Teachers' perceptions of Inclusive Education in the Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province

ABSTRACT

Little is known about the perceptions of teachers towards inclusive education in South Africa. The main goal of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in the Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province. The ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner was used as a theoretical lens for this study. The main objective of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in the Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province. Face to face individual interviews. This study was carried out in South Africa, whereby 15 teachers were interviewed individually. This study used a phenomenology design underpinned within interpretive paradigm to get insight on the benefits and challenges teachers encounter regarding the implementation of inclusive education. The data was inductively analysed using the thematic analytic methods that search for themes. The study use convenient and purposive sampling as initial plan to select the teachers that a researcher can easily access. Non-probability sampling was used as sampling technique where the sampling unable to give all individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. This study revealed that teachers had different perceptions of the implementation of inclusive education. Among the participants, 40% of teachers perceived inclusive education positively, 40% perceived it negatively, and 20% had mixed feelings. Teachers need to be empowered through continuous development platforms such as training and provided with guiding manuals. In addition, structures should be made accessible to accommodate all the learners and resources and supports should be made available for use in the inclusive schools.

Keywords: Benefits, Challenges, Inclusive education, Ecological systems theory; Bronfenbrenner's' theory

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is part of a broad human rights agenda, but teachers may have reservations about supporting the widespread inclusion of learners in the mainstream schools (Mdikana et al, 2007). The change occurred in classrooms as a result of new federal education laws which drew a wide range of reactions from general education (Bruster, 2014). It is, therefore, important to study teachers' perceptions, as it influences the way they work to produce the desired results (Bruster, 2014). Learners differ in terms of their behaviour, learning styles, abilities, exposures and interests (Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). Humans differ from one another owing to biological or conditional factors or unconscious forces (experiences) which make them learn uniquely (ibid). Every learner is an individual agent that can positively or negatively influence themselves and others (Donald, 2012). This may affect teachers' perceptions of disabilities positively or negatively (Lambe & Bones, 2006). Hofman and Kilimon (2014) state that teachers play a vital role in inclusive primary classrooms so that pupils can learn, regardless of their abilities. The same authors acknowledged that many teachers face challenges with the process of implementing inclusive education owing to insufficient skills to deal with the complexities of inclusive education in general.

The research conducted by Michael and Anthony (2008) on teachers' perception of inclusive education report that when the school teachers were exposed to the Inclusive Education Policy, they identified factors impeding the implementation. This was owing to the inadequate availability of facilities for implementation (Mdikana et al, 2007). Michael and Anthony (2008) also reported the issue of inadequate training and that teachers had different perceptions that also contributed to how they teach the subjects.

Teachers' understanding and perception of Inclusive Education Policy plays a major role in the entire implementation process as it lies mainly in the hands of teachers as the primary custodian of change in the education system (Cassady, 2011). The effective implementation of inclusion is affected by the perceptions and experiences of the teachers as the primary implementers of the curriculum (Cassady, 2011). Research by Drugas (2014) reported that teachers who see inclusive education as very stressful choose to exclude learners with disabilities from mainstream schools and support the exclusion of learners. The same author highlighted three types of pupil teachers in the

mainstream deliberately exclude. These include children with autism, mental deficits and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Hofman (2014) feels that providing support is a role for each teacher in the inclusive settings and that learners should no longer be sent to special schools, as had been the case previously. Consequently, the situation is nowadays reciprocal, as there is a huge shift from education traditional perspectives to inclusive ideology, whereby all learners are recognised and have an equal right to quality education (MoE, Sector Policy on Inclusive Education, 2013).

The pre-observation indicated that the majority of Namibian children are vulnerable (Mopes and colleagues (1994) report that the majority of teachers were not fully receptive to inclusion previously as they lacked differentiation skills and instructions to provide support for learners with disabilities. Most of the research concentrated more on the attitudes of those who are involved in the implementation process. However, knowing the attitudes of a person may guide the type or kind of perceptions, although they may not be used interchangeably. Therefore, Cassady (2011) argues that increased access of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools is associated with the efficacy and collaboration of teachers.

