. Next, the research design describes the structured process of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant literature.

Research Design

A sequential exploratory *mixed-methods design* was used, which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. This allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the literature that was elicited in the first phase, to be followed by an analysis of patterns and trends within the selected studies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The *qualitative* segment that formed part of this research comprises a review that synthesized the findings of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reports on trauma-informed teaching (henceforth TIT). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) this phase helps to work out

key themes, intervention strategies, and theoretical frameworks. The *quantitative* part includes the categorization and trend analysis of reviewed studies by methodology, sample population, and measure of effectiveness.

A deductive-inductive strategy was embraced, whereby the literature was first scanned for existing theoretical frameworks on TIE, and subsequently an inductive analysis of emerging themes within the data was used. This ensures a methodology that is both structured and flexible to allow for the appropriation of diverse perspectives (Bryman, 2016).

Studies were selected using strict inclusion and exclusion criteria detailed in the ‘Data Collection’ section and Appendix A1 to ensure that high-quality and relevant research informs the review. To increase reliability, the author accessed databases including ERIC, PsycINFO, Google Scholar through targeted search terms related to

- ❖ *trauma-informed teaching,*
- ❖ *teacher strategies for trauma,* and
- ❖ *educational interventions for students who experienced trauma.*

Zotero was used to manage sources and citations (see Reference Management and Appendix A2 for details). Studies collected were put through a *thematic analysis* approach, which resulted in findings being categorized (Braun & Clarke, 2021), into recurrent themes like classroom management strategies, emotional regulation techniques, and school-wide intervention models.

An analysis, comparatively, brought to light the variations amidst the different educational settings, student age groups, and cultural contexts. Further, content analysis was used to measure important parts of the reviewed literature, such as sample sizes, geographical distribution, and intervention types. This two-step analysis gives a fair balance of both qualitative thoughts and trends that were measured. This research did not involve human participants directly. Ethical integrity was maintained by ensuring accurate source representation, method transparency, and no publication bias (American Psychological Association, 2020). Public domain and research materials used were cited accordingly, and findings presented objectively to avoid misinterpretation or selective reporting.

A major *limitation* of the study was that it relied on secondary sources, which may not reflect classroom practices as they evolve. Also, there were variations in the methodologies of the studies, so direct comparison proved challenging. However, the use of a mixed-methods approach

helped to overcome these limitations, as it triangulates qualitative- and quantitative data to foster a comprehensive understanding of trauma-informed teaching strategies.

For transparency and replicability, Appendix A3 outlines the research process; provides the databases and keywords, along with the criteria for choosing the literature reviewed, and also provides the final selection process. Further, it frames a systematic and broad approach to the review of the relevant literature on childhood trauma in educational settings and, as such; it helped ensure a structured selection process of diverse perspectives and empirical studies to enable an overall well-balanced and well-informed analysis.

Despite some existing limitations, such as potential biases and unpublished studies, the methodology renders the findings more reliable and relevant. The study prioritized transparency and reproducibility by clearly documenting its search strategy, inclusion criteria, and analytical procedures so that future researchers could replicate or build upon the findings.

Data Collection

Booth, Sutton and Papaioannou (2016) highlight that a clearly defined and open *literature search* is important to ensure both the validity and applicability of a systematic review. This section describes the methods used to locate, screen, and choose scholarly works for this paper on TIP. The process included choosing the correct databases, proposing search terms, deciding on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and ordering studies into useful themes for analysis.

A full body of valid literature was collected, and searches were made using the *databases* Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and PsycINFO. These were picked for their wide and strong cover of reviewed education, psychology, and teaching research (Gough, Oliver, & Thomas, 2017). Also, a snowballing method was used - manually checking the reference lists of key studies to find more sources that fit the study's scope. To combine the search results, Boolean operators and controlled vocabularies were used. Sample *keywords* and *search terms* used were:

- ❖ trauma-informed education; trauma-informed practice; trauma-informed teaching) and (mainstream teachers or general education)
- ❖ teacher training; student trauma; classroom strategies
- ❖ TIP implementation; K-12 education; educator perspective

Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and institutional reports published between 2009 and 2024. Only English-language sources were included.

To maintain transparency and consistency in study selection, a structured approach of *inclusion* and *exclusion* was applied. The full table is presented in Appendix A3 and is summarized below.

Inclusion:

- ❖ Studies published from 2009 to 2024
- ❖ Peer-reviewed research or systematic reviews
- ❖ Empirical evidence on implementing trauma-informed practices in education.
- ❖ Research on implementing TIP, experiences of teachers or outcomes in classrooms.

Exclusion:

- ❖ Research that is not directly connected to formal education (i.e., clinical psychology settings).
- ❖ Articles that focus only on student trauma and not on the educational intervention.
- ❖ Non-English literature.
- ❖ Opinion papers or narrative reviews without a clear methodological base.

This filtering process helped eliminate studies not directly aligned with trauma, but focused on classroom-based strategies for mainstream teachers.

In the screening and selection process the search yielded approximately forty-two (42) records. These were screened through a three-step process:

1. Title and Abstract Review - Irrelevant studies or those lacking a TIP focus were removed.
2. Full-Text Review - Studies were evaluated against the inclusion/exclusion criteria.
3. Thematic Sorting - Studies chosen were sorted into the following key themes:
 - ❖ Definitions and theoretical foundations of TIP
 - ❖ Barriers to applying trauma-informed practices
 - ❖ Classroom strategies for mainstream educators

A full visual summary of this selection process is provided in the PRISMA Flow Diagram (Appendix A4). Twenty-five (25) sources were retained for full analysis after this process.

In the entire process, Zotero was used as a reference management tool to collect, annotate, and organize the selected studies. A screenshot of the organized Zotero library is provided in Appendix A2. This reference manager helped track keyword tagging, eased the curation of citations and classified sources by theme. Another PRISMA Flow Diagram, in Appendix A4, shows the stages of article selection and screening to further improve clarity. This figure provides a full visual

summary of the study selection process. It shows the number of records identified, screened and, eventually, the number of records included in this review along with the reason for the specific selection to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the review process (Moher et al., 2009).

The method of literature search outlined in this section elicits a study that remains both methodologically rigorous and topically relevant for analyzing TIE. Using a structured approach to source and screen literature proved beneficial as it allowed for including diverse high-quality studies that supported the analytical framework of the thesis. Thus, the review acts as the underpinning process for the subsequent sections that will deliver key findings and thematic analysis, and their contribution to practice.

Data Analysis

This section describes the thematic analysis of the selected studies that address strategies for general educators. The literature search and selection- as described in the data collection, and guided by the research aims outlined in Chapter 1- set the foundation for this analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model of thematic analysis, which included familiarization, coding, theme identification, reviewing, defining, and reporting.

