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**The perception of school teachers on children with learning difficulties in
Soweto**

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A research report submitted to the Discipline of Psychology in the School of Human and Community Development in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Education (Educational Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

DECLARATION

I, Chantel Kgothatso Bayane, hereby declare that this research report is my own work. All the work that was utilized and cited in this report by other authors has been referenced. This report is being submitted for a Degree in Masters in Education (Educational Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted previously for any other degree or any other training institution

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of teachers on learners with learning difficulties in one of the most impoverished communities in Soweto, South Africa. In addition to other socio-economic factors that cause educational performance to decline, learning problems and learning difficulties are an additional hindrance in the direction of obtaining educational qualifications. The study was guided by the constructivist theoretical framework, carried out using qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data and analysis was carried out using the thematic analysis. Three public high schools in the Soweto Township with a mix of different financial status and different home languages were included in the study. A total of fifteen teachers comprising five teachers per school participated in the study. The findings revealed that teachers with no formal preparation in working with learners with learning disabilities alleged that they were not capable enough to deal with the learners. Some teachers in this study were able to pinpoint learners who had learning difficulties; however, others were not able to. They also felt that the lack of rigid testing for distinguishing the learners with learning difficulties, was subjective and lead to their inability to identify the learners. In addition, lack of training for teachers in this area exacerbated the inability to identify and deal with learners with disabilities. The recommendations suggested a systematic instruction where both teachers and learners are supported to provide the correct level of intervention for adequate schooling. Future research should focus on investigating teaching practices pertaining to learners with learning difficulties.

Keywords: perceptions, children with learning difficulties, learning difficulties; school teachers, Soweto

ACRONYMS

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
B.Ed	Bachelor of Education
DOBE	Department of Basic Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
DSM-V	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition
FDG	Focus Discussion Group
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LD	Learning Difficulties
PGCE	Post Certificate in Education
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support
SLD	Specific Learning Difficulty
S.A	South Africa
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission

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1. CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This chapter provides the contextual background and highlights the rationale of the study presented in this research report. The researcher thereafter states the aims and purpose of this study.

1.1. Introduction

According to the South African Human Rights Commission (2012) education is not prejudiced and is to be made available to all by overcoming fiscal and corporeal challenges. In South Africa basic education is mandatory by the government and is a right. Under this charter, the pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels should have properly trained teachers and the required infrastructure so that teaching and learning can be conducted in a healthy environment. Furthermore, early childhood education, learning conducive schools, properly trained teachers, and the number of teachers as well as support material is mandatory. Although poverty and lack of infrastructure may act as primary barriers in attaining basic education, the learning ability of children also plays a role in educational attainment (SAHRC, 2012).

Nearly 4 million children and teenagers are diagnosed with a learning difficulty and most of them have more than one type of this difficulty. Individuals with learning difficulties find certain parts of learning to be challenging for example, the development of basic abilities such as reading, and writing as a result of brain's inability to process information. These individuals may not learn in the identical way or at the equivalent rate as their peers. However, this does not mean that they are 'less' intelligent, they just require a special educational provision (Mohamed & Laher, 2012).

A learning difficulty cannot be cured and as result it impacts on the individuals' performance throughout their lives. Since learning difficulties affect an individual's ability to develop basic skills, they can usually be recognized and diagnosed when an individual is in a school setting (Nel et al., 2014). The Department of Education (2001) states that more countries are beginning to accommodate learners with learning difficulties and those with miscellaneous obstructions to learning by giving them admission to conventional schools and syllabi. Given that there are miscellaneous learners who come from unlike communities it is important to find out what works for specific learners in specific schools and classroom settings. Schools are trying to

combine their capital and human resources to improve integration and cater for diverse learners (Nel et al., 2014).

In South Africa (SA), the Department of Education (DoE) issued White Paper Six: Special Education- Building an Inclusive Education and Training System in 2001 a framework policy which emphasises on inclusive education of all learners (including children with disabilities). It clearly indicates that everyone, everywhere needs to always have access to inclusive practices. This policy is made in accordance with international trends to transform the education system and retort to requirements of diverse learners (DoE, 2001).

However, this policy is not clear and is poorly implemented in SA as stated by Donohue & Bornman (2014) cited in Nel et al. (2014), which hinders the inclusive education implementation process. The “imagined” execution of inclusive education for learners with special educational requests does not match reality. It is not only about offering these learners access to conventional schools, what transpires in the classroom setting is also critical. Will these learners be able to contribute evocatively to different learning undertakings? Will they be accepted by their peers and teachers? These are some of the concerns that desired to be addressed in the implementation of exclusive education practices (Nel, et al., 2014).

The incorporation of learners with special prerequisites is not always a smooth process, for example, (Engelbrecht, 2016) found that in SA, teachers find implementation of inclusion to be very frustrating and stressful. Challenges such as lack of support structure contribute to these frustrations (Nel at el., 2014).

In addition, some of the challenges that encumber the success of inclusive education are our inimitable history of Apartheid, assortment (languages and ethnic groups) and paucity. Everyone has their own idea of how inclusive education should look like and what learners with learning difficulties need. These are some of the complexities faced by our country (Nel et al., 2014).

The search of finding approaches that can be used to remove barriers in learning and the application of inclusive education in SA is a never-ending development. Teachers are expected to preserve high superiority education practices while implementing thereof. Approximately 65 percent of mainstream teachers do not have training that includes how to respond to diverse

learning needs within mainstream classes; they were either trained for “specialized needs” in different educational settings or for general conventional education. Consequently, teachers consider that they do not know how to offer needed support to learners with learning difficulties and most of these learners are then left to attend special school. Special interventions are needed to support teachers with no training (Nel et al., 2014).

Within the perspective of this study, the teachers were the main area of focus whereby their ability to deal with learners with learning disabilities was investigated. Their practical training came into focus and how it served to prepare them came into question. Additionally, the resources available to teachers to carry out their instruction of learners with disabilities were assessed.

1.2. Rationale

The DoE introduced the execution of White Paper Six as a response to advocating for the civil rights of all South Africans irrespective of race, gender, sexual orientation, language of receiving basic education, religion, and disability. The aim of White Paper Six is to provide strategies and educational policies, which are going to provide inclusive education within schools (DoE, 2001). In SA, only few studies have explored the assertiveness of teachers towards inclusive education, studies only focused on independent schools and research samples were therefore obtained there (Blackie, 2010). Public schools were not included in these studies; hence this investigation intended to shed light on the teachers’ preparedness to instruct learners with disabilities, the approaches and capabilities of teachers instructing learners with disabilities in a public school and the convenience of resources to accomplish their jobs effectively.

The DoE has emphasized the importance of teachers being trained so that inclusive education may be successful. However, there has not been much research to assess the training programs and their impact on the classroom setting. There are lots of factors that hamper integration into practice of inclusive education within the SA context (Blackie, 2010). A review of research that was conducted in Soweto did not reflect published studies in this field of investigation; therefore, this study sought to respond to a gap within this area of enquiry. The conclusions of the study, consequently, may be used to improve the learners’ rudimentary educational level

and to deliver sustenance for learners performing poorly academically along with support for their educators.

1.3. Aims of the Study

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of teachers on children with learning difficulties in the area of Soweto.

The objectives were:

- To explore teachers' understanding of the concept "learning difficulties".
- To discover teachers' perceptions (attributes, attitudes, and expectations) influencing their behavior towards learners with learning difficulties.
- To investigate the specific resources required for learners experiencing poor academic performance in classroom education.
- To gain an understanding of how learning difficulties affect academic performance.

1.4. Overview of the Study

The research report is structured as follows:

Chapter one introduces the study and provides the rationale, aims and overview of the investigation.

Chapter two presents the literature review for the study, provides a definition of key concepts and the theoretical framework.

Chapter three presents the methodology followed for the study. It provides the aim, objectives, and research questions. It discusses the research design and data collection and analysis procedure. It ends with the ethical considerations that was carried out throughout the study.

Chapter four presents the biographical information of participants and the themes and sub-themes of the study that emanated from the data analysis process.

Chapter five discusses the main findings of the study, in relation to literature, as well as the implications of the study, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the relevant literature regarding learning difficulties, learning difficulties in children, the South African context of learning difficulties, and teachers' perceptions of learners with learning difficulties. It explores the intrinsic and extrinsic factors causing learning difficulties globally before delving into the theoretical framework that guided this study.

2.1. Definition of Key Concepts

2.1.1. Learning difficulties

The term “learning disorders”, “learning difficulties”, and “learning disabilities” are often used interchangeably in most reviewed papers of this study. There has been a continuing argument about the description of “learning difficulty” and it has been happening for many years now. Learning difficulty refers to an information - processing problem that hinders a person's ability to learn a specific skill and utilize it successfully. Learning difficulties usually affect individuals of average or above average intelligence. The difficulty of learning is not caused by serious emotional disturbance, sensory problems (like hearing impairments, or blindness), cultural differences, and cognitive challenges but is rather neurologically based (National Centre of Learning Disabilities, 2019). As the umbrella of disability covers several different types of disabilities that learners suffer with, within this study, only learning disorders and learning-related disabilities will be discussed.

2.1.2. Socio-Economic factors

In SA, a lot of children experience poverty, poor living conditions, overcrowded housing, great intensities of violence, unemployment, under-nourishment, and deficiency of basic services. These aspects place most learners at risk, dynamics such as substance abuse and the HIV/AIDS epidemic contribute to the harmful effects experienced by learners in low socio-economic status (Philpott & McLaren, 2011).

According to Nel and Grosser (2016) these factors may hinder learning and disrupt the socio-emotional wellbeing of learners. Poverty can have a severe bearing on the learning progression; parents who are illiterate or unemployed experience hardships in supporting the learning of

their children. Moreover, in areas where there are high levels of poverty, there are higher chances of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse which may consequently lead to school dropout.

2.1.3. Children with learning difficulties

Referring to the Mackay (2006) children with learning difficulties alludes any individual that experiences significant difficulties in acquiring and using specific academic skills such as reading, writing, listening, reasoning, and arithmetic which, in interface with numerous obstructions may interfere with learning or everyday activities. In this study, learners that lack specific academic skills will be considered as children with learning difficulties.

2.1.4. School Teachers

The term school teacher alludes to any individual who instructs, teaches or prepares other people at an academic instruction establishment or helps with rendering training administrations or training assistance or support administrations offered by or in an academic division (Mayaba, 2008) As specified by the DoE (1997), a teacher is an individual whose work includes instructing others at all degrees of instruction, in an academic and training setting, including formal and casual. In this study, the teachers are from the chosen schools in Soweto and have experience in teaching learners with learning difficulties.

2.1.5. Perception

The term perception alludes to the demonstration or faculty of capturing, by methods for the senses or of the brain, cognizance, and comprehension. It is the procedure of procuring, deciphering, choosing, and sorting out sensory data (Mayaba, 2008). In this study, how teachers view learners with learning difficulties will be the perception.

2.1.6. Soweto

This refers to the area of focus of this study. Soweto is an urban residential area in the Gauteng province of South Africa. It is characterized as a predominantly black area as a consequence

of apartheid, and historically prominent as riots persisted until the end of apartheid in 1994 (South African History Online, 2021).

2.2. The features of learning difficulties

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-V), a Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) is a medical term used to diagnose “learning difficulties”. Although learning difficulties are not synonymous with specific learning difficulties, a person diagnosed with specific learning disorder is most likely to meet the criteria for a learning difficulty (American Psychiatric Association, 2015).

Specific Learning Disorder is type of neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the ability to learn or use of key academic skills such as arithmetic, reading and writing. These skills are essential as they are a foundation for other forms of academic learning. SLD’s are usually diagnosed at an early age, however, at times, they may go unnoticed until adulthood. SLD’s can be categorized as “mild”, “moderate” or “severe”. (American Psychiatric Association, 2015).