Some studies conducted outside Namibia revealed that mainstream school teachers have little knowledge of implementing inclusion policy compared to those that work in special schools (Sukbunpant et al, 2013). It was further noted that the teachers' lack of knowledge or exposure on how to deal with learners with disabilities made them feel insecure which led to frustration and stress, and decreased the level of support for learners with disabilities (Mngo & Mngo, 2018).As much as learners need support, teachers and parents also need support and guidance on how they can best assist and provide support to the children. The collective effort and support would help all the educational stakeholders to fully participate in the education for all children and improve the attitudes and perceptions of learning disabilities (ibid). South Africa has an Education for All policy that aims for the inclusion of all learners with diverse needs such as disabilities, previously disadvantaged children, OVC and children from minority groups (Charton, 2005). The South African vision for mainstream education is to cater for the needs of all learners with special education needs and provide support in an encompassing manner without affecting their human rights negatively (Department of

Basic Education: White Paper, 6], 2001). According to Charton (2005), South Africa's apartheid past has resulted in underdeveloped education and health systems and structures, particularly in the northern regions of the country. Individuals with disabilities in these areas are mostly affected by poverty, high unemployment rates and a general lack of opportunities. Owing to a lack of public understanding on identifying learners with disabilities, schools faced problems (Charton, 2005), and teachers face increased pressure as their roles diversify compared to previous generations (Avramidis, 2000).

Teachers in the inclusive classrooms should be sensitised to a variety of teaching methods in accordance with the multiplicity of learning styles and strategies to combat challenges in teaching and learning processes (Subban & Sharma, 2005). According to Cassady (2011), professional attitudes may act to facilitate or constrain the implementation process of various policies and programmes, which also depend on the cooperation and commitment of the developers and implementers. Berry (2011) stated that the majority of teachers had learning support programmes in their schools that enabled them to provide support to their learners. However, teachers were not fully committed to the concept of inclusion and were uncertain of the benefits of inclusion owing to insufficient training and lack of collaboration for maximised support services (Cassady, 2011; Edwards & Richmond, 2000).

The preparation of teachers for inclusive teaching has undergone a pedagogical shift in recent years which required training institutions to provide quality pre-service teachers' training that enables them to cater for diverse needs in schools (Zyoudi, 2011). This means teacher training became an international responsibility that each country should emphasise to prepare and produce teachers that are competent enough to face the challenges in inclusive schools (UNESCO, 2015). It is therefore important to restructure teachers' training programmes to include classroom contents, management, strategies to adapt curricula and materials, and the roles and responsibilities associated with inclusive teaching and learning (Zyoudi, 2011). In strengthening the importance of teacher training on inclusive education, EENET (2000:7) reports that one of the teachers said:

> *This programme will never collapse. Even if you take the funding away, we will continue to include disabled children. We have*

repented! We no longer discriminate against disabled children. Now we know how to teach disabled children; we are being teachers.

This shows a positive response to inclusion and might contribute positively to the successful implementation of inclusive education. Based on the EENET (2000) reports, the sensitisation of parents on inclusive education contributed to overcoming the challenge of its implementation. Parents learned about their roles and responsibilities, and became empowered to contribute to the education of their children, including those with disabilities (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). In general, the whole population needs to be educated to eradicate superstitions about disabilities and the fear of the unknown in implementing the inclusion policy (Ajuwon, 2008).

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RATIONALE

Learners with special education needs are less attended to in schools, and some of them are still kept at the special schools that have recently been renamed as resource centres. If teachers are provided with all the guidance on inclusive education; why not effectively implement them. We decided to focus on the benefits and challenges teachers encounter regarding the implementation of inclusive education in the Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province. In our experience as ex-teachers, We learnt and experienced a lot with regarding to teaching learners with different abilities in which the education system in South Africa that are inadequately catered due to the fact that teachers are not capacitated to teach children with different abilities. It is challenging to provide undivided support to all children especially those with severe learning difficulties. In actual facts, learners come to schools with different learning abilities and difficulties, behaviour, learning styles, abilities, exposures, and interests. These may interfere with the way they learn and perform. In addition, as teachers, we are also different the way we handle and perceive the learners.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the international paradigm shift with regard the adoption of various policies

for the realisation of the inclusive education, the implementation moves at a slow pace. This was cited in various studies carried in different countries; whereby the findings revealed the various limiting factors that interfering with the implementation process. The Education White Paper 6 can be seen as the significant step towards the implementation of inclusive education, but it does not go far enough. Scores of teachers remain ill-equipped to teach learners with special educational needs. Training and development of such teachers remain problematic as their training is going at a snail pace. It is hoped that this study would lead to a better understanding of the benefits and challenges teachers encounter regarding the implementation of inclusive education so as to improve the quality of care and support of these children.

