



# EDUCATION. INNOVATION. DIVERSITY (EID)

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EID is an international, periodical scientific journal publishing original research which is of general significance to the education research community and which comes from a wide range of areas of education research and related disciplines.

This journal operates a blind review process. All contributions are typically sent to a minimum of two independent expert reviewers to assess the scientific quality of the paper. Every peer-reviewed research article appearing in this journal will be published open access. The journal is indexed in ERIH PLUS, DOAJ, CrossRef, WordCat.

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## PREFACE

Dear authors and readers,

I am delighted to present the new issue of the scientific e-journal “Education. Innovation. Diversity” (EID). The journal is the result of scientific cooperation between several universities - Rezekne Academy of Technologies (Latvia), Liepaja University (Latvia), Palacký University Olomouc (Czech Republic), Riga Stradins University (Latvia), University of Niš (Serbia) and Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania). EID aims to make major research and new findings of broad importance widely accessible. The journal is indexed in ERIH PLUS, DOAJ, CrossRef, WordCat.

It is a real pleasure that the number of countries where the journal is being read and from where we receive messages is increasing with each issue. I hope that this issue will be of interest to many readers.

Many thanks to each of the authors from Greece, Germany, South Africa, and Romania for entrusting their research to our journal! Thanks to the reviewers; it would not have been possible to publish this issue without their input and evaluation. We hope that the research published in the journal will be encouraging for readers.

We also invite other authors to submit papers for publication in the e-journal EID. We have started working on the creation of the 6th issue.

Themes:

- **Teaching and Learning** (curriculum development and innovation at all levels, approaches to accommodating national and state standards within the context of effective instruction and assessment, teacher development and mentoring, diversity in the classroom and augmented/virtual reality in education, etc.)
- **Language and Literacy Education** (theoretical perspectives on language or literacy that address teaching and learning; research-validated approaches to instruction and assessment or curriculum development and refinement for general education learners, second language learners, or those with particular needs; learner identity; social justice in literacy and language teaching and learning; accommodating national and state standards within the context of effective instruction and assessment; digitally-mediated learning, etc.)
- **Diversity in Education** (education and multicultural society today, intercultural communication, human rights and anti-racist education, pluralism and diversity in a democratic framework, pluralism in post-communist and in post-colonial countries, migration and indigenous minority issues, refugee issues, language policy issues, etc.)
- **Health and Sport Education** (interventions related to primary prevention of chronic disease from a social ecological perspective that conceptualized the effect of individual, interpersonal, institutional, community and policy factors on lifestyle behaviour, advancement of sport/exercise/health sciences, health promotion, health education, social rehabilitation, physical exercise and health, adapted physical activity).



- **Engineering Education** (engineering education at all levels, innovation in engineering education strategies, course and curriculum design, teaching, and assessment within and outside of the classroom, etc.)
- **Personality Development in the Educational Environment** (professional school counselling, bullying and bullying prevention, social emotional learning, college or career readiness, multicultural counselling and development, performance psychology, etc.)

We invite authors to submit papers to the journal's website <http://journals.rta.lv/index.php/EID> We hope that together we will be able to create a high-quality e-journal on research in education.

Responsible for the publication  
Dr.paed. Svetlana Usca

## TEACHERS ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE CENTERS IN GREECE

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**Abstract.** *Since 2015, increased numbers of refugee families with pre-school-aged children have arrived in Greece. Inclusion preschool refugee children in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) centers is about embracing diversity, including every child holistically and providing opportunities for all children to participate and benefit. The present study examined the general ECEC teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of refugee children into their classroom in public ECEC centers, their behavior and factors that might influence the attitudes towards inclusion based on Eagly & Chaiken's three-component model of attitude and Bronfenbrenner's theory. The research sample consists of 114 ECEC teachers working at public municipal child care centers in the area of Thessaloniki in Northern Greece. The results showed that the ECEC teachers have positive attitude towards inclusion of refugee children, however seemed doubtful in the implementation of inclusion.*

**Keywords:** *Inclusion; attitudes; preschool refugee children; preschool centers; preschool teachers.*

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### Introduction

Protracted conflict, violations of human rights, climate change and lack of economic opportunity have continued to drive millions of vulnerable people to more secure countries. In 2019, there were 71 million refugees and displaced people around the world, with an average of 37,000 persons fleeing their homes every day. According to UNHCR, more than 57% of registered refugees are from Syria (6.7 million), followed by refugees from Afghanistan (2.7 million) and South Sudan (2.3 million). Moving beyond providing immediate support to asylum seekers and new refugees, policy-makers have to deal with the challenges of how to promote the inclusion of those who are likely to stay, including refugee children and youth (OECD, 2019). Refugee children are a particularly vulnerable group that is easily overlooked in official statistics (Fazel & Stein, 2002). Globally, over one sixth of forcibly displaced persons are children under the age of five. Between 2018 and 2020, an average of between 290,000 and 340,000 children per year were born into a refugee life. Greece saw a dramatic increase in asylum-seeker arrivals starting in 2014. The 2016 EU-Turkey statement and the closure of the Greek border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, along with border closures along the Western Balkan route, led to an increase in the share of newcomers remaining in the country. Syrians constitute the largest group among arrivals to Greece, along with significant numbers of newcomers from Afghanistan and Iraq, including a range of African and Middle Eastern countries. More than one-third (37%) of refugees who arrived irregularly via sea crossings in 2017 were children. Today, it hosts over 118,000 refugees and asylum seekers the majority of whom are children and youth and the numbers continue to increase. A Large number of documented refugees were moved in the region of Northern Greece. 43 % come from Syria, 27% from Iraq, 7% from Afghanistan, 5% from Turkey, 4% from Pakistan, and 2% from Iran (UNHCR, 2019). Refugee and asylum-seeking children by age at November 2019 were 17100 aged 0 -5 and 13.730 aged 6-12.

The research objective of the current study is to examine teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of refugee children into their classroom in ECEC centers and factors that might influence the attitudes towards inclusion based on Eagly & Chaiken's three-component model of attitude and Bronfenbrenner's theory.

### **Literature review**

Access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE), therefore, can be vital in laying the foundations for children's long-term development, well-being, learning, social and health (Vandenbroeck, 2015; Vandenbroeck et al., 2018). Inclusion is about encompassing diversity, including every child holistically and providing opportunities for all children to participate and benefit. Inclusion is a basic human right. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child proclaimed that everyone children have the right to an education (Article 28) that develops their ability, prepares children for life, respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages (Article 29). The Regulation 155 of the National Regulations states that an approved provider must take reasonable steps to make sure that the education and care services provide

In refugee contexts, and in response to the needs of refugee children and their families, inclusion in quality ECCE centers serves as a powerful equalizer, helps young children to develop the resilience that is required to cope with traumatic and stressful situations like the conflicts and other emergencies, provide possible solutions for many issues that the young refugee children face, including trauma, mental health and exclusion. Inclusion in quality ECEC centers can provide physical protection, where children can learn basic knowledge about health and hygiene, where they will receive extra nutrition and where care and supervision will be provided by staff identify needs and work with parents and caregivers (UNESCO, 2021). Inclusion in ECEC centers offers psychosocial protection by providing opportunities for young children to play, to require part in cultural activities and by supporting social networks in the community. Also can promote a sense of safety and normality in children, whose lives are disrupted, help to reestablish familiar routines, centered on child-rearing activities and care needed for healthy development. For refugee children who have experienced trauma and loss, this psycho-social dimension will be particularly important to help their development and wellbeing (UNESCO, 2021; WHO, 2018). ECEC can provide cognitive protection, by helping children develop academic skills and by encouraging them to problem solve, listen, express their opinions, and make their own choices (UNESCO 2021). To ensure inclusion in quality ECEC centers for refugee children, it is important to respond to the specific needs of refugee families and their children, including their need for emotional support, and therefore the challenges of providing ECEC to culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Buchmüller et al., 2018).

Staff in ECEC centers needs to address numerous issues, including emotional difficulties, acculturation problems, language-literacy and basic skill levels, and cultural differences (Lamb, 2020; Park et al., 2018). Inclusion of all children in high quality inclusive ECCE services will bear a commitment to review and adapt pre-service and ongoing professional development and certification of the ECCE workforce to ensure they are fully prepared and supported. Beach (2003) argues that teachers views on other cultures, religions, languages, etc. can influence the successful or non-inclusion of refugee children. Teachers' attitudes could be perceived as the teachers' viewpoints or attitudes towards an idea of the concept of inclusion and its implementations. An attitude can be formed from cognitive, affective and behavior information about the objects and influences the individual's thought and action. Triandis (1971) explains that the attitude construct is related to a person's affective responses including feelings, moods and emotions. Thinking positively or negatively towards

a group of people can be categorized as having a positive or negative affect towards a member of that group. Sharma et al. (2006) claim that a positive attitude is the most crucial factor in becoming an inclusive teacher (Eagly & Chaiken, 2005). Teacher training is the first step in promoting positive attitudes as teachers must know how to handle differences in the classrooms. Hsien, Brown & Bortoli (2009) in investigating preschool teachers qualifications and attitudes towards inclusion reported overall there was a relationship between teacher attitude and educational qualifications, the higher the educational qualifications the more positive the attitude. A literature review conducted in four European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Slovenia and Netherlands) the importance of professional competencies of staff is highlighted to promote social inclusion. The ability and willingness to communicate with parents, to manage disagreements, to learn from them, and to explore various angles of a subject in an open-minded way are mentioned (Fukkink et al., 2018). It has been reported that staff in ECEC centers often lack knowledge and experience in how to best support the development of refugee children and work with families (OECD, 2019). There is a lack of research and evidence-based knowledge on best practices leaving teachers not sufficiently prepared and supported in their work with this target group (Hurley et al., 2011; Moinolnolki & Han, 2017b; Park & Katsiaficas, 2019). ECEC centers have to ensure efforts are put in place to build professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of those educators working in refugee contexts by offering training and professional development specific to working with this target group, and by organizing coaching, and sufficient opportunities for reflection, team and peer support (Krakouer et al., 2017; Lunneblad, 2017; Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2019). Acknowledging cultural backgrounds and personal histories of families is seen as an essential step in creating inclusive and respectful learning environments that create a sense of community and belonging (Buell et al., 2020) and help educators to address the diversity and heterogeneity of the groups of children and families they are working with. Educators have to find ways to effectively communicate with children with other language backgrounds (Hurley et al., 2011). Forlin and Chambers (2011) suggested that long-term support for teachers specifically required for mentoring new teachers as well as providing them continuous professional development (Fukkink et al., 2018).

For the purpose of this study, the three-component model of attitude which are cognitive, affective and behavioral (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Triandis, 1971) and Bronfenbrenner's theory were used. Solinger, van Olffen & Roe (2008) suggest that the use of the three-component model be adopted as a generic model for predicting and measurement of the organizational attitude. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory provides a useful framework for understanding the intersecting experiences and social environments that shape one's development. In particular the ecological systems theory describes an individual as being influenced by—and having an influence on—all levels of the system in which they live. The first layer of the system is the microsystem which is related to the teacher's immediate environment. Teachers interact with children and factors like knowledge, experience and training might contribute to the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion refugee children. The mesosystem describes the interaction between microsystems and this includes interactions between the teacher and school. The teacher's actions or beliefs may shape the school environment or functioning, while the policies or climate of the school may shape the teacher's professional decision making, professional competency is regarded as issues in the implementation of inclusion. Another level is the exosystem which describes systems that the individual does not participate in but that indirectly affect them through one or more microsystems. Government policies can be considered as exosystem variables that affect inclusion and the larger cultural context or macrosystem in which the schools and teachers operate.



In Greece, Early Childhood Education and Care is provided in two phases. ECEC provision for children under age 4 (ISCED 010) includes: municipal infant care (vrefikoi stathmoi for 2 months to 2.5 years), infant/child care (vrefonipiakoi stathmoi for 2 months to 4 years) and child care centers (paidikoi stathmoi for 2.5 to 4 years), for which the Ministry of Interior is responsible and private pre-school education and care settings (profit-or non-profit-making), as well as part-time childcare settings for infants or/and children and integrated care infant/child care centers, for which the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is responsible. Priority for registration is given to children of working parents or to those from families with many children, to orphans, to those from needy or single-parent families, to children of unmarried mothers, of divorced or separated parents, of parents with physical or mental disabilities. ECEC for children aged 4-6 (ISCED 020) includes: Pre-primary schools (nipiagogeia), public and private, are part of primary education for which the competence of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is responsible. The main objectives of this study are to determine the attitudes of the preschool teachers towards the inclusion of refugee children in ECEC provision for children under age 4 (ISCED 010), factors that might influence their attitudes, changes need to be considered or made at the preschool level before children are included.

### **Research questions**

1. What is the attitude of the preschool teachers towards the inclusion of refugee children in ECEC (ISCED 010)?
2. What factors that influence the attitudes of the preschool teachers towards the inclusion?
3. To what extent do these factors affect the preschool teachers' attitudes?

### **Research Methodology**

The research population consists of 114 ECEC teachers working in the area of Thessaloniki in Northern Greece. Thessaloniki is the second-largest city in Greece, with over 1 million inhabitants in its metropolitan area and the capital of the geographic region of Macedonia, the administrative region of Central Macedonia and the Decentralized Administration of Macedonia and Thrace. The municipalities that have been historically associated with the Thessaloniki metropolitan area are Thessaloniki, Kalamaria, Neapoli-Sykies, Pavlos Melas, Kordelio-Evosmos, Ampelokipoi-Menemeni and the municipality of Pylaia-Hortiatis.

The sample consists of 114 ECEC teachers, working at public municipal child care centers (vrefikoi stathmoi, vrefonipiakoi stathmoi and paidikoi stathmoi). First an information sheet was sent by e-mail with basic information about the research, its aims and methods. The information sheet stated clearly that participation was voluntary. The questionnaires were made through Google Forms and were distributed electronically on social networks and in electronic training groups. The present research was conducted from October to December of the academic year 2021. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was 10-15 minutes.

The research tool used in this study is the questionnaire. It is chosen as a method of collecting data because is the main research tool of the quantitative method, it is easy to create and use, ways of analyzing the material are standardized, the researcher cannot influence answers and they can ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. Moreover due to the situation in the country with the pandemic (SARS-COV-2) the questionnaires were distributed electronically. The responses were closed-ended with Yes-No answer and Likert-grade rated: a) from 1 to 5 where 1=Not at all, 2=Little, 3=Enough, 4=Very and 5=Very and b) from 1 to 5 where 1=I disagree strongly, 2=I disagree slightly, 3=I do not agree, nor disagree,

4=I agree a little and 5=I agree very much. The Likert scale is considered to be the most widespread type of scale to measure the attitudes, beliefs and views of large groups. This instrument consists of four parts: in the first part of the questionnaire, participants will have to answer demographic questions such as gender, age, position, years of service, basic and multicultural studies. In Part B there are Likert-type questions measuring beliefs relative to inclusion (Cognitive component), in part C measure the teachers' emotional reactions when they had to deal with refugee children (Affective component) and part D measure intentions (Behavioral component). On the basis of information gathered from the literature and past studies, an early draft of the questionnaire was distributed to twelve (N=12) early childhood teachers, from different ages and areas, who did not participate in the main phase of the study. After taking into account their comments and recommendations, the final version of the questionnaire was developed. The teachers were asked to respond to the questionnaire elements and to consider whether this questionnaire was indeed. It was also to ensure that the terms used were not ambiguous and to see how people interpret the questions, to find out how long the questionnaire took to answer and if there was any feature that people were not likely to answer. For the internal consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha correlations were calculated. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were:  $\alpha=0.81$  for the scale addressing the cognitive component,  $\alpha=0.94$  for the affective component and finally  $\alpha=0.75$  for the behavioral component (Cronbach's alpha coefficient of a scale should be above 0.70). In order to evaluate questionnaire's structural validity, Pearson correlation coefficients were applied amongst questions. All correlation coefficients were high and statistically significant, advocating the validity of the questionnaire.