An inductive- and interpretive *analytical approach* was used, allowing themes to emerge organically from the literature without imposing pre-existing frameworks. Key concepts, recurring strategies, and implementation patterns were manually coded (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and then organized into three overarching themes relevant to integrating TIP.

These final themes were:

1. The impact of trauma on student behavior and learning.
2. Barriers to implementing TIP in mainstream classrooms.
3. Practical, evidence-based strategies for teachers.

This thematic structure relates to the aim of identifying challenges and new approaches in TIP.

Theme 1: Trauma Effects on Student Learning and Behavior

Many studies have laid great emphasis on the diverse ways in which trauma manifests. It very often presents as impairment of cognitive function, emotional regulation, and even social interaction. For example, the field of neurodevelopment proves that adverse childhood experiences hinder the brain from developing normally, and will adversely affect the abilities of children to remember, pay attention, and solve problems (Van der Kolk, 2014; Jennings et al., 2017).

These findings help contextualize classroom behaviors, and underscore the need for educators, to be sensitive and not only respond with disciplinary measures. Concerns reported by teachers are: Difficulties in interpreting trauma-related behaviors which manifest as aggression, withdrawal, and inattention, may be mislabeled as defiance and/or non-compliance. Howard and Navarro (2016) argue that such misinterpretation often culminates in a punitive response rather than a supportive one, thus further victimizing the affected students.

Theme 2: Barriers to Trauma-Informed Practice

Although TIP-awareness has continued to increase, systemic and institutional barriers have significantly impeded the implementation thereof across the board. As stated by Milner (2020), the major limitations include inadequate teacher preparation programs, lack of professional development, and inconsistent policy support. Teachers report feeling overwhelmed when having to take on trauma-management with no institutional support, and little to no training (Gay, 2018).

Large class sizes, limited time and no access to counseling support, especially in under-resourced schools, intensify burnout, and secondary traumatic stress. Mansfield et al. (2016) further posit that these barriers attest to the requirement of systemic reform on a very comprehensive basis, and the need for strategic planning related to implementing TIP.

Theme 3: Evidence-Based Strategies for Teachers

Many studies recommend evidence-based strategies; such as integrating social-emotional learning (SEL), establishing predictable routines, and emotionally safe learning environments. This practice helps to enhance student engagement and reduces disruptive behavior.

Building trust through consistency, empathy and clear communication has also been highlighted as effective. Santaro (2019) emphasize, that teachers who receive continuous professional support are confident in applying TIP strategies and can foster resilience in their students for current and future situations in class- and beyond the school.

To integrate the thematic framework, this section draws on the set of themes developed during the research stages outlined in Appendix A3: Research Process Table. Though the text does not include verbatim coded extracts, final themes will reflect the manner in which the literature was transparently, systematically, and iteratively engaged to ensure analytical validity and alignment with the purposes of the review.

Results of this analysis showed that while trauma profoundly affects learning and behavior, systemic barriers may prevent the embracement of TIP by teachers to the fullest. There are many evidence-based strategies that can help educators make the entire school environment sensitive to trauma. For this purpose, current teaching practice requires supportive leadership, relevant professional development, and a school-wide commitment to make teaching and learning emotionally and psychologically safe. Next, we will investigate ethical considerations of performing a literature-based study on trauma in educational contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity in research is the most important element of producing the findings true, responsible, and free of bias. Since this is a literature review, there are no direct human participants, and no data collected through surveys, interviews, or experiments. However, it does not minimize the level of ethics that this paper must meet- particularly academic integrity and responsible citation, along with the avoidance of bias in the selection and interpretation of studies. This section presents key ethical issues related to this research-transparency, correct attribution of sources, and adherence to ethical guidelines for secondary research.

The nucleus of this study is based upon *academic integrity*. To prevent plagiarism, the research process followed guidelines by correctly acknowledging the source with in-text citations and references. Citation practices followed APA 7th edition guidelines and were supported by Zotero for accuracy and transparency. It is ensured that direct quotes and paraphrased content are attributed to their original authors to continue the exercise of good intellectual property practices, as encouraged by Resnik (2022).

Transparency in the research process makes the findings credible as based on the criteria defined in the data collection. With such detailed documentation of the search strategy and databases, and thematic analysis process, the research allows other scholars to replicate the findings or to build on them (de la Guardia & Sturdy, 2019).

A major ethical concern in the literature review is the risk of *selection bias*, where studies are chosen based on possible preconceived notion and not on objective criteria. To reduce this, studies were systematically selected through a multi-staged screening process, as described in the data collection section. The sources include a great variety, from qualitative case studies to large-scale quantitative research, which may reflect the topic from various angles. Conflicts of interest

regarding the reviewed studies were noted and critically assessed (Gough et al., 2017) to minimize interpretation bias. All reviewed materials were taken from legitimate and reputable academic bases. The study gave preference to open-access publications and licensed institutional resources to ensure compliance with *copyright* and *licensing terms*. Where conceptual models, data tables, or direct quotations from primary studies were used, proper attribution was provided following the norms of scholarly communication.

According to Bouter (2020), an integral part of upholding the integrity of research is by giving the original authors their due credit and refraining from any form of misrepresentation. Equally, Gough, Oliver, and Thomas (2017) place emphasis on the use of explicit data and reference practices in conducting systematic reviews. Therefore, all secondary content in this thesis is dealt with under careful observation of intellectual property rights and fair use guidelines.

Even though this study entirely relies on secondary data- as no human participants are directly involved- ethical principles are still key. Credible research involves correct sourcing with a clear sign of the study's limitations and respect for the work of others. Suri (2019) states that in even the most systematic of literature reviews, the researcher is still called upon to exercise ethics in the selection, analysis, and reporting of studies to stave off issues of bias and misreporting.

Another key concern is study honesty, especially for openness and replicating results. Bouter (2020) highlights that building a culture of honesty involves (i) credible reporting, (ii) no selective referencing, and (iii) clear articulation of inclusion/exclusion criteria. In compliance, this work has kept a clear and orderly way for identifying, screening, and including literature.

Full citation and referencing for all sources used have been provided to manage bibliographic data [Zotero]. In keeping with the code of practice for research ethics and integrity, it will be ensured that this study maintains not only academic rigor but also responsible scholarship. The need for clarity in the review's presentation processes has been emphasized by Gough, Oliver, and Thomas (2017), which this study has accommodated by specifying the methods of relevant literature identification and analysis.

Even with the absence of human participants, the principles of *confidentiality* in the handling of study materials were observed. All studies involving anonymized case reports or sensitive teacher experiences were referenced to maintain the privacy of the individuals involved in the original research (Resnik, 2022). The researcher also abided by ethics in the handling of

secondary data to act under the tasking academic institutions and professional bodies.

