

## Towards Making Tourism Education Programmes More Inclusive: From The Perceptive of Disabled People

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### Abstract

The study explores the existence of the seemingly latent potential, ability, and willingness of disabled people to participate in tourism education programmes by using the social model of disability. Consequently, unveiling the cause and effective intervention thereof. A qualitative research design enabled in-depth face-to-face interviews and Facebook group discussions collected data from disabled people. This research method allowed the researchers to gain relevant information from the real-life experiences of participants. A difference in opinion was observed between participants already enrolled at education institutions and not enrolled participants. However, all believe they have the potential, ability, and willingness to participate in tourism education programmes. The literature shows tourism education facilities as overlooking biases, stigmatisation and discriminatory practices to disabled people, deeming them unable, incapable and unwilling to study for tourism degrees. While results show effort to accommodate and enrol disabled participants, challenges and struggles remain due to underlying obstacles. Clearly, the social model of disability exposed that if the potential, ability, and willingness of disabled people to participate in tourism education programmes remain invisible to tourism educators, the participation, involvement and thriving of disabled people may continue to be compromised. Therefore, the articles provide steps to enhance inclusion.

**Keywords:** disability inclusion; tourism education programmes; disabled learners; disabled people

### Introduction

Despite the progress made in tourism education, there is still a struggle to accommodate disabled people in tourism education programmes to thrive. Tourism education programmes have addressed inequalities and shortages of competencies among tourism employees for more than four decades (Airey & Tribe, 2010). The value of tourism degrees is dependent on the curricula (content), the course design, learning environment, students' ability to learn, and quality of teaching (content delivery) (Al Romeedy et al., 2020; Nhuta et al., 2015). Research has shown inconsistencies in the alignment of tourism labour and consumer market needs and the enrolment and accommodation of disabled people within tourism education (Al Romeedy et al., 2020; De La Fuente-Rodes et al., 2016). This research explores the existence of the latent potential, ability, and willingness of disabled people to participate in tourism education programmes and unveil the causes and the nature of the effective intervention.

There is no clear data disaggregated by type of impairments, gender, age, etcetera of disabled learners studying for any tourism-related qualification (De La Fuente-Rodes, 2016; Makuyana & Saayman, 2018). However, Ndlovu (2019) believes that there are obstacles for

these learners to enter most study fields in South Africa. It concurs with the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM, 2011) and Mutanga (2017b; 2018), who indicated an overall enrolment of less than 1% of disabled learners out of the total number of students at universities in South Africa. The researchers above revealed a consistent lack of reasonable accommodation of disabled people in formal education, leading to a lack of interest in formal learning and some dropping out of tourism studies (De La Fuente-Rodes et al., 2016). In this article, the social model of disability helps to reveal the causes of underlying obstacles faced by disabled people to enter and thrive while learning about tourism at education institutions (Shakespeare, 2004; Watson, 2012; Wilson & Scior, 2014). Consequently, this study could uncover interventions to address the causes and implement plans accordingly. It will afford disabled learners the choice to pursue their perceived potential, ability, and willingness to be part of the tourism sector in South Africa and beyond its borders (Makuyana, 2020; Ndlovu, 2019; Reeve, 2014). The article presents the literature review, method/approach, results, discussion, and implications of the study's conclusion.

### **Literature review**

Literature on disability, inclusion and the participation of disabled learners in tourism education is scarce (Makuyana, 2020). Sigala & Baum (2003), Al Romeedy et al. (2020) and De La Fuente-Rodes et al. (2016) believe tourism education caters mainly for abled tourism labour and consumer market needs because there is: i) insufficient collaboration with both industry and organisations of and for disabled people; ii) a lack of direct involvement of educators in the accessible tourism industry, and iii) a poorly defined role for education in the tourism industry (advisory bodies are included), that adversely affects the implementation of disability and inclusion (Al Romeedy et al., 2020; De La Fuente-Rodes et al., 2016). Like the American, Australian, and European tourism education sectors, South African tourism education lacks an adequate sector-based education matrix for disability and inclusion (Makuyana & Saayman, 2018; Ndlovu, 2020). It, therefore, implies that tourism education has not yet fully prepared to nurture the potential of disabled learners to acquire tourism degrees.

### ***Accessibility of tourism education in South Africa***

Institutions have entry requirements to study for professional degrees (Ndlovu, 2019). FOTIM (2011) highlighted the existence of the Disability Centre/Unit at the universities and that institutions do not deny disabled people entry. However, students are advised of the difficulties they might endure, especially those with visible impairment and occupational needs (Ndlovu, 2019). According to Mutanga (2017a; 2018) and Ndlovu (2019), all prospective learners face obstacles when enrolling, for example, the lack of adequate financial and other resources (Chetty & Pather, 2015). However, disabled people face additional challenges because teaching and learning have been designed with little consideration of disability and the educational needs of disabled learners. For example, there are no auxiliary teacher aides when delivering lessons in a class with a visually impaired learner, and the library has little tourism material that is transcribed in accessible formats (Makuyana & Saayman, 2018; Mutanga, 2017; Ndlovu, 2019). Obstacles to learning emerge from misunderstanding and misinterpretation of disability and inclusion within the education environment, which ends up being regarded more from an individualistic approach to impairment needs than enhancing universal access to all learners (Ndlovu, 2019).