### **Data Analysis**

The SPSS (Statistical package for Social Sciences) was used for the needs of the present study. In addition, descriptive statistics averages and standard deviations were computed, as well as inductive statistics for hypothesis tests to answer key research questions. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were calculated first to describe participants' responses to each item of questionnaire. A t-test was used to compare the differences in teachers' attitudes and perceptions. The  $p<.01$  level was selected to determine the statistical significance of the t-test results. Finally, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare means between independent groups.

### **Analysis of Results**

The study involved 114 ECEC teachers, of which 24.60% (n=28) are graduates of the Pedagogical Department of Pre-Primary Education (nipiagogoi- ISCED 6), 40.4 % (n=46) are graduates of Department of Early Childhood Education and Care (ISCED 6), 35.0% (n=40) are Early Childhood Education and Care Assistants (ISCED 5). As for the reference for the years of service 15.8% (n=18) are the teachers with 1-5 years of service, 20.2% (n=23) had 6-10 years of service, 25.5% (n=29) had 11-15 years of service, 18.5% (n=21) had 16-20 years of service and 20.0% % (n=23) had 21-25 years of service. 52.7% (n=60) of participants had in-service multicultural training, while 47.3% (n=54) had no in-service training in relation to multicultural education. Of 114 participants 19.3% (n=22) had no work experience with refugee children, 59.7% (n=68) little work experience and 21.0% (n=24) had lot of experience. Table 1 shows descriptive information on the participating teachers.

Table 1 Descriptive information's on the ECEC participating teachers'

Variables	Categories	Frequencies	Fig. Frequencies
<b>Age</b>	20-24	2	1.8%
	25-29	9	7.9%
	30-34	18	15.8%
	35-39	34	29.9%
	40-44	30	26.4 %
	45-49	13	11.4 %
	50-up	8	6.8%
<b>Years of service</b>	1-5	18	15.8%
	6-10	23	20.2%
	11-15	29	25.5%
	16-20	21	18.5%
	21-25	23	20.0%
<b>Basic studies</b>	Pre-primary teachers	28	24.6 %
	Early childhood educators	46	40.4 %
	Assistants	40	35.0 %
<b>In-service multicultural training</b>	Yes	60	52.7%
	No	54	47.3%
<b>Multicultural training</b>	Conference	32	27,1%
	Seminar	42	35,6%
<b>Work experience with refugee children</b>	No experience	22	19.3%
	Rather no experience	68	59.7%
	Rather a lot experience	24	21%

ECCE teachers' asked about their intentions towards inclusion of refugee children in their classroom. The 22.8% (n=26) respond no, 15.8% (n=18) respond yes and 61.4% (n=70) yes under conditions (cognitive component). Of the participants with yes or yes under conditions, 15.7% (n=14) reported that the challenge of being in a ECEC center will promote the academic growth of the refugees children, 22.9% (n=20) of them believed that inclusion will promote social independence, 20.0% (n=18) believed that the presence of the refugee children will promote acceptance of differences on the part of other children, 11.4% (n=10) believed that inclusion will promote emotional development of the refugee children and 15.7% (n=14) believed that inclusion will help their families. Of the participants with no, 19% (n=5) of the respondents reported that inclusion is likely to have a negative effect on the emotional development of the refugee children, 69.3% (n=18) reported that the refugee children will be socially isolated by other children and 65.4% (n=17) of the respondents reported that they are no able to support overwhelming level of needs among refugee children.

The Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to examine the effect of the ECCE teacher's age, basic studies, in-service multicultural training on ECCE teacher's intentions towards inclusion of refugee children in their classroom. There was no significant association between the ECCE teachers' age (Pearson  $X^2=0.1000$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.999 > 0.05$ ), basic studies (Pearson  $X^2=1.1139$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.8921 > 0.05$ ) with ECCE teacher's intentions towards inclusion of refugee children, but there was significantly correlated with in-service multicultural training  $p=0.006 < 0.05$  and work experience with refugee children  $P= 0.0158 < 0.05$  (Table 2 & 3).

*Table 2 In-service multicultural training \* Intentions towards inclusion of refugee children*

		Intentions towards inclusion of refugee children			
		Yes	Yes under conditions	No	Total
In-service multicultural training	Yes	15 (24.9%)	35 (58.4%)	10 (16.7%)	60 (100%)
	No	3 (5.5%)	35 (64.8%)	16 (29.7%)	54 (100%)
Total		18 (15.8%)	70 (61.4%)	26 (22.8%)	114 (100%)
X <sup>2</sup> Tests		Value		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
Pearson X <sup>2</sup>		10.23955	df 2	P= 0.006	

*Table 3 Work experience with refugee children\* Intentions towards inclusion of refugee children*

		Intentions towards inclusion of refugee children			
		Yes	Yes under conditions	No	Total
Work experience with refugee children	Yes	15 (62.4%)	8 (33.4%)	1 (4.2%)	24 (100%)
	No/ Rather no	3 (3.3%)	62 (68.9%)	25 (27.8%)	90 (100%)
Total		18 (15.8%)	70 (61.4%)	26 (22.8%)	114 (100%)
X <sup>2</sup> Tests		Value		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
Pearson X <sup>2</sup>		8.2943	df 2	P= 0.0158	

The ECCE teachers were asked to report their feelings in relation to their professional competence and qualification to respond and organize inclusion of refugee children. Only 3% of the ECCE teacher's answer I agree, 65% answer I disagree and 32% answer I agree a little (affective component). The participants were asked to report their intentions in relation to inclusion (behavioral component). The 86% of the respondents will co-operate with the parents of the refugee children for the benefit of their children, 23% of the respondents will change their teaching processes (more personalized) to accommodate refugee children in their classroom, 55% will cooperate with other specialist (psychologist, language teacher, social worker), 45% will cooperate with administrator of the center, 67% will promote social inclusion of the refugee children and their families, 79% are willing to engage in in-service on multicultural training, 57% will engage in developing skills for managing behavior of children and 7% of the respondents will do nothing specific. The Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to compare the effect of the ECCE teacher's age, basic studies, in-service multicultural training and work experience with refugee children with ECCE teacher's professional competence and qualification to respond and organize inclusion of refugee children. There was no significant association between the ECCE teachers' age (Pearson  $X^2=0.138$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.937 > 0.05$ ), basic studies (Pearson  $X^2=1.428$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.497 > 0.05$ ) with teacher's professional competence and qualification to respond and organize inclusion of refugee children. Significantly correlated to teacher's professional competence and qualification to respond and organize inclusion of refugee children was in-service multicultural training (Pearson  $X^2=14.7448$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.001 < 0.05$ ) and work experience with refugee children (Pearson  $X^2=11.813$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.0006 < 0.05$ ). There was significant association ECCE teachers' intention towards inclusion of refugee children in their classroom with their feelings in relation to their professional competence and qualification to respond and organize inclusion of refugee children (Pearson  $X^2=16.13230$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.0003 < 0.05$ ). The Kendall tau-c test ( $=0,357$ ) showed that ECCE teachers who chose "I disagree" about their professional



competence and qualification to responded and organize inclusion of refugee children also have negative intentions towards inclusion of refugee children in their classroom (Table 4).

Table 4 Professional competence and qualification\* Intentions towards inclusion of refugee children

		Intentions towards inclusion of refugee children			
		Yes	Yes under conditions	No	Total
Professional competence and qualification	Yes	10 (25.6%)	25 (64.1%)	4 (10.3%)	39 (100%)
	No	8 (10.6%)	45 (60.0%)	22 (29.4%)	75 (100%)
Total		18 (15.8%)	70 (61.4%)	26 (22.8%)	114 (100%)
X <sup>2</sup> Tests	Value	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)			
		df			
Pearson X <sup>2</sup>	16.13230	2	0.0003		
Kendall's tau-c	0.357				

The ECCE teachers were asked to report factors and problems can influence the inclusion process in a ranking question. Respondents had to rank each of the items into their preferred order using 1 being the most important object to 10 being the least important object. Results are shown in Figure 1. The lack of refugee-specific pedagogical training noted as more fundamental problem (68% of participants rated it 1), followed by the lack of work experience with refugee children scored 4.15. Many teachers has ranked professional development third, also claim that the language barrier is a challenge to be faced (27%), relations with the family of the refugees, lack of external support from social services, lack of practical intercultural competence to meet the overwhelming level of need among student, adapting materials that can cater to their students' needs. Results are shown in Figure 1.

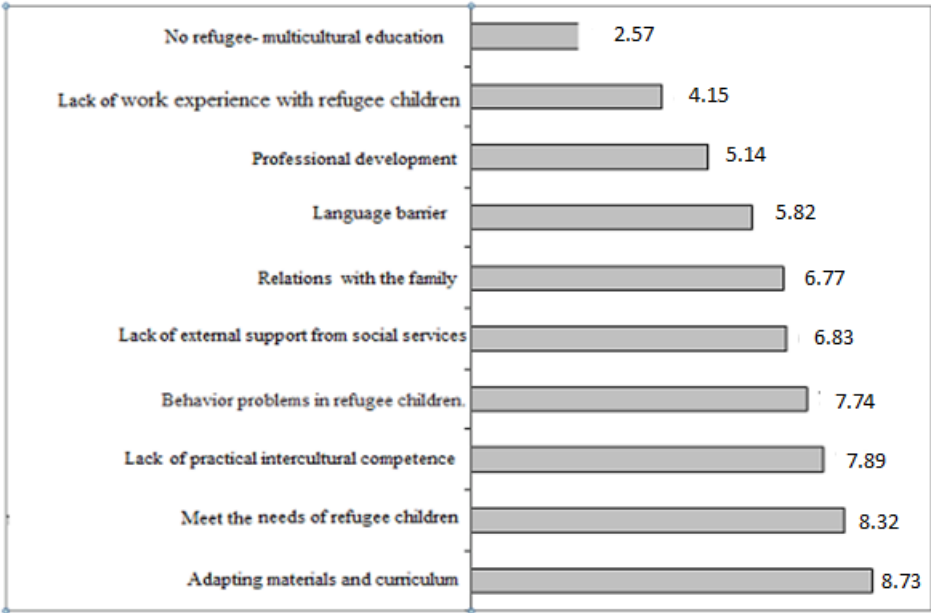


Figure 1 Factors and problems can influence the inclusion process

The analysis of attitudes components revealed that there were associations between: behavior and affective component; Cognitive and affective component; behavior and cognitive

component. Table 5 shows the relationship between the cognitive, affective and behavior components.

*Table 5 Relationships between cognitive, affective and behavioural component of attitudes*

Attitude Component	Cognitive	Affective	Behaviour
<b>Cognitive</b>	1.00		
<b>Affective</b>	0.48**	1.00	
<b>Behavior</b>	0.61**	0.54**	1.00

\*\*p<0.01

All correlations were significant at the level .01 level. Pearson’s correlations were conducted on all components Correlation between cognitive and affective component was investigated using Pearson correlation coefficient. There was a positive relationship between cognitive component and affective component ( $r = 0.48$ ,  $n=117$ ,  $**p<0.01$ ), there was positive relationship between cognitive component and behavior component ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $n= 117$ ,  $**p<0.01$ ), affective and behavior component ( $r = 0.54$ ,  $n= 117$ ,  $**p<0.01$ ).

## Discussion

The present study examined the general ECEC teachers attitudes towards the inclusion of refugee children into their classroom in public ECEC centers, their behavior and factors that might influence the attitudes towards inclusion based on three component theory. In this study the three components of attitudes are connected, what they think (cognitive) may influence their feelings (affective) which impact on their reactions (behavioral). General ECEC teachers have positive attitude towards inclusion of refugee children, however seemed doubtful in the implementation of inclusion. They reported that inclusion will promote the academic growth, social independence, acceptance, emotional development of the refugee children and will help their families. The ECCE teachers reported that factors and problems could influence the inclusion process were the lack of refugee-specific pedagogical training, lack of work experience with refugee children, professional development, also claim that the language barrier is a challenge to be faced, relations with the family of the refugees, lack of external support from social services, lack of practical intercultural competence to meet the overwhelming level of need among student, adapting materials that can cater to their students' needs. Teachers reported feeling insecure in effectively serving refugee children's specific needs and to find overcoming language barriers as well as communication with the parents difficult. Here, teachers' professional competence and work experience seems to play an important role. Research suggests that the quality of ECE teacher training has a strong influence on teachers' perception of self-efficacy to support children's learning and development (Mitter & Putcha, 2018). Varcoe and Boyle (2014) found that while teachers were positively disposed to the idea of inclusion, many felt that they lacked the knowledge, skills and resources to provide fully inclusive classrooms. This perspective is shared by Burke and Sutherland's (2004) research, who found that teachers' concerns toward inclusion are not often based on ideological arguments but instead on pragmatic concerns of how inclusive education can be implemented. Savolainen et al. (2012) large-scale study of teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy in inclusive education revealed that the more teachers believe they are able to implement inclusive practices, the more positive their attitudes towards inclusion. These findings align with previous studies that indicate that the more training and opportunities to reflect on this training to become inclusive educators, the better prepared pre-service teachers feel about adopting this approach to begin their teaching careers (Bentley-Williams & Morgan, 2013). Findings revealed that pre-service teachers had developed good theoretical understanding of inclusive education through

their coursework. However, their development of possible selves as inclusive educators was less well-defined in that they had difficulty extending their understandings of who they might be as inclusive teachers beyond their coursework samples. This difficulty in identifying their cultural selves beyond a stereotypical norm of who a classroom teacher is indicates a need for more and extensive time for pre-service teachers to develop their professional identities as inclusive educators (Tangen, 2017). Accordingly, a study conducted in a university teacher education in Northern Sweden revealed low preparedness to meet the educational needs of immigrant children. Student teachers recognized existing systemic problems in the education of immigrant children and expressed a feeling of a lack of practical intercultural competence to meet such children (Rasheedah, 2019). In a qualitative study, 25 early childhood educators participated in semi-structured interviews to illuminate the experiences of teachers as they work with preschool children and families. The teachers overwhelmingly expressed concern about their lack of cultural competence and a need for professional development (Hurley, 2011). Similarly, Gerokosta investigate the views of the preschool teachers of the island of Chios in Greece, on the integration of refugee children in public kindergartens. The results show that the kindergarten teachers have a positive attitude towards the integration of young children but they consider it necessary to train them and to solve basic problems. Apart from the language of refugee children, teachers believe that the attitude of the local community and the parents of the local pupils may affect the integration of refugee children (Gerokosta, 2017).