RESEARCH GOAL, OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research goal

The main goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers towards inclusive education in the Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province.

Objectives of the study

Main research objective

To explore the perception of teachers towards inclusive education

Main research question

What are the perceptions of teachers towards inclusive education?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study explored teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education in the Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province. This study's outcomes may be used by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa. The researcher believes that, once the education officers get well informed about the benefits and challenges regarding the implementation of inclusive education, they would be in the better

position to support the learners with special educational needs that can inform inclusion policy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was informed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, by the theorist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) to explain how a child's environment affects how a child grows. This theory was used as a theoretical lens to this study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015) on how learners" environments affect their learning. The implementation of inclusive education would be successful if the ecological environments made appropriate to provide maximum support. Therefore, Dreyer (2017), and Swart and Pettipher (2005) emphasise that schools should be organised into inclusive setting and able to recognize and respond to diverse needs, learning styles and the pace of learning for the learners in schools.

Research paradigm (world view)

This phenomenological qualitative design underpinned within interpretive paradigm. Paradigm is originated from the world paradigms (Greek work) which means pattern (Durrheim, 1999). Paradigm refers to a particular belief on the nature of settings on what can be known and how it comes to be known (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015; Hammersley, 2012). It can further be defined as a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and the research (Mackenzie & Knipes, 2006). Paradigms are being influenced by the theoretical framework and establish relationships among constructs locally and internationally (Mertens, 2005). Interpretivism refers to the natural world on the past experiences (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015).

Nature of study

This is an educational research in the field of inclusive education settings. Research refers to a scientific and systematic approach to search for specific information for the specific research topic (Kothari, 2004). However, this study will use a systematic approach or format when presenting and reporting the findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Cohen, et al., (2018) in order to answer research questions, qualitative data collection method need to be employed to provide

comprehensive data.

Research design and methodology

Research design refers to research logic plan that shows how the research was conducted, by showing all major parts of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This means, it is a logical set of procedures or structures that give directions from underlying philosophical assumptions to research design (ibid). On the contrary, methodology is a systematic, theoretical analysis of the procedures applied to the field of study and does not set to provide solutions to the problem but offers the theoretical underpinning for understanding which procedures can be applied (Kothari, 2004). The study employs interpretive qualitative approach. Interviews were audio or tape-recorded and then transcribed. The transcribed data was analysed, coded organised into themes, and then presented narratively (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, Smith, 1983).

Interview method

The interview is a flexible tool for data collection, whereby a researcher use multi-sensory channels i.e. verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard (Cohen, et al., 2018; Kothari, 2004). During interviews, the researcher follows specific questions as guide that leads to research question answered and other constructive information (Maree, 2011; Trochim, 2008). In this study, the interview method was used to get an in-depth insight on the benefits and challenges towards implementation of inclusive education. Another reason for choosing interview method was that it allows the researcher to probe for more clarity, which increases the comprehensiveness (Cohen, et al., 2018). Although interview method allows a researcher to probe, it was also criticised on the ground that it can be intimidating to the participants and may affect the intended data (Cohen, et al.
2007; 2011; 2018).

Interview participants

The research targeted 15 teachers from four different schools in Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province where each teacher was interviewed individually for 45 minutes.

Profile of the participants

Teachers who participated in this study were purposely selected for easy accessibility (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Teachers who participated in this study had different teaching experiences that ranged from novice teachers to well experienced teachers. Teachers" profiles are summarised in table 1.