A person must meet these four criteria to be diagnosed with a Specific learning disorder:

1. Experience difficulties in at least one of the following categories for at least six months
 - Reading difficulty (slow, inaccurate).
 - Struggling to make meaning of what is read.
 - Spelling difficulties.
 - Difficulty in expressing oneself in writing (problems with punctuation, grammar, or organization).
 - Difficulty grasping number concepts, number calculations or facts.
2. Have academic skills that are significantly below what is expected for child’s age and pose challenges in school or everyday activity.
3. The difficulties begin during school-age even if some people do not experience substantial difficulties until adulthood.

4. Factors such as hearing problems, pediatric stroke and intellectual disability do not cause the learning difficulty (American Psychiatric Association, 2015).

Some of the common features of learning difficulties (LD) include poor learning strategies, language, mathematical difficulties, information processing, and the powerlessness to pay attention (Lerner, 1989). Characteristics may also vary across learners with LD, these various characteristics include difficulty recalling words, attention deficits and/or hyperactivity, poor motor coordination, poor self-management, poor integration of information, visual perception problems, inefficient learning strategies, auditory perception problems, behavioural problems, anxiety, and depression as well as low level of motivation (Mohamed & Laher, 2012).

South Africa characterizes learning disabilities in a similar manner as that of global investigations. The White Paper on a specialized curriculum needs alludes to LD as obstructions to learning and development, which is the definition that will be employed in this study (DoE, 2001). Obstructions to learning and advancement was characterized by the Department of Education as those components which lead to the failure of the framework to suit a variety of learners, which causes learning cessation, or which keep learners from getting to educational services (Mohamed & Laher, 2012).

2.2.1. Intrinsic factors causing learning difficulties globally

Learning difficulties may be result from dysfunction in the central nervous system, malformation, physiological or genetic influences and defects in the emerging fetus, and other medical factors (Nel & Grosser, 2016).

2.2.1.1. *Developmental factors*

Developmental factors refer to delayed development (when children mature at a slower rate than others) for example, in language and interpretation, intellectual, motor, and social abilities. In addition, when children cannot use their senses to discriminate, distinguish and interpret stimuli this indicates meager perceptual progress which can be seen in the subsequent areas: Auditory and visual perception, recognizing and interpreting auditory sensory information,

auditory and visual discrimination- being able to distinguish between one object from another or sounds (Nel & Grosser, 2016).

2.2.1.2. Genetics

This denotes the transmission of learning difficulties through heredity and traits, it is often traced through family history of similar learning difficulties which can be related to reading, language, or speech (Nel & Grosser, 2016). Studies by Hallahan et al., (2020) and Dednam (2005) have found that between 35 to 45 percent of learners with LD have a parent who has a learning disorder for example, difficulty in arithmetic and reading were some of the difficulties found in parents.

2.2.1.3. Teratogenics

According to Nel and Grosser (2016) teratogenics refers to when parents are exposed to harmful substances such as alcohol, drugs, pesticides, and nicotine. These agents may cause defects, malfunction, affect the development of the fetus, and may contribute to behaviour problems, attention disorders, intellectual and sensory disabilities.

2.2.1.4. Organic and ecological factors

These are metabolic and biochemical factors which comprise; hormone problems, unevenness in neurotransmitters which may cause attention deficits and may contribute to learning difficulties. In addition, when vitamins and proteins are not metabolized effectively hypo or hyperactivity could result (Nel & Grosser, 2016).

2.2.2. Extrinsic factors causing learning difficulties

2.2.2.1. Systematic factors

These factors refer to lack of adequate facilities at schools, lack of basic learning material, assistive devices, inadequate human resource development comprising training of teachers and other people who play an important role in dealing with LD, lack of mother tongue teachers,

and overcrowded classrooms. All of these contribute to barriers in the education system (Hugo, 2006).

2.2.2.2. Pedagogical factors

This has to do with an inflexible curriculum, inadequately trained teachers, and approaches which do not accommodate diverse learning needs such as kinesthetic, visual, and auditory and lack of support for teachers, all these factors may cause learning breakdown. Other factors include, not making use of sign language for learners with hearing impairment and when alternative communication strategies are not provided for learners experiencing difficulties with speaking (Nel & Grosser, 2016).

The language of learning and teaching (LOLT) is often not most learners' first language in SA. Most learners are not proficient in LOLT (English), and this is the common medium of instruction that is used in most schools, and this may create barrier to learning. In addition, many teachers are also not proficient in LOLT which may cause a lot of misunderstandings between learners and teachers (Nel & Theron, 2008).

2.3. The effect of learning difficulties on learners

Mohamed and Laher (2012) found that learners with LD experience academic challenges and are performing poorly at school. These learners experience more emotional outbursts, immaturity, clumsiness, hyperactivity, have a low self-esteem and self-concept which may in many cases result from not being accepted by their peers. The low self-esteem emanates from feeling worthless, difficulty in taking initiative, not putting effort when faced with problems, and as a result these learners often give up even before attempting to do anything (Mohamed & Laher, 2012).

Various studies have also shown that learners with LD tend to have a reduced circle of friends and are more likely to experience bullying in school (Carter & Spencer, 2006; Warner-Czyz, 2018). Luciano and Savage (2007) initiated those learners with LD are victims of bullying, and this may have long term consequences on them. These consequences may include depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem. Learners with LD show characteristics of internalized problems and this may lead to their peers rejecting them (Mohamed & Laher, 2012). This

section presented the general consequences of the effect of learning difficulties on learners, the next section will focus on the South African situation concerning learners with learning difficulties.

2.4. Learners with learning difficulties in South Africa

There is regularly an obscuring of clearly defined meanings between disability and chronic disease in SA's policy background. Chronic disease is comprehended as being an ailment that cannot be restored, furthermore, it should be overseen as a life-long responsibility. Where such an ailment is not overseen well, it might lead to practical losses, for example, forfeiture of sight or confinements in physical movement. When the chronic ailment brings about functional impediments, it is viewed as a disability (Graham et al., 2010). Philpott and McLaren (2011) evaluated that up to 40% of the reasons for disability are avoidable. Young people living in destitution are progressively more defenseless to inability, as destitution associated factors initiate needless debilitation.

The subsequent points explain the conditions related with debilitation, learning difficulties and disability in childhood:

Developmental incapacity: In line with three populace-based overviews led in SA between 1992 and 2002, the general pervasiveness rates for all classes of formative incapacity fluctuated from 1.6 to 6.0% (McLaren et al., 2003).

Cerebral palsy: SA has a great pervasiveness of children with cerebral palsy (10 for every 1,000). Birth interrelated injury is one of the essential causes, and it is for the most part presented by intellectual weakness (Couper, 2002).

Down syndrome: Christianson (1997) cited in African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) (2011) initiated that down syndrome in SA happens in one in each 600 births. The rate increments with motherly age, once the woman is more than 35 years old.

Neural tube defects: Venter et al., (1995) cited in ACPF (2011) proclaimed that a birth commonness of 3.35 per 1,000 children exists in SA for neural tube defects commonly, spina

bifida furthermore and anencephaly. The ingestion of folic acid (a category of vitamin B) prior and through pregnancy can avert most neural tube defects.

Hearing disability: Goldman and Holme (2010) found that, about 7.5% of young pupils in SA experience the ill effects of differing degrees of hearing forfeiture. Copley and Friderichs (2010) report an essentially higher predominance of hearing disability than other birth disabilities; infant hearing impairment is the most renowned inborn sensory birth defect, occurring in 4-6 per 1,000 live births.

Intellectual disability: Research in various municipalities discovered comparable general pervasiveness rates for children under 10 years of age. For instance, 15 for each 1,000 in Bushbuckridge, Limpopo (Christianson et al., 2000; and 17 per 1,000 for mild intellectual debilitation and 7 for each 1,000 for extreme intellectual debilitation in Manguzi, KwaZulu Natal (Couper, 2002).

Epilepsy: An investigation of 6,692 rural children by Christianson et al. (2000) discovered that 0.73% had epilepsy; lifetime predominance was 7.3 per 1,000, while dynamic pervasiveness was 6.7 per 1,000. Related developmental incapacity was chronicled in 71% of affected children, with 16% appraised as moderate to serious. In excess of half of the children with epilepsy (57%) did not acquire medicine. This examination presumes that the pervasiveness of epilepsy in the country adolescence populace explored is higher than that verified in generally comparable studies from sub-Saharan Africa, and the poor use of fitting treatment is a complex concern (ACPF. 2011).

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): An investigation by (Oosthuysen, 1995) found that the pervasiveness of ADHD was roughly 9% of a school sample. In any case, the possibility that the pervasiveness could be elevated since teachers proved unable check the period for which side effects had been present (ACPF, 2011).

HIV: The latest records accessible from UNAIDS gauge that a total of 430 000 children between the ages of 0-14 years in SA are infected with HIV (UNAIDS, 2021).

Diagnosing LD is progressively hazardous in SA due to the above scenarios. Since the completion of politically sanctioned racial segregation, SA has and still is experiencing

remarkable change with respect to its education framework. In the politically sanctioned racial exclusion interval, isolation denied numerous individuals of equivalent education (Mohamed & Laher, 2012). Teachers were insufficiently prepared, and this weakened instructors and learners. Because of the imbalances, numerous SA students showed the subjective attributes of LD. These students, who were instructively denied before, ought not to fall under the mark LD but instead under the name "special educational needs" (Mohamed & Laher, 2012). Given this recognizable proof, diagnosing students in SA was and is a multifaceted practice.

Nevertheless, this is an area of concern, especially in a third world context. Most recently, Nel et al., (2014) reports that one in ten learners in SA have more than one disability, while Mayaba (2008) reports that 2.5% of children in SA agonize from serious disability. Orphaned learners give off an impression of being bound to have LD at a higher rate than learners with parents, with roughly 3.9% and 2.4% individually (Nel et al., 2014). This outcome could be connected to the HIV scourge in the nation, similarly as learners whose disability was caused because of HIV and AIDS are likely to turn into vagrants. Moreover, kids who live in care homes or who are homeless give off an impression of being bound to have some type of LD when contrasted with learners living in a family (Philpott & McLaren, 2011).

Investigations on the specific causes of learning disabilities among learners in SA would lead to appropriate methods to deal with them effectively. Additionally, understanding the causes of LD would enable teachers to identify the specific type of LD and react appropriately, given that they do have proper preparation and adequate resources (Mohamed & Laher, 2012).

2.5. Teachers' perception on learning difficulties

Like all of us teachers are also human beings that have thoughts and feelings, and they therefore also have pre-conceived ideas, and attitudes towards disability. Subban & Sharma (2006) found that teachers' perceptions (attitudes, expectations, and attributes) play an important role in how learners experience their school environment. These perceptions are more likely to influence how teachers behave towards particular learners which can determine the experiences and accomplishments of learners in the school environment.

The most important criteria for the education system to succeed is to identify the factors that influences attitudes, and beliefs about teaching learners with LD. The success or failure of

inclusion is highly influenced by teachers' perception and behaviour towards learners with LD. Mainstream teachers are not very open to the idea of inclusion education and are generally not supportive of it as a result, learners with LD are not accommodated (Mohamed & Laher, 2012).

The manner in which teachers perceive learners with LD is likely to have a bearing in the classroom setting. An exploration by Brady and Woolfson (2008), explored the connection between teachers' roles, attitudes, and self-efficacy concerning people with disability. The study, conducted in Britain using quantitative methods, found that teachers with more experience ± 15 years saw LD as being internally accredited in comparison to those with less experience. However, teachers who were newly taught saw LD as teacher driven and externally attributed. In addition, the study found that teachers that had a high self-efficacy made more effort to assist learners with LD and accepted some responsibility of learners' difficulties. Finally, the study found that teachers perceived learners with LD as having no regulation over their development in contrast to learners without LD.

The challenge with teachers' perception is that they may deprive learners with LD an educational experience, and this might lead to a particular group of learners receiving limited differentiated experience within an inclusive mainstream setting. Teachers' perceptions of learners with LD may be shown to the learners through subtle behavioral and emotional cues, learners' beliefs about their educational success in the future may be influenced by these cues. As a result, learners with LD lose confidence, doubt themselves and are likely to have a negative view about their future (Mohamed & Laher, 2012).