Teachers' work experience with refugee children was related to higher agreement with multicultural beliefs and more negative stereotypes. Working with refugee children influences teachers' cultural beliefs and stereotypes in a way that teachers who are experienced in working with refugee children may view children's different backgrounds more positively and consider them when interacting with these, but are also more likely to assume that encounter more difficulties in pre-school and are thus in need of more support from their teachers (Chwastek, 2021). Studies from Australia (Ferfolja, 2009), Ireland (Leavy, 2005), and USA (Walker Dalhouse, Sanders & Dalhouse, 2009) found that teachers required experience, explicit exposure, and training with and about refugees in order to develop socio cultural understanding and perspective to foster safe spaces for learning, build positive teacher-student relationships, recognize the importance of student agency for engagement, and become aware of the particular realities and experiences of refugee children. Both experiences demonstrate that pre-service teachers can and should be better prepared to fulfill the needs of refugee students (Kovinthan, 2016). Bařaran (2021) in her study aims to focus on the class and school wide experiences of teachers working with Syrian refugee students and to reveal what these experiences indicate in terms of inclusive education. The main hypothesis of this study is that inclusive education should be reconsidered in terms of teachers' in-service/pre service training, beliefs, attitudes and competencies. Qualitative design was employed in the study since it explored teachers' lived experiences on refugee student phenomenon. The sample consisted of 21 teachers. The results showed that teachers believed that their efforts to provide refugee students with qualified and equal education were not sufficient. It was suggested that curriculum be designed in an exceedingly way that it included refugee students, long-running studies be planned and pre service/in-service trainings be reconsidered contextually (Bařaran, 2021). There was a positive effect of beliefs about teachers' own competency (both cultural competency and perceptions about prior preparation) on self-efficacy ( $sr^2 = 0.35$ ) and teachers' willingness in implement practices ( $sr^2 = 0.08$ ) (Kurbegovic, 2016).

Rasheedah & Relebohile investigated teachers' interactions with refugee children in a child care center in Durban. The findings suggest that several factors, including poor classroom management and pedagogical practices, inadequate and inappropriate resources and a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers influenced the character of interactions between the refugee children and their teachers and unless the provision of ECDE in the center

is not significantly improved, for example, by addressing the factors that mentioned above the refugee children will still be poorly prepared for mainstreaming schooling (Rasheedah, 2019). Language and cultural barriers hinder successful communication. Educators perceived these barriers as major obstacles in early childcare programs for refugee families and they emphasized the importance of easy accessibility for refugee families, and an adequate educator-child ratio. They suggested predictable and reliable structures (e.g. repeating timetables) with consistently enforced rules, which promote routines, and foster reliable relationships with refugee children and parents. Gabriel, Kaczorowski and Berry (2017) in their study aimed to shed light on teachers' problems and what their attitudes are after their involvement with students from refugee backgrounds and indicates the foremost frequently claimed problems. The 36% of the respondents claim that adapting materials that may cater to their students' needs may be a problem while many teachers (32%) also claim that the language barrier may be a challenge to be faced. Trauma experiences (mentioned by 26% of teachers), students' lack of schooling experience (mentioned by 21% of teachers), low level of literacy or illiteracy (mentioned by 21% of teachers), and having the ability to deal with the various cultural backgrounds (mentioned by 17% of the participants). Among the least frequent problems as emerged through the particular survey were namely, the potential relations of the teacher with the family of the refugees (mentioned 12% of the teachers), problems with motivation (mentioned by 14% of teachers), large classes (mentioned 12% of teachers) among others. Busch et al. (2018) investigated challenge. Busch et al. (2018) investigated challenges and possible solutions in ECEC. Challenges perceived as most difficult concerned language barriers and communication with parents.

Teachers believe that both schools and teachers play a crucial role in supporting refugee youths' mental wellbeing and every contributes in unique ways. However, schools and teachers are not always successful in supporting refugee youth and teachers reported facing challenges like unclear roles and a lack of resources. In fact, the roles and responsibilities ascribed to teachers have become increasingly complex round the world; they are stretching beyond instruction to encompass activities like psychosocial support and also the fostering of social cohesion and belonging (Schleicher 2018). McDiarmid et al. (2022) investigated 30 Swedish educators' perceptions about the role of centers and teachers in supporting refugee children's mental wellbeing. The foremost common barriers reported were: uncertainty about their responsibilities for supporting youths' emotional health, the variable quality of external social service supports for students, the high variability in the types of needs they encounter, a lack of external support from social services, , the overwhelming level of need among students, and therefore the emotionally taxing nature of supporting students' mental wellbeing. Teachers also noted that they had received little to no refugee pedagogical training. Teachers described these challenges as affecting their personal mental wellbeing which made it difficult for them to supply sustained support to students (McDiarmid et al., 2022). Shriberg (2010) reports that 96% of teachers surveyed had no training at all in the way to educate refugee children; 50 % of them reported interest in receiving information about the culture, politics, history, and education systems of the countries of origins. Almost all of those surveyed wanted to acquire best practices for teaching refugee children, including practical teaching techniques and adaptations of curriculum. Teachers need guidance on how to best educate refugee children and the way to achieve access to the resources available from other similarly situated educators throughout the world. Shriberg points out that 'educators might not be fully awake to the unique and creative strategies and coping skills refugee children possess which will help them attain success as students' (p. 5). Rose (2018) in her doctoral thesis examine the beliefs of teachers within the context of Australian social, political, and education history and policy, as well as the commonly held beliefs towards refugees and refugee children. Ultimately, it was found that teachers' beliefs towards refugee students are deeply complex, subject to multiple influences



and discourses. Moreover, teacher beliefs do not seem to be static; they are demonstrated to point out the flexibility to be reshaped. The experience of teaching refugee students was identified by the participants as crucial to shaping and reshaping their beliefs, as was open discussions with colleagues which led to beliefs being challenged and reshaped. Working conditions, like school culture, funding, and teacher support held some influence on the beliefs of the teachers (Rose, 2018).

## Conclusions

The present study examined teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of refugee children into their classroom in ECEC centers and factors that might influence the attitudes towards inclusion based on three-component model of attitude and Bronfenbrenner's theory. In this research the three components of attitudes are interconnected. What the teachers think (cognitive) may influence their feelings (affective) which can have impact on their reactions (behavioral) and also the three components may influence one other. In this study, the ECEC teachers do not feel ready for inclusion and they need support in terms of skills and training, resources and facilities as well as knowledge and awareness about refugee children. Teachers' attitude is influenced by bidirectional interactions within the ecological system. Within the microsystem factors such as training, experience, teaching experience and knowledge influenced the teachers' attitude. Within the mesosystem, the support from social workers, parents, principals and community are needed by preschool teachers. As in the exosystem, teachers also addressed the barriers to be taken into considerations such as the organization of inclusion, the modification of programmers, pedagogy. Within the macrosystem, in terms of designing the inclusion policy professional development (pedagogical and classroom management skills, abilities and training) might be improved.

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## EXAMINING INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF BLIND STUDENTS AT A RURAL BASED SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract.** *This study sought to examine barriers to learning for blind students at a rural based South African University. Premised on the qualitative design, data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews with 5 blind students, two academic support staff and four lecturers who were identified through purposive sampling. Emerging themes from the data were identified through content analysis of the verbatim responses. The study found that reasonable accommodation was not provided for blind students in the lecture halls at the university under study. The study further found that, study materials and computers in the university library and mainstream computer laboratories were not adapted for blind students. Third, lecturers were not trained to teach blind students with some lecturers using PowerPoint presentations while teaching when blind students could not access the screens. The study recommends universal design for all learning facilities, thorough training for all staff teaching students with disabilities and the development of a disability policy in the university.*

**Keywords:** *blind, braille, reasonable accommodation, disability, universal design.*

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### Introduction

The recognition of the rights of people with disability has been on the United Nations agenda for a while (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, hereafter) 1989; UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UNSREOPD, hereafter) 1993; UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, hereafter) 2006). Several countries, including South Africa, have ratified some of these conventions and started putting in place legislation to accommodate learners with disability. Legislation in the UK requires all public authorities, including higher education institutions, to actively promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities (Goode, 2007; Richardson, 2015; Vickerman and Blundell 2010). In Brazil, the educational integration of persons with disabilities (visual, auditory, physical and intellectual) has increased (De Camargo et al., 2013). Australia, the United States of America and Israel, have legislation concerning the integration of students with disabilities into higher education (Fuller, Bradley and Healey 2004). Recently, the United Arab Emirates in the Middle East made efforts to promote the rights of people with disabilities (Alhammadi, 2016). In Australia, policy initiatives and legislation ensure that students with disability are presented with an equitable experience in, and access into, higher education (Dryer et al., 2016). In Zimbabwe, disability policies are in place although outdated (Chikukwa & Chimbwanda, 2013).

Findings from the literature indicate that despite a growth of interest in widening access, participation and inclusive higher education, the voices of disabled students themselves have hardly been heard (Fuller, Bradley, & Healey, 2004; Vaccaro, Kimball, Ostiguy & Wells, 2015; Moriña, 2019). Furthermore, while legislation has been enacted the



world over as shown in the preceding paragraphs to enable access for students with disabilities, little research seems to have been conducted on the category of blind students and their experiences of the higher education context. Studies conducted seem to either focus on students with disabilities in general or where research focus is on visually impaired students, blind students and partially sighted students are lumped together. (see for example, Fuller, Bradley, & Healey, 2004; Whitburn, 2014; Seyama. Morris, & Stilwell, 2014; Cunnah, 2015; Kendall, 2016; Patterson & Loomis 2016; Moriña, 2019; Kim & Kutscher, 2020).

It is incumbent upon universities to guarantee the necessary conditions and opportunities to ensure that all students can engage and learn. In this regard, it is useful to listen to the voices of the students (Moriña, 2019). This will help institutions of higher education better understand how they can support collegiate success among students with disabilities (Kim & Kutscher, 2020). Sachs and Schreuer (2011) aver that the opportunity that legislative changes present for the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education institutions, and the resources dedicated to that purpose, call for an in-depth examination of the results to determine how these students participate in academic and student life at university.

The massification of higher education in South Africa following the advent of democracy meant that populations previously disadvantaged under apartheid now had access to education. In South Africa, the Ministerial Statement on the Implementation of the University Capacity Development Grant program 2021-2023 (DHET, 2020) concludes that the system has not yet been able to transform sufficiently to effectively and equitably support the success of previously marginalised groups. Disaggregation of the student data in the Ministerial Statement is only by race and gender. No statistics are given on the retention, throughput and graduation rates of students with disabilities. It is against this background that this study, grounded in the qualitative paradigm, used individual semi-structured interviews conducted with five blind students who were studying at the rural based university to examine the issue of inclusion and exclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. The population of this study consisted of all registered students with disclosed disabilities, all academic support staff in the Disability Unit and all lecturers teaching blind students. Purposive sampling was used to identify the blind students through available university records. Interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) was used to engage participants to understand their lived experiences from their perspectives. The study seeks to contribute to the debate on the plight of students with disabilities with a specific focus on blind students in rural disadvantaged contexts.

### **Review of Literature Conceptualising Disability**

The South African White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (WPRPD, 2015) conceptualises disability as a complex and evolving concept and argues that defining it must take into account that, “current definitions of disability have evolved over time, and reflect a more progressive view of disability than was the case in the past” (p.17). Among the various attempts to conceptualise disability, two dominant models have emerged, the medical model and the social model of disability.

The medical model focuses attention on the nature of the person’s impairment and the degree to which this impairment may or may not prevent the person from carrying out various tasks or participate in activities in ways regarded as normal (Howell, 2005). This model sees disability as inherent in the individual, rather than as a social condition vested in the social milieu (Ndlovu & Watson, 2016). The model focuses on individual deficit or impairment, and attributes any restriction that the individual confronts in his or her everyday life as the

inevitable and tragic consequence of that impairment (Hammell, 2006; Ohajunwa, Mckenzie, & Lorenzo, 2015). The emphasis is on the impairment rather than the abilities the person might possess.

The disability rights movement rose against the medical model arguing that the circumstances of people with disabilities and the discrimination they face are socially created and have little to do with the impairments of people with disabilities (Howell, 2005). This gave rise to the alternative social model of disability. Rather than focusing on individual impairment, this model focuses on the physical and social barriers which exclude people with disabilities and renders them powerless and voiceless (Watson, 2004). As Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2011) show, a person's impairment is not the cause of disability, but rather disability is the result of the way society is organised, which disadvantages and excludes people with impairments. The solution to the problems of disabled people in this paradigm therefore lies in restructuring society in order to accommodate them. South African legislation, for example, the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disability (WPRPD, 2015) is aligned to the social model of disability.

### **Visual Impairment**

Visual impairment relates to those students who are categorized as legally blind, having a visual acuity of 6/60 or less in the better eye, and/or a visual field of less than 10 degrees (Permvattana, Armstrong, & Murray, 2013). According to Shepherd (2001), the visual system can be considered as the dominant sensory modality in humans as almost half the brain is devoted to sight, and about 70% of the total capacity of the brain devoted to processing sensory information is devoted to handling visual information. Chikukwa and Chimbwanda (2013) define visual impairment or low vision as, "a severe reduction in vision that cannot be corrected with standard glasses or contact lenses and reduces a person's ability to function at certain or all tasks" (p.4). The level of visual impairment ranges from severe short-sightedness to blindness (Ghafri, 2015). Most learning typically occurs visually. The challenge facing visually impaired students is that the enormous amount of learning that normally takes place via vision must now be achieved using other senses and methods. The focus of this paper is on the challenges faced by blind students at a rural based South African university.

### **Legislative framework on education for people with disabilities in South Africa**

Following the demise of apartheid, several pieces of legislation have been promulgated to advance the rights of people with disabilities in South Africa. These include the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (CRSA, hereafter) (1996), the White paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS, hereafter) (1997), the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE, hereafter) (2001), White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (SNEBIETS, hereafter) (2001), the White Paper for Post-School Education (PSET, hereafter) (2013) and the White Paper on the Rights of People with Disability (WPRPD, hereafter) (2015). The South African legislation as explained in the paragraphs that follow, steers people away from the medical conception of disability discussed in a previous subsection, which focuses on individual impairment or deficit and instead focuses on the elimination of physical and social barriers that exclude people with disabilities and renders them powerless and voiceless - a tenet of the social model of disability. The CRSA (1996) declares all people as equal and outlaws discrimination on any basis and guarantees the right to quality services for persons with disabilities. The

entrenched Bill of Rights (BR) of the CRSA (1996) Subsection 3, states that no person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone.