Since ethical consideration falls under the umbrellas of research design and *data collection*, this study also aligns the broader discussed ethical research frameworks discussed in the afore sections. Specifically, in Appendix A3: The Research Process Table shows the methodological rigor applied to ensure fair selection of literature and thematic coding [Data Analysis] further reinforces the reliability of the findings.

For greater transparency and to reduce possible bias by the researcher in the selection and analysis of studies, a structured ethics checklist was developed and applied. This checklist (see Appendix A5) helped make uniform decisions during the process of screening under the research questions outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. It comprised reflective prompts on the relevance, credibility, cultural sensitivity, and ethical integrity; each related to the methodological principles outlined before. This, acted as an internal quality control measure for ensuring ethics and academic standards within the whole review.

In summing up this chapter, we may confirm that without ethical considerations, it is impossible for a review of literature to be credible and fair to all. By checking and ensuring there is no bias, this study:

- (i) correctly used the sources with responsible citation;
- (ii) applied the correct academic integrity standards, and
- (iii) avoided selection bias while citing the sources, and respected intellectual property rights to make it a study of rigorous research ethics.

The next: Chapter 4, is to discuss the findings that were uncovered during this research, and what it holds for both current and future TIP in mainstream classroom settings.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will outline the major findings emerging from the literature review on trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE): Practical strategies that teachers can adopt to support students who are affected by childhood trauma. The section draws on empirical studies and theoretical contributions obtained through a structured review process and synthesizes them in relation to the research objectives set in Chapter 1. As a primary goal the review seeks to provide an evidence-based discussion that moves beyond abstract theory and into actionable, teacher-focused solutions that can be integrated into everyday classroom practice.

Research on trauma-informed practices (henceforth TIP) has established that teachers, by monitoring the effects of trauma on the students, can either address the issues, or unknowingly exacerbate them. Developmental neuroscience has connected adversity, especially ACEs (such as maltreatment, neglect, and household challenges), to alterations in the development of neural circuits that regulate stress and emotions (Felitti et al., 1998; Van der Kolk, 2014). Such non-academic baggage that learners carry, directly affects their ability to focus, keep information, and work pro-socially with peers. At school, teachers may be the first non-family adults to detect trauma symptoms in these students and address it meaningfully (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2019, as cited in Karris, 2022).

The findings in this chapter are relevant, given the preponderance of trauma among school-aged children. Without strategies and institutional backing, teachers may misinterpret trauma-related behaviors as defiance or disengagement, which may lead to disciplinary actions that further isolate vulnerable students. When teachers are equipped with TIP approaches, such as (i) creating emotionally safe learning spaces, (ii) employing relational strategies and (iii) modifying instruction- students are most likely to re-engage with the learning process and experience both academic and emotional growth (Carello & Butler, 2015).

This section reasserts not only the significance of TIE, but also offers educators, school leaders, and policymakers a discussion grounded in best practices that have come to the fore in recent scholarship. Each theme presented offers a lens through which to see and better address trauma within the confines of general education settings. The chapter contributes to bridging the gap between educational theory and classroom-based implementation, turning insight into impact.

The findings are organized into three primary sections to ensure clarity and thematic focus:

1. Recognizing the Impact of Trauma on Students

- This theme highlights how the effects of trauma, manifested in school settings, change behavior, emotions, and cognition.

2. Implementing TIP in the Classroom

- This section explores relational strategies, differentiated instruction, and changes to the physical and emotional classroom environment.

3. Fostering Teacher Resilience and Systemic Support

- This part emphasizes the role of teacher well-being, professional development, and institutional culture in supporting trauma-informed efforts.

Together, these themes show how well TIP can be integrated for the educational spectrum at every level, thus benefitting not only the students with some history of trauma but also making the environment more inclusive, supportive and empathetic for all learners.

Theme 1: Spotting Trauma Signs

An important aspect of trauma-informed care (henceforth TIC) in education is to develop the skill of teachers in understanding the signs that their students may undergo trauma. As research has shown, the behavioral signs of trauma may not be overtly disruptive; they can easily be misinterpreted as other- such as a personality trait, or lack of interest in learning. In the absence of specific training and conscious awareness, these behaviors may act as a distracter, hence delaying much-needed support and intervention (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2019, as cited in Karris, 2022).

Children who have suffered trauma will usually exhibit a variety of behaviors, reflective of the neurobiological and emotional impacts of the experience. These include chronic absenteeism from school, sudden changes in academic performance, irritability, defiance, withdrawal, and problems in relating to peers and adults (Dods, 2013; Van der Kolk, 2014). Signs are often missed as most educational settings are run on strong behavior expectations and policies of discipline. Teachers may assume the child is inattentive, oppositional or unmotivated, yet the student may respond to environmental triggers that are reminiscent of traumatic experiences (Meister, 2019).

The neuroscience of trauma provides a compelling explanation for these behaviors. In the work of Van der Kolk (2014) compelling evidence shows that trauma alters the developmental neurology of the brain's limbic system, compromising the amygdala, hippocampus, and pre-frontal

cortex- areas that integrate emotion, memory and executive function. This neurobiological disruption will affect how students process data, retain their learning, and engage in cognitive thinking, which has far-reaching implications for the teacher. Therefore, this becomes highly useful for the teacher to understand how brain biology translates into behavior and distinguishes willful misbehavior from a response based on trauma. The latter can also alter the stress response system in the body and, as a result, pupils may fluctuate between states of hyperarousal (for example, fidgeting, aggressive, extremely alert) and hypo-arousal (for example, dissociated, extremely quiet), which severely constrains classroom functioning (Carello & Butler, 2015).

Signs of trauma should be identified at an early stage, since it would offer an opportunity for educators to take supportive action. Several studies such as those by Alisic, (2012) and Dods, (2013) have revealed that training teachers on how to recognize emotional and behavioral indicators related to trauma results in a significant improvement in student support. For example, in the author's case study of a Canadian elementary school, Dods (2013) describes how teacher training in trauma recognition resulted in the identification of signs such as urgent bathroom needs, unexplained tiredness, or an unusual attachment for routines. These resulted in timely referrals to school counselors, the consequent initiation of individualized support plans, and changes in instruction to address the student's emotional regulation needs.

Observation of trauma is not only limited to the individual. It can be embedded in a whole-school approach, which promotes regular communication among staff, and sharing reports or observation checklists. For example, in a study conducted in multiple schools, Brunzell et al. (2019) found that teachers who had received training in being trauma-informed were more confident in observing shifts in mood-, in participation and in peer interactions - referred to as 'soft signals' that are often early warnings of distress, and can be acted upon before more acute academic or behavioral issues occur. The proactive identification of such victims upholds one of the basic principles of TIE by developing a safe, stable and responsive learning environment.