There is a liaison between the way in which teachers facilitate new knowledge based on their experience and teachers understanding of learners' ability. This has shown to be an effective way of teaching as it is an active process of learning (Mohamed & Laher, 2012). Hugo (2006) found that some teachers had knowledge about LD and were willing to improve their understanding of LD. These teachers were therefore in a better position to offer education in an inclusive mainstream school.

In SA, it is hard for teachers to collaborate with parents and involve them in their child's education (Mohamed & Laher, 2012). Teachers do not have sufficient training in working collaboratively with parents and communities which makes it difficult for them to engage with these two parties. In addition, teachers have faced a lot of criticism from parents, lack of

support, trust, and respect. It is essential for teachers to work together with parents in the education of learners with LD and for inclusive education to be successful (Mohamed & Laher, 2012).

Another important fact to note is in ensuring the success of inclusive education for learners with LD is the role of the whole school in ensuring that teachers have all the support they need within the school as well as around the community. For example, psychological, learning support, social work, occupational/physio- therapy, speech, and hearing. If all these parties work collaboratively to offer teachers support then learners with LD can be provided with quality support (Donald, 1984).

The perceptions of teachers play a significant role in the education of learners with LD. Teachers need to offer each other support and deal with the challenging task of working with learners with LD, they need to fully understand LD in order to identify a learner with LD. Parents and communities as well need to work with teachers to enhance adequate education for these learners (Mohamed & Laher, 2012).

2.6. Theoretical Framework

This study is dependent on social and cultural contexts of interpersonal interactions between learners and educators, the constructivism approach will be followed. This approach regards an individual and their perceptions and experiences within the confines of their environment and relationships.

2.6.1. Origin of Constructivism

The beginnings of constructivism are accepted to occur in the era of Socrates, who asserted that instructors and learners have a duty to converse with one another and decipher and build the concealed information by questioning on enquiries (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Murray (1992) likewise expressed that the word constructivism presumably is developed from Piaget's (1968) "constructivist" interpretations, just as from Bruner's (1996) "constructivist" portrayal of innovation education. Moreover, Perkins (1991) called attention to constructivism which has different backgrounds in brain research and reasoning of this period: the formative point of

view of Jean Piaget (1968) and the development of psychological brain research within the direction of prominent researchers similar to Bruner (1966).

2.6.2. What is constructivism?

Constructivism is a blend of various hypotheses dispersed in to one structure. It is the absorption of equally behaviouralist and psychological goals. The constructivist position keeps up that knowledge is a procedure of developing significance; it is the method by which people make sense of their understanding (Caffarella & Merriam, 1999). Mvududu and Thiel-Burgess (2012) define that constructivism is generally advertised as a technique to assess youngsters' level of grasp and to indicate that understanding can increase and transform to a more preeminent level of perception. Along these lines, constructivism indicates the 'how' of erudition and discerning. Constructivism represents the way that the learners can understand the information and likewise how the resources can be educated viably (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Considering Constructivism as an instructive theory, the teachers have a duty to consider what learners are aware of and permit their learners to abide their awareness into practice (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

2.6.3. Constructivism in practice

Constructivism as an instructive philosophy and informs those teachers ought to firstly think about their understudies' information and permit them to place that information into application (Mvududu & Thiel-Burgess, 2012). As it were, Mvududu and Thiel-Burgess (2012) speak to the constructivist outlook as one of the main academic situations in instruction. Constructivist encouraging just advances learners' inspiration and basic reasoning and urges them to adapt autonomously (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Constructivist teachers may guarantee that knowledge encounters incorporate issues that are critical to the understudies and are not simply identified with the requirements and benefits of teachers and the instructive framework (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

Constructivism accepts that student's originations of information are acquired from a consequence creation search in which learners build singular translations of their encounters. The learners' developments during the assessment, addressing also, breaking down of errands and encounters yield information whose communication to outer authenticity may have slight

credibility (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Be that as it may, the majority of the learners' developments is separated through a procedure of social exchange or conveyed discernment (Brown, 1994). Applefield et al. (2000) brings up that the job of the student in constructivism is imagined as construction and changing information.

Lester and Onore (1990) cited in (Amineh & Asl, 2015) show that the instructors' very own convictions about educating (their developed frameworks) are significant and decide the categories and degrees of changes they can make. Likewise, Lester and Onore (1990) express those instructors see educating and the circumstance through the perspective of their own built framework. Consequently, the principles that influence an educator's capacity to instruct in a value-based, constructivist way is the conviction that information is developed by people (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

Further, teachers would need to make a move in speculation and change what they accept about information so, as to truly change their educating. As indicated by Mezirow (1990) as cited in (Gray, 1997), considering instructing practice adds to the educator's capacity to cross the extension as far as how the individual ponders educating. This empowers the educator to interchange, for instance, from a transmission instructional run-through (which is regular in customary education) to a constructivist and value-based one, which is the aim of constructivism. Replication additionally includes a study of the suppositions on which the educators' convictions have been constructed, and through consideration, their points of view are changed.

Vygotsky's (1978) and Piaget's (1968) constructivist learning hypotheses are upheld by Semple (2000) who presents an outline of the fundamental rules that make up the hypothetical system, which is critical to learning and education. The accompanying standards are that information is developed from the experience of the learner. Learners become engaged with opportunities for growth that question speculations and invigorate conversation. Whenever offered the chance to make forecasts, learners frequently start changing theories about learning peculiarities. The constructivist educator ought to expect adequate open doors for learners to test their speculations, particularly through team conversation of substantial encounters (Opoku-Asare et al., 2014).

Information dwells in the brain rather than remotely. Learner focused instruction is a contextualized system of developing information rather than getting it. Information is built in light of individual encounters, and theories of day-by-day encounters. Learning is an individual translation of the macrocosm in that the learner's convictions and values are utilized in deciphering artifacts and occasions. Thus, the learners' external environment can play a role in stifling their academic achievement by encouraging obstacles to learning. Furthermore, learners absorb and decipher new data as indicated by moral standards and principles to give importance to and comprehend their present individual encounters, as learners contrast their new encounters and already existing assumptions (Opoku-Asare et al., 2014).

Educators following a constructivist point of view base their guidance on what the learners definitely know, as an establishment (Duhaney & Duhaney, 2000). In this manner, to present new ideas, instructors should talk about a few related thoughts initially, that are as of now natural to the learners. This training assists learners with LD due to their low confidence and rehashed failure encounters. On the off chance that they get the opportunity to begin with something recognizable, new learning does not appear to be so overpowering and disappointing to them. Ellis (1997) suggests strategies like planning and conceptualizing.

Another rule hidden the constructivist approach is an emphasis on key thoughts and the connections of these thoughts in the subject matter (Ellis, 1997). Applying this guideline, instructors stress associations of significant ideas that are the significant thoughts for the discipline, rather than segregated pieces of information. In mathematics, for instance, instructors could accentuate fractions and their relationship to decimals and percent. Dynamic learning is a significant aspect of a constructivist way to teach. At the point when learners were effectively engaged with the example, they learn and hold the data (Duhaney & Duhaney, 2000).

This study is fixated on the teaching and learning of SA learners with LD. It centres on the experiences and perceptions of teachers with regard to learners with LD and how they react to these learners in terms of their training and obtainability of resources. Since SA is a developing nation, a way out of poverty for many citizens is through educational attainment. Given the prominence of learners with LD, their needs also should be met in an inclusive educational setting so that they can contribute to the SA economy and be effective citizens as well (Opoku-Asare et al., 2014)

2.7. Conclusion

Learners with LD take more of a teacher's time and effort to be taught effectively due to their scholarly deficiencies. Notwithstanding, the teacher should be in a position to identify the learners with LD and their shortcomings, however it is not always possible in the South Africa setting. This may be due to large classroom settings, and the great variances in intrinsic and extrinsic development of LD. Thus, a study on teachers' perceptions of learners with LD in South Africa is warranted.

3. CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will briefly state the aims of the study and the research questions. This is followed by a discussion of the research design, research methodology, ethical considerations, tools to data collection and the analysis of data.

3.1. Research Aims and Questions of the Study

This study aims to explore teachers' understanding of learning difficulties and their perceptions of learners with learning difficulties. The research questions and objectives were as follows:

3.1.1. *Primary Research Question*

- What are teachers' perceptions of learners with learning difficulties?

3.1.2. *Secondary Research Questions*

- What are the teachers' understanding of learners with learning difficulties?
- What are teachers' views of the influence of learning difficulties on the learners' academic performance?
- What are teachers' views of support resources necessary for learners with learning difficulties?

3.1.3. *Objectives*

- To discover teachers' perceptions (attributes, attitudes, and expectations) influencing their behaviour towards learners with learning difficulties.
- To explore teachers' understanding of the concept "learning difficulties".
- To gain an understanding of how learning difficulties affect academic performance.
- To investigate the specific resources required for learners experiencing poor academic performance in classroom education.

3.2. Research design

This investigation adopted a qualitative methodology. Qualitative exploration is grounded on constructionism, which accepts that numerous realities are socially fabricated through single and combined observations or interpretations of the identical circumstances (McMil & Schumacher, 2006). Qualitative exploration is focused on understanding the progression and the societal and ethnic backgrounds which lie beneath numerous behavioural outlines and frequently slanted towards discovering the ‘why’. As indicated by Cohen et al., (2002) subjective techniques include gathering printed or verbal information. Furthermore, Lune and Berg (2017) posit that subjective research is valuable for acquiring knowledge into circumstances. Myers (2013) made reference to one of the key advantages of qualitative investigations is that it permits an investigator to see and comprehend the setting inside which choices and activities happen.

This methodology was favoured since the researcher investigated the school-teachers encounters and perceptions on learners with learning disabilities. As indicated by Liamputtong (2007) qualitative techniques permit participants to communicate their encounters. School teachers have the option to provide comprehensive notes on their encounters. Lune and Berg (2017) called attention to this strategy due to it usually being utilized for investigating practices and opinions on specific issues. This methodology permitted teachers to communicate their opinions and contemplations openly about instructing learners with learning difficulties. The qualitative methodology is utilized when the researcher expects to acquire complex audio and text-based portrayals of the participants’ encounters (Mack, 2005).

3.3. Population, Sampling Procedure, and Sample

Forming a suitable study population and apposite sampling process is a significant characteristic for an investigator with the intention of answering the research questions. Atkinson and Flint (2001) describe the study population as having all the elements that meet the criteria for inclusion in a study. In this study, the study population were teachers who taught in mainstream schools in Soweto and who had experience teaching learners with learning difficulties. As stated by Jankowicz (2013), sampling is a premeditated selection of people, signifying a specified population. Subsequently, it is unmanageable for the researcher to inspect the whole population as a result of interval, cash and admittance restrictions it becomes

significant for the researcher to regulate sampling size and sampling structure, with the purpose of gathering verdicts from the illustrative set of population. The study site was three mainstream schools in the Soweto area.

As stated by Churchill (2006), sampling technique can be separated into two portions - specifically probability and non-probability selection. Saunders et al., (2009) outlines probability test group as a fortuitous of each circumstance being nominated from the population being identified and equivalent. Probability is grounded on arithmetical revision. However, non-probability test group is an instance where sample has not been carefully chosen using the random selection process (Churchill, 2006). It suggests that some components are more prospective to be nominated than others in a specified population (Bell & Bryman, 2018). Constructed on the above argument, the investigator will use probability test group for this study.

A purposive inspecting methodology was utilized to choose the participants. In purposive test group, sample members are nominated with a 'purpose' to characterize a location or type in relation to a strategic principle. It is also known as criterion-based selection (Ritchie et al., 2013). Three public high schools in the Soweto region were approached to contribute information. The schools were arranged in societies that are illustrative of the diverse financial and verbal clusters in the Soweto township. Five teachers per selected school were approached to contribute to the exploration. These teachers were familiar with learners with learning difficulties and they were able to provide more insight and discuss the challenges and drawbacks at length.