Tourism managers have questioned the potential and ability of disabled people to partake in tourism education because impairment/disability does not fit into the image they want their organisations to portray. To preserve tourism glamour, they often discriminate against disability. (Gronvik, 2007). On the other hand, education providers regard a lack of

response to enrolment advertisements as a gesture of unwillingness to pursue formal education among disabled people (Ndlovu, 2019). However, researchers in accessible tourism education like Groschl (2005; 2007; 2011), Makuyana (2020), Makuyana & Saayman (2018) believe that there is a lack of disability inclusion in the processes of programme/course design, content generation, learning and content delivery. Disability is also not considered in the outcomes and environment of education. The researchers further concur that disabled people struggle to learn due to limited communication in the form of enrollment advertisements about the teaching methods and barriers that might exist. Furthermore, limited access to information aims to prepare individuals with disabilities for broader career choices and successful enrollment processes into these programmes. (FOTIM, 2011). Consequently, there is little room to exercise the right to choose careers and opportunities, scare, stigmatise and discourage them (Ndlovu, 2020).

### ***Perceived obstacles among disabled learners***

Gröschl (2011) and Makuyana & Saayman (2018) opined that educators had neglected the needs of disabled learners due to overt or subtle discriminatory attitudes and structural ignorance among tourism education providers. According to Daniel et al. (2005), disabled learners, when willingly pursuing their potential within tourism education, experience obstacles from i) intrapersonal dimensions, which refer to personality and a person's psychological state and physical functioning/cognitive abilities, ii) interpersonal interaction with others in a society that upholds the stigmatisation of disability within the education environment (other learners, and educators included), and iii) structural constraints from the teaching and learning methods which are influenced by the policy, process, procedures, and the physical environment. These factors overshadow the potential and willingness of disabled people to be professionally empowered for economic involvement and participation (De La Fuente-Rodes et al., 2016; Ndlovu, 2019; 2020).

Makuyana (2020) and Makuyana & Saayman (2018) suggest that shared interactive spaces can enhance the experiential understanding of disabled learners and expand formally gained tourism and disability expertise. It concurs with Goreczny et al. (2011), who states that individuals who engage and have contact with disabled people exhibit a more positive attitude than individuals who do not. Attitude and perceived ability, potential, and willingness of disabled people to acquire tourism degrees are determined by the extent to which impairments are deemed "acceptable" by abled counterparts within tourism education (Goreczny et al., 2011). Nonetheless, learning and the satisfaction level is influenced by the learnt tourism competencies, as evaluated against the disabled learner's ability to apply what was learned (Wilson & Scior, 2014).

Curricula used by tourism education providers are developed and privately owned by institutions (Ndlovu, 2020). It is therefore difficult to fully gauge how inclusive a curriculum is. (Ndlovu, 2019). However, tourism educators and abled learners fail to successfully engage with disabled learners because they struggle to understand disability and their need for inclusion within the education processes (Makuyana, 2020). It is worsened by the fact that policies related to disability are interpreted by government and institution delegates and implemented by educators who have a limited understanding of disability and the need for inclusion (Al Romeedy et al., 2020; De La Fuente-Rodes et al., 2016).

### ***Experiences of disabled people in tourism education in South Africa***

The participation of disabled people in tourism studies is still emergent in South Africa (Makuyana, 2020). Generally, when disabled learners are enrolled in mainstream tourism education and training, they face more challenges than abled cohorts (Choruma, 2007; Daniels

et al., 2005; Gröschl, 2011). If a disabled learner is enrolled, tourism educators use intuitive skills when teaching such learners (Makuyana, 2020). It fosters inadequate, inconsistent, and unsustainable approaches that stigmatise and discourage disabled learners from acquiring tourism education (Makuyana & Saayman, 2018). In most cases, the adaptive strategies of disabled learners compromise the quality of their tourism learning experiences (Makuyana & Saayman, 2018). Hence, It is clear that tourism educators and abled learners struggle to accommodate, interact and deal with disabled learners throughout the teaching and learning process (Makuyana, 2020).

Tourism education fosters inequality and exclusion. Because of intersecting, social identities and stereotypes are understood and explained from a medical, cultural/religious and charity perspective (De La Fuente-Rodes et al., 2020). As a result, disabled individuals are regarded as homogeneous. They are exempted from socio-economic obligations like acquiring employable skills and employment as they are deemed 'sick and unfortunate' (Choruma, 2007; Disabled World [DW], 2016).

