CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In this chapter limitations and shortcomings of the study are discussed. The researcher also looks at the recommendations for further studies to be done on the topic. A conclusion finalises the study.

5.1 Limitations and Shortcomings of the Study

The study looked at the educators’ perceptions and attitudes towards immigrant learners in a primary school. The sample was based on educators’ views from only one site. The findings are therefore not generalisable to all schools, which makes purposive sampling a limitation in the study. It is probable that perceptions and attitudes of high school educators could be different to those of primary school educators.

The fact that the respondents knew the researcher could also be a limitation in the sense that they might have agreed to participate in order not to disappoint the researcher. This could also form a limitation because respondents might not have been completely honest or free in the interviews because of fear that the principal might know what they had said. Some educators might have felt embarrassed to admit that they have issues around immigrant learners because they feared being judged in front of somebody they know.
Another limitation could be the fact that educators might have discussed the questionnaires while completing them, as a due date had not been set. Some educators were seen completing questionnaires whilst sitting together, even though they were asked not to discuss questionnaires or their answers, they did talk about some statements in the questionnaire. From this it could be deduced that not all responses were individually based.

The fact that interviews took place mostly at the school could be seen as a limitation, in the sense that educators felt they could give some time to the researcher for the interview and they were sometimes distracted by something else along the way eg. a learner would come in and ask to talk to the educator and the educator had to attend to the learner and the interview had to be postponed. In another instance another educator walked into the class and just sat down and wanted to join ‘the conversation’. The venue, the classroom and/or the boardroom, for the interviews could also have made educators feel too relaxed. This informal setting was used in order for educators to be comfortable in a familiar environment. This familiar environment could have turned out to be uncomfortable for educators who could have feared other educators overhearing or feared interruptions.

Another limitation of the study came from the use of a Likert scale as a data-gathering instrument. The Likert scale is a five-point scale and thus allows for the middle band selection. This was evident in this study where respondents were more inclined to select the mean, ‘sometimes’.
5.2  Recommendations

Based on the limitations of this study, the researcher saw a need for the following recommendations for further studies around this or similar topics. Recommendations for stakeholders in education will also be explored briefly.

5.2.1 Size of Sample and Levels of Schooling

The study was meant to elicit educators’ perceptions and attitudes in a single educational setting. It would thus be recommended that in future studies more schools be considered for such a study and that the educator sample be expanded. This could perhaps be organised by district.

5.2.2 Anonymity of Researcher

It would also be recommended that the researcher be somebody who is not known to the participants in order for them to take the study more seriously, reduce bias and allow educators the opportunity of expressing their views more freely. If the participants know the researcher, maybe he/she can assign somebody else to conduct the interviews in order to maintain anonymity of the respondents. Interviews could also be held at a neutral place where both parties do not feel overpowered by the other, and in order to avoid distractions.
5.2.3 Access to Policy

For this particular school, it would be recommended that whenever policies from the Department of Education arrive they are distributed to educators and perhaps discussed by the school staff in order to circumvent misunderstandings or misconceptions that might arise. There could also be a central place where policies are kept so that they could be accessible to educators. It is recommended that the school develop their own immigrant learners’ policy for the school that would help them with dealing with diversity stemming from the inclusion of immigrant learners into a school environment.

5.2.4 Support to Educators

Educators in this public school felt that they are not visibly supported and that more training to equip them to be able to deal with all the issues at school level was needed. It is recommended that educators need to be trained and well prepared for the implementation of inclusion. The educators felt that they understood inclusion theoretically, but practically remained baffled.

5.2.5 Communication

Communication should be more open across all stakeholders of education in order to support educators, in the seven roles of the educator. This could be done in a sense that the representatives from the Department of Education need more visibility, and policies created in the Department of Education need to be more accessible to educators.
5.3 Conclusion

This study was conducted in order to explore educators’ perceptions and their attitudes towards immigrant learners in their classrooms. The conclusion of this study will be presented in relation to the research questions formulated in paragraph 1.3:

The first fold of the research question was to identify the attitudes and perceptions of educators towards immigrant learners. In order for the researcher to be able to explore and answer this question, one needs to first examine the concept of an attitude. According to The New Collins Compact Dictionary of The English Language (1984: 32), attitudes are the mental view, or opinion. They could also be defined as disposition and behaviour.

Based on the research findings of this study it can be concluded that educators are not fully aware of the effects of their attitudes on immigrant children in their classrooms and that they felt the strain of having to deal with different learning barriers in their classrooms without being trained for them.

During the interviews it transpired that some educators, specifically those from the foundation phase, mentioned that they felt sorry for their learners. This might be a sign that they are somehow aware that immigrant learners are victims of circumstances and that they, as educators, can either make or break their learners at that stage. The majority of the respondents (47%), who were educators from the intermediate phase, were more frustrated about their own plight than that of the learners. They felt that at that schooling
phase learners are expected to come into their classroom with some knowledge base. These educators further stated that they expected learners to have basic skills in language and numeracy. They also expressed their concern around the issue of not having time to re-teach the basics.

In conclusion, the findings of the study reflected that most respondents were either non-committal or indecisive in their responses. From that an inference can be made that most educators are not aware of their contribution in promoting or discouraging xenophobia within the learning environment.

The fact that educators might be or might not be aware of the effects of their attitudes in the classrooms leads to the second fold of the research question, which was to reflect on the attitudes and perceptions of educators with regards to the fact that attitudes and perceptions could be seen as a barrier to learning in South African schools for immigrant learners.

In primary schools, learners do mostly what they see their educators do. This modelling of behaviour was an observation the researcher made during the time of the study and while still in practice. It suggests that educators are responsible for cultivating xenophobia in their classrooms. Negative comments towards immigrant learners, such as “…hey you, you are taking someone else’s space here. I will deport you!” made in front of the whole class suggests that unintentionally educators’ attitudes reflected in their behaviour might cultivate xenophobia in their classrooms.
The research findings confirm that in most cases immigrant children from different backgrounds are still excluded. These children are seen as troublemakers in the classroom and their peers call them derogatory names. Educators see these children more as a burden to deal with rather than seeing them as any other learner. In this particular study the different backgrounds spoken of refer to the different countries of origin. Children from different countries battle to fit into their classrooms mainly because of language issues, mainly French and Portuguese. However, once the language obstacle has been removed they are seen as arrogant or as having behaviour problems, and because of the policy to downgrade them they become not only older than their class cohort but also physically bigger.

This study suggests that immigrant learners may be affected by xenophobia in the learning environment of the school. It also suggests, that educators through their behaviour and attitudes are possibly in part responsible for cultivating this social phenomenon. Lastly, it is suggested that there is a strong need for detailed and specific educator training around immigrant learners that would assist both educators and immigrant learners with the primary school context.