The INDS (1997) acknowledges that the majority of people with disabilities in South Africa have been excluded from the mainstream of society and have thus, been prevented from accessing fundamental social, political and economic rights. The strategy cites several factors as having contributed to the neglect of people with disabilities, among them the political and economic inequalities of the apartheid system; social attitudes, which have perpetuated stereotypes of people with disabilities as dependent and in need of care; and a discriminatory and weak legislative framework that has sanctioned and reinforced exclusionary barriers.

Another piece of legislation, NPHE (2001) advocates for an increase in the number of non-traditional students entering higher education particularly women and people with disabilities. The plan requires universities to indicate in their three-year plans, strategies, time-frames and targets to increase the enrolment of students with disabilities. The year 2001 saw the publication of the Education White Paper 6: SNEBIETS which further outlined measures to include students with disabilities in the education system.

The PSET (2013), like the other pieces of legislation refers to the issue of inclusive education for all. The White Paper argues that the achievement of greater social justice is closely dependent on equitable access by all sections of the population to quality education and points out that, “the post-school system must respond to the special education and training needs of various social groups such as the youth, the disabled...” (p.10)

The most recent legislation on the issue of disability is the WPRPD (2015). The vision of the WPRPD is the creation of a free and just society inclusive of all persons with disabilities as equal citizens. This is aligned to the social model of disability, which argues that the solution to the problems of people with disabilities lies in restructuring society in order to accommodate them. In this regard, the WPRPD (2015) commits duty bearers to realising the rights of persons with disabilities by:

- Accelerating implementation of existing legislation that advocates equality for persons with disabilities;
- Taking calculated action to ensure that their rights as equal persons are upheld;
- Removing discriminatory barriers to access and participation;
- Ensuring that universal design informs access and participation in the planning, budgeting and service delivery value chain of all programmes (p.11).

It can be seen from the above discussion, though not necessarily the case for all 26 universities, that the South African higher education system provides support for students with disabilities within the diversity rights framework (Matshediso, 2007) guided by national legislation and underpinned by the principle of fundamental human rights for all. Most public universities in South Africa have an office responsible for students with disabilities commonly referred to as a Disability Unit (DU).

The philosophy behind establishing the DUs according to Tugli et al. (2013) is to promote the equal participation of people with disabilities in all spheres of university life and to eliminate unlawful disability discrimination, including disability related harassment. These units, however, although in existence, do not always result in quality support for the students with disabilities.

Results from a study by Naidoo (2010) on factors affecting the academic development of students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal show that the lack of staff in the Disability Unit and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students; lack of resources and lack of funding from the University negatively affected the efforts of the Disability Unit to offer support to students with disabilities. Similarly, a study by Tugli et al. (2013) revealed that the Disability Unit at the University of Venda was understaffed (only two staff members) and the

staff felt overworked and overwhelmed. Concern about Disability Units programmes being isolated or disability issues not being integrated into core areas of the institution's functioning emerged in the findings of a study by Howell (2005). Similarly, in a pilot study on challenges faced by students with disabilities at four universities in the Western Cape Province in South Africa, the Department of Social Development (DSD, hereafter) (2015) reports that students complained of the long time it took to get braille material due to staffing constraints in the Disability Units. Thirty-two percent of their participants indicated that they encountered barriers in accessing learning materials in accessible formats. The report noted:

“These barriers include absence of Braille and large font material; delays in getting material transcribed or adapted into accessible formats; test scripts and old examination papers only available in small print; reference material in libraries needed for assignments and other projects not available in accessible formats.” (p. 47).

In the same vein, the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM, hereafter) (2011) identified under-funding as a key constraint in the funding of several Disability Units. With inadequate budgets, such units cannot adequately cater for disabled students.

Another major challenge facing visually impaired students in South Africa is stigmatisation and alienation faced if students disclose their condition. According to findings of the DSD (2015), participants who chose not to declare disability gave reasons relating to societal negative perceptions including labeling, alienation, attitudinal problems and stereotyping. Some of these reasons for non-disclosure as the DSD (2015) shows, are indicative of the prejudicial nature of society towards persons with disability.

### **Study Context and Objectives**

This study sought to examine barriers to learning for blind students at a South African University. The specific objectives of the study were to: Identify challenges faced by blind students at a rural based university; examine ways in which blind students mitigate these challenges and explore ways of ensuring reasonable accommodation for blind students in higher education. The institution studied is a small to medium-sized, comprehensive university located in a remote rural area and draws most of the students from previously disadvantaged rural schools. The institution has a Disability Unit established in 2001 to integrate services for students with disabilities. The Unit has three staff members and an intern and supports students with the following disabilities: visual, hearing, physical, speech impairments, chronic illnesses (e.g. epilepsy), painful conditions (e.g. back injuries & carpal tunnel syndrome), psychological disabilities (e.g. bipolar disorder & severe anxiety/depression), learning disorders and temporary disabilities (e.g. broken limbs). According to statistics from the Disability Unit, 118 students disclosed their disabilities in 2014 and of these 52 were partially sighted while five were blind while in 2022, a total of 99 students disclosed their disabilities 15 as partially sighted and one as blind. Four of the five interviewed participants became blind later in their lives while one participant was born blind. Four of the participants were in their undergraduate studies, one each in levels one, two, three and four of their studies while one of the participants was a postgraduate student. With regards to gender, four participants were male while one was female and all the participants were black.

### **Research Methodology**

Grounded in the qualitative paradigm, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with five blind students who were studying at the rural based university in South

Africa. The population of this study consisted of all registered students with disclosed disabilities, all academic support staff in the Disability Unit and all lecturers teaching blind students. Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the study and is based on the assumption that a researcher wants to discover and gain insight, and thus, selects a sample from which the most can be learned (Yssel, Pak, & Beilke, 2016). Records in the Disability Unit were used to identify the blind students. The two academic support staff in the Disability Unit and four lecturers who had blind students in their classes were also included in the sample for triangulation of data. In this study, the researchers wanted to gain insight into the challenges faced by blind students in navigating the higher education landscape, hence purposefully selecting those affected by the impairment (blindness). This produced rich data.

The interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) was used both during the interviews and the data analysis process. IPA is a qualitative approach which aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience (Smith and Osborn 2015). IPA approach argues that good research interviewing recognises that the course and content of an interview cannot be laid down in advance (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2009; Alase, 2017). According to Tuffour (2017), the aim of IPA is to look in detail at how someone makes sense of life experience, and to give detailed interpretation of the account to understand the experience.

IPA has a commitment to understanding particular experiences in context (Rose et al. 2019). Such experiences cannot be predetermined. Rather than a rigid interview schedule that would be followed religiously therefore, a prompt sheet with a few main themes for discussion with the participants was produced to guide a loosely structured interview process (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008). The theme statements were developed after a thorough review of literature sources that speak to the experience that is being studied, that is, blind students in higher education in rural contexts. The prompt sheet checklist ensured that while participants were given the freedom to take the lead in the conversation, the data gathered would still speak to the purpose of the research. The interview schedule was merely the basis for kick-starting the conversations with participants. As Jeong and Othman (2016) show, it is important that IPA researchers as a rule, utilise the open-ended question formula.

During the interviews, the researchers did not only listen to what the participants described about their experiences, but also focused on the interpretation of those experiences through probing, and asking critical questions to the participants, as suggested by Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2016). In addition to field notes taken during the interview, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in order for both researchers to be able to participate in the process of analysis. Coding was first conducted by each researcher individually and then in a joint discussion leading to a decision on core themes as suggested by Berggren, Rowan, Bergbäck and Blomberg (2016).

Interviews of each participant were analysed individually, to identify emerging themes. Following this, the researchers looked for common patterns across the analysed cases. This resulted in restructuring and relabeling the original individual themes into few overarching themes (Lourens & Swartz 2016a).

### **Ethical considerations**

Working with people with a range of special needs demands sensitivity and an increased awareness of the great vulnerability of many of these research participants (Magwa & Magwa 2015). Appointments were made with each of the blind students individually where the research project and its purpose was explained to them. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Further, they were informed that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained and that their identities would not be disclosed as pseudonyms would be

used. Participants gave informed consent. The five students were then given alphabetic name codes; Blind Student A (BSA), Blind Student B (BSB), Blind Student C (BSC), Blind Student D (BSD) and Blind Student E (BSE). Academic support staff (AS) were coded numerically as AS1 and AS2 while lecturers (L) were coded as L1, L2, L3 and L4. Ethical clearance was sought from the Research Ethics Committee of the University following the university's ethical clearance application procedures and was granted under reference number CHETL/11/01/E0811.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results are presented and discussed according to the following emerging themes: challenges related to mobility and accessibility, instructional challenges, assessment practices, lack of knowledge, interaction with non-disabled students, academic support from the Disability Unit and academic support from the library. Samples of verbatim responses from the participants are used in the discussion of each identified theme. The choice of which participant to quote in each instance was guided by both the typicality of the response with regards to the theme identified and the need to represent all participants as much as possible in the quoted responses.

### **Challenges relating to mobility and accessibility**

One of the themes that emerged from the data was in relation to accessibility and mobility around campus due to carelessness in infrastructure development and negligence by fellow students and academics. The following were examples of responses on the issue:

- *Changes along the route to places of choice are intermittently changed without our knowledge. We end up falling on trenches(BSA)*
- *I once fell into the ditch and luckily it was not so deep. I could not proceed to my class that day as I was mildly injured (BSD).*
- *It is not easy to move on the paths of the university because there are light poles erected on the middle of the paths (BSE).*
- *No. there are a lot of disturbances. People drive around the campus as if they are on a freeway. People park everywhere. Security staff are not consistent in monitoring this challenge (L3)*
- *No. it is horrible. University community parks the cars everywhere and they drive so fast on the campus roads. This is not good for those students with disabilities (AS1).*

The results show that new infrastructure development projects around the university were not communicated to the students leading to challenges for blind students as shown in the responses above. The student concerns are corroborated by both the academic support staff (AS1) and the lecturers (L3). More stringent security measures would go a long way in helping curb careless driving and undesignated parking in the university. The issue of mobility and accessibility is also reported in the literature. Howell and Lazarus (2003) argue that barriers for students with disabilities are exacerbated by higher education institutions in South Africa that remain largely physically inaccessible to many disabled students, especially physically disabled and blind students. Lourens and Swartz (2016a) found that simply getting around campus was a challenging task for the students who spoke of threats of motor vehicles and obstructions in the environment such as holes in sidewalks, low-hanging branches and road works. Similarly, a study by Chikukwa and Chimbanda (2013) in Zimbabwe, found that totally blind students faced problems of construction work (trenches dug up everywhere), parked cars and water puddles. In this regard, amendments to campus design that are not only



visually impaired student-friendly, but also environmentally friendly are warranted (Berggren et al. 2016). This, according to (UNCRPD) (2006) means the design of products, environments, programmes and services should be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design.

One student however, felt accessibility was better for blind students compared to physically disabled students although he had problems with elevators as shown in this response:

- *Access into buildings is better to blind students because we can manage to go to the other floors of the building using steps. The lift in the main administration is not user friendly to the blind person as the buttons are not clearly marked in Braille and there is no voice synthesizer to help the blind user (BSB).*

From the analysis of the excerpt above, it is indicative that students with sight challenge emphasise the need for good access into buildings. However, the access in existence is not user friendly to students with sight problems because there are no braille signs and audio configuration to assist in effective usage by the blind.

### **Instructional challenges**

One issue identified by academic staff and lecturers was the issue of accessibility to learning and teaching in the lecture halls as a result of lack of universal design in the construction of lecture rooms:

- *Chairs in these lecture halls are located far from the white board making it difficult for visually impaired to see what is written. Most students with visually impairment just go to classes only to listen to the lectures (ADS1)*
- *The sitting arrangements are in a form of a stadium and it is difficult for a blind student to walk through. Chairs are built in and in a form of a row and it becomes difficult for a blind student to walk through to the chair (L4)*
- *Some lecture halls are not conducive for teaching visually impaired students. For example, lecture halls A and E. The board is far from the seats (L2)*

Such infrastructure design issues identified by lecturers in the responses reveal lack of universal design planning in the furniture installation in the lecturer rooms. Ensuring that universal design informs access and participation in the planning, budgeting and service delivery value chain of all programmes (WPRPD, 2015) will ensure that all categories of students are catered for.

Negative attitudes of lecturers and insensitivity to the needs of blind students during the actual learning and teaching process were major issues raised by the blind students, for example:

- *Some lecturers are arrogant. They do not provide pamphlets and they tell us to consult with other students. I followed one lecturer the other day and he told me; 'you disabled students like to be treated special. He is not God. I had to quit the module' (BSB).*
- *As a lecturer I have never given such students special handouts, except that they write their tests and examinations in Disability Unit where they are well-catered (L2).*
- *My students get materials like other students. I don't differentiate them because I was not orientated or trained to care for the students with disabilities (L4).*
- *They send materials to us and we adapt them according to the needs of students. The challenge only pops up if a student did not divulge his/her disability to the lecturer (AS1).*

There was justification by those lecturers who refused to give blind students materials so that they could take them for adaptation, for example - converting material to braille arguing that this amounted to special treatment. This argument by lecturers, in our view, cannot

be accepted as this is a category of students that does indeed need special treatment. The significance of the lecturer as partner in the success of the blind student is also evident from the student responses. This reproduction of negative attitudes in higher learning emanates from people viewing disability negatively (Ndlovu and Walton 2016) and could be attributed to the medical model of disability, which sees disability as inherent in the individual, rather than as a social condition. Ryan (2011) as cited in Dryer et al. (2016) conducted research into the knowledge, attitudes and experiences of staff within Australian universities. This research suggested that universities need to be more informed, and consistent with legislation in the area of disability as staff at times held negative or hostile attitudes towards students with disabilities. Similarly, Chikukwa and Chimbwanda (2013) in their study found that some lecturers were reluctant to modify their classroom procedures, giving students only partial accommodations. They further argue that given the significance of lecturer attitudes to the success of blind and visually impaired students, it is important to understand the significance of attitudes of not only the lecturers but also of peers and other campus administrators to the success of these students. Studies in the literature emphasise the importance of lecturer preparation programmes to provide extended experiences for future lecturers to facilitate conceptual shifts and improve attitudes about assisting students living with disabilities (Barton-Arwood, Lunsford, & Suddeth, 2016; Zongozzi, 2022)

As the social model of disability argues, a person's impairment is not the cause of disability, but rather disability is the result of the way society is organised, which disadvantages and excludes people with impairments (Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou 2011).