Table 1   Teachers' Profile

Teacher's Code	Teaching Experience (years)
T1	4 years (in teaching Life Skills)
T2	4 years (teaching).
T3	12 years (teaching)
T4	5 years (teaching)
T5	14 years (teaching)
T6	3 years (teaching)
T7	12 years (teaching)
T8	9 years (teaching)
T9	7 years (teaching)
T10	14 years (teaching)
T11	8 years (teaching)
T12	2 years (teaching)
T13	23 years (teaching)
T14	5 years (teaching)
T15	10 years (teaching)

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Interview structure

The semi-structured interview (with open-ended questions) was used as a flexible approach; whereby key questions were used to define the key area that the research aimed to explore (Kothari, 2004). Semi-structured interview allow participants to express themselves thoroughly by giving their views, opinion and share experiences (McMillan & Schumacher,

2010). Therefore, it requires a participant to answer a set of pre-determined questions and allow probing and sometimes require clarification from the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Maree, 2011).

Type of interview

Face-to-face interview were used in this study. The researcher directly engaged in discussion or conversation with teachers and asks questions as per preparation of the interview guide. The individual interview was used instead of focused group because it allowed the researcher to observe the behaviours and non-verbal features of the participants. However, interview is criticised for causing inconvenience owing to long distances a researcher could travel to the research site (Oltmann, 2016). The similar situation was experienced in this study that it was challenging to conduct the interview as the researchers has to travel to around Johannesburg East District.

Interview sessions

The interviews were conducted during the convenient time of the teachers to avoid interactions on their school schedules. Some of the participants had time to listen back to the conversation to rectify or clarify on the information provided. However, participants were satisfied with their responses. Only one interview session per teacher was conducted.

Interview site(s)

The study was conducted in schools situated in Johannesburg East District, Gauteng. Since Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province is a vast district, the study targeted five schools, but eventually, only four schools were accessed for the study. Schools consisted of different phases as summarised in table 2, for in-depth exploration.

Table 2 Schools' Profiles

Schools' Code	Level / Phase offered	No. of participants
School 1	Secondary level ● Junior Secondary Phase (Grade 8-10) ● Senior Secondary Phase (Grade 11-	3
School 2	Combined school ● Primary Phase (Grade: Pre-primary to	4
School 3	Primary School (Pre-primary to Senior Primary – Grade 7	4
School 4	Primary School (Pre-primary to Senior Primary – Grade 7	4

Sampling

The study use convenient and purposive sampling as initial plan to select the teachers that a researcher can easily access (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Non-probability sampling was used as sampling technique where the sampling unable to give all individuals in the population equal chances of being selected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Bertram and Christiansen (2015) state that a researcher needs to clear on how to select the site and participants with justification on the selection.

Participant selection

Schools and teachers were purposively (non-probability sampling) selected from schools in Johannesburg East District. According to Cohen, et al. (2018), the reason for selecting from different schools is to collect wide range of data that represent variety of ideas, views, opinion and experiences that teaching different grades or phases. As researchers, we used those criteria to find out if there is any connection on teachers' teaching experience and grade being taught to understand the benefits and challenges towards the implementation of inclusive education in schools.

Data analysis

Since this research project carried out qualitatively, inductive data analysis was used whereby generalisation will be induced from synthesizing gathered information McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). With inductive reasoning, the theory is developed from the ground up, or bottom up from the detailed particulars, rather than from the top down (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data to make sense of data (Cohen, et al., 2018). A researcher organises what was collected from the teachers" interviews and make meaning from data (Bodner & Orgill, 2007). In short, the data collected in this research project was phenomenologically analysed and presented narratively.

Validity and trustworthiness of the study

Validity refers to strategies that researchers use to ensure the accuracy and

trustworthiness of the result findings (Creswell, 2014). The trustworthiness of the research based on the following components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Devault, 2017). *Credibility refers* to internal validity which accurately presents the particular context in the study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015; Mayan, 2001). To ensure creditability of this study, we involved 5 teachers from different schools to increase the validity of the data collected, referred to triangulation (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015). *Transferability* refers to the case whereby data obtained is transferrable to the other contexts (ibid). For that reason, we used rich and thick description of participants by supplying clear and detailed information (Mayan, 2001) about teachers" perceptions towards implementation of inclusive education. *Dependability* refers to the degree of assuring that the findings indeed reflect what transpired and accurate (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Mayan, 2001). For the *confirmability* of data in this study, I used member checking method; whereby participants have listened to the audio recording and the transcript of data to rectify any error or clarifications that needed (Devault, 2017;

Maxwell, 1992).