Study participants eligibility criteria were as follows:

1. Teachers who taught in schools in Soweto.
2. Teachers in mainstream schools.
3. Teacher must have had experience with or have taught a child with learning difficulties.

3.4. Research Instrument

Semi- structured interviews is a method of collecting data which relies on asking questions within a pre-arranged thematic framework. It is a combination of structured and unstructured interviews which are often qualitative in nature (Saunders et al., 2009). The semi-structured interview is a prominent information gathering tool in subjective investigation. It is a strategy of assessing individuals' observations, undertones, and portrayals of conditions and structure of credibility. It is correspondingly a compelling technique of comprehending others (Punch, 2014). Punch (2014) states that interviewing is the key technique for information or data collection in subjective investigation.

The semi-structured interview is carried out through meeting participants and probing their responses at the meeting. The meetings are directed utilizing an interview guide, which is a prominent information assortment instrument that can be used to accurately capture the perspectives of participants (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.4.1. *Pretesting of the research instrument*

The instrument was piloted amongst 5 teachers that were not part of the sample in the study and once their feedback was received, the researcher had to make minor changes. Modifications included removing the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as part of the instrument for data collection. The researcher found that the teachers were reluctant to participate when they were informed that they would be part of a conference video call as a group, where focus is placed on in depth discussions. This could be due to fears of being victimized after the study was over for cases of incompetence if they were not equipped to deal with learners with LD (Koshal et al., 2013). It could also be due to fears of being judged based on their professional capacity and any difficulties they may have as a teacher. The FDG's involve communications between respondents, usually in a relaxed way, where their contributions are distinguished and allow the investigator to gather data. There is no need for structure as it allows free conversation flow (Seidman, 2006).

After careful consideration, the researcher removed the FDG, thereafter the researcher's supervisor approved the modifications before the data collection began.

3.5. Data Collection

The collection of data concerning the calibre of contributors in this study was through the use of semi-structured interviews, which permitted the reactions obtained to be authenticated (see Appendix 7). The questions focused on the interactive teaching process concerning learners with learning disabilities, and respondents were requested for their sentiments on how they deal with learners with learning disabilities. They were asked to comment on whether they had received adequate training and proper resources to deal with learners with learning disabilities. They were also asked what their take is on the academic performance of learners with disabilities.

The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews bolster the comprehension of perceptions the respondents have on learners with LD. The respondents were given the chance to develop on how they perceive or experience learners with LD, how they go about instructing them in the classroom, what resources are currently available to aid their teaching and learning experience and what effective steps can be implemented for the effective teaching and learning of learners with LD.

A semi-structured interview is a two-way conversation where the researcher requests that respondents verbally depict their own comprehension about the methods of reasoning, attitudes, renditions, and preambles about the phenomenon under investigation. The expectation of subjective discussion is to consistently accomplish rich expressive data that will help the researcher to comprehend the respondents' level of awareness and credibility (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were steered with the goal of understanding the data that researchers have put forward and their own observations on issues of facilitating teaching and learner for learners with LD.

Qualitative information collection techniques included semi-structured interviews with the five teachers. A meeting plan was utilized to organize interviews and time was allocated so, as to retrieve as much information as possible from the teachers. This was scheduled as electronic meetings and was conducted over telephone communication or/ and WhatsApp audio/ video calls. Non-verbal communication and body language signs, in the cases of video calls, was also detected and chronicled as data. This gave suggestions on emotions, state of mind and

trepidations that the respondent may have not felt self-assured in voicing (Christensen et al., 2011).

Seidman (2006) places emphasis on in-depth consultations and the importance it offers as awareness into the respondents' life experience. The questions that were used in this situation are open-ended and allowed the respondent to construct on their experience, an understanding of issues surrounding the study subject can also be increased in this manner even if the respondent does not openly refer to it while communicating their information (Christensen et al., 2011).

Qualitative content analysis denotes any qualitative information decrease and sense making determination that takes a dimension of qualitative material and endeavours to recognize core reliabilities and connotations (Patton, 2002).

Data collection was through semi-structured interviews, this involved a conversation between the researcher and participant where the discourse was guided by a set of interview questions that allowed for further probing into the responses given by the participants. The data was collected by transcribing these conversations and perusing this in order to determine themes that have arisen from the data collected.

3.6. Data Analysis

De Vos (2002) describe data analysis as the process whereby a phenomenon is broken down into its constituent parts for it to be understood better. De Vos (2002) designated that data analysis in a subjective investigation requests two strategies. The first contains information analysis at the location while information is being arrayed; corresponding to the subsequent which incorporates information analysis when the researcher has completed data gathering. As expressed by Creswell and Clark (2017), information collection and investigation falls in line together with the expectation of accomplishing an intelligible comprehension of the data.

A thematic analysis approach was utilized to break down the information collected from participants. As indicated by Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is a technique for recognizing, investigating, and detailing themes within collected data. A theme highlights significance about the information concerning the exploration questions and speaks to some

degree of regular or typical reactions or importance within the information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen to guarantee the rich portrayal of the information. As per Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis gives a rich topical depiction of the complete informational collection.

Braun and Clarke (2006) additionally notice that there are five stages of thematic analysis which comprise:

- Acquaintance with the information: which is deciphering the data, examining and re-perusing the evidence and taking note of preliminary thoughts. Information was inspected utilizing the interpretative technique with the certainty of raising topics that emerged from semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Coding: This alludes to scanning for fascinating examples or highlights over the whole informational collection. Scanning for topics: Collating codes into impending subjects and assembling all information pertinent to every potential topic. The researcher perceived subjects, apportion codes, sort responses and afterward acclimatized responses into the content. Expressive strategies allowed the examiner to explain the teaching style and choices in the sampled schools (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Reviewing subjects: Checking if the topics are corresponding to the coded extricates and the whole informational assortment. On the expression of McMil and Schumacher (2006) and Nieuwenhuis (2006) information investigation is a repeating system that is joined into all portions of subjective assessment. By inductive investigation, groupings and layouts emerge from the data, rather than being constrained on them going before information is gathered.
- Defining and naming the subjects: Clear definitions and names for each topic.
- Writing up: creating an insightful report of the investigation.

The researcher immersed herself in the raw data by thoroughly going through the responses of each participant to each question in the interview. Then codes were generated by the researcher,

thereafter the researcher identified and classified four common themes and six sub-themes. Once these were redefined and reviewed, a thematic table was drawn up to classify the themes.

With the end goal of this exploration the information was perused cautiously and altogether and afterward deciphered and investigated. At the point where the information was coded, the researcher searched for designs in the information and organized them into the various classifications.

3.7. Trustworthiness of the research

Trustworthiness or truth estimation of subjective research and straightforwardness of the investigation is essential to the expediency and honesty of the discoveries (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). It is the obligation of the researcher to guarantee that the rights, interests, values, and convictions of respondents are regarded. The value this holds is that conversations and dialogue can be held for a lengthy period and probing questions were asked with regard to the teachers' perception on interacting with learners with learning difficulties. The advantages of this research design are that it is able to acquire sincere, opulent, profound evidence which enlightens ordinary samples of activity and prominence from the viewpoint of those being contemplated. These qualitative interviews underscores the implication of the voice of the subjects under study and snowballing direct data in respects to the lived encounters of the participants on a specific topic. It will cast a spotlight on social procedures (Yin, 2009).

The meanings of value criteria in subjective research within the confines of trustworthiness are as follows: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility denotes the inevitability that can be placed on the reality of the investigation detections. This builds up when the investigation detections speak to possible data drawn from the respondents' exclusive information and is a right understanding of the respondent's unique standpoints. In this study, credibility was maintained by pursuing data through the use semi-structured interviews and methodology clearly described as implemented. Data presented is that of the participants and not the researcher.

Transferability refers to how much the consequences of subjective research can be progressed to different surroundings or backgrounds with diverse respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher emboldens the transferability judgment through thick depiction. This came

about by analysing the situations and asking more probing questions directed to the respondents on similar practical situations. Since three schools were used, the research instrument would remain the same, ensuring that the instruments would cover the specified areas it set out to cover. In this study, the researcher remained detached from the participants by utilizing the online method of data collection to ensure that the researcher remains unbiased.

Dependability denotes to the manner in which the study is conducted and conditions that the study should be dependable across time. Dependability also refers to the consistency of the data over similar conditions. Furthermore, Shenton (2004) asserts that the detailed process of the research design and methodology strengthens the dependability of a qualitative study. In this study the researcher provided a detailed research design and methodology process, and ensured all information and responses obtained were protected and confidential.

Confirmability is founded on the acknowledgement that the research is never impartial (Morrow, 2005). Confirmability will be employed to ensure that the results from this study can be verified for appropriateness by other researchers (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The researcher will perform this through inspecting and rechecking the data, in addition to engaging the assigned Supervisor's confirmation.

3.8. Ethical consideration

Research is a delicate procedure and all things considered individuals who participate in the investigation procedure must be safeguarded (Leedy & Omrod, 2019). Certain means must be considered by the researcher to ensure that moral norms are clung to for the study populace (Leedy & Omrod, 2019). Consequently, the researcher will tend to the accompanying issues: permission, educated consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and absence of harm/injury to respondents.

3.8.1. Confidentiality

The investigation respondents were guaranteed that their identities would not be uncovered, including the names of participatory schools. It was thus that pseudo-names were utilized in

reference to the participatory schools. The participants signed a written consent and confidentiality, and anonymity was respected and assured. Responses are kept anonymous as no identifying information is asked for on the questionnaire. The results of this study will only be processed by the researcher and her supervisor; therefore, confidentiality is ensured. The researcher repeatedly explained to the respondents that the data they provided was utilized for the investigation only. The name of the principal will remain anonymous as well. Transcripts, and audio recordings can only be accessed by the investigator and the supervisor. They are stored in a protected laptop which has a secure password. Printed transcripts are locked in a cabinet.

3.8.2. Volunteerism

The participants could withdraw from the study at any given moment without experiencing any victimisation. Participants were informed that they do not have to answer any of the questions that may arise in the interview if they do not wish to. The participants were qualified teachers, they were not a vulnerable sample, and all participants were willing to partake in the study. The topic was not sensitive, and participants did not receive any incentives for participating in the study

3.8.3. Informed Consent

Data collection took place through a WhatsApp call and the participants responses were recorded as well. Participants were asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Once permission was obtained from the school principal, the teachers that wished to partake in this study were given the Participant Information sheet (See Appendix 4) and Consent Form (See Appendix 5). Once all the data was collected and analysed, all the information was kept confidential.

3.8.4. Ethical clearance

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics committee- Non- Medical (HREC Non- Medical) at the University of the Witwatersrand; ethics clearance number (MEDPSYC/20/06) (See Appendix 1).

3.8.5. Permission to conduct study

Subsequently, a written permission to conduct the study was gained from the Gauteng Department of the Education research officials (See Appendix 8). The researcher approached the principals of the school telephonically to gain permission to interview the teachers for the study.

General feedback from the results of the study will be presented in a summary which will be put up in the school's staff room once the research is completed in June 2022. A copy of the final research report will also be sent to the principal on request. Results may also be reported in a journal article.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

The research methodology was explained in the previous chapter. This involved an in-depth description of the study design, method of sampling, and data collection strategies. This chapter comprises the data analysis and findings. The findings of the present study incorporate the interpretation of semi-structured interviews with participants from the schools.