Implications of the findings are very significant. If teachers know how to read signs of trauma, they can reframe their interpretations of student behavior and approach interactions in the classroom with empathy. Therefore, reading signs leads to other classroom-level interventions that include (i) allowing a student to take breaks by moving around, (ii) using non-verbal strategies, or (iii) changing seating arrangements. All these minor changes can completely reassure students

about their safety and belonging in the classroom. Further, these practices do not require formal psychological training, but are grounded in relationship-based and observation-driven teaching.

A point of critical thinking emerges from the above: If trauma manifestations among students are not well articulated to the teachers, how then can those students expect to be supported well by their educators? Even the most well-meaning teachers, if they do not know what to seek, may miss an opportunity for early and effective intervention. This reasserts the need for sustained professional development (henceforth PD) that offers not only theoretical input but also practical tools for observation and referral.

In brief, the ability to identify trauma symptoms is essential for teachers who are in the process of transforming their practice to adopt a trauma-informed approach to teaching. Viewed from the current literature, it is seen that varied and complex interactions between trauma and its effects on behavior and learning highlight the importance of sharing principles on how best to support individuals in ways that are non-punitive. Students previously considered as presenting challenging behaviors or being inattentive can now be part of a classroom setting where teachers who are sensitive to trauma, prompt questions that require deeper answers, and help create the required emotional scaffolding for healing and growth.

Theme 2: Implementing Trauma-Informed Practices (TIP)

Trauma-informed practices (henceforth TIP) in mainstream classrooms have gained increased attention because of their potential to foster safe and supportive environments for all students. This section reviews evidence for practical methods that teachers can implement, along with common barriers to integration and how these may be overcome.

The core of trauma-informed teaching (henceforth TIT) is *effective classroom strategies* through the building of predictable routines, which will automatically reduce anxiety and increase student self-regulation. Collier (2022) noted that such rituals at the start of every class, with clear transitions and visual schedules, help the students feel secure especially those who may have issues with unpredictability. Bellamy et al. (2022) suggest that routines, even if not classroom-based, should be implemented throughout the school for support at every level of the organization.

Further to the above, strategies in calming such as mindfulness exercises and breathing techniques prove to enhance regulation of emotions. This may comprise teacher-led grounding exercises, access to stress/fidget tools, and periods when a learner can self-regulate in a calm zone

or any quiet area within the classroom (Collier, 2022; Bellamy et al., 2022). Their delivery of such techniques is also key; in this Bellamy et al. (2022) argue to make some modifications within the techniques to reflect the backgrounds of the students, thus enhancing relevance.

Intentional classroom design has a major effect on children who have experienced trauma. Bright, flexible, seating areas that are sensitive to their needs may decrease overstimulation, as it gives students an opportunity to have physical spaces where they feel safe and grounded. Collier (2022) states that some of these factors have been proven to give not only emotional safety but also propel academic engagement.

One such empirical study supporting the effectiveness of these strategies is based on a Southern California school. For example, by implementing a trauma-informed approach they noted measurable improvements in student outcomes after integrating relationship-centered practices and emotional regulation routines. Students themselves expressed greater self-advocacy, coupled with decreased behavioral disruptions- as reported by the school (Wall, 2021). According to teachers, classroom strategies yield a more inclusive atmosphere and sharp reductions in disciplinary incidents- as reported by NEA (2023); Carello and Butler, (2015).

In addition, social-emotional learning (SEL) and differentiated instruction are acknowledged pillars of TIP. According to arguments by Parker et al. (2020) and Razmeh and Salgado (2024), SEL promotes resilience and self-regulation within trauma-affected learners while offering differentiated strategies; this permits the student to undertake knowledge in ways that do not re-trigger trauma because of fixed assessment structures.

Barriers that seem to work against the extensive implementation of TIP are (i) time constraints, (ii) rigid curricula, and (iii) inadequate training, as frequently cited by teachers (Haynes, 2022; Taylor et al., 2023). It may also be challenging for teachers working under the condition of high-stakes testing or large classes to incorporate trauma-sensitive strategies as part of the daily instruction. To overcome these obstacles, the literature recommends ongoing professional development that includes not just theoretical content but modeling and coaching. Bellamy et al. (2022) suggest integrating TIP into school-wide behavior support programs so that teachers receive consistent guidance. Collaborative efforts among administrators, counselors, and teachers are required to align expectations and implement TIP that can be scaled and is cohesive.

In sum, implementing TIP means a great deal more than just the teaching strategies - it means (i) teaching within a structured routine, (ii) applying calming techniques with (iii) an inclusive classroom design, and relating all this to support strategies. While systemic barriers remain, research has shown that with support and training, teachers can implement these approaches, transforming classrooms into spaces where all students can heal and learn.

Theme 3: Supporting Teacher Resilience

As mainstream school settings embrace TIE, it becomes increasingly clear that the well-being of the students affected by trauma cannot be supported in isolation of the wellness of the teachers serving them. Teachers play a critical role in the frontline response to the emotional needs of students. This section explicates the effects of working with students- who have experienced trauma- on teachers and prescribes scientifically proven strategies for building resilience and fostering sustainable teaching practices.

The *emotional toll* on educators is not to be underestimated. Teachers with a sustained history of interaction with traumatized students may develop what is often referred to as secondary traumatic stress (STS) - the “emotional residue that results from the exposure to another’s traumatic life events” (Jennings et al., 2017, p. 98). Presenting symptoms often include exhaustion and feelings of being overtly challenged, as well as withdrawal and attentional difficulties; these can mimic primary trauma (Carello & Butler, 2015). In the long term, the lack of organizational support and a trauma-informed environment may lead to burnout.

Diverse classrooms add to the emotional labor. A teacher may feel pressured to not only differentiate their instruction but also comfort students who might be troubled by issues related to trauma, poverty, or displacement (Gay, 2018). Without effective tools and time to process these demands, professional identity and health are at risk. Santoro (2019) posits that it is in such instances of constraint by policy, the feeling of demoralization- not to be confused with burnout- can set in for teachers who want to act under their values of professionalism and student care.

These pressures make teacher *resilience*, or the sustaining of personal and professional *well-being* in the face of challenges, a central concern of TIE. Various strategies have been proposed and employed, with the mindfulness-based stress reduction (henceforth MBSR) emerging as one of the most evidence-backed. In a randomized controlled trial conducted by Jennings et al. (2017) teachers who participated in MBSR programs reported lower stress levels and improved

emotional regulation and classroom climates.