### **The social model of disability's theoretical perspective**

The social model of disability has three schools of thought based on different perspectives of the continental region where the school of thought originated. First, the English view is supported by social creationists like Oliver (1996) cited in Watson (2012). Second, the North American idea is motivated by social constructionists like Shakespeare and Watson (1997; 2001; 2002) cited in Watson (2012). Third, the European notion embeds Post-modernism that was advanced by researchers like Danforth (1997a; 1997b; 2000), Danforth and Rhodes (1997) and Skrtic (1991), among others cited in Berghs et al. (2016). The social model of disability emphasises that disability is imposed on persons with impairments through stigmatisation and excluded from full participation in society (Berghs et al., 2016). The study of psycho-emotional, social relation, sociology, and ethical perspective on impairments share a common objective to fight socio-economic oppression (Berghs et al., 2016).

#### ***Social creationists within the social model of disability***

Social creationists advocate distinguishing between impairments and social situations that render people disabled (Makuyana, 2020). According to Makuyana (2020), social creationists explain impairment as lacking all or part of a limb or having a defective limb and mechanism of the body. At the same time, disability is taken as the restriction of participation in the mainstream of socio-economic activities because social organisation takes little to no account of persons with impairments (Watson, 2012). Vehmas (2004) argues that disabled people are an oppressed social group whose inferior status is a by-product of unjust social arrangement and not the natural effect of their impairment. Thus, the labelling 'person with a disability/disabled people with disabilities' is the material product of socio-economic relations that have developed within a specific historical context (Vehmas, 2004). This article explains the discrepancies that have influenced the failure of tourism education to include the educational needs of learners with impairments (Ndlovu, 2020) - consequentially compromising and discouraging disabled people from pursuing their potential and willingness to demonstrate their ability to acquire employable competencies and meaningful employment.

#### ***Social constructionists within the social model of disability***

Social constructionists believe disability is a social construct (Makuyana, 2020). Vehmas (2004) emphasises the significance of ideas, attitudes and language that have produced, constructed, created, and contributed to shaping reality within society. Tourism education fosters disability exclusion, yet the essence of tourism is to enhance inclusive social cohesion

through human migration to and from a designated tourist destination (Makuyana & Saayman, 2018). However, it is natural to hold and interpret various perceptions of the differences and diversities among people regarding their physical or mental conditions (Vehmas, 2004). This article proposes that any human being has the potential and ability to be a tourism student regardless of their impairment. It is one's own decision to be willing or not interested in pursuing a tourism career. Educational institutions should not discriminate and stigmatise disabled people when a choice has been made.

### ***Ethical perspectives within the social model of disability***

From an ethical perspective, social creations and constructions regard the socio-economic environment as developed based on assumptions and ideas of how humans are supposed to be functioning (Vehmas, 2004). On the one hand, the social constructions of a human being create the foundation for material arrangements in society, thereby espousing disablement (Reeve, 2014; Watson, 2012). On the other hand, the material arrangement of society influences how human beings should function, their identities, norms, behaviour, and how potential and 'abilities' should be perceived (Reeve, 2014; Watson, 2012). In this article, the social model of disability seeks to broaden the way disabled people are regarded within tourism education because not all impairments render one unable (DW, 2016).

According to Makuyana (2020), it is the extent of i) exposure that gives boldness to a person with a disability to fulfil their potential, pursue ability and to be willing to join the workforce, regardless of a discriminating environment, ii) understanding and interpretation of disability and inclusion among abled counterparts that reduce stigmatisation of disabled people, iii) the influence of knowledge, culture and religious beliefs on the perceptions of disability and inclusion within the society, iv) the spatial separation between disabled and abled counterparts in societies, and v) the written and unwritten policies and practices that govern day to day socio-economic livelihood among people, that determine the level of acceptance of disabled people. The above factors play a role in the capacity of the tourism education programmes to accommodate disabled people.

The rationale of using the social model of disability was to establish that tourism education programmes have contributed to the stigmatisation and exclusion of disabled people (Reeve, 2014; Watson, 2012). The social model of disability explains disabling practices that accept differences in bodies, minds, race, gender, and ethnicity while alienating disability to be celebrated and not denied (Ndlovu, 2019; Vehmas, 2004). The argument of this article implies that 'the disabled' does not exist, neither does 'the normal'; however, people are heterogeneous and have diversified potential that needs to be explored, understood and nurtured accordingly.