Ethical considerations

According to Fouka and Mantzorou (2011), ethics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the dynamics of decision-making about what is right or wrong when carrying out the study research and to do with protecting the dignity of participants, institution and publications of the research information. Before we collected data, all values and ethical considerations underlying this study were considered and informed the work of the researcher (Coe, Waring, Hedges, & Arthur, 2017). The Ethical Clearance from Unisa Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC) was obtained. Afterwards, we obtained research permission letter from the District Director and the HOD from the Gauteng Department of Education and from concerned schools. In order to respect and protect the identity of participants, codes were used in order to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality. Teachers participated in this study on a voluntarily basis and their rights to withdraw without any penalty were clearly exercised in this this study. For instance, some participants denied to be recorded during interviews. We respected their decision, and proactively

took notes of their interviews responses and transcribed them immediately to remember easily what was said.

Limitation of the study

As it has already been indicated this study was conducted in one education district, namely, Johannesburg East in the Gauteng Province. Therefore, the data cannot be generalised to represent the views of the whole of South African teachers and Gauteng to be specific teachers.

Delimitation of the study

Initially, the researchers had planned to collect data from five schools in the region, and interview 15 teachers in total (three teachers per school). However, the researcher managed to collect data from four schools that positively responded and interviewed 15 teachers as planned. The main challenge that contributed to this was due the vastness of the district and the distance the researchers had to travel from school-to-school. During the structured interviews, two participants were not willing to be recorded. To overcome such challenge, as researchers we took notes of their responses during the interviews. Despite challenges experienced, the research journey was a productive learning experience and positively contributed to my own personal and professional growth. The whole process went so well, and could obtain the data that could answer the research questions.

Reflection on data collection process

The researchers initially planned to collect data from five schools in the region, and interview
15 teachers in total (three teachers per school). As a result, the researcher managed to collect data from four schools that positively responded and interviewed 15 teachers as planned. The main challenge that contributed to this was the vastness of the district and the distance between schools. Despite challenges experienced, the research journey was a productive learning experience and positively contributed to our own personal and professional growth. The whole

process went so well, and could obtain the data intended to that could answer the research question.

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of my study was aimed at exploring the perceptions of teachers in the the implementation of inclusive education in the Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province. In the previous section, I presented the overview of research design and methodology used to collect data. Thereby, the data were collected from 15 teachers from four different schools in the Johannesburg East District. The participants and schools were given codes to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality, as discussed as it has already been discussed. For instance, teachers were coded as Teacher 1 (T1), Teacher 2 (T2), and so on. Schools were coded as School 1, School 2; and so on. The following themes resulted from data analysis.

This study revealed that teachers had different perceptions of the implementation of inclusive education. Among the participants, 40% of teachers perceived inclusive education positively, 40% perceived it negatively, and 20% had mixed feelings about it. The issue concerning mixed feelings about inclusive education was also reported in a study by Newton (2014) that showed teachers had mixed perceptions of the implementation of inclusive education.

Some of the teachers' perceived inclusive education as the best approach to resolve issues related to inequalities and non-discrimination in the education system and indicated that it would be ideal if all schools are made ready for the implementation. Some of them applauded the Ministry of Education for the initiative to introduce inclusive education. Teacher 5: "Inclusive education is a good step towards educating the whole Namibia, but its implementation should be looked at and should be addressed to a specific group of teachers." Teacher 11: "It is a good thing, holistically every child need to be included. They need to work with them and help them to master the competencies they are struggling with."

Teacher 2 felt strongly that learners with physical disabilities had more potential for learning than those without visible disabilities. Teacher 2 stated that:

> *Why should we discriminate those ones from schools? Because, sometimes when we build special schools or schools only for..! Then is like, I mean, we label people that this place is only for who and who and who, so for me also for us, the global community should understand and accept. At the end, those same people are from our society and going back to our society.*

These findings differ from the argument by Deluca and colleagues (2014), who state that it is appropriate to separate learners and place them in specific schools as per their needs. Hofman and Kilimo (2014) also opposed the idea and emphasised that inclusive schools welcome every learner with various disabilities, either mild or severe, hidden or obvious. This correlates with the idea in CSIE (2008) that argues that it is unlawful for any education provider to discriminate between learners based on their background or abilities.