Along with mindfulness, peer support networks are at the heart of resilience-building. Collegial communities allow for sharing experiences, reflecting on challenges, and solving problems collaboratively. All these would work toward reducing professional isolation and foster a sense of shared purpose. For example, Mansfield et al. (2016) confirm that resilience frameworks integrated within teacher education programs encourage pre-service teachers to develop awareness about stressors and personalized coping mechanisms that can help them once in-service later on.

Administrative support also has a great influence. Schools that put a focus on the well-being of their staff by (i) offering them flexibility in making schedules, (ii) providing access to wellness resources, and (iii) display visible commitments in leadership towards mental health-prove significantly successful in the prevention of burnout (Aronson et al., 2016). In such environments, it is more likely to retain confident- and motivated teachers who can learn and respond to the needs of learners.

It is increasingly acknowledged that *student outcomes* are directly determined by *teacher well-being*. This relates to the fact that empowered teachers in both the emotional and professional senses are better equipped to address students' behaviors and adapt instruction to individual needs, as noted by Carello and Butler (2015). Such abilities eventually foster the development of classroom environments that are, per the discussion in Bellamy et al. (2022), orderly, responsive, and predictable, all of which are key aspects of being trauma-informed.

In addition, well-regulated teachers serve as important co-regulators for students. Neuroscientific evidence shows that students mirror the emotional tone of the surrounding adults; thus, the ability of a teacher to stay calm in the face of stress in the classroom will be reflected in the students' ability to manage dysregulation (Van der Kolk, 2014). In prioritizing the mental health of teachers, schools invest not only in the workforce but in the academic, social, and emotional well-being of the students.

Teachers cannot fulfill this role without support. Findings from the literature highlight the dual challenge faced by educators: to care for trauma-affected students while also maintaining their own psychological health. Resilience building programs- whether mindfulness, peer networks, or institutional support - offer practical, evidence-based tools to sustain teachers in roles. By doing this, schools build the foundation for truly trauma-informed learning environments.

Integration and Comparison of Findings

The last part of Chapter 4 ties the main findings from the earlier thematic analyzes, linking the themes by comparing them with wider research in the field to comprehend where new or under-explored insights have emerged. Together, these provide a more in-depth understanding of how teachers can effectively implement trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE).

The *three major themes* that were explored are (i) signs of trauma; (ii) trauma-informed practices (henceforth TIP) and (iii) teacher resilience support - an interdependence, albeit a clear one. Trauma recognition is foundational: if teachers cannot identify signs of trauma, even the best strategies may be misapplied or overlooked. Once recognized, responsive strategies help reduce the emotional disruptions that are experienced by trauma-affected children. Such implementation depends on the well-being and preparedness of teachers.

A strong *overlap* has emerged between the need for teacher training in the identification of trauma (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2019, as cited in Karris, 2022) and implementing effective practices (Carello & Butler, 2015). Though this establishes a connection, relatively few studies have longitudinally assessed the impact of teacher resilience building on student outcomes. This forms the basis for further, in-depth research into how teacher well-being can create sustained academic success for students. Another key point of *synthesis* is the common emphasis of all themes on school-wide support systems. From policy implementation to classroom-level interventions, the literature shows that isolated efforts, however effective they may be, cannot sustain long-term impact without a united commitment to TIE.

The findings reviewed share much common ground with the *wider body of literature* within TIE; this perspective holds the classroom as a place not fraught with risk but also one that can bring healing to students who have faced adversity (Van der Kolk, 2014; Jennings et al., 2017). Consistent across several studies, being trauma-informed is often reflected in a better classroom climate, and reduced numbers of disciplinary referrals and stronger relationships between students and teachers (Bellamy et al., 2022; NEA, 2023). The literature consistently stresses the inter-relationship between three core elements:

- ❖ teacher competency
- ❖ emotional support systems and
- ❖ administrative infrastructure

Gay (2018) and Howard and Navarro (2016) both underscore the role of culturally responsive pedagogy in strengthening TIP, suggesting that trauma and cultural marginalization frequently intersect. These findings reinforce the view that TIE must be sensitive not only to psychological injury, but to the broader socio-cultural contexts in which trauma occurs. Consistent with Kyriacou's (2011) research on teacher stress, several studies noted that emotional labor in trauma-informed classrooms cumulate. If there are no long-lasting institutional plans for recovery, teachers may become disengaged or demoralized over time (Santaro, 2019). This supports the growing advocacy to add teacher wellness frameworks into the setup of trauma-informed schooling.

While many of the findings reinforced existing knowledge, several *novel insights* also surfaced. Perhaps most compelling was the evidence that the aesthetics of classrooms - such as calming colors, natural lighting, and flexible seating - impacted the psychological well-being of the learners. Such environmental factors, usually not discussed at the policy level, significantly lowered anxiety and behavioral disruptions (Parker et al., 2020). This suggests that even design-based, low-cost interventions can have a meaningful effect when trauma-informed principles apply to the physical classroom space. Another imminent idea relates to the part of relationship building. Though the value of relationships is well known in education, studies in this review showed that trauma-informed relationships should be intentional and consistent. Teachers who daily talked with students (for example, saying hello by name, and listening without judging) built trust even in students who had long histories of relational instability (Carello & Butler, 2015; Wall, 2021).

One other area of concern was the reported gap between time of adopting policy and when it is implemented in classrooms. Though the trend is shifting towards institutional recognition of TIE, most studies have a similar observation in that teachers do not have the capacity, or even time, to practice the provisions, especially in poorly resourced schools (Wilson et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2023). This calls for investment that goes beyond policy language and seeks both realistic and sustainable implementation strategies.

This review highlights the complexity and promise of TIE by *synthesizing* the *findings* in all three themes. Identification of trauma, evidence-based practice, and resilience of the teacher, emphasizes the importance of evidence in the findings while suggesting new directions, such as the influence of classroom design and relational dimensions of TIP. Implementable strategies for future research, advocacy in policy, and teacher preparation is detailed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations

Trauma-informed education (henceforth TIE) is more than a philosophy; it is a mandate for the delivery of professional development to create school environments that ensure efforts are in place not only to recognize but also to address and mitigate the effects of trauma on students. These evidence-based recommendations are to support the practical application of trauma-informed strategies (henceforth TIS) based on the findings showed in this thesis.

Professional Development (PD): Mainstream teachers are usually the first-line contact with trauma-affected students. They need simple methods, which are flexible and can be applied within the constraint of limited resources. For example, simple daily practices that do not require any finance, such as

- ❖ starting lessons with mindfulness breathing exercises,
- ❖ individually greeting students at the door, or
- ❖ having movement breaks may create a predictable and calming environment as prompted by Jennings et al. (2017).