### **Rationale for disability and inclusion in tourism education programmes**

The South African government has various programmes aiming to bring transformation that improves the socio-economic rights of disabled people as rooted in the United Nations Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) of 2006 and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 cited in Makuyana & Saayman (2018). For better economic empowerment that can enhance the exercise of the right to choose, it is more strategic to include disabled learners and disability within tourism education as they have the potential, ability and are willing to pursue their career dreams (Daniels et al., 2005; Makuyana & Saayman, 2018).

### ***The rationale of the study***

The study explores the perceived potential, ability, and willingness to acquire a tourism degree among disabled people. Consequentially, identifying underlying obstacles for the inclusion of disabled people in tourism education and the causes. The study would enhance interventions

for the education environment to take cognisance of disability without compromising disabled and abled learners' educational needs (Ndlovu, 2019; 2020). Interestingly, these struggles and obstacles are similar for all tourism education providers when disabled people pursue their potential and abilities and are willing to acquire tourism degrees in South Africa (Shaida et al., 2021).

### **Method/approach**

A qualitative research design uses interpretive and transformative research approaches (Creswell, 2014). The interpretive research approach enables conversations during interviews to embed personal experience-based data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The transformative paradigm allows the participants to express the reality of their circumstances (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study took into account the social context of the participants – their gender (relations, expectations, and norms), sex, socio-economic background, age and type of impairment as influential in their experiences, voice and perceived disability (Hosking, 2008). The target population is the beneficiaries of fifteen national organisations and disabled people in South Africa. Participants have "hard to reach" characteristics, as advised by Marpsat & Razafindratsima (2010). The study used purposive-stratified sampling to reach the sample size who have lived experience, knowledge of tourism education processes and disability, respectively (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Smith, 2012).

The researcher purposively used the thirteen Facebook groups he joined in 2018. All have a common objective of advocating for disability inclusion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The author<sup>s</sup> built rapport with the group members because they have 'hard-to-reach characteristics' (Etikan, 2016; Naderifar et al., 2017). The Facebook groups were defined by the types of impairments members of the groups had. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Table 1 below shows the participants who are above 18 years. N (200) have no formal tourism qualification but once worked in tourism-related sub-sectors (accommodation, car rentals, travel agents, tour operators, airlines, and cruise ships) before acquiring an impairment. Nonetheless, they have matriculated. Their experience in the tourism-related sector gives insights on potential, ability, and willingness to receive formal tourism education. N (100) were looking for employment in the catering and travel sectors.

In contrast, N (71) looked for opportunities to develop economic empowerment and recruitment into the tourism industry. N (1) is an online travel and tour business owner for disabled people. Diversity among participants enhanced the varying views related to the potential, willingness, and ability of disabled people.

Age, gender, socio-economic background aligned with secondary schooling, participation in travel and recreation/travel culture, and working in tourism subsectors influenced the participants' perceptions of their world. The largest Facebook group had ten thousand members, while the smallest had seven hundred and fifty members. The researcher aimed to gather as many opinions as possible. Choruma (2007) and Hosking (2008) regards the views of disabled people as the 'voice of the usually silenced and forgotten ones' that need to be heard by stakeholders in authority and general readership.

The primary data collection tools were face-to-face in-depth interviews and Facebook-group chat interview discussion guides. According to Alshenqeeti (2014), these tools ring answers to the research questions such as those outlined in this study. The tools have three research questions that allow follow-up questions if any need arise to enhance detailed conversations (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The first question asked in the study was: What were your experiences when you entered the tourism education institution, as influenced by your perceived ability, potential and willingness to study? The second question is: What is your perception of the institution's effort to include disabled learners in the learning process to

enhance their learning experience? The third question is: Can you share your perceived obstacles their causes and suggest interventions for tourism education programmes to strengthen the exploration of ability, potential and will among the disabled and abled alike?

Table 1: Summary of participants

Population	Sample size	Justification	Total Participants	The interviews		Place/ Platform					
				Starting date	Finishing date						
Beneficiaries of fifteen (15) disabled people's organisations (DPOs) in South Africa	Thirteen (13) groups on Facebook:  *Three groups- {N (30) amputated legs; N (40) amputated arms; N (40) amputated hands}.  * Three groups of- {N (30) severe visual impairment; N (30) moderate visual impairment; N (40) mild visual impairment}.  * Four groups- {N (30) mild hearing impairment; N (30) moderate hearing impairment; N (30) severe hearing impairment; N (30) profound hearing loss}.  *Three groups of mobility impairment- {N (13) paralysis; N(13) cerebral palsy; N(13) stroke}.	They have participated in tourism in different ways	N(369)	01 March 2019	30 March 2019	Facebook group-chat platform					
	Two (2) enrolled students for tourism degrees at a tertiary institution						They have lived experiences aligned with entry, and teaching and learning for tourism studies	N(2)	05 February 2019	06 February 2019	University campus
	One (1) Disability Unit staff member						The participant is involved in disability issues for different needs and programmes.	N(1)	22 February 2019	22 February 2019	University campus

Source: Authors' work

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institution's effort to include disabled learners in the learning process to enhance their learning experience? The third question is: Can you share your perceived obstacles their causes and suggest interventions for tourism education programmes to strengthen the exploration of ability, potential and will among the disabled and abled alike? Three external people pilot tested the tools to evaluate the political correctness of the terms used in the tools and gather the intended data while being unambiguous to the potential participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Smith 2012).