### **Assessment practices**

Another major finding under instructional challenges related to assessment with regard to whether or not the assessment practices used accommodated the condition of blind students. All the five students were positive although they alleged that there was poor planning at times;

- *Blind students write their tests and examinations in the adapted exam lab in the Disability Unit. Test papers are either Brailled or given in an electronic format. With the aid of screen reading software, I find it very easy to read and write (BSE).*
- *I had to write a little bit late sometimes when the lecturer could not provide an electronic question paper to the exam department. The exam had to be scanned, edited and brailled while waiting in the exam room (BSC).*
- *The University staff seem to believe that students with disabilities should only be assisted in the disability unit. Even lecturers, when they have challenges with disabled students, they send them to the disability unit (AS1).*

The Disability Unit should be lauded for ensuring assessment accommodation for the blind students. The Unit seems to be aligned to the social model of disability, which focuses on removing the physical and social barriers which exclude people with disabilities (Watson, 2004). Adapting the assessment instruments for students with disabilities also resonates with one of the requirements of the WPRPD (2015) which legislates for the removal of discriminatory barriers to access and participation. Academic support staff in the Disability Unit, however, expressed concern at the fact that academics were abrogating their responsibilities and dumping interventions related to students with disabilities on the Disability Unit rather than co-owning the student support. It is significant to note that the findings of this study contradict those of Vickerman and Blundell (2010) where 11.1% of disabled students indicated that their assessments did not cater for their needs, compared with

3.6% of their non-disabled peers. The results further contradict those of Dryer et al. (2016) which showed that students with disability were often challenged by assessment practices. The issue raised in the last response above however, about examinations and tests being adapted while the students were already waiting in the examination room to write, points to poor coordination between the lecturers, the examinations department and the Disability Unit. The Disability Unit, the lecturer who sets the examinations paper and the examination department need to liaise with each other to ensure that all examinations have been adapted for disabled students before the examination date.

### **Lack of knowledge**

The need for training of staff who work with disabled students came out strongly in the findings of this study. This appeared in responses from both students, academic support staff and lecturers as shown in these responses:

- *Lecturers do not really know how to assist a blind student. They demonstrate, project their PowerPoint presentations and write on the board forgetting that a blind student cannot see and needs special attention (BSC).*
- *In the class, the lecturer writes a lot on the board and narrates so little of what they have written. Sometimes they will just point at facts on the board saying this and that, when you combine this and that you get this (BSA).*
- *New staff should be inducted on how to interact with disabled students. Unfortunately, we have a backlog due to the pandemic (AS1).*
- *Lecturers should be trained to take care of students with disabilities (L4).*

With regards to the lecturers' capacity to help blind students, the results from all the categories of participants (students, lecturers and academic support staff) indicate that lecturers were not conversant with how to deal with these students. The way they presented their materials in class did not accommodate the needs of blind students. There was, however, one student who was positive and who stated that her lecturers were friendly and understanding as shown in this response:

*My lecturers are friendly. They never ask questions that demand me to draw. I request all the slides from the lecturer immediately after lesson. Sometimes they give me hard copies which I take to the disability unit for scanning, editing and brailing (BSE).*

As shown in the responses, projecting power point presentations on the screens and writing on the whiteboards did not accommodate blind students if this was not accompanied by verbal reading of what was on the slides. Whatever is projected or written on whiteboards should also be read out aloud to accommodate this category of students. The issue of lack of knowledge and training of lecturers is reported in the results from a study by Mushome and Monobe (2013) which revealed that lecturers found teaching visually impaired students a problem as they had never been trained to teach this category of students. Chikukwa and Chimbwanda (2013) also found in their study that most lecturers lacked special training in handling students with disabilities even though they had first degree qualifications and even postgraduate degrees in Special Needs Education. If academics are to respond effectively to the needs of the visually impaired student, they will need to invest time in relevant staff development (Shepherd, 2001). As Vickerman and Blundell (2010) show, "Whilst equality legislation is an important part of the jigsaw, it is vital that this is matched by the education and training of higher education (HE) staff to respond proactively to the diverse needs of the disabled students they support" (p.28). On the issue of policies, citing the University of South Africa (UNISA), Zongozzi, (2022) argues that, "Although UNISA appears to have good disability policies in place, the problems mentioned so far seem to stem from poor

implementation of these policies” (p.1653). It is noteworthy however, that one of the five blind students interviewed was positive and stated that her lecturers were friendly and understanding.

### **Interaction with non-disabled students**

One of the obstacles faced by people with disabilities in general and blind students in particular as shown in the results of this study is stigmatisation and isolation by abled people. The blind students in this study felt that their abled counterparts rejected them and did not want to associate with them. This rejection and isolation by non-disabled students was expressed as follows:

- *Some abled students do not like to form a group with a disabled student. They have negative perceptions that maybe we shall be a burden to them (BSD).*
- *The abled students do not easily fuse with disabled students. When lecturers require us to form groups, they isolate us (BSB).*
- *They don't want to help them. They say there are getting marks from something that they didn't work for (L3).*
- *All disabled students are side-lined by the able students. The able students do not want to create friendship with the disabled students (L1).*
- *The university is not good for the formation of diversity groups since students are not trained for this kind of formation (AS1).*

The rejection and isolation by abled students was expressed in cases where abled students did not want to form groups with students with disabilities when group work tasks were assigned. The sentiments from the blind students are echoed by the academic support staff (AS1) and the lecturers (L1 and L3). The argument for student training in issues of diversity suggested by one of the lecturers is indeed laudable.

Not all non-disabled students were labelled as having negative attitudes towards blind students. One blind student had not experienced any problems interacting with non-disabled students while one lecturer had witnessed cases of abled students assisting a blind student in her class:

- *I make friendships with my classmates. I do not have problems when it comes to formation of groups in the class (BSE).*
- *Yes, my students always assist the visually the impaired student, they always assist her with finding venues, with recording presentations for her and in case she doesn't come to class they always update her (L4).*

Such social stigmatisation, discrimination, isolation and stereotyping of disability can also contribute to depression and withdrawal of some students with disabilities (Tugli et al. 213). Fvazza et al. (2016) aver that, children with disabilities are among the world's most stigmatised and excluded population because of limited understanding and knowledge about persons with disabilities. Such stigmatisation and labelling, as the literature shows, might result in students concealing their disabilities where these are not easily visible. Yssel, Pak and Beilke (2016) found that one barrier was reluctance on the part of students to disclose their disabilities and be labelled. Citing Jacoby and Austin (2007), Vickerman and Blundell (2010) suggested that having a disability can increase the perception that they are devalued and stigmatised, and as such, this may be why some students were concerned about disclosure in case it results in negativity and lack of access.

A study by Lourens and Swartz (2016b) found that some partially sighted students, whose impairment was less obvious, went to great lengths to conceal their visual impairment in order to gain acceptance and inclusion into non-disabled peer groups. The fact that not all

abled students were labelled as having negative attitudes towards blind students shows that there are some students who are accommodating.

### **Academic Support from the Disability Unit**

Results show that the Disability Unit was seen as a valuable resource centre for the blind students. Two students spoke positively about the Disability Unit. Factors external to the disability unit that negatively affected efforts to support blind students were identified by academic support staff:

- *The Disability Unit is the only accessible building in the campus. The staff is very helpful but the library staff are not competent enough to assist us (BSD).*
- *The Disability Unit staff are trying their level best but the staff is inadequate to cater for us effectively (BSB).*
- *As a unit we provide them with assistive devices on loan as soon as a challenge is identified. The problem is only their personal adapted devices that are purchased by their bursaries. You will find that the unit initiate the procurement process of assistive devices this year and they are only to be purchased two years later. Sometimes the devices are purchased when the student has dropped out or completed the degree (AS1).*
- *When the unit has secured some funds from Department of Higher Education for the improvement of its services, it becomes rocket science to release such funds. Something should be done to alleviate such delays (AS2).*

Timely provision of learning and teaching resources is critical for all students and even more critical for students with special needs such as blind students who do not have alternative access to learning without such resources. Procurement delays as identified by the academic support staff have to be rectified to promote equity of outcomes for blind students. All lecturers were not sure of the provision of devices because this responsibility was vested in the Disability Unit.

One student had issues with the operating hours of the Disability Unit. Unlike the university library that closed in the evening, the Disability Unit closed early leaving these students without access to adapted resources as shown in this response:

- *The main challenge happens after the Disability Unit is locked when the admin staff go home because we will not have access to the adapted lab. There are no internet cables in the hostels. If installed, we will be able to access the network licensed Job Access with Speech (JAWS), the screen reading software (BSE).*

This lack of after-working-hours access could be because of the reported shortage of staff in the unit. Such staff shortages are not peculiar only to this institution. Naidoo (2010) also reported that lack of permanent staff at the DU at the University of KwaZulu-Natal resulted in delays in students receiving study and examination related materials. While according to Tugli et al. (2013) the philosophy behind establishing the DUs is to promote the equal participation of people with disabilities in all spheres of university life, it appears from the results that at the university under study, blind students had no access once Disability Unit staff left at the end of their normal working day. Lack of ‘after-working hours’ access seems novel and peculiar to this study as such a concern could not be found in the literature reviewed.

Blind students received disability grants, which they used to procure laptops for their studies. The students, however, lamented the lack of internet services in the residences, which rendered their devices useless as shown in these responses:

- *There is no internet access in the residence (BSA).*

- *From 2010 we were given laptops that cannot access internet as there is no WIFI in the campus (BSC).*
- *ASI No. there are no adapted labs in the residence. Visually impaired students have to travel to the library to study in the evening. The university should build labs that are adapted. This will help students not to travel long distances at night.*

This calls for the need for planning for an after-hours service for these blind students. A shift system could be introduced or alternatively arrangement could be made to have a security officer man the Disability Unit adapted lab after working hours. The university could also consider installing WIFI in residences as the students lamented the lack of internet services in the residences, which rendered their laptop devices useless in accessing information. Alternatively, accessible computers should be made available in the usual computer rooms that the general student population uses so that students with disabilities can access these after the disability unit has closed.

It was worrying to note that three out of the four lecturers had not bothered to check what conditions were like in the residences for blind students as they either were not sure or confessed to never having been to student residences.

### **Academic Support from the Library**

Two of the students, as shown in the verbatim quotes below, felt the library was not conducive enough for them citing lack of resources and moody unapproachable staff:

- *There are no electronic or Braille books in the library. As from 2013, an adapted lab was established but still running short of important tools such as Pearl reading cameras, IPAL solo standalone reading device and many more (BSA).*
- *In the library, they have a school representative who assists me whenever I am looking for references but the staff members are often moody and unapproachable. There are no electronic books (BSE).*
- *The library is very good inside because there is a ground floor where the blind students can walk freely and have access of computers and internet (L3).*
- *The lab for disabled students in the library is too small with little resources (AS1).*
- *Blind students need a dedicated human support. Blind students need someone to direct them in the library (AS2).*

While lecturers viewed the availability of an adapted computer laboratory section in the library as adequate, academic support staff felt the adapted section could be enlarged. In unison with students, as shown in the responses, academic support staff felt resources for blind students in the library were inadequate. Close collaboration between the library and the Disability Unit could be one way in which adapted resources could be incorporated into the library budget.

Students with disabilities, including blind students, like any students need access to library resources to complete assigned tasks. Although an adapted lab had been built in the library, it had not been equipped with requisite resources. It should be noted that there was dearth of literature relating specifically to blind students. Studies reviewed referred generically to visually impaired students who would include partially sighted students. This study therefore, contributes to the debate by foregrounding the plight of totally blind students. A study exploring the use of the library by visually impaired students (Sehić & Faletar, 2014) found that in most cases, these students visited libraries only after all other options had been exhausted because their experience had taught them that their academic libraries did not possess adequate technology and resources needed for their studies. In this regard, Eskay and Chima (2013) assert that the education system in developing countries not fully embraced or adopted the technology associated with special library services for the visually impaired

students. This is evidenced in the lack of production and distribution facilities for reading materials for these students.

Ekwelem (2013) advises that as more people with disabilities attend higher education institutions, it is incumbent upon library management to provide the same level of service to them as is provided to users without disabilities. In the current case study, close collaboration between the library and the Disability Unit could be one way in which adapted resources can be incorporated into the library budget. With regard to attitude of library staff, while this study found that some library staff were moody and unapproachable, in contrast, a study by Sehić and Faletar (2014) found that students were treated with respect by library staff and did not discriminate against them. The students added that library staff were open, helpful and in most cases, available to spare some extra time for blind students. The issue of context could also be a contributing factor as there was a dearth of literature on blind students in higher education from rural contexts of Africa.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

It can be concluded from the results of this study that considerable strides have been made towards accommodating the needs of students with disabilities in line with the social model of disability-both in relation to inclusive policy legislation in South Africa and efforts by the Disability Unit at this university. Tenets of the medical model can however still be seen in the lack of adequate institutional arrangements around universal design and in the way lecturers and students without disabilities treat students with disabilities.

The study found that reasonable accommodation was not provided for blind students in the lecture halls at the university under study as study materials in the library were not properly adapted, computers in the university library and mainstream computer laboratories were not accessible to blind students and lecturers were not trained to teach blind students. Some lecturers used PowerPoint presentations while teaching when blind students could not access the screens. The study recommends universal design for all learning facilities which, according to UNCRPD (2006) means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. Adapted computers should be made available in the usual computer rooms that the general student population uses so that students with disabilities can access these after the disability unit has closed for the day.

The study further recommends thorough training for all staff on teaching students with various disabilities. A short term recommendation offered while the university is still looking for resources to hire more staff is that a shift system be introduced or alternatively, arrangements be made to have a security officer stationed at the adapted lab after working hours. The university should also consider installing WIFI in the residences. In addition, it is recommended that the Disability Unit, the lecturers and the examinations department need to liaise with each other to ensure that all examinations have been adapted for disabled students before the examination date.

The study further recommends improvement in the university's procurement processes to ensure that all students in general and blind students in particular receive the requisite resources needed for learning and teaching on time.

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## ACADEMIC STAFF DEVELOPMENT AS AN ENABLER TO GOOD TEACHING PRACTICES AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN THE EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

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**Abstract.** Higher Education (HE) institutions have to provide support to Academic Staff Development (ASD) through policies, funding and strategies that afford lecturers opportunities to attend ASD disciplinary-based and professional training. Upgrading the nature of teaching and learning is a key strategy in HE and that responsibility lies with Higher Education institutions that identify with the innovative nature of teaching and learning. Good teaching is not an accident, it is achieved through continuous engagement and enhancement of lecturers on both content and innovative pedagogical skills. Such skills need to be honed continuously to close gap in lecturers' gap and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) suits that approach. This study was grounded on principles of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). It was conducted in one university campus comprising of two sites in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. A purposive sample of 51 academics was used for data collection. Content analysis was used to identify emerging themes from the interview responses. The findings showed that lecturers regard ASD as enhancing quality teaching and empowering lecturers to improve their lecturing skills and responsibilities. **Keywords:** academic staff development, good teaching, pedagogical content knowledge.