This chapter will provide a description of the demographic details of the participants and the four following themes: 1) knowledge of White Paper 6, 2) telling the difference between learners with learning difficulties and those without, 3) difficulty in teaching learners with learning difficulties, and 4) underlying factors in learners having learning difficulties. There are also six sub-themes derived from the themes

4.2. Biographical Information of Participants

4.2.1. Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

	PSEUDO- NYM	EDUCATION LEVEL	GENDER	RACE	DURATION OF TEACHING
1	Duduzile	Diploma in Foundation Phase	F	B	9 years
2	Phumzile	Advanced Diploma in Education (Intermediate Phase)	F	B	10 years
3	Lebo	Diploma in Foundation Phase	F	B	Over 15 years
4	Lesego	Degree in Education (BEd)	F	B	2 years
5	Mpumi	Diploma in Education (Intermediate Phase)	F	B	11 years
6	Nancy	Diploma in Education	F	B	9 years
7	Neo	Diploma in Foundation Phase	F	B	11 years
8	Nomsa	Degree in Education (BEd)	F	B	4 years
9	Ntando	Honours in Education Management	F	B	30 years
10	Simangele	Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE)	F	B	5 years
11	Sthe	Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase	F	B	7 years
12	Thabsile	BEd Honours in Management and Leadership	F	B	14 years
13	Thandaza	Degree in Education (BEd)	F	B	8 years
14	Thato	Degree in Education (BEd)	F	B	5 years
15	Zendera	Honours Degree in Education	F	B	13 years

Abbreviations: F-Female, B-Black

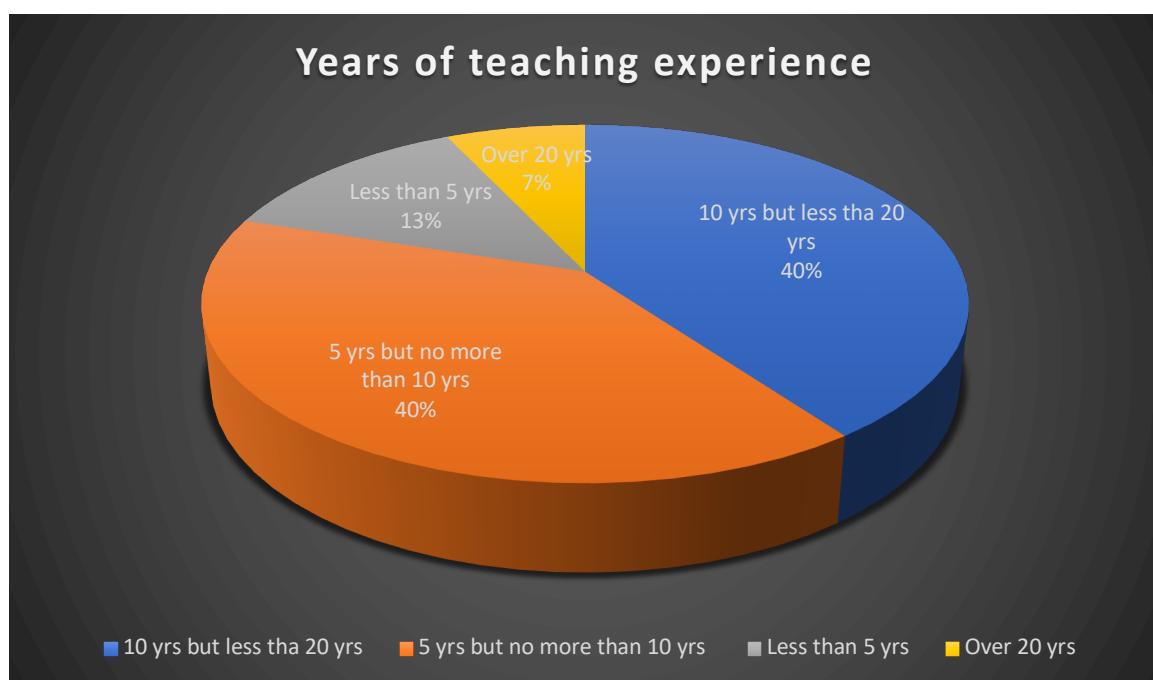
The fifteen participants are referred to by pseudonyms (as indicated in Table 4.1). The table above condenses the biographical profile of the 15 participants from the schools who have experience with teaching learners with disabilities. All 15 participants were Black females. The participants had teaching experience ranging from 2 to 30 years. Participant degrees ranged from diplomas to post-graduate degrees.

The 15 participants in this study ranged between over 20 years of age to over 55 years of age. The majority of participants in this study were over 20 years of age ($n = 9$; 60%), followed by

the 30 - 40 - year-old age group ($n = 4$; 26%), and the minority age group was the 40 – 55-year-old age group ($n = 2$; 13%).

In this sample, 100% ($n = 15$) were black female teachers. The highest qualification of the sample was an Honours degree in Education and (BEd) Honours in Management and Leadership 20% ($n = 3$), followed by a Degree in Education (BEd) 26% ($n = 4$). 40% ($n = 6$) of this sample had a Diploma in Education. Lastly, only 6% ($n = 1$) of this sample had a Post Certificate in Education (PGCE).

Majority of the participants had at 10 years but less than 20 years of experience as teachers ($n = 6$; 40%), followed by ($n = 6$; 40%) of participants who had 5 years but no more than 10 years teaching experience. ($n = 2$; 13%) of participants had less than 5 years of experience and a minority of the participants ($n = 1$; 7%) had 20 years or more experience.



4.2.2. Figure 1: Experience in the field of teaching.

4.3. Themes and Sub-themes

4.3.1. Table 1: Summary of Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
4.3.1.1. Knowledge of White Paper 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The academic performance of learners with learning difficulties
4.3.1.2. Difference between learners with learning difficulties and those without	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Telling the difference between learners with learning difficulties and those without• Behaviour of learners with learning difficulties
4.3.1.3. Difficulty in teaching learners with learning difficulties	
4.3.1.4. Underlying factors in learners having learning difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interventions required for learners experiencing poor academic performance in classroom education• Need for training• Accommodating learners with learning difficulties at mainstream schools

4.4. Knowledge of White Paper 6

The Education White Paper Six (2001) which focuses on Inclusive Education, as well as the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) strategy (DoBE, 2014) was implemented as a tool to address the needs of learners with learning difficulties. It serves as a structural plan to provide additional support for these learners and encourages more inclusive education. The SIAS strategy also necessitates parents to be joint decision-makers in establishing an educational plan suitable for their children (DoBE, 2014). Epstein's model of overlapping spheres serves as a theoretical framework that underpins the argument for collaboration between families and school to support learners who face reading difficulties and

the consequent general academic under-performance (DoBE, 2014). Since the Education White Paper Six aims to promote more inclusive education for learners with learning difficulties, it is critical to assess the participant's knowledge related to this important document.

Participants agreed that they possessed knowledge of the White Paper Six constituents. Participant response regarding the Education White Paper 6 document was positive with only three participants stating they are either unsure or have studied about it a long time ago. The two quotes below indicate knowledge of the policy, while the third quote indicates participants who were unsure about the policy.

In terms of acknowledging the White Paper Six, *"...I learnt a lot about it when I was still in Varsity, it's a good policy but not really practical I must say"*. [Participant Lesego; 2 years teaching experience]

"Yes, I have heard of it, I even studied about it. It's a framework of policy that talks about children with special needs". [Participant Thabsile; 14 years teaching experience]

"Not entirely sure, but I know it's a government policy on Education regarding accommodating learners". [Participant Duduzile; 9 years teaching experience]

Most of the participants showed a positive response towards the Education White Paper Six. This finding is comparable to the results by Jacobs (2020) who reported that schools in KZN who included the enrolment of learners with learning difficulties and optimistic may experience possible benefits of inclusive education and improve the level of teaching (Jacobs 2020).

Conversely, a study highlighted those teachers who did not have formal training in working with learners who had learning difficulties felt less competent and less efficacious than special education teachers (Opoku et al., 2014; Schnitzer et al., 2007). This study emphasized that teachers may have trouble accessing the necessary resources and support needed for inclusion need training. Previous studies have reported that educators with many years of experience who received their training prior to the implementation of the White Paper 6 may be challenged to realign their teaching methods (cited in Ainscow, (2009); Deno & Bornman, 2014). Teachers may require additional support structures and regular familiarization with this

important document to strengthen their abilities in educating children with learning difficulties (Kalenga & Fourie, 2012; De Jager, 2013; Jacobs & Govender, 2020).

- *The academic performance of learners with learning difficulties*

Participants reveal that there are major differences when they compare the academic performance of learners with learning difficulties and those without. They reveal that learners with learning difficulties are slower with their work, have problems reading and writing, and struggle to grasp the concepts being taught.

“Yes, as I have mentioned earlier those children with learning difficulties find it hard to remember mathematical concepts, they struggle to count backward, they process things more slowly. These are all signs of dyscalculia which is a learning difficulty related to mathematics”.
[Participant Zendera, 13 years teaching experience]

“Yes, learners with difficulties normally get left behind with their schoolwork, they read, write at a much slower pace, and sometimes they even reverse letters when writing. So, I think the first sign is when a child delays to do something. Some find it difficult to even read and write”.
[Participant Sthe, 7 years teaching experience]

Some participants felt that there are differences between the academic performance of learners with learning difficulties and those without, but these differences are not major.

“uhm...I don’t think the differences are major but there are differences, for example, learners with learning difficulties have a challenge in that they cannot focus in class, some experience reading difficulties so these are signs that a child may be having a learning difficulties, I think that is how you can distinguish”. [Participant Phumzile; 10 years teaching experience]

4.5. Difference between learners with learning difficulties and those without

Identifying learners as having a disability proves to be a challenge globally but is particularly prevalent in poorly resourced settings. The disability may not be visually apparent and those with learning difficulties may display behaviours which are homogenous to that of learners without disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 2002). Therefore, examining participant knowledge

related to the identification of learners with and without learning difficulties and the learner's behaviour formed essential components which required further examination in the present study.

- *Telling the difference between learners with learning difficulties and those without*

Some of the participants stated that it is difficult to tell the difference between learners with learning difficulties and those without. The environment and upbringing of learners make it difficult to distinguish behaviourism issues from learning difficulties.

: “... it's not very easy, but you can tell that a child has a learning difficulty. Yes, but it is not very easy, when it starts, you tell yourself that the child is naughty they don't want to do their schoolwork maybe you do not have the child's history and all of that.”. [Participant Ntando; 30 years teaching experience]

“I think it is difficult... it's not that easy. Children suffer from a lot of conditions so sometimes it can be a bit tricky to tell whether the child has a certain learning difficulty or not, I don't think it's that easy to distinguish”. [Participant Nomsa; 4 years teaching experience]

There are those participants who found it is easy to tell the difference between learners with learning difficulties and those without from their experience.

“I think it's quite easy to tell the difference between a child with learning difficulty and a child that is normal. Learners with learning difficulties struggle in class, they struggle to understand, to grasp and they have a short attention span”. [Participant Phumzile; 10 years teaching experience]

“I think it's quite easy. Learners that have learning difficulties tend to struggle in one way or another in class that is how you pick it up. For example, I have a learner in my class who really gets frustrated when she has to write. This child can articulate herself well and can answer questions in class but when she has to write it is a mission”. [Participant Lesego; 2 years teaching experience]

There were those participants who felt that it can sometimes be easy to identify the child with learning difficulty at the same time with the other child it may be difficult. *“I can’t say it’s easy or difficult. But sometimes as teachers, we are able to pick up children that experience challenges, especially when they are evident. At times you might think that a child has a learning difficulty only to find that they have slow processing speed which impacts their grades, so it’s never easy or difficult I must say”*. [Participant Thato, 5 years teaching experience]

The findings of the present study were debatable as some teachers were able to identify learners with learning difficulties while others could not. Since there is no formal assessment in South Africa for identifying learners with learning disabilities, the decision is purely subjective, and some teachers may feel it is not feasible for them to make such choices. Therefore, it may be beneficial for South Africa to develop or adopt a formal assessment within their schools to employ uniformity when it comes to identifying learners with learning difficulties.

International standards reveal that there are multiple tools that can be implemented to recognize learners with learning disabilities. The methods involve discussions with the parents regarding the development of their child, using school-based assessments over a prolonged period (ranging from 3 to 4 months), and developing a multidisciplinary team to perform evaluations. An unbiased assessment is needed to determine a student’s eligibility for special education as part of inclusive education. An example of this is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the U.S. (Mandlawitz, 2007). It is also used in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Sweden (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017; Goldman & Holme 2010; Wehmeyer & Patton, 2017). These studies highlight the importance of using assessment tools when teachers are unable to identify learners with learning difficulties earlier.