Predictable routines are to be encouraged as they build not only a sense of security but also decrease the cognitive load for those who would otherwise be constantly in a hypervigilant state because of trauma. Differentiated instruction remains a critical component of TIP. Teachers should be trained to recognize that trauma may manifest as academic disengagement or behavioral issues and respond with flexibility in instruction and assessment (Parker et al., 2020). Providing alternative ways for students to show understanding can also include:

- ❖ visual projects,
- ❖ verbal reflections, or
- ❖ working in pairs that may decrease performance anxiety and increase engagement.

A further illustration of TIS application in the classroom is presented in *Table 5*; a selection of simple methods, that mainstream teachers can implement, along with their intended benefits for trauma-affected students.

Table 5: Trauma-Informed Strategies for Mainstream Teachers: Practices and Benefits

Recommendation	Rationale / Purpose	How It Supports Trauma-Affected Students	Reference
Teacher Strategies			
Integrate mindfulness & regulation strategies (e.g., breathing exercises, calm corners).	Helps students learn to self-regulate emotions and reduce anxiety in real-time.	Reduces classroom disruptions, builds student resilience.	Jennings et al., 2017
Establish predictable routines & classroom consistency.	Provides psychological safety and a sense of control for trauma-affected students.	Decreases hypervigilance, promotes trust and focus.	Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016
Use differentiated instruction and flexible response techniques.	Honors students' emotional readiness and academic needs without punitive measures.	Promotes inclusion and equity while reducing triggers.	Cole et al., 2013

These classroom-based strategies while impactful, are most effective when reinforced by comprehensive training and institutional support. This highlights the need for targeted teacher training opportunities.

Professional development (henceforth PD), tailored to TIP, is essential for sustainable change in classrooms. Very often, modules related to trauma are not included in pre-service teacher training programs because children's emotional and behavioral needs result from a history of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) as stated by Alisic (2012). Ongoing PD should include

- ❖ an understanding of the neuroscience of trauma and children,
- ❖ classroom strategies and techniques for
- ❖ creating safe and inclusive learning environments for all children.

It would be advisable for schools to apply a tiered training model, beginning with introductory workshops, followed by deeper sessions focused on implementation, cultural sensitivity, and trauma case studies that are unique. Online courses, and peer-led workshops can provide flexible, low-cost alternatives to conventional PD formats, especially in school systems where funding is low (Thomas et al., 2019).

School Policies: The adoption of TIS must accompany systemic support. School policies, which by any measure appear to emphasize punitive discipline, high-stakes testing, or a rigid curriculum, may unintentionally re-traumatize vulnerable children. Instead, school policies should embrace

restorative practices that emphasize accountability, empathy, and relationship repair to students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Leadership teams must make it a priority to include trauma-informed approaches in their school improvement plans, comprising a behavior response framework and student support teams. Trauma should have responsive protocols, clear referral pathways, and interprofessional collaboration between teachers, school counselors, and administrators to ensure effective intervention. Schools might also consider the following to reinforce trauma-informed spaces:

Diagram 7: Expanded System-Level Support: School-Wide Policies

School Policies

1. Invest in trauma-informed professional development (PD) for all staff

- Creates whole school awareness, empathy, and responsibility.
- Confident teachers mean consistent care for the students.
- *Reference: Alisic (2012)*

2. Replace punitive discipline with restorative practices

- Avoids re-traumatization through harsh disciplinary actions.
- Encourages accountability, healing, and relationship repair.
- *Reference: Wolpow et al. 2009.*

3. Embed trauma-informed practice (TIP) in school mission and planning

- Aligns trauma-awareness with the school's broader cultural values and accountability systems.
- Encourages lasting change and fairness throughout the system.
- *Reference: SAMHSA (2014)*

While school-wide policies create the structural framework of TIP, broader collaboration beyond school walls is needed to fulfill, and respond to the complex needs of students affected by trauma. *Teacher Well-Being and Resilience Programs:* Supporting students who have undergone trauma may lead to secondary traumatic stress and emotional and emotional exhaustion in educators. Burnout not only reduces the quality of instruction but equally serves as a trigger for teacher attrition. Programs that promote teacher resilience, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), may include peer mentorship networks and scheduled reflective practice. Mansfield et al. (2016) confirm that this will help mitigate emotional fatigue, and schools should adopt such

practices. Policies on the provision of confidential counseling support for teachers, such as protected planning time and flexible scheduling during high-stress periods, should be explored.

Inclusive Classroom Environments: Safe spaces in trauma-informed classrooms are described as both emotionally- and physically safe. Regulation can be supported by physical spaces that offer

- ❖ calm corners,
- ❖ neutral lighting, and
- ❖ visual cues of the transition or self-regulation techniques (Bellamy et al., 2022).

Classrooms should avoid overstimulation and foster a sense of autonomy and relatedness. Emotionally, inclusivity means that students feel acknowledged and respected. Class discussions, creating rules together and ensuring consistent teacher-student check-ins build community and reinforce trust. Fostering relationships is not an additional task; it is the core of effective TIP.

Community Partnerships: Teachers cannot be expected to meet the needs of traumatized students all by themselves. Schools should actively partner with community agencies, including mental health, child welfare, and family programs. This partnership should support the scope outside the school and provide additional resources for the students and their families. For example, a school could partner with a local clinic to have on-site counseling or refer families to groups that receive support because of trauma. These partnerships should be culturally responsive and rooted in mutual trust to ensure accessibility and impact (Wall, 2021). To enhance support from the community, as outlined above, the groups shown in Diagram 8, can enhance service access and student-care.

Diagram 8: *Extending Support: Community and Caregiver Engagement*

Community Partnerships

1. In collaboration with local mental health organizations

- Broaden access to trauma-related resources, beyond what school staff alone can offer.
- Ensure that students receive timely, specialized, mental health support (Downey, 2007).

2. Engage caregivers through workshops and trauma education

- Help families support their children's emotional- and academic recovery.
- Create a united support system between home and the school (Wall, 2021).

3. Advocate for district-level funding and TIP legislation

- Ensure widespread access to training, staffing, and support for mental health.
- Assess systemic gaps, and strengthens long-term implementation of TIP (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017).

Sharing across systems, these partnerships extend the school's capacity to support the student holistically, and reinforce that TIE is most efficient when shared across systems.

Policy-Level: Beside the school level, the ministries of education and national policymakers have a crucial role to support the adoption of TIP. Trauma-informed modules should be included in teacher licensure programs at the policy level. An integrated approach toward curricular social-emotional learning (SEL) standards is also imperative. Further, specific funding allocated for mental health staff, intervention programs, and staff training can bridge the gap between aspiration and implementation (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). Long-term planning is required to assure continuity. Policies must support data collection and evaluation of TIP programs to measure effectiveness, and guide continuous improvement. Inclusive policy development that involves educator voices will further promote buy-in and contextual relevance.