In February 2019, the researcher first met two students with disabilities, studying towards a tourism degree on one of the South African university campuses. The discussions led to establishing a relationship and interest in the study. The researcher was introduced to the DU staff by the students. The first author obtained consent to participate was obtained separately from each participant. The researcher conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with the two tourism students and one DU staff member conveniently for the interviewees. Interviews enhance flexibility when discussing personal/sensitive issues (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Despite it being their second language, all participants were comfortable communicating in English. There was no communication barrier between the interviewer and interviewees. All the interviews were audio-recorded after the participants granted permission, transcribed verbatim and given to the interviewees for verification.

The researcher acknowledged the perceived sensitivity of personal issues related to disability and considered the network he had established on Facebook as a potential source of rich, reliable data. Primarily if the Facebook chat discussion is conducted among members that foster perceived shared empathy, a sense of belonging emerges due to shared similar experiences (Sivanandan et al., 2014). Hence, the researcher engaged the administrators of the thirteen Facebook groups, which he was a member of, for authorisation to collect data from the co-members.

The first author obtained authorisation, and then the researcher introduced the study on the Facebook group platforms. The researcher posted an informed consent letter on each of the group platforms. Hence responses to the discussion were a gesture of giving consent (Sivanandan et al., 2014). The first author conducted the Facebook group-interview chat-discussion on the group platforms, respectively (Holtz et al., 2012). The use of the Facebook group platform provided "safety in numbers", confidence, and buy-in to participate in the study using their day-to-day interface (Holtz & Wagner, 2009). The Facebook group interview chat-discussion approach further encouraged the liberty to express an authentic and 'natural' perspective (Holtz et al., 2012). Galasinska (2010), Holtz & Wagner (2009), and Holtz et al. (2012) once used internet-based fora as reliable sources of primary scientific data.

There was no communication barrier as the thirteen Facebook group members were comfortable responding by text on the group platform. Khalif (2018a; 2018b) and Xia et al. (2013) believe online group platform posts allow transparency while sharing ideas with autonomy, trust, and control over time. As discussed in the above paragraph, each question was a separate post to initiate a discussion (Baum & Clarke, 2006; Biriya & Thomas, 2014). It allowed each question/theme (post) to have a 'thread' of discussions running through all related responses from different participants (Baum & Clarke, 2006; Biriya & Thomas, 2014). It is reliable as it is uncommon for discussions to derail unless it surpasses 50 000 characters (Baum & Clarke, 2006; Biriya & Thomas, 2014). Post counts were used to signifying the level of participation of each participant (Biriya & Thomas, 2014). This discussion started on 01 March 2019 and ended on 30 March 2019.

The collected data were analysed using Creswell's (2014) qualitative data analysis framework highlighted by the Grounded Theory approach. The researcher transcribed the data into text. The researchers followed Graebner, Martin & Roundy (2012) in cleaning data by

reading through it several times while uncovering insights into the participants' thoughts using inductive and deductive coding. Based on Eisenhardt cited in Gehman et al. (2018), the first author then organised and prepared thematic analysis using a coding framework developed from the literature reviewed in this study Miles & Huberman (1994) advised the researcher to use descriptive coding by reading the transcribed data while assigning labels emerging from the participants' views to the research questions for the current study. The author used interpretive coding to fragment and reorganise data to identify themes contextualised to the research. At the same time, decontextualising researchers' experiences as Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2013) advised. The co-author then read over the codes and underlying data to find how the codes (themes and constructs) can be grouped into categories based on either thematic or conceptual similarities as per guidance obtained from Charmaz (2014).

Saldana (2015) developed analytical memos as part of the researchers' reflections on the codes, the phenomenon, the informants, and their interrelations that distinguished coding from analysis and results. Following Saldana (2015), the memos were based on intuition, reflexivity, and serendipitous occurrences related to disability inclusion in tourism education. While the coding process and analytical memorising enable the emergence of patterns in the data, it only enabled and did not determine them as advised by Saldaña (2015). Atlas.ti.8 was used as a computer-aid analytic tool that allowed for the immersing of data for in-depth analysis. This research led to the identification and elaboration of new concepts and ideas about how the tourism education environment can be more inclusive of disabled learners. A detailed narrative presents major themes as results rooted in the rigour of data, as shown below.

