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An exploration into educators' perceptions and attitudes towards immigrant learners

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study was an exploratory case study (De Vos et al, 2005: 272). A case study as described by De Vos et al is "an exploration or in-depth analysis of …a single case over a period of time." Stake (1995) in De Vos et al (2005: 272) argues that the sole criterion for a case study should be the 'opportunity to learn'. Thus this case into xenophobia in a school in Gauteng was mainly qualitative in nature and used semi-structured interview schedules to eliciting deep, rich data that could be used to explore the research questions. Both closed and open-ended questions supported the instrument. Supportive quantitative data into participants' demographics further enriched the study.

3.1 Exploratory Study

According to Mark (1996: 219) in De Vos et al (2005: 272) this study can be classified as an instrumental case study; as it was used to facilitate the researcher's gaining knowledge about a social issue. Whereas Neuman (2000), as cited in Schimper (2004: 12) cites exploratory research as research into an area that has not yet been studied and in which: "a researcher wants to develop some initial ideas and then be able to formulate more focussed research questions where necessary". In this particular study the researcher felt the area around educators and immigrant learners would not only generate ideas for further research to be conducted on xenophobia but also highlight the effects and impact of it on children.

3.2 Sample

Purposeful sampling was used in the study. “In purposive sampling a particular case is chosen because it illustrates some feature or process that is of interest for a particular study – though this does not simply imply any case we happen to choose” De Vos et al (2005: 328).

This research was done at a suburban, primary school in Gauteng. The school was purposively selected because the researcher knew that there were many (im)migrants living in its community.. The school was also the only co-educational public primary school in the area. The target sample was set for 15 educators, although only 13 participated. 9 of the participants were females, while 4 were males. 7 educators classified themselves as Black, 1 as Indian, 2 as Whites and 3 as Coloureds.

Educators were invited to participate on a voluntary basis. This was done by informing them that there were neither benefits nor penalties resulting from the choice to participate or not. This also makes this sample a ‘volunteer sample’. Silverman (2000) mentions that this kind of sampling works well when the respondents know each other. The respondents, participating in this study, all knew each other because they work together. They did not need to encourage each other to participate though, as they were willing. They were not coerced into participating and found it easy to either agree to participate or to decline because they also knew the researcher.

3.3 Procedure

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the Gauteng Department of Education and from the principal of the school. Subsequently, a letter was sent to the school outlining the aims and the nature of the study (Appendix 1) after which the questionnaires (Appendix 2) were delivered to the school. On return of the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with the participating staff members were conducted (Appendix 3).

The questionnaires, used to gather information from the educators, were 5-point questionnaires. No identifying details were required on the questionnaires in order to ensure confidentiality. After analysis and interpretation, the questionnaires were destroyed for ethical reasons.

It took almost one month to collect all the questionnaires back from the respondents. Some were returned within a week and others took longer. Only after all participants had returned their questionnaires could the interviews be scheduled. Interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis.

With the consent of the participants the interviews were recorded on tape. During the interviews the researcher also observed the participants. The taped recordings were transcribed and interpreted and then destroyed for ethical reasons.

Further data was gathered from written sources, such as the Department of Education's policies on Inclusion, the school's policy and/or memoranda on inclusion in the school.

3.4 Instruments Used

A questionnaire was used as a measuring instrument to assess educators' attitudes and their perceptions towards immigrant learners and inclusion. A copy of the questionnaire is attached in Appendix 2.

3.4.1 Structure of the Instruments

The questionnaire comprised of two sections. The first section consisted of twelve questions, some of which had sub-questions and concentrated on the demographic information of the respondents, covering variables such as age, gender, qualifications, position at school, phase they teach in and number of years they had been educators. The section looked further into their needs as educators, with respect to inclusive education.

The second section looked at educators' teaching and learning needs and comprised of twenty-five statements on educators' attitudes and perceptions towards their work, which includes educating immigrant learners. A Likert scale was used to measure the range to which an educator agreed or disagreed with the statement. The scale ranged from 1 to 5 (1– Never; 2 – Hardly Ever; 3 – Sometimes; 4 – Often; and 5 – Always).

Statements 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19, and 24 were designed to assess perceptions of educators, whereas statements 2, 3, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 25 were designed to assess educators' attitudes.

3.4.2 Data Analysis

Data collected from questionnaires was analysed statistically. Statements were divided into negative or positive statements. They were further sub-divided into statements related to perceptions and statements related to attitude. The frequency and percentages of educators' responses from the second section of the questionnaire were calculated for further analysis.

The responses to semi-structured interviews were grouped according to the common themes that emerged. This was done with the view to establish a discourse and to determine the manner in which it was said i.e. looking at specific words, which depicted attitudes and feelings of educators. The semi-structured interview schedule is attached as Appendix 3.

The research findings are discussed in length in the following chapter. The discussion is based on the detailed interpretation and analysis of the responses.