Conclusion

This thesis addressed how teachers can best help students who experienced and are experiencing trauma by finding, assessing and implementing proven strategies to create inclusive, sensitive -to-trauma learning environments. Grounded in counseling psychology and educational research, the study details the need for more knowledge and readiness by general educators, especially in the primary and lower secondary school levels, to notice and react to trauma. With an emphasis on practical applications, the research contributes to growing scholarly discourse on how trauma-informed education (TIE) can be operationalized in mainstream contexts.

The literature review revealed three pivotal areas essential to this process: (1) recognizing trauma symptoms in students, (2) implementing classroom-based trauma-informed practices, and (3) fostering teacher resilience and well-being. These themes present a holistic framework for trauma-responsive teaching. Key findings suggest that the sooner hypervigilance, withdrawal, aggression, or inconsistent academic engagement of a child is identified as a response to trauma, the less likely the child will be mislabeled as defiant or apathetic (Brunzell et al., 2019; Van der Kolk, 2014). For example, making sure that predictable routines are established proved very effective in implementing TIE, where children were taught to embrace such measures that also ensured physically and emotionally safe environments. These steps instill a culture of safety and trust that improves academic and personal development.

The results underscore the importance of supporting teachers. There is elevated burnout and secondary traumatic stress within the population of educators serving trauma-affected children when they lack institutional support. Teachers' resilience can be improved by professional development, peer collaboration, and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs (Jennings et al., 2017; Carello & Butler, 2015). This allows teachers to build the capacity of consistent, compassionate, and structured learning environments when they feel supported and emotionally regulated.

This study contributes to the broader fields of counseling psychology and educational practice beyond the classroom by emphasizing the intersection of emotional wellness and pedagogy. It reasserts the teacher's role in under-resourced schools as a purveyor not just of content but also of frontline mental health support. By providing them with tools to recognize and respond to trauma, and by supporting them in their use thereof, schools mitigate the long-term negative effects of early adversity and promote equity in educational outcomes (Thomas et al., 2019).

However, some limitations have to be considered. First, this thesis derives from a study based on literature and not from any empirical research or original data collection; thus, it does not test the strategies' effectiveness but only synthesizes the evidence.

Second, the bulk of the literature comes from Western societies (mainly North America and Australia); and may not apply to a broader range of more heterogeneous educational systems. Very few studies take into consideration the unique implementation challenges of TIP in multilingual classrooms or schools with high numbers of immigrants - a trend in most parts of the world.

These limitations point to several avenues for future research. Longitudinal studies should be performed to track the outputs of trauma-informed training (TIT) and its effects on teacher retention and student performance over time, to substantiate TIP's long-term benefits. Further, cross-cultural comparative studies can manifest trauma in different socio-cultural settings, and how trauma-informed strategies should be appropriately adjusted in those contexts. Finally, future research may examine the institutional changes needed to facilitate the systemic use of TIE - which includes leadership training, policy change, and aligning the curriculum.

This study argues that TIE holds great potential for enhancing academic and emotional experiences of those who have experienced trauma. Through awareness, responsive practices, and support, teachers can establish classrooms where students develop resilience and belonging.

Final Reflections

Childhood trauma is not merely a personal crisis, but it is a learning and societal imperative that demands collective responsibility. As expounded in this thesis, trauma impacts not only the internal world of a child, rather it shapes their capacity to engage, learn, and thrive within the classroom. It thus becomes the responsibility of educational systems to respond not only with academic rigor, but also with consciousness, empathy and inclusivity. Schools, when trauma-informed, can become safe havens of recovery and do not reemphasize harm.

In this view, TIE is not an optional supplement to pedagogy - it is central to educational equity. The more we understand trauma's effect on attention, behavior, emotional regulation and memory, the clearer it becomes that mainstream teaching cannot overlook it. Creating trauma-sensitive classrooms enables students to reconnect with their learning, rebuild a sense of safety, and cultivate resilience that supports long-term well-being (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016).

The focal point of this change is the teachers-who stand at the intersection of emotional care and academic instruction, both as observers and first responders. With adequate training, and institutional support, teacher may identify the subtle signs of trauma and respond in ways that promote healing rather than harm. Teachers' relational capacity based on empathy, structure, and trust is one of the most powerful tools in supporting trauma-affected students (Jennings et al., 2017). For this reason, teachers have to be nurtured in surroundings that place emphasis on both their mental health and professional growth.

The call to action is clear: Policymakers, school leaders, and teacher educators must recognize that TIE is not a passing trend, but a necessary evolution of inclusive teaching. Dedicated time, structural change, ongoing PD and community engagement are the criteria for sustainable TIP. This thesis urges all stakeholders to take these findings as a starting point, a foundation upon which schools can be rebuilt into spaces of safety, dignity, and growth.

If the aim is to leave no child behind, then we must begin by understanding that some students are not behind; they are in pain. Let us move forward with urgency and care to make every classroom a space where healing is possible, learning is accessible, and every student - regardless of their past - can flourish.