Several teachers lack knowledge related to disability. Due to this fact, it is presumed that several learners who may have form of intellectual disability are unrecognized and are currently being educated in general schools without the appropriate support (Wisdom et al., 2016). Learners with intellectual disabilities are more likely to encounter learning difficulties and therefore being able to identify them early may allow for teachers to provide them with the additional support that they need.

A study by Ghimire (2017) stated that school-teachers lack adequate knowledge concerning learning disabilities. This is aligned with some of the participant responses in the current study.

Ghimire (2017) emphasized the importance of teachers recognizing learners with learning difficulties at an early stage and suitable training should be offered to them. This facilitates the learning process for the learner with learning difficulty and promotes inclusive education.

While the views of the teachers varied between being able to identify learners with learning difficulties, with some teachers displaying a more confident view than others, they also identified behaviours that can assist in identifying these learners as will be discussed in the following sub-theme.

- Behaviour of learners with learning difficulties

This sub-theme focuses on the findings based on the teachers' understanding of the behaviour displayed by learners with learning difficulties. The participants had varied responses about their perceptions related to the behaviours of learners with learning difficulties. Several participants felt that the learners with learning difficulties are disruptive in class, however, it can occur sporadically and is learner dependent.

“Not all of them you know. There are some children you will find that they are very reserved and quiet in class and then there are those that are disruptive, it really depends”. [Participant Sthe, 7 years teaching experience]

“Inattentive yes, disruptive no”. [Participant Thato, 5 years teaching experience]

“It depends on you know. It depends on the approach, children generally especially in the foundation phase don't have a language that is fully developed to express how they felt so they have a tendency to display this in their reactions and the way they do things sometimes they regress, sometimes maybe they get aggressive.” [Participant Lebo, over 15 years teaching experience]

There is a connection between learner behaviour and teacher's views related to learners with learning difficulties. Learner behaviour impacts how teachers perceive them and in doing so subsequently affect a teacher's beliefs and their behaviour. This has significant impact on the outcomes of learners with learning difficulties. It has been previously shown that learners who display more positive behaviours create better perceptions in teachers than those who display disruptive behaviours (Brady & Woolfson, 2008; Sebba, et al., 2018). In the present study most

of the participants believed that learners with learning difficulties would be disruptive in class. A plausible reason from a previous study explains that these learners may find it difficult to interpret social cues and lack the capacity to understand what behaviour is deemed appropriate (Ghimire, 2017). Learners with learning problems face fears and feelings of depression and are subject to experience more social rejection by peers (Goldman & Holme, 2010). At moments of educational transition or change, learners with learning problems may externalise their problems through inappropriate behaviours (Goldman & Holme, 2010). Learners with learning difficulties who experience significant behavioural deficits such as a lack stability and controllability are viewed by teachers as requiring external or special schooling facilities. Teachers tend to develop belief systems based on the behaviour demonstrated by learners with learning difficulties. This consequently affects their perceptions and forms the basis of the challenges they face when working with learners with learning difficulties. This will be elaborated in further detail in the next theme.

4.6. Difficulty in teaching learners with learning difficulties

This theme will focus on the challenges and difficulties experienced by teachers when teaching learners with learning difficulties. It will aim to identify some of the thoughts and feelings that teachers face when working with learners with learning difficulties.

Participants felt that it is difficult to teach learners with learning difficulties. They shared some of the challenges they experience as per their quotes below.

Participant recounted her experience: *“It’s difficult. I have 35 learners in my class so you can imagine how overwhelmed I am, I am under so much pressure so it’s quite challenging for me to be patient and to give individual attention to all the learners. Learners with learning difficulties need special attention and honestly it makes it difficult for the teachers because already they are under so much pressure. So yes, I would say it is difficult”*. [Participant Duduzile, 9 years teaching experience]

Another participant added: *It’s not easy even with the experience that I have but still because cases are different, you see cases are different and most of our learners are experiencing problems, social problems, economic problems, and things that are currently happening in the country are affecting them, so which makes it very difficult. Otherwise, you would say that if*

the child eh... I have done this one, two, and three but still, he/she is not coping then I have to investigate, there is a problem, you see?" [Participant Ntando, 30 years teaching experience]

There were participants who felt that while teaching children with learning difficulties is challenging, it can be accomplished with the dedicated time and patience from the teacher.

"To tell an honest truth, I can never say it is 100% easy, uhm... there are situations where you basically excel but then there are places where you find that there's a child that is displaying serious learning barriers in the classroom that you realize that this is beyond basically what I can do, and it maybe needs a special person to be able to break through some of the barriers so in this sense you find that you are able to stretch some parts but when you dig deeper you realise that some of these things need other stakeholders, you can't do it by yourself". [Participant Lebo, over 15 years teaching experience]

In previous studies, teachers have justified their behaviour of not being able to adequately assist learners with learning difficulties in their class due to their lack of training (DoE, 2001; Xaba, 2011). The same that they have reported that they feel unprepared and apprehensive when faced with learners with learning difficulties in regular classrooms. They may experience concern about their preparedness and question their coping ability to teach these learners (Blanton et al., 2011).

Understanding teacher perceptions and their challenges is critical in the development of inclusive teaching methods and attitudes towards learners with learning difficulties (Forlin et al., 2009; Xaba, 2011). Additionally, external factors pertaining to cultural and contextual factors need to be considered by the Department of Education and government. It is of increasing significance that teachers adapt and accept the expanding diversity within the learner population.

4.7. Underlying factors in learners having learning difficulties

This theme will encompass the following subthemes: Interventions required for learners experiencing poor academic performance in classroom education, the need for training of teachers and teacher responses related to accommodating learners with learning difficulties at mainstream schools. Each will be explained in further detail.

Participants raised numerous underlying factors based on their experiences and observations of working with children with learning difficulties. Participants mentioned that there were multiple factors that are responsible for learning difficulties. Cultural, contextual, and linguistic factors have the potential to affect educational outcomes. Numerous factors which need to be acknowledged include the roles of parents, extended family, and the parents' involvement related to their child's academic progress (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

Some participants went further to describe what they believe are the underlying factors as evidenced in the quotes that follow. *"Look, there is never one cause, I think it is multiple factors, genes, socialisation, environment and I think there are many more factors"*. [Participant Thato, 5 years teaching experience]

"I think it is genetics, social problems so basically nature and nurture both play a role. You get that a child is born with a certain impairment or defect from their history sometimes it is things that affect them at home, social problems that contribute to their behaviour, you find that it becomes a barrier in the classroom". [Participant Lebo, over 15 years teaching experience]

"I think sometimes it is hereditary, sometimes it may be a social problem, sometimes it is a problem from home, sometimes it's the teacher because at times we also tend to be the contributors... For instance, if you don't understand the child, you reprimand him/her, you do all of these things the child will eventually think that you don't like him/her. Sometimes all you have to do is to talk to the child, ask them what the problem is, because really most of the time teachers are the problem. The child ends up not wanting to go to school because of you, your behaviour as a teacher. We also have our own stress from home and then we take it out on the children". [Participant Thabsile, 14 years teaching experience].

Among the top reasons for learners experiencing learning difficulties are, environmental exposure and social problems, trauma, genetics, and parenting styles were listed most frequently (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). It has been shown in previous studies that the most effective school structure and support systems take these factors into consideration and integrate them into providing the relevant support for learners with learning difficulties (Hansen, 2012). It is crucial to understand the roles of affective and motivational factors for all

children, including those with learning difficulties (Xaba, 2011). Various interventions may be beneficial such as bridging the interface between the home and school environments in improving learning outcomes for those affected with learning difficulties (Hansen, 2012).

- *Interventions required for learners experiencing poor academic performance in classroom education*

To boost learner performance, often the appropriate resources and specific interventions are required. Resources is the broad term that can include tools and services which are useful to achieving the desired goal. All the participants stated that resources are necessary however, there are little to no resources at all available to them to adequately teach learners with learning difficulties.

“Eh...you know honestly schools in the townships are really struggling, we really do not have sufficient resources, and we always have to improvise.”. [Participant Phumzile, 10 years teaching experience]

“I feel like the government could do more to support teachers in mainstream school, maybe if we had school psychologists who would be able to identify these learners so that they can be assisted. Government should provide us with necessary resources to support these children”. [Participant Nancy, 9 years teaching experience]

The participants reveal that there are too many learners in public mainstream schools which contributes to the government being unable to afford to provide resources for all the schools. The participants felt that the government may be trying its best but there are just too many children to cater for. The government may not necessarily be able to afford to have specialists such as educational psychologists in public schools.

“We have a large number of classes and there are a lot of public schools which makes it almost impossible for the government to assist everyone”. [Participant Thato, 5 years teaching experience]

“So, we are a private school, but we are the ‘poor private school’ in the township (she laughs) we charge less school fees and the subsidy we receive from the department is not enough, children end up being neglected”. [Participant Thabsile, 14 years teaching experience]

Studies such as Wisdom et al. (2016) as well as Vaughn and Linan-Thompson (2003) put forward that Australia, Canada, Western Europe, or the United States have more infrastructure to develop useful tools which in certain instances may be inaccessible to Africa, as also stated by Xaba (2011). Within the context of learners with learning difficulties, it is often stated in the literature that teachers in low-to-middle income countries lack these resources which would help them significantly (Ghimire, 2017).

- *Need for training*

Participants emphasized that training is needed for teachers who educate learners with learning difficulties.

“We have received training, but I don’t we have all the skills needed to work with children that have learning difficulties. I don’t think the knowledge we have is enough honestly”. [Participant Neo, 11 years teaching experience]

“...it is difficult, very much difficult because you have to cater to their individual needs, you must understand that children are different, so you have to be trained to work with children that have difficulties”. [Participant Mpumi, 11 years teaching experience]

Participants mentioned that governments also may not be able to afford training for teachers which results in children not being assisted and helped to achieve academic success.

“Honestly, we all know that public schools struggle, they have never been prioritized. The government is failing us, they are busy telling us to implement white paper 6 but how can we do that if there’s no resources. We really can’t”. [Participant Nomsa, 4 years teaching experience]

Participants placed emphasis on training programs and workshops. There is a need for the Department of Education to develop and institute these programs and workshops at the

teaching facilities. Following the inclusion of a comprehensive training workshop (Baker-Ericzèn et al., 2009) perceived competence and attitudes toward inclusiveness increased. The training focused on the history of learning difficulties, practical approaches for teaching learners with disabilities, positive behavioural care, and building collaborative partnerships with professionals and parents.

Previous studies have stressed that teacher training should aim to improve their skills, knowledge, attitudes and promote teachers' willingness for inclusiveness (Borg 2011; Forlin, 2009). Empirical research in the UK and US have confirmed that teacher education has positive effects on both competence and attitudes whilst decreasing teachers' anxiety and hostility (Beacham & Rouse, 2012). All the participants believed they have not received adequate training to teach learners with learning difficulties and this is an important determining factor in how well teachers are able to accommodate learners with learning difficulties at mainstream schools. Their ability and responses to accommodating learners with learning difficulties at mainstream schools will be discussed in the subsequent sub-theme.

- *Accommodating learners with learning difficulties at mainstream schools*

Despite attempts by the Department of Basic Education in exposing teachers to learning support and policies such as the Education White Paper 6 - Special Needs Education: Building Inclusive Education and Training (EWP6) (DoE, 2001), teachers still face numerous challenges in mainstream schools. Participants believe that learners with learning difficulties should attend special schools instead of mainstream schools.

"In addition, township public schools are overcrowded so we already have so much pressure".
[Participant Mpumi, 11 years teaching experience]

Participants with longer durations of teaching experience had an opinion that learners with learning difficulties should be accommodated in separate special schools.