However, some of the teachers in this study expressed mixed feelings about inclusive education. Although they felt that inclusive education is a good approach targeted at removing bias in the education system, they also noted challenges and the impracticality of it. This is in line with Liggins (2016), who said that inclusive education is worthwhile but challenging. Teachers with mixed feelings about inclusive education were very concerned about the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. They were concerned that it would be challenging for teachers and learners to adapt to the situation.

> *Inclusive education can be implemented to some extend but they are really some cases that learners need to be in special schools... I have a son that has disability as well and I would never want him personally in the mainstream. It depends on the type disability and availability of resources at the school.* (T1)

> *I am convinced that we still need to have an institution where inclusiveness can be practised. To transform schools into inclusive schools, that's imagination, is a dream we will never able to …. You know! You run a risk of exposing those kids even more on humiliating. Imagine a child is on a wheelchair the school is not conducive, the structures are not ready* (T3).

*We still have to go until 2030. I would rather, go for establishment
of more special education centres where we have the teachers,
have the environment and we have curriculum, where these kids
can learn more, than special schools to mainstream* (T3).

It can be deduced from the excerpts that teachers acknowledged that learners have
diverse disabilities, and they felt that those with severe disabilities need to be kept in
special schools. Severe disabilities or difficulties are related to mental deficiency,
deafness and blindness cannot be handled in mainstream schools unless there are
specialised equipment and specialised teachers. However, some teachers believed
that some physical disabilities, such as partial blindness or learners in wheelchairs with
some learning difficulties, might fit into mainstreams classrooms. As seen in the
excerpts, teachers said that, although they support inclusive education, existing
infrastructure is inaccessible and not disabled-friendly, especially to learners in
wheelchairs. Teachers strongly believed that it would be ideal for transforming only
some schools into fully inclusive ones and others into special schools to support
learners as per their needs. This in line with the findings of the study by Mngo and
Mngo (2018) who report that, even though teachers were very supportive of the
inclusion policy, they preferred to separate schools or classrooms for learners with
disabilities or special educational needs. Landsberg (2011) supported the idea of
accommodating pupils with severe learning disabilities in resource centres.

However, this was challenged by Donohue and Bornman (2014), who argued that it is
inhuman to isolate learners and place them as per their disabilities. The participants in
this study said that learners with severe disabilities who can no longer benefit in the
mainstream schools were referred to Resource Schools for intensive support and could
return to the mainstream schools later, if possible (MoE, Life Skills Syllabus, 2016).

It was evident that most of the teachers in this study with more teaching experience
perceived the inclusion policy more positively compared to the less experienced ones.
Similar findings were made in the 2010 study by Avramids and colleagues, which
showed that most of the experienced teachers support and perceive the inclusion
policy positively compared to less experienced teachers. In contrast, Subban and
Sharma (2005) found that older teachers had a less positive attitude than young
teachers and showed discomfort with inclusive education expectations. The successful

implementation of inclusive education is primarily through accepting, understanding and attending to learners' differences and diversity in the classrooms (McManis, 2017). It remains challenging whether or not the implementation of inclusive education would have the expected outcome. This is because of the differences in the teachers' perceptions (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Therefore, it was further emphasised that teachers' perceptions of inclusion might become more positive as a result of adequate training which, in turn, may result in improved learning support services, and vice versa (ibid).

Another thing that emerged which is worth discussion was that learners with disabilities faced challenges regarding humiliation by teachers and their peers. This would affect how particular learners cope and perform in schools. It was also noted in interviews that some learners with disabilities were not welcomed by other pupils or teachers in schools. This was due to insufficient knowledge because they were not properly orientated before the introduction and implementation of inclusive education.