The collected data fostered rigour and reliability because the data collection process followed the Grounded Theory assertion furthered by Charmaz & Thornberg (2021). The present study is groundbreaking within tourism education. Based on Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) and Charmaz & Belgrave's (2012) belief, a range between 10-30 in-depth interview participants' opinions achieves a data saturation level. In this study, saturation was reached by the third in-depth face-to-face interview; and the second Facebook group interview discussion. The third to thirteenth Facebook group interview discussions verified and confirmed a trend pattern in line with advice from Gentles et al. (2015). the researcher recorded all the interviews to uphold the trustworthiness of the data as recommended by Alshenqeeti (2014). The outcome of the analysis is presented as the results following a look at the role of the researcher.

Researchers' reflexivity was part of the study as disability advocates. However, audio recordings alleviated researcher biases during data collection (Charmaz, 2014). researchers ensured trustworthiness and rigour by circulating each group's consolidated feedback to ascertain the inclusion of all the opinions raised by participants (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding fostered anonymity of the participants from each forum, and the opinions that constituted the discussion were for this study only (Creswell, 2014). The first researcher transcribed verbatim. However, the researcher's influence during analysis and interpretation cannot be eliminated but was mitigated by using computer-aided data analysis (Atlas.ti.8) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After circulating each group's consolidated feedback, the researchers asked the administrators to delete the questions and responses posted online as agreed between the participants and the data collector (Biriya & Thomas, 2014).

## Results

Researchers observed opposing views as related to enrolment into tourism studies. The enrolled students expressed that they found it easy to enrol and thrive within the teaching and learning environment. The rest, 369 participants from the Facebook groups, said that they felt excluded (alienated). They highlighted the causes and interventions needed to remedy the situation. In addition, tension was observed when participants related their experiences of disability and

spoke about their impairments and their educational needs for participation in tourism studies. However, all concurred that they have the potential, ability, and willingness to participate in tourism degree programmes.

### ***Perceived ability***

As opposed to the participants of the Facebook discussions, the two enrolled students and the DU staff member believe in the ability of disabled people to enter into tourism education successfully. One of them said, ‘having an impairment does not automatically qualify me to study. You still have to acquire the necessary matric results.’ (Tourism student, 1, Female, 20 years old).

The DU staff member highlighted policies that advocate reasonable accommodations related to students’ entry and further studies. She was, however, concerned about the low enrolment statistics. ‘After ten years of experience, I can conclude that students with disabilities do not fit in and struggle to enter tourism degree programmes as shown by low-enrolment statistics. Thus, even the teachers have low expectations that disabled learners will succeed in academic and professional careers (DU staff 1, Female, 49 years old).

All participants (N372) concurred that students with disability are just as able to enrol as students without disabilities. However, they felt excluded during the secondary level. They felt unable to successfully access career educational information to prepare them for tertiary education. All (N372) participants perceived it was not the same with abled counterparts. The above view has been deemed an obstacle to entry to tourism studies. ‘As opposed to mainstream schools, special schools such as the ones for the deaf and blind offer subjects which limit entry to other professional degree programmes. So, obstacles emerge from the secondary school one would have attended.’ (Former tourism worker, 78, Male, 30 years old).

### ***Perceived potential***

A consistent response was observed from 81% (300 out of 372) participants that some special schools offer the same subjects as mainstream schools. It is one’s choice to do the ones aligned with one’s dream career. The above views show the experiences of disabled people as complex to be generalised because choices of subjects and careers intersect with the presence of an impairment, thereby influencing different perceived potential, and disability is experienced differently.

Only the enrolled tourism learners expressed obstacles when pursuing their potential during the teaching and learning phase. It is due to the ignorance of lecturers, administrators and managers who often do not understand disability and inclusion. In this regard, one of the learners said, ‘It is prevalent that lecturers treat me like I am “sick” and “abnormal” as soon as I declared my impairment by showing the medical proof. It worsened by ignorance related to reasonable accommodation in a learning environment’ (Tourism student 2, Female, 24 years old). The other one said, ‘I feel like if I say something they disagree with, they disregard it as abnormal, yet I desire to participate and learn too’ (Tourism student 1, Female, 20 years old). The responses show disabled people desire to learn and acquire the know-how when handling and interacting with others (interpersonal and social skills).

### ***Perceived willingness***

The enrolled tourism students highlighted that the university values the intellectual ability of everyone; hence success depends on one’s willingness to join the professional degree programmes, contrary to the 350 out of the 371 (94%) disabled participants from Facebook groups who expressed their willingness but felt that the mainstream higher education system was designed without considering the educational needs. It would include differentiated

instruction or accommodations and teaching and cooperative learning activities within the classroom. It gives immediate feedback as these students quickly need to see that what was taught is what they have understood and learned. One of the participants said, ‘It is not the impairment that dehumanises me, but rather the socio-economic setting at learning institution that kills the ego, emotional vigour and discourages me from pursuing a formal tourism qualification. Hence, I am seeking informal means to empower myself and participate in tourism business...’ (Former tourism worker, 109, Male, 40years old).