Some participants with shorter durations of teaching experience felt as though learners with learning difficulties can be accommodated at mainstream schools, but with more training and resources.

“They can be accommodated, we just need to be more trained, and they need to at least provide us with necessary resources, I think they can be accommodated but for now it would be best if maybe they attend special schools because they have more resources than mainstream schools and they are at a better position to assist these learners”. [Participant Sthe, 7 years teaching experience]

There will always be a debate as to whether learners with learning difficulties can be accommodated in mainstream schools. This is due to numerous reasons and participant responses varied. Those that disagreed attributed this to their lack of resources and lack of appropriate interventions.

In South Africa, most learners with specific learning difficulties are identified and attend mainstream schools (DoE, 2001). Dyson (2001) suggested that learners with learning difficulties should be educated alongside their peers wherever possible and with appropriate support. The Norms and Standards for Educators state that teachers need to be *“qualified, competent, dedicated, and caring”* (DoE, 2001, p.4). Teachers have to fulfil multiple roles and are the main factor in making inclusive education in mainstream schools succeed (DoE, 2001).

With the proper tools and provisions, learners with learning difficulties can attain achievements academically. They can even become successful employees and become active members of society. All the participants stated that learning difficulties can be overcome with the correct support from both teachers and parents.

“Yes, yes. As I have said before, their problems are not the same. Those that have minor problems can overcome this if we give them adequate support as teachers and parents as well because teachers cannot work alone, the parents also have to be there so if we work as a team with the parent then the child can overcome the challenge”. [Participant Thabsile; 14 years teaching experience]

It also depends on passion, are there people who are teaching as passionate also because if the staff is not passionate it's also a problem but if everybody is passionate and giving it the best that they can then these children would do so well”. [Participant Lebo; over 15 years teaching experience]

4.8. Conclusion

The inclusion of learners with learning difficulties in mainstream schools is dependent on the adequacy of training and resources provided. The academic success of learners with learning disabilities are also dependent on the correct support that they receive from teachers, the government providing adequate resources and training and the teachers' own attitude and commitment. The participants highlighted several challenges they experience affect the way they interact, perceive, and teach learners with learning difficulties. The participants reported that the challenges in accommodating learners with learning difficulties ranged from under-resourced classrooms, inadequate training, large numbers of learners in the classroom to a lack of relevant support by the Department of Education. Participants views differed by the length of durations of teaching experience. Participants with more years of teaching experience were less amenable to accommodating learners with learning difficulties and thought they should be accommodated in separate special schools. The next chapter discusses the findings of the study.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

This final chapter summarizes and discusses the main findings in relation to aims of the study. Limitations of this research and future directions will also be explained. This chapter commences with a recap of the aims, purpose and research questions of this study as follows:

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' understanding of learning difficulties and their perceptions of learners with learning difficulties.

The research objectives of the study were as follows:

- To discover teachers' perceptions (attributes, attitudes, and expectations) influencing their behaviour towards learners with learning difficulties
- To explore teachers' understanding of the concept "learning difficulties"
- To investigate the specific resources required for learners experiencing poor academic performance in classroom education.
- To gain an understanding of how learning difficulties affect academic performance.

The primary research question was:

- What are teachers' perceptions of learners with learning difficulties?

The secondary research questions were:

- What are the teachers' understanding of learners with LD?
- What are the teachers' understanding of the concept "LD"?
- What are teachers' views of the influence of LD on the learners' academic performance?
- What are teachers' views of support resources necessary for learners with LD?

There were four major findings on this study. The first finding was that teachers may require additional support structures and regular familiarization of the White Paper Six document to strengthen their abilities in educating children with learning difficulties. Secondly, teachers' perceptions in identifying children with learning difficulties is linked to learner behaviour. Thirdly, teachers may experience difficulties and challenges in working with learners with

learning difficulties. Lastly, teachers found that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors contribute to the development of learning difficulties

5.2. Teacher Training, Support Structures and Familiarization of the White Paper Six Policy

This study found that teachers may have trouble accessing the necessary resources and support needed for inclusion need training. In South Africa it has been shown that teachers equate the implementation of inclusive education to stressful and complicated situations (Walton & Rusznyak, 2014). It requires ongoing support in the classroom, adequate training programs and skill enhancing practices in teachers at a local and district level. It is based on the policies like the Education White Paper Six which was elaborated on previously. This ensures that inclusive education is accessible to the general population whenever they need it. Previous research has not always been in favour of these measures.

This study found that the majority of positive responses that were reported by the teachers regarding having knowledge about the White Paper Six were vague and lacked detail. It appeared as if teachers did not want to be perceived as ignorant or as lacking knowledge regarding the policy. White Paper six is criticized by Donohue and Bornman (2014) for being difficult to grasp and for highlighting obstacles that impede its implementation in South Africa. Ironically, the reality does not match the intent. Teachers are still struggling to put it into effect, despite the fact that they are expected to maintain high-quality educational procedures (McLeskey et al., 2014).

Three participants in this study stated were either unsure or indicated that they studied about the policy a long time ago. These findings are in line with Bornman and Donohouse (2014) who reported that educators with many years of experience who acquired their training prior to the introduction of the White Paper Six may find it difficult to realign their teaching approaches, according to previous studies. The current study found that teachers may have difficulty obtaining the necessary resources and support for inclusion, and that they require training. To increase their abilities in educating children with learning disabilities, teachers may require additional support structures and regular familiarization with this vital material.

According to research conducted in South Africa, teachers find the adoption of inclusive practices in their classrooms to be stressful and demanding, and they reported that being competent in inclusive practices in a classroom can be challenging if support systems are limited and inefficient (Donohue & Borman, 2014; Nel et al., 2014). Teachers' ability to provide support to students is limited by their own knowledge, abilities, and resources. "Teachers need to be highly trained and motivated to be successful," as Loreman et al. (2010:7) rightly state. Although many instructors are enthusiastic about inclusion, however, the key areas of concern include inclusion training, acceptable curricula for all students, school, and classroom structures and available resources, that obstruct inclusion. The environment and state in which the study's participants educate make it difficult for them to provide help to students in their classrooms (Nel et al., 2014).

Majority of the participants in this study agreed that they did not receive adequate training to work with children with learning difficulties. According to research, teachers' willingness, or reluctance to including learners with learning disabilities in regular classes is related to their knowledge base and experiences (Stoler, 1992). However, more research revealed that the most common source of educator reluctance is a lack of basic abilities to teach learners with learning difficulties (Hallahan et al., 2020).

The major resource for fulfilling the aims of inclusive education and training systems is classroom instructors. As a result, teachers will need to increase their knowledge and skills, as well as create their own. The most effective training will most likely take place at schools that have some experience working with students with special needs. The most likely source of educator reluctance is a lack of basic skills or ongoing training to educate learners with learning disabilities. The most likely source of educator reluctance is a lack of basic skills or ongoing training to educate learners with learning disabilities.

Up to 65% of mainstream educators lack a formal first teacher education certificate that includes instruction in how to respond to various learning needs in standard classrooms (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). They were either trained for "specialised education" or general education or in different educational environments. This paradigm of initial teacher education and learner support is based on a medical deficit approach, in which specialized intervention is required and support is provided by Education Support Services specialists.

Inclusive education is a never-ending process that has posed significant educational challenges and aims to remove learning barriers in South Africa (Dreyer et al., 2007).

5.3. Teachers' Perceptions in Identifying Learners with Learning Difficulties

According to Ghimire (2017), school teachers do not have appropriate knowledge of learning difficulties. This corresponds to some of the present study's participant responses. Ghimire (2017) stressed the necessity of teachers recognizing learners with learning disabilities early on and providing appropriate training. This makes learning easier for students with learning disabilities and encourages inclusive education.

The findings of the present study were debatable as some teachers were able to identify learners with learning difficulties while others could not. There seems to be a link between learner behaviour and teachers' perceptions in identifying learners with learning difficulties. Learner behaviour has an impact on how teachers see them, which in turn has an impact on a teacher's views and behaviour (Wehmeyer & Patton, 2017). This has a substantial impact on the outcomes of students who struggle with learning. It has already been demonstrated that students who exhibit more positive behaviours have better teacher perceptions than students who exhibit disruptive behaviours (Pather, 2011). The majority of the participants in this study thought that students with learning difficulties would be disruptive in class.

The majority of educators in this study indicated that learners with learning difficulties may struggle to perceive social cues and lack the competence to understand what behaviour is considered suitable. This finding is reflected the study by Goldman and Holme (2010) who reported that learners with learning difficulties may externalize their challenges through improper behaviour at times of scholastic transition or change. Teachers consider students with learning disabilities who have substantial behavioural deficiencies, such as a lack of stability and controllability, to require external or special schooling. Teachers' belief systems are often formed based on the behaviour of students with learning disabilities. As a result, their perceptions are influenced, and the issues they confront while dealing with learners with learning disabilities are exacerbated.

However, some of the teachers in this study indicated that the environment and upbringing of learners make it difficult to distinguish behaviourism issues from learning difficulties. This

finding is in line with past research that indicates that children with learning difficulties are a heterogeneous group who show difficulties in many different areas, not all children with learning difficulties exhibit behavioural issues (Xaba, 2011).

The majority of teachers viewed learning difficulties on the basis of how a child behaves in the classroom. As a result, it is assumed that numerous learners with intellectual disabilities go unnoticed and are currently being educated in mainstream schools without the necessary help (Wisdom et al., 2016). Learners with intellectual disabilities are more likely to have learning challenges, therefore being able to see them early may allow teachers to offer them with the extra help they require.

5.4. Challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with learning difficulties

In this study, all of the teachers reported that they found it challenging to teach learners with learning difficulties. Teachers previously rationalized such actions by claiming that they are unable to appropriately assist students with learning disabilities in their classes owing to a lack of training (DoE, 2001; Xaba, 2011). They have also stated that when confronted with students with learning difficulties in regular classrooms, they feel unprepared and apprehensive. They may be concerned about their preparedness and doubtful about their abilities to instruct these students. The importance of training programs and workshops was emphasized by the participants.

Largely, the teachers in this study reported that they have formed negative perceptions towards inclusive education due to the class size. Teachers reported that due to the size of the class and the time slots allotted for instruction, they are unable to offer learners with learning difficulties the attention they require. This finding is in line with Engelbrecht (2006), who reported that the classroom situation in mainstream schools does not match the needs of learners with learning difficulties. The integration of learners with learning difficulties in mainstream schools can be challenging, large classes tend to reduce the effectiveness of classroom management.

According to previous research, teacher training should attempt to increase teachers' abilities, knowledge, and attitudes, as well as promote teachers' willingness to be inclusive (Borg et al., 2011; Forlin, 2009). Empirical research in the United Kingdom and the United States has found

that teacher education improves both competence and attitudes while reducing teachers' anxiety and hostility (Beacham & Rouse, 2012). All of the participants stated they had not gotten appropriate training to educate students with learning disabilities, which is a key determinant of how well teachers can accommodate students with learning disabilities in mainstream schools.

In order to build inclusive teaching approaches and attitudes toward learners with learning disabilities, it is necessary to first understand teachers' perceptions and obstacles (Forlin et al., 2009; Xaba, 2011). External variables such as cultural and contextual issues must also be taken into account by the Department of Education and the government.

5.5. Teacher's perception of underlying factors in learners having learning difficulties

Underlying factors of learning difficulties include both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Environmental exposure and social problems, trauma, genetics, and parenting styles are among the most common reasons for learners encountering learning challenges (Pather, 2011). Previous research has demonstrated that the most effective school structures and support systems take these aspects into account and incorporate them into providing appropriate help for students with learning disabilities (Hansen, 2012).

In this study, teachers reported a number of underlying factors based on their experiences and observations of working with children with learning difficulties. These include, cultural, contextual, and linguistic factors which may affect a child's performance in school. Numerous factors which need to be acknowledged include the roles of parents, extended family, and the parents' involvement related to their child's academic progress.