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### Introduction

The purpose of this article is to investigate whether academic staff development in pedagogical content knowledge enhances good teaching. Data was collected using face-to-face and telephonic interviews, qualitative research methods. The age long practice in the university teaching generally has focused on delivery of academic contents in ways that suggest that the cognitive academic contents in various fields are the only important consideration. According to Ajibade, Adeleke, and Oyetoro (2020), this practice has, really, produced academic giants in different disciplines who may have adequate content knowledge and research skills but who may lack other components of teaching needed to produce all-round professionals who possess pedagogical content knowledge that would help in impacting others positively. These academic giants include seasoned, research respected professors who are specialists in their disciplines. They might have published books and articles that carry a lot of content knowledge (CK) but they lack the pedagogical knowledge (PD). Berrett (2012) opined that professors who do not have an understanding of pedagogy may think about the content students should learn, but not the cognitive capabilities they should develop. It is difficult to blame such lecturers as they are totally oblivious that something more than content knowledge would be required of them as university teachers who are meant to contribute maximally to students' all-round development in the highest educational echelon. This means that some lecturers might not notice their pedagogy gap in their teaching approach until they are confronted by issues like curriculum design, assessment, technology integration into teaching and feedback.

Although training of lecturers started in 1980s, research generally shows that gaps in pedagogical training still exist among teachers in colleges and universities (Biku, Demas, Woldehawariat, Getahun, & Mekonnen, 2018; Negassa & Engdasew, 2017; Tsegay, Zegergish, & Ashraf, 2018). Efforts at addressing these gaps in ability to exhibit pedagogical skills in instructional delivery have continued to receive attention as various HEIs and governments of



some countries like South Africa through CHE guidelines. HEIs have to improve the quality of teaching as universities begin to realise that the possession of a doctoral degree may not be a proxy for teaching competence (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008; Okolie, Igwe, Nwajiuba, Mlanga, Binuomote, Nwosu & Ogbaekirigwe, 2020). HE institutions have introduced policies and strategies like short courses in teaching as well as sending their academics to other HEIs to register and study HE teaching qualifications like PGDip (Higher Education) to close the PCK gap. Negassa and Engdasew (2017) in their own evaluative study of a pedagogical skills training for teachers in Adama Science and Technology University, Ethiopia, also reported positive effects on the participants' teaching skills in using lesson planning, active learning, continuous assessment and classroom management.

## Literature Review

Almarghani and Mijatovic (2017) argue that many Higher Education institutions (HEIs) are pressurised to develop good quality university education. These pressures emanate from the competition on the market of HE facilities, national initiatives for quality assurance and accreditation, and the ever-changing pre-requisites from employers and industry. Therefore, HEI should plan and offer credible programmes or short learning programmes to continuously upskill their academic troops.

Nasser-Abu and Alhija (2017) ascertain that the terms like 'good', 'effective', 'excellent', 'quality' teaching are applied interchangeably when referring to student learning. Generally, the literature displays there is no agreed-upon definition of good teaching, nor are there well-established resources for quantifying it (Nasser-Abu & Alhija, 2017) but below are some of the definitions or interpretations of good teaching from literature. Hativa (2015) defined two general dimensions of good teaching. The first common dimension is cognitive and re-counts to cooperating the learning content to students. The cognitive dimension consists of three sub-dimensions (Hatiya, 2015) to which she brings up as: course and lesson organisation, clearness, and interest/intellectual challenge. The second common dimension is affective good teaching which refers to generating optimistic classroom atmosphere (Hatiya, 2015). Two sub-dimensions entitled as responsiveness (interaction with students) and showing respect, (support and empathy with students) define the second dimension. Hatiya (2015) claims that this inconsistency is based on the fact that good teaching is context based whereby good lecturers might do different things in varying HE institutions with a variety of students for different goals. In this study the term 'good teaching' is used.

McMillan and Gordon (2017) define good teaching as characterised by lecturer eagerness and zeal; is student centred; is experientially based, participative, and intended to create basic reasoning, reflection, and critical thinking abilities; causes students to extend their applied comprehension; is prefaced on a sufficiently planned, significant educational programme that adjusts results, teaching and learning techniques, and appraisal; creates students' fitness through useful input and includes on-going lecturer reflection. The question then is how does Academic Staff development (ASD) enhance such good teaching and furthermore do the lectures at the chosen HDI know what good teaching entails.

Elsewhere, Hénard and Rosereare (2012) viewed good teaching as the effective use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students. Hativa (2015) provided a similar definition that also centres on teaching outcomes. Hativa (2015) emphasised that good teaching supports high-quality learning and that in addition to developing a consideration of the subject matter, an assortment of skills and capabilities, as well as assertiveness, are advanced through good teaching. Thus, teaching ought to accomplish multi-dimensional tenacities in addition to learning.

Chikari, Rudhumbu and Sivotwa (2015), further points out that despite the fact that a few lecturers have more distinctive talent than others, all successful teaching is the consequence

of studying, reflecting, practice, and hard work, therefore teaching well is not a coincidence it should not be accidental. Excellent lecturers are made, not born; they become excellent through investment in their teaching abilities (European Science Institution (ESF), 2012). European Commission (2013:13) states: “A good teacher, like a good graduate, is also an active learner, questioner and critical thinker”. It is a waste of time, determination, and institutional assets to leave lecturers to learn by trial and error. In this way, staff associated with teaching and supporting student learning should be qualified, supported, and sufficiently resourced for that teaching. Teachers learn best through professional development that addresses their needs (Meissel et al., 2016) so that fills in the gaps in the skill sets of new teachers, and to continue to develop the expertise of teachers (Evers et al., 2016) throughout their career. Professional development is necessary to keep the teacher up-to-date with the continuously changing practices, and student needs. Each academic needs to be supported, get relevant academic and professional qualification that will strengthen his/her discipline knowledge plus the pedagogy on how to facilitate teaching effectively.

Somewhere, Vorster and Quinn (2017) ascertain that good teaching involves becoming more acquainted with who your students are, providing for the genuine adapting needs of the students in front of you and not the magically decided ready students you might want, drawing in information students bring into the course, utilising instructional methods that give students a chance to connect effectively in learning and to interface their current information to new information, drafting them into the skill levels and methods of "being" of control, utilising solid, substantial and reasonable techniques to evaluate their students, and more. Good teaching requires having both a strong discipline identity and a strong pedagogic identity, with the understanding that strong pedagogy is grounded in a deep understanding of the discipline. This is aligned with PCK chosen theoretical framework.

Academics work with knowledge as the basis of their identity. Identity is embedded in the discipline (or disciplines) as a knowledge learner, a knowledge producer, and as a knowledge disseminator. These are not binaries. Academic identity is not a static construct; it is fluid and of a hybrid nature. The identity of an academic in HE ought to be rated with both academic qualifications and professional competence. They might be expects in their disciplines but further training in the pedagogy is always crucial to keep them abreast of new learning process strategies. Identity changes over time, as work foci and values (the personal project) and external influences (e.g. marketisation) change and as a career progresses, or even as the notion of ‘discipline’ changes. Therefore as the identity changes, academics need guidance and proper training on how to align their teaching approaches to the students and curriculum demands. Academics necessarily need to work across these knowledge areas in different ways at different points in their careers. The PCK combo intertwines pedagogy with content knowledge and moulds a competent academic with good, effective teaching. Pedagogy builds the how to facilitate curriculum in the lecturer.

Furthermore, the fact that good teaching needs to be research-informed is one example of the interplay between being a good teacher and a good researcher. Both are equally important, interdependent and both roles need to be developed, valued, rewarded, and incentivised. In terms of curriculum transformation, effective teaching requires that lecturers have a good understanding of the interplay between knowledge and power, and the ability to question ‘what knowledge’, ‘whose knowledge’ and ‘who is served’ through knowledge selection into the curriculum.

Cameron and Woods (2016) cite an ongoing cooperative study in Australian universities (Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards Project) (AUTCSP 2014) which offers a valuable structure to characterise national teaching measures and principles. Its seven models are portrayed and conceptualised as a network to give instances of execution at every one of five degrees of vocation movement. In Sweden, Lund University has distinguished three overall standards of 'good' teaching, portrayed as 'educational capability', which they have used to



perceive and remunerate phenomenal teaching practice. Lund University's origination of an 'Educational Academy' (Olsson, Martensson, & Roxa, 2010) is a structure that is utilised to assess teaching ability. These great teaching standards have been utilised to conceptualise principles that empower lecturer improvement professionals to help lecturers in developing their mastery. These principles empower lecturers to be deliberate and centred in building up their skills and furnish assessors with strategies to survey the degrees of the educational capability of each lecturer.

Also, in South Africa, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) and the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) introduced National Excellence in Teaching and Learning Award in 2010 and even the university understudy does offer Vice Chancellors' Teaching excellence awards since 2012. The national awards are issued yearly to deserving applicants across all higher education institutions in South Africa, One of their aims is to show support at a national level for excellence in teaching and learning in higher education.

Kember and Wong (2000) outlined what poor teaching is. They inferred good and poor teaching within four quadrants moulded by the junctures of students' philosophies about learning (passive vs. active) and their perception of their teacher's beliefs about teaching (traditional/transmissive vs. non-traditional). Teaching is perceived as poor when students' beliefs concerning learning and their perception of their teacher's beliefs about teaching were dissenting (Kember & Wong, 2000).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study because PCK is associated with the teacher's learning organisation in the classroom, which challenges their creativeness in altering the teaching resources (Kulsum, 2017). The PCK is defined as the basic skill for lecturers so that they improve their teaching excellence and approach (Kulsum, 2017). According to An, Kulm and Wu (2004) the significance of PCK is comprised of three parts namely knowledge of content, curriculum and teaching. Teaching is a multifaceted perceptive action where the teacher is expected to apply knowledge from various fields (Barnett & Hodson, 2001; Cochran, et al., 1993): (a) subject matter knowledge, (b) pedagogical knowledge, and, (c) pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Hence knowledge of content alone is not enough to teach effectively.

According to Shulman (1986, 1987) cited in Hancherngchai (2018), the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) as a new realm of teacher knowledge has been a useful framework for discovering the teachers' needs and content improvements. Shulman (1987) presented Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) as a key part of the knowledge base of teaching, that is comprised of (a) subject matter knowledge, (b) curricular knowledge, (c) pedagogical knowledge (d) knowledge of students, (e) knowledge of the context, and (f) knowledge of educational goals. He conceptualised PCK as containing influential subject matter specific correlations, illustrations, models, demos and other techniques of constructing the module logical to other people where both the content and pedagogical knowledge are incorporated.

Ever since Shulman, many researchers have investigated PCK and it has been construed in diverse ways (Gess-Newsome, 1999; Cochran, et al., 1993; Grossman, 1990). Grossman (1990) expounded on Shulman's work, by theorising PCK as an outcome of alteration of information from three areas: (a) subject matter knowledge and beliefs, (b) pedagogical knowledge and beliefs, and, (c) knowledge and beliefs about context. Individually, these knowledge areas portray PCK as improvement and in turn affects the three underwriting areas while Franke and Fennema (1992) denoted PCK as teachers' knowledge of teaching processes such as operational approaches for planning, lecture room practises, behaviour managing

systems, lecture room organization procedure, and inspiration procedures. Magnuson, Krajcik and Borko (1999), adding on Grossman's effort, termed PCK for teaching as comprising of five parts: (a) orientations toward teaching, (b) knowledge and beliefs about the curriculum, (c) knowledge and beliefs about instructional strategies, (d) knowledge and philosophies about students understanding of explicit subject topics, and (e) knowledge and theories about assessment in that theme.

Hancherngchai (2018) contends that content knowledge is a necessary but not the only condition for good teaching because lecturers also need to choose appropriate examples and exercises in the correct sequence so that students are guided in their learning. The PCK notion explores the teaching strategies, approaches, and procedures that assist a lecturer to teach more effective but these should be contextualised to relevant National Qualification Framework (NQF) level of the course/module taught. Lastly, Coenders (2010) describes PCK as knowledge for teaching. Daries (2017) supports Shulman (1987) conception as he also explains Pedagogic Content Knowledge as an amalgamation of content and pedagogy into a consideration of how curriculum matters or themes are designed, characterised, and modified to the diverse benefits and capabilities of students. Kultsum (2017) elaborates that PCK is the basic skill for lecturers so that they improve their teaching excellence and approach. This means PCK will enhance lecturers to combine content with effective and innovative teaching approaches relevant to the national qualification (NQF) level and students' cognitive levels. The innovative teaching skills are taught in the staff development training. PCK also develops lecturers to design curriculum inclusive of diverse and integrated assessment to accommodate diverse students attributes. Such an approach results into future ready graduates for the market with the required applied competences namely foundational, practical and reflexive skills (SAQA, 2012).

The PCK concept may be interpreted differently by different people, but it is generally agreed that this amalgamation of knowledge affects how teachers teach and how students learn (Berry, Loughran, & van Driel, 2008). For all the topics they teach, discipline teachers should have a well-developed PCK not restricted to CK hence the need for continuous training on pedagogical skills. PCK is developed by integrating its contributing parts, reflecting on them, and active processing. Teaching experiences shape and develop PCK (Clermont, Borko, & Krajcik, 1994; Van Driel, et al., 1998). Furthermore, according to Kulsum, (2017). PCK is also associated to the teacher's learning organisation in the classroom, which challenges their creativeness in altering the teaching resources.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative research method was used where face-to-face and telephonic interviews were conducted. The study was conducted in one campus comprising of two sites. The 1<sup>st</sup> site offers qualifications ranging from a certificate to advanced diploma while the second site offers undergraduate degrees and post graduate degrees up to doctoral level. A purposive sample of 51 academics who attended Academic Staff Development workshops inclusive of seven (7) who also completed the Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDip(HE)). Only 27 academics responded to the invite for interviews which ultimately were used for data collection. The interview questions were guided by the following key statements which were also used as themes:

- a. The training has improved my teaching knowledge
- b. Participating in the training programme has enhanced my teaching methods
- c. The training was aligned with my teaching needs
- d. The core areas which were more relevant towards my teaching
- e. The new skills acquired in the training cannot be practiced in my lecture rooms

Before the interview started, I addressed the participants about why she/he was chosen as part of the sample, of their rights to withdraw anytime, the purpose of the study and that their

identity will be kept a secret in this study. Each interview was conducted in a room where no one could hear what was discussed. The questionnaires were sent to participants using google docs to their private emails and responses never had their names. The consent form addressed the principles suggested by Neuman (2014). All willing participants signed the consent form to ensure the fair distribution of risks involved in this study and the promise of respectful treatment of participants, which involves maximising good outcomes, and minimising risks. The interviews were recorded to ensure trustworthiness of data. Content analysis was used to identify emerging themes from the responses.

## **Results and Discussion**

There were 27 participants composed of 55% females and 45% males. Their age groups start from 30 -39 years (29%); 40-49 years (43%); 50 -59 years (23%) and the above 60 years group (8%). Their academic qualifications are 12% PhD, 67% Masters and 21% below Masters qualification. Participants who possess a Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDip(HE)) were 14%, 31% have other teaching qualifications which are not at higher education level and the majority 55% participants have no teaching qualifications.