Twenty-seven participants (7,3%), mostly from the Facebook groups for those with amputated hands, stroke injuries and cerebral palsy, expressed that they have lost interest and willingness to be either learners or employees within the tourism sector. They cited their inability to travel easily as the main reason. One of them said: ‘I am not willing to participate in tourism as it’s for the elite, and I always feel inferior whenever I want to partake in any tourism activities (Former tourism worker, 200, 34 years old). Another said: whenever disability is not accommodated, it scares me, and I become hesitant to participate...’ (Former tourism worker 155, Female, 37 years old).

### ***Disability-inclusion in tourism education in South Africa***

Only enrolled learners felt included, regardless of whether tourism teaching and learning still needs more inclusive initiatives to support learners. One of them said, ‘In some cases, I am considered to lead a group discussion and group assignments, which makes me feel that I am part of the learning group’ (Tourism student 1, Female, 20 years old).

The two tourism students’ both feel that there is accommodation and help from the Disability Unit (DU). However, 369 participants from the thirteen Facebook groups have contradictory feelings. They express a common view that tourism education (training/staff development) should capacitate educators to support disabled learners. The concern is not about enrolling students with disabilities into the education system but about assisting them to access the required resources that enhance learning. Everyone's distinctive remark (N371), but DU staff said that educators and non-disabled learners distance themselves as they feel sorry for disabled people in most interactions. A common perception among the 371 participants suggested that tourism education providers use their own tacit and intuitive skills when dealing with disabled people. Such scenarios lead to the stigmatisation of these learners, thereby depriving them of dignity and independence in pursuing their talent and ability. The participants ascribe these scenarios and behaviour to lack of capacity, ignorance, misinterpretation and misunderstanding of disability and heterogeneous impacts of impairment on individuals.

Three hundred and seventy-one (99,7%) of the participants expressed concern about the tourism content and teaching and learning methods skewed towards accommodating abled learners. Participants perceived that learning methods do not cater for all learners. 99,7% of participants perceive that their potential, ability, and willingness to be part of formal tourism education programmes are thwarted. Despite the disability quotas, enrolment adverts, jobs and learnership opportunities with clauses that disabled people are encouraged to apply. Thirty out of three hundred and seventy-one (8%) of the disabled participants are discouraged because they perceive efforts towards inclusion as mere statements to make abled people feel like they are making an effort towards inclusion. Yet, these statements lack practical implementation.

### ***Perceived obstacles and their causes***

All 372 participants concurred that regardless of having the potential, will and ability to partake in tourism education, there are obstacles for people with a severe impairment such as visual, hearing and speech disorders. These obstacles could hinder the execution of interactive

occupational work that needs articulative ability, such as outdoor tour guiding. In addition, severe dyslexia and communication disorders are some impairments that hinder the entry and participation in tourism studies among participants. One of the participants said, ‘I can study tourism, but entry into the labour-intensive tourism sector that prefers semi-skilled as aligned with physical appearance can be problematic’ (Owner of an online travel agent, Female, 48 years old). Such utterance implies that some impairments limit the ability of disabled people to enter into and thrive within tourism studies and the industry.

All 372 participants concurred that formal higher education is not affording disabled people the opportunity to have a dialogue on disability inclusion in formal education and the need thereof in the industrial workforce. Participants highlighted the above as the root of systemic ignorance, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of disability among educational authorities and tourism educators. The participants had mixed feelings about the effect of separating disability and non-disability policies within implementation processes of teaching and learning, which in most cases perpetuates a ‘them and us’-environment.

### **Discussion and implications**

Just as the social model of disability highlighted that socio-economic arrangement is crucial, the results tested that disabled people possess the potential, ability and willingness to participate in tourism education programmes. The inequitable system, practices such as developing separate policies, and the intuitive know-how of staff and personnel when teaching students with disabilities make such learners struggle at the point of entry and during the learning processes at tourism education institutions. The argument made through the social model of disability clarifies that both inclusive policies and policy implementation are needed to accommodate everyone within the tourism education environment. This study shows that two enrolled learners who participated in this research think they can acquire the tourism degree they qualify for. However, Dastile & Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), cited in Ndlovu (2019) and Facebook participants' accounts, reflect the misconception of attending to individual impairment needs as disability inclusion.