According to Hansen (2012) factors that affect development of learning difficulties include: environmental exposure, there seems to be a link between exposure to high level of toxins and learning difficulties. Family genetics were also found to increase the risk of child developing a learning difficulty. Psychological trauma / abuse in early childhood may have a negative impact on the development of the brain which may increase the risk of developing a learning difficulty. Finally, physical trauma such as nervous system infections or/ and head injuries were also found to play a role in the development of learning difficulties.

According to this study, teachers believe that learners with learning disabilities can achieve academic success with the right tools and resources. They have the potential to be successful employees and contributing members of society. Learning challenges can be solved with the right help from both teachers and parents.

For all children, even those with learning difficulties, it is critical to comprehend the roles of affective and motivating elements. Various treatments, such as bridging the gap between the home and school contexts, may be effective in improving learning outcomes for persons with learning disabilities.

5.6. Implications of the study: Interventions and recommendations

Changes are needed at various levels. Based on participant responses, several strategies need to be implemented. The South African government needs to implement the policies in place and provide the appropriate resources for teachers. More training programs and workshops are necessary to develop teacher skills and to foster confidence in their abilities when interacting with learners with learning difficulties. The participants stated that if teachers felt more prepared and supported, there will be a concomitant increase in feelings of comfort in interactions, decreased anxiety and willingness to face the challenges of accommodating learners with learning difficulties.

Diversity education and awareness trainings, which when successfully applied can influence behaviour and change attitudes especially among teachers who were trained prior to the introduction of the White Paper 6 document. Teachers with more years of teaching experience also needed to realign their teaching methods and attitudes to incorporate a more inclusive approach. Inclusive pedagogy and didactics are central to teacher training programs and inclusion workshops (Hansen, 2012). It is important to improve classroom culture, assessment skills and employ assistive technology. A more practical approach is needed along with the support of the relevant people involved (Forlin, 2009). A recent study by Jacobs and Govender (2020) supports the findings of the present study.

In addition to this, the presence of healthcare professionals (such as speech therapist, occupational therapist and psychologists) at schools would be beneficial.

5.7. Limitations

The sample size of 15 participants was insufficient, making the results difficult to extrapolate to the wider population. The findings cannot be generalised to a broader context due to the qualitative nature of the data as it has low external validity. This research study is only applicable to the specific population of teachers in Soweto. Another methodological flaw in this research was the data gathering method, which was only the semi-structured interview.

The researcher's ability to explore for more information, by focus group discussions where deeper conversations could have spurred, was constrained by using a single method for data collection. This research gives some baseline information and may not reflect the opinions of all registered teachers in the country. Existing data, on the other hand, may be expanded upon through more research. Follow-up focus group interviews might provide more detailed information, allowing for data triangulation and reliability (Morrow, 2005).

The questionnaire in this study was a self-designed information gathering tool that was limited to the research study's objectives (De Vos, 2002). The respondents were limited to the questions in the questionnaire rather than the formation of a framework that would have been generated through a semi-structured interview, despite the fact that there were open-ended questions that solicited their perspectives.

5.8. Suggestions for Future Research

Therefore, understanding teachers' views and perceptions related to these concepts are integral to improving teaching practices pertaining to learners with learning difficulties. This may assist in identifying gaps which can be improved to enhance education for learners with learning difficulties. Establishing routine protocols or assessments to screen for students with learning difficulties is an important aspect that should be considered by the Department of Education in South Africa. This may allow learners with learning difficulties to receive the additional support that they may require from an earlier age. This may facilitate the learning process and develop better interaction within the school environment. Future research should focus on investigating teaching practices pertaining to learners with learning difficulties.

5.9. Conclusion

The adequacy of training and resources offered is a determining factor in the inclusion of learners with learning disabilities in mainstream schools. Learners with learning difficulties' academic progress is also influenced by the appropriate help they receive from teachers, the government's provision of proper resources and training, and the teachers' personal attitude and commitment. Several issues that the participants face have an impact on how they engage with, perceive, and educate students with learning disabilities, according to the participants. Under-resourced classrooms, inadequate training, large numbers of learners in the classroom, and a lack of relevant support from the Department of Education were all mentioned as issues in accommodating learners with learning disabilities by the participants. The length of the participants' teaching experience influenced their opinions. Participants with more years of teaching experience were less receptive to accommodating students with learning disabilities, believing that they should be placed in separate special schools.

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Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance certificate



SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE **CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MEDPSYC/20/06

PROJECT TITLE:

The perceptions of school teachers on children with learning difficulties in Soweto

INVESTIGATOR

Bayane Chantel (1153663)

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

SHCD/Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

15 June 2020

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Minimal Risk

EXPIRY DATE

31 December 2022

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

25 July 2020

CHAIRPERSON


(Prof. Zaytoon Amod)

cc: Dr Busisiwe Nkala-Dlamini (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.



Signature

Date

____/____/____

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix 2: Gauteng Department of Education certificate



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	03 February 2022
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2022– 30 September 2022 2022/42
Name of Researcher:	Bayane CK
Address of Researcher:	68 Amsterdam DR Olivendale Randburg
Telephone Number:	065 943 7218
Email address:	byanekgothatso@gmail.com
Research Topic:	The perceptions of teachers on children with learning difficulties in Soweto
Type of qualification	Masters
Number and type of schools:	3 Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Johannesburg South

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

[Signature] 03/02/2022

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix 3: Permission letter to conduct study at the school



University of the Witwatersrand,
Psychology Department
The school of human and community development
Tell: 011 717 4541

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Chantel Kgothatso Bayane, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am seeking permission to do research at your school.

The area of research in this study is the perceptions of teachers on children with learning difficulties in Soweto. The study will focus on teachers' perceptions (attitudes, expectations, and attributes) towards learners with learning difficulties. It will look at how these perceptions influence the behaviour of teachers towards learners with learning difficulties. Given the changing demographics of schools, I want to understand how the needs of diverse learners can be addressed, and how can teachers be equipped with necessary skills. In addition, how can this knowledge be then be used to assist learners with learning difficulties reach their full potential according to their mental abilities.

Five teachers will be approached to participate in the research investigation. These educators would have to be familiar with learners with learning difficulties as they would be able to provide more insight and discuss the challenges and drawbacks at length. If they agree, qualitative information collection techniques will include semi-structured interviews with the five teachers.

For participation in this study, teachers will be interviewed individually over the phone. Completion of the interview will take approximately 30 minutes of their time. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and they will not be disadvantaged for choosing not to participate in this study in any way. There are no foreseeable risks or benefits for participants taking part

in this study. Teachers do not have to answer any of the questions that may arise in the interview if they do not wish to. Responses are kept anonymous as no identifying information is asked for on the questionnaire. The results of this study will only be processed by myself as the researcher and my supervisor, so confidentiality is ensured. Data collection will take place through telephonic calls, and the participants responses will be recorded as well.

Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins.

General feedback from the results of the study will be presented in a summary which will be put up in the school's staff room once the research is completed in November this year. A copy of the final research report will also be sent to the principal on request. Results may also be reported in a journal article.

I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my research at your school. The permission letter should be on the school's headed paper, signed and dated, and specifically referring to myself by name and the title of my study.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

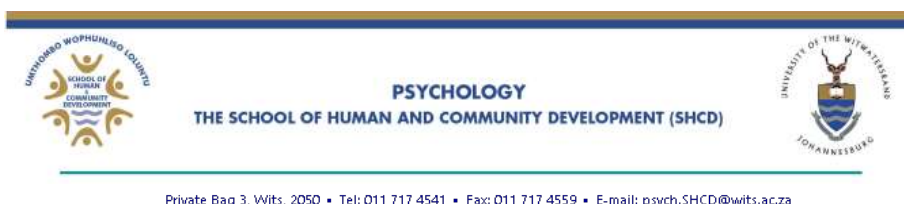
Yours sincerely,

Chantel Kgothatso Bayane

Chantel Kgothatso Bayane
065 943 7218
bayanekgothatso@gmail.com

Busisiwe Nkala-Dlamini
Busisiwe.nkala-dlamini@wits.ac.za

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet



APPENDIX 4: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Educator,

Good day, my name is Chantel Bayane, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. The area of research in this study is the perceptions of teachers on children with learning difficulties. I would like to invite you to take part in this study, which will look at the perceptions of educators towards learners with learning difficulties, and their perceptions towards barriers to learning.

For participation in this study, you will be interviewed over the phone and it will only take approximately 30 minutes of your time.. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you will not be disadvantaged for choosing not to participate in this study in any way. There are no foreseeable risks or benefits for participants taking part in this study. You do not have to answer any of the questions that may arise in the interview if you do not wish to. Responses are kept anonymous as no identifying information is asked for on the questionnaire. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting.

A coding system will be used to keep track of all the completed interviews from one particular school. The results of this study will only be processed by myself as the researcher and my supervisor, so confidentiality is ensured. If direct quotes are used from the final set of questions at the end of the questionnaire, no identifying information will be included in the quote. All data gathered from this study will be stored in a password protected laptop with restricted access to the researcher and research supervisor. All questionnaires will be destroyed after being stored for the allocated time set out by the University.

General feedback from the results of the study will be presented in a summary which will be put up in each school's staff room once the research is completed in November this year. A

Appendix 5: Consent Form

The perceptions of school teachers on children with learning difficulties in Soweto

Chantel Kgothatso Bayane

I,, agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
---	-----	----

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report	YES	NO
---	-----	----

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
--	-----	----

I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO
--	-----	----

.....

..... (signature)
..... (name of participant)
..... (date)

..... (signature)
..... (name of person seeking consent)
.....

Appendix 6: Audio Consent Form



Appendix 6: Audio consent form

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING OF STUDY PARTICIPATION

The perceptions of school teachers on children with learning difficulties in Soweto

I hereby consent to audio recording of the interview¹, or focus group discussion¹, or classroom interaction¹

I understand that:

- The recording will be stored in a secure location (a locked cupboard or password protected computer) with restricted access to the researcher and the research supervisor.
- The recording will be transcribed and any information that could identify me will be removed,
- The recordings will be erased within either (a) two (2) years of the publication of the research findings, or (b) six (6) years, if no publications arise from this research
- Anyone wishing to access this information in the future will first have to obtain the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee (Medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
- Direct quotes from my interview, without any information that could identify me, may be cited in the research report or other write-ups of research.

Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Signature or mark _____

Appendix 7: Research Instruments

Appendix D: Proposed Instruments

Research Instruments

A purposive inspecting methodology will be utilized to choose the participants. 3 public high schools in the Soweto region will be approached to participate. The schools are arranged in communities that are representative of the diverse financial and language groups in the Soweto township. Five teachers of the selected schools will be approached to participate in the research investigation.

Instruments

Qualitative information collection techniques will include semi-structured interviews with the five teachers. Semi-structured interview schedule will be used to facilitate one-on-one interviews with the participants to explore the concept of learning difficulties, their thoughts on learners with learning difficulties and find out what support structures are required for both learners and teachers. A semi-structured interview is a highly subjective instruments to use as it relies heavily on the interpretations of the researcher. A meeting plan will be utilized to organize interviews and time will be allocated so as to retrieve as much information as possible from the teachers. This will be scheduled as an electric meeting.

Interview Schedule

Section A: Participant Demographic Information

1	Highest qualification	
2	Years of experience as a teacher	
3	Experience with learners with learning difficulties?	
4	Do you know what White paper 6 (issued by the Department of Education in 2001) states?	

Section B: Teachers perceptions on learners with learning difficulties

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to tell the difference between learners with learning difficulties and those without?
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to teach learners with learning difficulties?
3. What do you understand to be reasons behind learners having learning difficulties?
4. Do you find that students with learning difficulties are disruptive in class?

Declaration Regarding Plagiarism

- I understand what is meant by “plagiarism”. Plagiarism is using another’s work and pretending that it is one’s own. Not referencing one’s sources or not citing them accurately also constitutes plagiarism. I understand that plagiarism is wrong, and is contrary to the university’s regulations regarding intellectual property as stipulated in the general regulations manual.
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