One of the issues that emerged from teachers in this study was how a disabled learner would feel among others without disabilities in the class. "It is like a taboo and smacked as too unique; which could be a challenging life experience" (T7). With such perceptions, not all teachers or learners would be strong enough to deal with such differences during teaching and learning. To maximise the support of implementation, support from all education stakeholders to address the learners' needs in schools is required (UNESCO, 2015).

It was evident that some teachers perceived strongly that inclusive education as impossible. Teacher 7:

> *To be honest, I am not for inclusive education, because it is very difficult, even for the child. If a child is not intrinsically motivated, it is very difficult for the child with disabilities to cope in the mainstream education. I really don't see any benefit unless a child… as I really said is motivated to study. There are some kids that set off by disabilities or may be the cultural backgrounds or even the gap in the region between the rich and poor. So it is very difficulties to accommodate the child with disabilities in the normal mainstream schools. You understand? That child is automatically discouraged because of his… may be physical appearance or*

these or aaaa what is it, the richer and poorer gap or how to put it? Because of that! Now you want to take everyone or bring everyone together and the same results are expected from everybody; despite of those difficulties the other child is facing. (T7)

It can be deduced from this excerpt that some teachers do not support the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. This was also reported in the study by Sesaye (2018) carried out in Sierra Leone that teachers showed negative perceptions of inclusive education. Such perceptions are a challenge as they may affect the implementation process (Hofman & Kilimo, 2014; Subban & Sharma, 2005). The findings of the recent studies revealed that teachers had different perceptions of learning and disabilities, and some of those that support it also had reservations. Some teachers perceived inclusive education negatively and felt it would never work in schools. Teachers felt it was difficult to teach learners with disabilities with other learners since they are at different learning pace. It was revealed there was cultural complexity with such inclusion and learners with disabilities face humiliation from other learners. This correlates with the findings by Ali and colleagues (2006), which reveal that teachers might form perceptions that affect their views based on a number of factors. It can, therefore, be deduced that the implementation of inclusive education faces challenges owing to different views and perceptions of the primary implementers, the teachers, which may affect the fulfilment of their obligations (Cassady, 2011).

Even though teachers displayed different views on inclusive education, there were some benefits that emerged that need to be discussed. In the next section, the discussion is on the benefits of inclusive education.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Since this study was aimed at exploring teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in the Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province, this study could be extended with an intervention that would positively contribute to the changed perceptions of teachers towards the inclusion of learners with learning disabilities in mainstreams schools. The similar study can be done to explore the teachers' perceptions towards the implementation of the inclusive education in schools. A comparative

study would also be required to explore the effectiveness of incorporation of the inclusive education framework into the reformed/ revised curriculum.

**CONCLUS
ION**

This study was aimed at exploring teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education in the Johannesburg East District, Gauteng Province. This study was informed by the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979), which emphasised on the uniqueness of the child as influenced by the ecological environments such as home, school and society. Like any other countries that part of United Nations, had signed an „Agreement" to transform into inclusive education. As a result, South Africa launched the Education White Paper 6. In order to answer the research questions, 15 teachers from different schools were interviewed individually. The findings revealed that teachers had different views and knowledge on about inclusive education. Despite the differences in understanding of the concept, majority of teachers commonly pronounced inclusive education as unbiased learning approach. Therefore, learners" diverse needs are accommodated and acknowledged irrespective of their learning abilities or disabilities or backgrounds. Some teachers demonstrated inadequate understanding about inclusive education, which revealed inadequate exposure to such policy. Teachers perceived inclusive education implementation differently. Those with positive perceptions support inclusive education and expected to result in improved education. However, those with negative perceptions felt that inclusive education would never work and unbeneficial to learners with disabilities. Some teachers with mixed feelings thought that in the cases that challenges are resolved, inclusive education may work in the benefit of all learners. Therefore, the findings revealed some benefits and challenges experienced towards the implementation of inclusive education.

Therefore, teachers need to be empowered through continuous development platforms such as training and provided with guiding manuals. In addition, structures should be made accessible to accommodate all the learners and resources and supports should be made available for use in the inclusive schools. Therefore, the participants emphasised on frequent training to be equipped with all the relevant and updated strategies to provide appropriate and adequate support to all learners. The findings were summarised and the recommendations were provided for improving the education system, and also for further researching.

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