### **The training has improved my teaching knowledge**

Most respondents contend that ASD enhancement is for lecturers who were never trained to teach; therefore, it is intended to capacitate them with the understanding that it will help them to meet basic requirements to lecture in HE institutions. Some respondents related the issue of ASD with improvement of teaching and stated that ASD was the advancement of ability to teach effectively. Most of the interview participants felt that ASD is relevant to their teaching and career profession. Participant 13 voiced that it is a career change where she learnt the pedagogy of teaching and learning. Comments from some participants are listed below:

*“The training has improved my teaching knowledge”;*

*“Participating in the training programme has increased my motivation as a lecturer”*

### **Participating in the training programme has enhanced my teaching methods**

The response by P2 and P10 highlights the fact that participants acknowledge the importance of training of academics without a teaching qualification to equip them with pedagogical content knowledge in addition to the disciplinary expertise they already have.

Remarkably, the talk of strengthening pedagogical content knowledge is predominant in the interview information, particularly from five members. Most likely it is because all hold PGDip qualification and the other is an academic developer. P3 contends that such exposure engages one to reflect as they lecture in HE and further recognises that ASD enables lecturers with teaching aptitudes to guide HE students in a manner that is unique. P5,P11,P12, P15 referred to enabling of academics when she described ASD as an engagement of lecturers on teaching abilities and that it underpins and develops them as better-prepared lecturers in offering excellent teaching.

The training discourse also arose from the interview data. Participant P3 stressed that ASD was regarded as a technique to train academics and professors in lecturing expertise, signifying that professors were knowledgeable experts in their disciplinary fields but require to be trained as university teachers.

Respondents also see the outcome of ASD as leading to improvement and upgrade of the teaching and learning competencies within the departments. For example, P2 contended that

consistent refresher workshops and courses are essential for academic staff advancement as they result in improved teaching tactics. P8 explicated that ASD programmes are important in the acquisition of teaching skills.

These respondents' perspectives are aligned with Quinn (2012) and D'Andrea and Gosling's (2001) observations. In their case studies in South Africa and the UK, these authors correspondingly ascertained that academic staff development (ASD) was concomitant with the development of teaching and learning in the HE sector. Surprisingly, some studies (Mizell, 2010) assert that there is no convincing proof to agree with this. Interestingly, the information from the interview reveals that Academic Staff Development's focus is on teaching abilities and methods. Data also showed that using workshops and seminars is the foremost technique in training such competencies. Results categorically display that ASD can be anticipated in relation to its purpose, its methods, its empowering aspect and development. University teachers' development is one of the central dialogues that arose and it characterises ASD. The staff development programmes lend authority to endowing lecturers with pedagogical strategies in teaching undergraduates.

Volbrecht (2003) stated that lecturers' development via ASD should conscientise them to confront HE curriculum problems. Furthermore, Feiman-Nemser (2001) emphasised that academic staff development raises the lecturers' cognisance of HE encounters that impede excellence. It also transpired that Academic Staff Development is linked to induction and training, in that order. There is a growing perception that lecturers' status as discipline or subject experts is inadequate; lecturers require investment and upskilling in the expertise and skill of teaching. Nevertheless, induction and upskilling are restricted in comparison to ASD that might be wide-ranging in freedom and perception (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). In reality, some experts caution that we should not adopt skills training only, as an ASD approach (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) due to the connotations related to it, which include becoming proficient in practical ability, which is a confined interpretation of ASD. Instead, ASD ought to be correctly conceptualised as Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) with an objective of preparing lecturers to grow as reflective specialists (Bath & Smith, 2004).

Some of these comments were:

*"The programme has helped me to carry out my teaching duties effectively. It has also helped in relating with my students.*

*"It has improved my perception about teaching and handling student-lecturer relationship.*

*"It has helped me a lot in the area of evaluation of learning outcomes especially setting of questions and organisation of my lectures. Empowering lecturers to improve their lecturing skills and responsibilities, which encompasses preparation, lecturing, and handling students' assessments*

*"Capacitation to teach is an add-on to my experience*

*"Lecturers need to be trained since they hold only discipline-based degrees.*

*"It is a ladder to my promotion as these courses like an assessment in HE count as criteria for promotion"*

### ***The training was aligned with my teaching needs***

Congruent to this rationale, lecturers considered professional development appropriate if it considered their exact requests and apprehensions or if their learning practice and their departmental tasks are included within the ASD activities (Hunzicker, 2010). Wood, et al. (2011), in their study, also concluded that lecturers need discipline-specific approaches in teaching to develop the mathematics profession in Australia. Some of these comments were

*"ASD addresses my teaching needs, but follow-ups are needed to address certain grey areas when in practice.*

*"It is very relevant because it helps in developing necessary skills required in*

*teaching in the University especially for those who did not go through teacher training programme and do not have previous teaching experiences. It compliments my mind-set and commitment to nation-building through capacity building and mentoring of future academics”.*

***Core areas that were more relevant towards my teaching***

Participants identified aspects they felt were relevant and could empower them if training was provided. Most participants identified curriculum development and design as a core area for training needs for any lecturer. The reasoning is that they feel the basics to teach depend on the plan, structure, and design of the curriculum as lecturers strive to constructively align their teaching. This is aligned with Biggs’ (2003) model of constructive alignment which McMahan and Thakore (2006) defines as coherence between assessment, teaching strategies, and intended learning outcomes in an educational programme.

Some participants identified technology integration into teaching and learning as requiring serious attention through ASD to reinforce academics’ viability. She proposed that technology ought to be incorporated into teaching, concentrating on the substance and teaching approach of the technology.

While some participants, like P3 and P5 were concerned with content-based needs, P4 was worried about how academic professional development addressed students' diversity. In signifying student centredness, P6 recognised that ASD supported them in realising the diversity of students, recognise the students and their prospects thus leading lecturers to comprehend the differences of their students and reasons for creating opportunities and consultation sessions for students. Chabaya (2015) emphasises a similar argument that an equipped professional course reflected reservations equally for the lecturers and students in its plan. Merriam (2001) believes that the students’ criticism formulated a decent basis of acknowledging students' desires to contribute to ASD projects and to enrich them to be more significant.

***The new skills acquired in the training cannot be practiced in my lecture rooms***

*“The new skills acquired in the training could not be practiced in my lecture room”  
I am generally concerned about my inability to implement the innovative practices learnt during the programme”.*

*It provides the opportunity to meet other early career teachers/researchers in the university.*

After analysing data from the interviews, the following findings emanated:

- Lecturers in the study regard ASD as enhancing quality teaching; empowering lecturers to improve their lecturing skills and responsibilities which encompass preparations, lecturing and handling students' assessments. As Almarghani and Mijatovic (2017) argue, many HE institutions (HEIs) are pressurised to develop good quality of university education, quality teaching can be achieved through transforming the lecturers’ teaching aptitude, skills, and approaches. Transformation without empowerment is not possible. These are critical theory characteristics that are also ASD drivers towards effective lecturer career and classroom practice. ASD is defined as an engagement of lecturers with teaching abilities; it underpins and develops them as better prepared lecturers in offering excellent teaching. The need for training on PCK becomes implicit here.
- Curriculum development and design are core areas for training needs for any lecturer. Hence it is not surprising that the respondents classified curriculum issues as a core attraction to their attendance of ASD. The reasoning is that lecturers consider the basics to teach depend on the plan, structure, and design of the curriculum as lecturers strive to constructively align their teaching. This is aligned

with Biggs's (2003) model of constructive alignment. Due to the current transformation and changes in teaching and learning in HE, lecturers need adequate technical skills to enable them to integrate technology in curriculum development and teaching as technology has become an enhancer to teaching and learning in HE (Balyer, Özcan, & Yildiz, 2017).

- There was also a mention of the importance of aligning module content to pedagogical content knowledge one area of need for ASD. ASD is characterised by academics as career-changing where they learn the pedagogy of teaching and learning, and most are encouraged to attend if the topic/area of the training is relevant to their teaching. Wood, Vu, Bower, Brown, Skalicky, Donovan, Loch, Joshi, and Bloom (2011) in their study, also established that lecturers need discipline-specific approaches in teaching to develop their subject-specific profession. In critical realist philosophy.
- Another finding from the study is that attendance is for personal growth, as more responses showed that lecturers do plan towards their future careers in the teaching profession. This is consistent with Mariss (2011), who advocates that for staff development to be effective, two components, namely, one's professional development and the institutional development process, are crucial. They are motivated as they become confident to assist students' wellbeing. When lecturers are confident in both content and pedagogical knowledge, they become empowered to teach effectively. They easily contextualise their teaching tools and constructively align their teaching with assessment of learning.

## Conclusion

There is evidence that lecturers see ASD as enhancing their teaching for effective delivery, develops their skills (constructive alignment, assessment, credits), and knowledge of teaching and learning (learning theories, teaching methods, student engagements in class). ASD empowers lecturers as HE professionals to teach better and obtain better professional qualifications like PGDip (Higher Education) and SETA accredited courses. All these professional qualifications enhance promote and result to good teaching practices. Finally, lecturers are made, not born, hence there is great support from the academics for well organised, quality training, professionalising, and upskilling initiatives to develop good university lecturers. For this HEI to transform its academics, there is a need for strengthening its ASD approach.

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## EU YOUTH BELIEFS IN GENDER BASED DISCRIMINATION, SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

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**Abstract.** *Gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault are the factors that impact youth engagement in the labour market and society. Monitoring of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault among young people in the European countries remains under-developed. The research aim is to analyse beliefs of young people in the European Union in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. The research is built on the basis of both theoretical and empirical methods. The theoretical analysis shaped the conceptual framework of the research. The empirical study was based on the survey implementation. Data were collected in five European Union countries in March-April 2022. The data were analysed via the mean calculation as well as ranking. Data interpretation was applied in order to summarise the study findings. The theoretical analysis allows for the establishment of the inter-connections between beliefs and values. The data analysis reveals that young people believe in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. The results show that physical appearance and people race are the Top 2 beliefs that coincide in all the three phenomena, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Research limitations are outlined. Future work is proposed.*

**Keywords:** *beliefs, gender based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, values.*

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### Introduction

Gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault are the factors that impact youth engagement in the labour market and society. Young people are in the particular focus of the European Union. This particular attention devoted to young people by the European Union is reflected in the EU Youth strategy for 2019–2027 (European Commission, 2018). Youth employment and social inclusion are based on diversity (European Parliament, 2012). Therefore, monitoring of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault among young people can help recognise if any problems exist in the field of youth gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Early problems identification in the field of youth gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault allows for faster appropriate reaction that could promote the increase in overall economic growth and social cohesion.

In order to monitor the situation in the field of youth gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, the European Union implemented a couple of surveys. In 2012 gender inequalities in the European Union were explored (European Parliament, 2012). In 2015, European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2015) revealed the prevalence of unwanted sexual attention among working population in Europe. Analysis of these studies shows that, in the previously implemented surveys, young people were not a target group. It means that the situation in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault among young people might differ in comparison to other age groups. Hence, the studies results cannot be applied to the population of young people in the European Union. Another issue is that the studies were centred on one field, for example, the study of the European

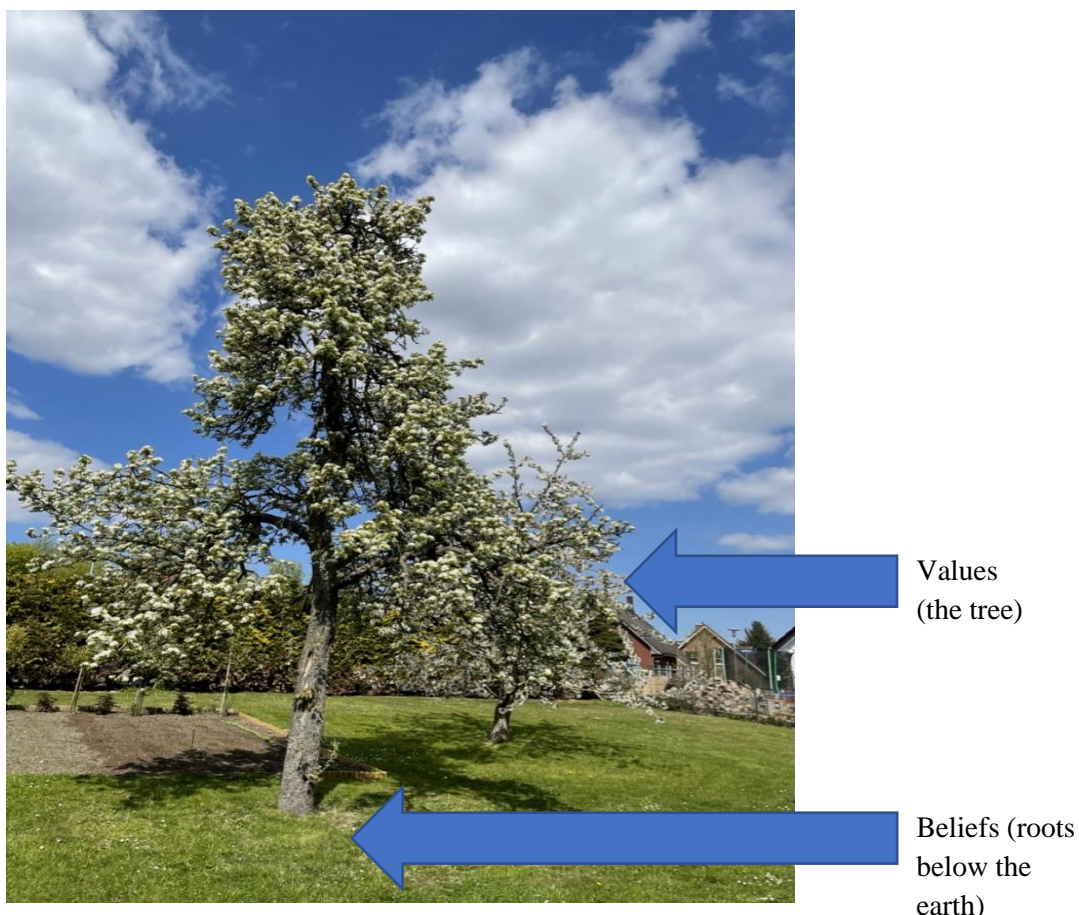
Union was devoted to only gender inequalities in the European Union (European Parliament, 2012). A study carried out by European Institute for Gender Equality in 2015 (EIGE, 2015) concentrated only on unwanted sexual attention among working population in Europe. That means that, on the one hand, only one field, namely unwanted sexual attention, and, on the other hand, only working population, were under investigation. Consequently, monitoring of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault among young people in the European countries remains under-developed.

The research aim is to analyse beliefs of young people in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault in the European Union.

The research is constructed on the basis of both theoretical and empirical methods. The theoretical analysis built the conceptual framework of the research. The empirical study was based on the survey implementation. The data were analysed via the mean calculation as well as ranking. Data interpretation was applied in order to summarise the study findings.

### Conceptual Framework

Beliefs are defined to be individual's assumptions on what is right or wrong. Beliefs are the roots of values if values' development is considered as tree's growing as illustrated in Figure 1.



*Figure 1 The relationship between beliefs and values (the authors)*

Beliefs can be considered from two perspectives (Österholm, 2009):

- The social perspective, also known as the outer side, and
- The individual perspective, also defined as the inner side.