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APPENDICES

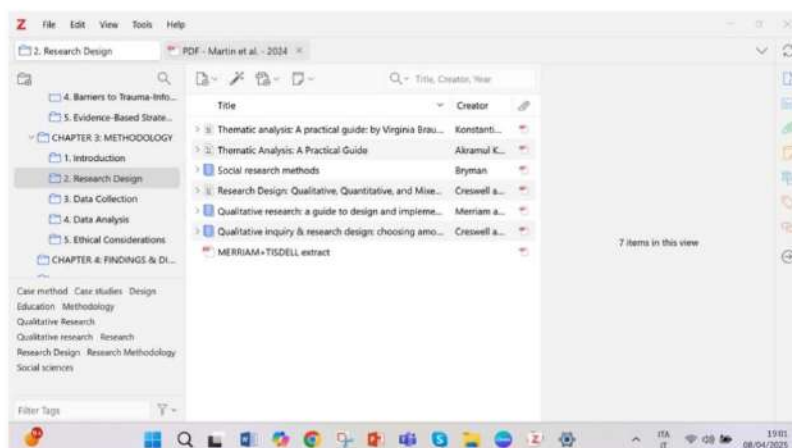
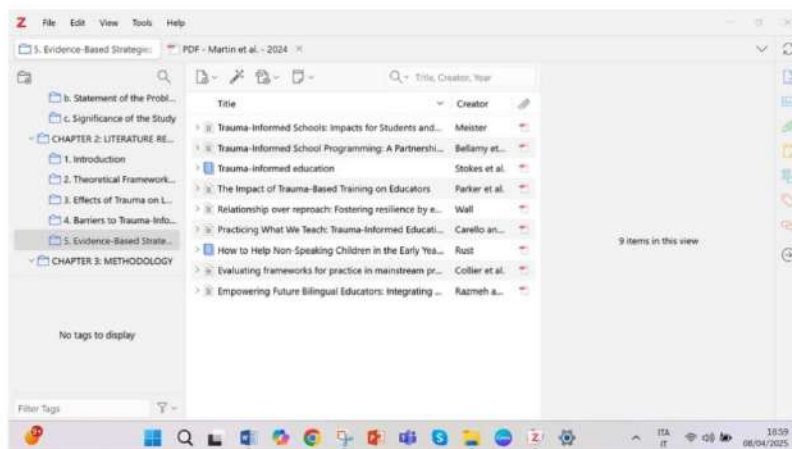
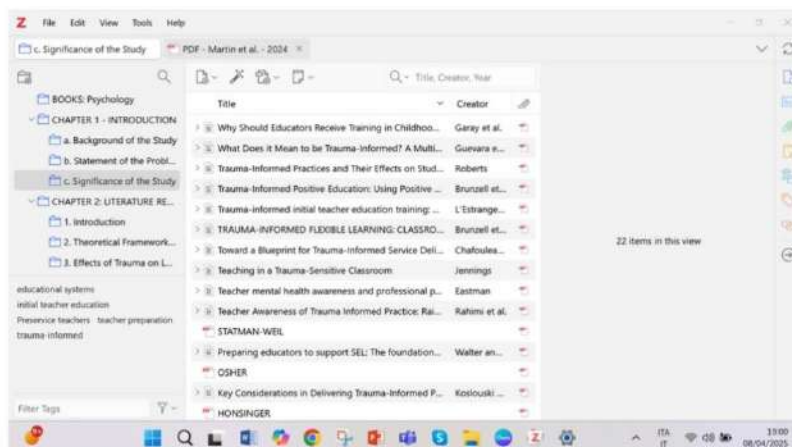
APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

Appendix A1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature Selection

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Study Focus	Studies addressing childhood trauma in educational settings, particularly mainstream classrooms.	Studies focusing solely on clinical or medical interventions without an educational component.
Population	Research involving primary and middle school teachers or students affected by trauma.	Studies focusing only on adult learners or higher education settings.
Methodology	Empirical studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and qualitative research that apply to classroom strategies.	Opinion pieces, anecdotal reports, or studies lacking empirical data.
Time Frame	Studies published within the last 20 years to ensure relevance.	Older studies unless they are foundational works still widely cited.
Language	Studies published in English to ensure accessibility and consistency.	Non-English studies, unless they provide unique insights unavailable in English-language sources.
Relevance to Education	Research linking trauma-informed teaching practices, teacher training, and classroom interventions.	Studies unrelated to education, such as those focused solely on neuroscience or therapy outside school contexts.

This table clarifies how studies were selected to maintain **relevance, methodological rigor, and applicability** to trauma-informed teaching in mainstream classrooms.

Appendix A2: Screenshot of Zotero Library Used for Source Management



Appendix A3: Research Process Table

Stage	Details
Databases Searched	Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, PsycINFO
Search Terms	"trauma-informed education" OR "trauma-informed practices" OR "TIP in schools") AND ("mainstream teachers" OR "general education" OR "classroom strategies"
Search Filters Applied	Peer-reviewed, published between 2009 - 2024, English-language studies
Total Initial Results	Forty-two (42) articles
Screening Process	❖ Title & Abstract Review - Removed studies unrelated to trauma-informed practices in education (e.g., trauma therapy or clinical interventions). ❖ Full-Text Review - Excluded studies lacking empirical data or relevance to classroom-based TIP strategies.
Thematic Analysis	Organized studies into key themes: • Effects of trauma on learning and behavior • Barriers to implementing TIP • Evidence-based strategies for mainstream teachers
Final Studies Included	Twenty-five (25) articles selected for in-depth review

Appendix A4: PRISMA Flow Diagram

This flowchart summarizes the literature screening and selection process employed in this thesis, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines.

Stage	Details
Identification	- Records identified through database searches: 116 articles from Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and PsycINFO using search terms such as “trauma-informed practice” OR “trauma-informed teaching” OR “TIP in schools” AND “mainstream teachers” OR “K-12 education.” - Additional records from manual searches: 21 studies identified through snowballing (reference lists and citation tracking). - Duplicates removed: 16 duplicates removed across databases.
Screening	- Records screened (titles & abstracts): 85 studies assessed for relevance to trauma-informed practices in mainstream classrooms. - Records excluded: 15 studies excluded for focusing on non-educational settings, student trauma without teacher perspective, or lacking relevance to TIP strategies.
Eligibility	- Full-text articles assessed for eligibility: 42 full-text articles reviewed for methodological rigor and relevance to research objectives. - Full-text articles excluded: 59 studies excluded due to (a) lack of empirical focus = 21 studies, (b) clinical or therapeutic trauma focus = 18 studies, or (c) limited discussion on teacher implementation of TIP = 20 studies.
Final Inclusion	Studies included in the review: 25 studies selected for full inclusion and thematic analysis, categorized into theory, barriers, and trauma-informed strategies for mainstream educators.

Appendix A5: Ethical Checklist for Transparency and Objectivity in Literature Selection

This checklist was used to ensure transparency, inclusion, and objectivity during the literature selection process for this review of trauma-informed practices for mainstream teachers.

Checklist Criteria	Guiding Question	Chapter Alignment	Notes
Relevance to Research Aims	Does the study address teacher strategies for trauma-affected students in schools?	Chapter 1 & Chapter 2	Must reflect educational, not clinical focus.
Credibility of Source	Is the source peer-reviewed or from a reputable academic publisher?	Chapter 3	Preference given to empirical or theoretical studies.
Ethical Integrity of the Study	Does the original study show ethical clearance or participant protection?	Chapter 5	Important especially for case studies or interviews.
Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion	Does the study acknowledge diverse cultural, socioeconomic, or migration backgrounds?	Chapter 2	Aligned with multicultural considerations in TIP.
Alignment with Inclusion Criteria	Does the study meet the defined inclusion criteria (e.g., timeframe, language)?	Chapter 3	Criteria applied uniformly.
Avoidance of Duplication	Is the study distinct from other sources already included?	Chapter 3	Ensures variety in perspectives.
Balanced Representation of Perspectives	Does the study offer a unique or contrasting view worth exploring?	Chapter 4 & Chapter 5	Includes conflicting or alternative voices where relevant.