A mixture of different perspectives is a central cause for the creation of beliefs as a messy construct (Österholm, 2009).

Consequently, young people beliefs in the field of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault are crucial for the success of young people integration into the labour market and their social inclusion.

Beliefs in the field of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault summarised in Table 1 are based on the literature review implemented in December 2021-February 2022. Beliefs about employment, marital status, being young (Xiao, Zong, Geng, Deng, & Zhu, 2020), religion (Forman-Rabinovici & Sommer, 2018), race (Perry, Harp, & Oser, 2013), physical appearance (Lee, Son, Yoon, & Kim, 2017), and educational level (Carliner, Sarvet, Gordon, & Hasin, 2017) were outlined. Table 1 shows the beliefs that might impact gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

*Table 1 Beliefs in the field of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault (the authors)*

<b>Belief</b>	<b>Gender based discrimination</b>	<b>Sexual harassment</b>	<b>Sexual assault</b>	<b>Perspective</b>
Being young	X	X	X	Outer/social
Race	X	X	X	Outer/social
Physical appearance	X	X	X	Outer/social
Marital status	X	X	X	Outer/social
Educational level	X			Inner/individual
Religion	X			Outer/social
Employment	X			Inner/individual

Table 1 demonstrates that gender based discrimination relates to all the beliefs found in the research literature, namely being young, race, physical appearance, marital status, educational level, religion, and employment. In turn, sexual harassment and sexual assault are found to be related to beliefs in being young, race, physical appearance, and marital status. Hence, gender based discrimination relates to both inner and outer sides of an individual while sexual harassment and sexual assault are mostly connected to the outer side of an individual. This finding explains the difference in the number of beliefs between gender based discrimination, on the one hand, and sexual harassment and sexual assault, on the other hand.

### **Methodology of the Survey Analysis**

Beliefs in the field of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault illustrated in Table 1 served as the basis of the survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was based on respondents' self-assessment. Each question in the questionnaire was applied the 4 point Likert scale as demonstrated in Table 2.

*Table 2 The 4 point Likert scale in the survey questionnaire (the authors)*

<b>The 4 point Likert scale in the questionnaire</b>	<b>A short description of the 4 point Likert scale</b>
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Agree
4	Strongly agree

It should be noted that the survey questionnaire contained 62 questions in total. In this work, we keep the original number of the question in relation to beliefs in gender based discrimination (Questions 5-11), sexual harassment (Questions 38-41), and sexual assault (Questions 55-58).

In March-April 2022, the survey based on the elaborated questionnaire was carried out in five European Union countries. Altogether 309 respondents from Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, Lithuania, and Romania took part in the survey. Table 3 discloses the survey results in socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

*Table 3 Survey results in socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (the authors)*

Nr	Question	Number of answers					
		Romania	Germany	Italy	Lithuania	Czech Republic	TOTAL
1	Which country are you from?	69	61	56	63	60	309
2	What is your gender:						
	a. Male	15	43	10	28	17	113
	b. Female	53	18	44	35	35	185
	c. Other	1	0	2	0	8	11
3	What is your employment status:						
	a. Employer	1	1	0	0	3	5
	b. Employee	9	4	17	5	24	59
	c. Student	59	54	39	58	33	243
	d. Entrepreneur	0	2	0	0	0	2
	e. Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	What is your educational level:						
	a. Secondary school	34	0	5	1	15	55
	b. High school	1	0	2	24	0	27
	c. Vocational school	1	0	1	1	0	3
	d. College	0	0	0	32	44	76
	e. University	33	61	48	4	0	146
	f. Other: please, specify	0	0	0	1	1	2

Thus, 309 respondents, young people, aged 18-30 from Romania, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, and Czech Republic participated in the survey. Related to the gender of our respondents, 185 were females, 113 males, and 11 have chosen the category “other”.

The majority of the respondents from Romania are the female students from colleges and universities.

The majority of the respondents from Germany is represented by the male university students.

The majority of the respondents from Italy are female university students.

The respondents from Lithuania almost equally represent female and male students from colleges and universities.

The respondents from the Czech Republic are mostly female students from colleges.

The majority of all the respondents are university students.

The data collected by each partner was integrated into one EXCEL file. Afterwards, the data were cleaned and prepared for analysis. This included the survey questionnaire - previously translated into national languages - to be integrated into the unified file. The data preparation also aimed at checking the connections between the question and the question number in the partner's surveys. The data were analysed via two methods:

- The mean and
- Ranking (Ahrens & Zascierinska, 2020).

The mean of a question in the dataset from the survey questionnaire represents the average value of the question in this dataset. The mean is based on the data taken from every observation shown by the respondents of the survey questionnaire. The mean indicates the center value in each question in the survey questionnaire. The center of the collected data is a numerical value from 1 to 4. The mean allows for the description of the data tendency. In the case of the present research, the mean shows whether the respondents agree or disagree with the survey questions about gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. The mean results were analysed at the levels of:

- Mean in each category, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, in each country,
- Mean as the overall value in each category, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, in all the five partner countries, namely Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, Lithuania, and Romania.

On the level of each country, the results of each question on each level of the 4 point Likert scale were calculated separately and presented in a table.

Ranking refers to an evaluation used for the advancement of the evaluated item (Ahrens & Zascierinska, 2020). The use of the ranking method was thought as the act of summing up young people beliefs into a single, holistic number or score is meant (Elbow, 1994). Ranking was intended to emphasise vertical differences between the options (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

The obtained mean of each question of each country was ranked. The options available were placed in order without any attempt to describe how much one differs from another or whether any of the alternatives are, for example, good or acceptable (Coe, 2010, p. 45). It should be pointed that ranking differs from rating as rating means that the used categories are often given numerical labels, such as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (Coe, 2010, p. 45). The higher was the mean the higher the question was ranked.

## Research results

Table 4 reveals the mean results related to gender based discrimination in five participating countries.

*Table 4 Mean results related to gender based discrimination (the authors)*

Nr	Question	Mean results in each country					Total Mean	All questions' mean
		Romania	Germany	Italy	Lithuania	Czech Republic		
5	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience gender based discrimination?	2,71	2,52	2,91	2,76	2,69	2,72	2,87
6	Do you believe that race of people might	2,81	2,67	3,36	2,75	3,23	2,96	



	impact gender based discrimination?						
7	Do you believe that physical appearance of people might impact gender based discrimination?	2,72	2,72	3,55	3,05	3,27	3,06
8	Do you believe that marital status might impact gender based discrimination?	2,46	1,54	2,93	2,59	2,98	2,5
9	Do you believe that your educational level might impact gender based discrimination?	2,61	2,67	3	2,43	3	2,74
10	Do you believe that your religion might impact gender based discrimination?	2,65	2,69	2,95	2,63	3,15	2,81
11	Do you believe that gender based discrimination might impact your employment?	2,51	2,54	3,21	2,62	2,92	2,76

Source: The authors.  
n=309

The mean results presented in Table 4 point that young people in Italy and Czech Republic have a stronger belief in gender based discrimination in comparison to the respondents from Romania, Germany, and Lithuania.

Table 5 shows the mean results of each question and each question ranking in relation to gender based discrimination.

*Table 5 Mean and ranking results related to gender based discrimination (the authors)*

Nr	Question	Total Mean	Ranking
5	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience gender based discrimination?	2,72	6
6	Do you believe that race of people might impact gender based discrimination?	2,96	2
7	Do you believe that physical appearance of people might impact gender based discrimination?	3,06	1
8	Do you believe that marital status might impact gender based discrimination?	2,5	7
9	Do you believe that your educational level might impact gender based discrimination?	2,74	5
10	Do you believe that your religion might impact gender based discrimination?	2,81	3
11	Do you believe that gender based discrimination might impact your employment?	2,76	4

Source: The authors.  
n=309



The ranking results demonstrate that young people have a stronger belief that people experience gender based discrimination due to their physical appearance, race and religion. Physical appearance, race and religion relate to the outer side of an individual. In regard to religion, we consider it to be an outer sign as individual's religion could be recognised on the basis of an individual's clothing, religious crosses, etc.

The mean results related to sexual harassment are presented in Table 6.

*Table 6 Mean results related to sexual harassment (the authors)*

Nr	Question	Mean results in each country					Total mean	All questions' mean
		Roma nia	Germ any	Italy	Lithu ania	Czech Republic		
38	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience sexual harassment?	2,94	2,80	2,66	2,94	2,81	2,83	2,81
39	Do you believe that people race might impact sexual harassment?	2,70	2,71	3	2,68	3,18	2,85	
40	Do you believe that people physical appearance might impact sexual harassment?	2,93	2,86	3,43	3,03	3,55	3,16	
41	Do you believe that marital status might impact sexual harassment?	2,29	2,16	2,28	2,33	2,85	2,38	

Source: The authors.  
n=309

The mean results shown in Table 6 allow finding out that young people in Czech Republic, Italy and Romania have a stronger belief in sexual harassment in comparison to the respondents from Germany and Lithuania.

Table 7 demonstrates the mean results of each question and each question ranking in relation to sexual harassment.

*Table 7 Mean and ranking results related to sexual harassment (the authors)*

Nr	Question	Total mean	Ranking
38	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience sexual harassment?	2,83	3
39	Do you believe that people race might impact sexual harassment?	2,85	2
40	Do you believe that people physical appearance might impact sexual harassment?	3,16	1
41	Do you believe that marital status might impact sexual harassment?	2,38	4

Source: The authors.  
n=309

The ranking results emphasized in Table 7 allow for a finding that the young people have a stronger belief that sexual harassment refers to people physical appearance, race, and

being young. Physical appearance, race and being young represent the outer side of an individual.

Table 8 discloses the mean results related to sexual assault.

*Table 8 Mean results related to sexual assault (the authors)*

Nr	Question	Mean results in each country					Total mean	All questions' mean
		Roma nia	Germ any	Italy	Lithu ania	Czech Republic		
55	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience sexual assault?	2,64	2,66	2,76	2,86	2,77	2,74	2,71
56	Do you believe that people race might impact sexual assault?	2,54	2,66	3,02	2,60	3,07	2,78	
57	Do you believe that people physical appearance might impact sexual assault?	2,55	3,14	3,12	2,60	3,35	2,95	
58	Do you believe that marital status might impact sexual assault?	1,87	2,11	3	2,38	2,48	2,37	

Source: The authors.  
n=309

The mean results shown in Table 8 allow discovering that young people in Lithuania have a stronger belief in sexual assault in comparison to the respondents from Germany Czech Republic, Italy, and Romania.

Table 9 demonstrates the mean results of each question and each question ranking in relation to sexual assault.

*Table 9 Mean and ranking results related to sexual harassment (the authors)*

Nr	Question	Total mean	Ranking
55	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience sexual assault?	2,74	3
56	Do you believe that people race might impact sexual assault?	2,78	2
57	Do you believe that people physical appearance might impact sexual assault?	2,95	1
58	Do you believe that marital status might impact sexual assault?	2,37	4

Source: The authors.  
n=309

The ranking results emphasized in Table 9 assist in finding that the young people have a stronger belief that sexual assault refers to people physical appearance, race, and being young. Physical appearance, race and being young represent the outer side of an individual.

Table 10 reveals Top 3 beliefs of young people in relation to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

**Table 10 Top 3 beliefs of young people in relation to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault (the authors)**

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Gender based discrimination</b>	<b>Sexual harassment</b>	<b>Sexual assault</b>
1	Physical appearance of people might impact gender based discrimination	Physical appearance of people might impact sexual harassment	Physical appearance of people might impact sexual assault
2	People race might impact gender based discrimination	People race might impact sexual harassment	People race might impact sexual assault
3	Religion of people might impact gender based discrimination	Being young might impact sexual harassment	Being young might impact sexual assault

Source: The authors.  
n=309

The ranking results summarized in Table 10 allow identifying that the young people have a strong belief that gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault are impacted by people physical appearance and race. It should be noted that physical appearance and race represent the outer side of an individual.

### Survey Findings

The data analysis shows that the total mean of young people beliefs about gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault is 2,80 as shown in Table 11.

**Table 11 Total mean in relation to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault (the authors)**

<b>Gender based discrimination</b>	<b>Sexual harassment</b>	<b>Sexual assault</b>	<b>Total mean</b>
2,87	2,81	2,71	2,80

Source: The authors.  
n=309

The results of the young people self-assessment carried out through the survey questionnaire contribute to the finding that physical appearance and people race are the Top 2 beliefs that coincide in all the three fields, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. All the three phenomena, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, are influenced by an individual's outer side or social perspective.

The survey questionnaire also discloses that young people in Czech Republic and Italy have stronger beliefs in gender based discrimination and sexual harassment while young people in Lithuania have a stronger belief in sexual assault.

### Discussion

An interesting observation is formulated by Österholm (2009). Österholm (2009) finds that a mixture of different perspectives is a central cause for the creation of beliefs as a messy construct (Österholm, 2009). The author would prefer to view beliefs from only one perspective: either from the social perspective or from the individual perspective.

Against this, another approach that identifies the unity of both perspectives - the external (social) perspective and the internal (individual) perspective - was elaborated by Zašcerinska (2011). The approach received the name "Developing the System of External and

Internal Perspectives” (Zaščerinska, 2011). In this approach, there is a cycle based on three phases of the development of the system (beliefs in our research):

- In Phase 1, beliefs are identified from the external (social) perspective,
- In Phase 2, beliefs are defined as the unity of both perspectives - the external (social) perspective and the internal (individual) perspective, and
- In Phase 3, beliefs are analysed from the internal (individual) perspective.

Each phase is built on the previous one. If necessary, each phase and the whole cycle can be repeated.

Another issue that requires a deeper analysis is the belief of young people in physical appearance and race that might most impact the exposure of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Physical appearance and race are defined as an individual’s outer side or social perspective. It would be great to find out if an enrichment of an individual’s inner side or individual perspective through education could help diminish the impact of people physical appearance and race on the exposure of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

### **Conclusions**

The theoretical analysis allows for the establishment of the inter-connections between beliefs and values. The mean in relation to young people beliefs in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault shows that young people believe in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Results reveals that the respondents agree that a young age, people race and physical appearance, and marital status might impact gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. For young people, physical appearance and people race are the most important factors related to all the three phenomena, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Marital status, educational level, and employment might not be so important when considering gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. The study allows for a conclusion that an individual’s outer side or social perspective prevails when discussing gender based discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. The carried out study helps understand that the evaluation of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault by young people in the selected European countries is heterogenous as young people have beliefs of different levels in regard to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Thus, young people in Czech Republic and Italy have stronger beliefs in gender based discrimination and sexual harassment while young people in Lithuania have a stronger belief in sexual assault.

There are some limitations in the present research. A limitation is that the inter-connections between beliefs and values have been set. The extended literature review might increase the list of young people beliefs in relation to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. A limitation also is the participation of the respondents from only five selected countries. Participation of respondents from other countries in the survey might change the study results.

Future work proposed to compare young people beliefs about gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault with a level of exposure. Comparative studies with other age groups are to be carried out, too.

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