Results concur with Ndlovu (2019) that DUs foster the advocacy of rights of disabled learners; however, their approaches do not promote disability inclusion as universal accessibility approaches. Thus, disabled learners' educational needs are not incorporated into the learning programmes, just like the non-disabled cohort. One is barred from the system (Ndlovu, 2021). Results reflect insights into the influence of special education. Nonetheless, the social model of disability does not support a system that separates ‘normal standards/ability’ from ‘disabled/special standards’. The social model of disability does not emphasise a person's inability (Howel, 2006). Still, advocates for the learning environment and resources to support the existing education system pay attention to learning behaviours and continuously enhance better learning for the abled counterparts (Mutanga, 2018; Ndlovu, 2019). The participants' account revealed that some special schools do not have grades/levels and specific subjects at matric to study for tourism at degree level.

Results of this current study concur with Ndlovu (2019; 2020) and Watson (2012) generally that the feeling of inclusion and exclusion among disabled people is experienced differently. Even people with the same impairment do not experience disability the same. Thus, participants from Facebook groups made up of individuals with similar impairments gave different responses for the same question. Mhona (2018) and Ndlovu (2020) said socio-economic backgrounds, namely how one would have raised socialised and raised exposure to assistive technologies and coping strategies, influence how the inclusion of one view. These play a role in perceived accommodation and inclusion. Nonetheless, just as Ndlovu (2020) opines, the results point towards the need to amend views that embeds misconception of

disability inclusion and reasonable accommodation for disabled people and the tourism education stakeholders.

Participants raised that severe dyslexia and communication disorders are some impairments that hinder entry into and participation in tourism studies. However, according to Tinta et al. (2020), sheltered workshops can address learning for the highlighted segment to participate in income-generating activities. Therefore this concurs with the social model of disability that humanity is diverse. There is no need to highlight dichotomies set by disability and ability, often socially constructed. This study concurs with Ndlovu (2019), Mutanga (2017a; 2018) and Makuyana & Saayman (2018) said it must be understood that impairment and disability are not the same. The social model of disability perspective explains that a society (tourism education programmes included) disables and limits, not impairments.

Just as the social model of disability describes the effects of excluding disability and disabled people, the results highlight different views on impairment and disability among participants. Participants reflected the views on exclusionary designs of tourism education programmes, emphasising their specific impairments as the obstacle to successfully entering and thriving/surviving while studying and in the workplace. The above view concurs with Shakespeare (2004) that when an impairment, rather than a disabling condition, is emphasised as a limitation, it is an obstacle in itself. Therefore, the authors of this study agree with Ndlovu (2019) that the focus of the responsible authorities should shift from transforming an exclusive context of learning to equip the students to suit the context. Oliver (1990), cited in Abberley (2002), views the state of tourism education as individually oriented.

The current authors concur with Ndlovu (2019) and Watson (2012) in that it is not the impairments but the tourism education environment (perceptions included) and design of the programmes that pose obstacles that limit people/students with particular impairments to enter and thrive in tourism education and the consequential employment thereof. It is in line with the social model of disability's notion of society's stereotyping of impairments (Vehmas, 2004). Results reflect that participants believe that stereotyping of specific impairments hinder entry into formal tourism education and could be seen as a reproduction of individualised understanding of self (Devlin & Potheir, 2006; Lawson & Woodin, 2012) that has been internalised by social identities (Campbell, 2009). Hence, disabled people could unconsciously exclude themselves from entering tourism education at the institution by pre-judging themselves before they are judged by others (Ndlovu, 2019). Just as Ndlovu (2019)'s findings, the participants of this study appear to conceptualise disability and impairment as the same.

### ***Interventions***

Step 1: Tourism education organisations should liaise with disabled people organisations for education authorities to interpret disability legislative frameworks in South Africa for greater inclusion at implementation levels. It can enhance the development of disability-inclusive tourism educational activities within the programmes with measurable outcomes that are monitorable and assessable within a timeline but not using a silo approach. Step 2: The participants suggested initiatives to afford disabled people informative, educational knowledge and opportunities to acquire tourism competencies from formal tourism education providers. Step 3: Tourism educators should be empowered with knowledge related to disability and acquire the know-how to deal with disabled people using an Organisational-Human Resource Development system. Step 4: Tourism education organisations should engage disabled people in developing disability inclusion in tourism content. Disability-inclusive content in tourism education programmes can enhance capacity building among disabled and abled learners. Step 5: As Ndlovu (2019) instructed, tourism education programmes should use universal design instructions in the teaching and learning systems. Disability and inclusion should emanate from

tourism education providers as proactive approaches, making it easier for disabled people to enrol. The discussion informs the conclusions as presented below.

## Conclusion

The role of the social model of disability in this article was to shed light on the extent to which tourism education programmes contribute to excluding disabled people from pursuing their ability, potential and willingness to partake in tourism studies—at the same time, revealing that obstacles to full participation as influenced by the perceived level of inclusion among disabled and abled counterparts. It, therefore, implies that there are underlying obstacles that are not visible to tourism educators, disabled people themselves and those responsible for disability issues at an institution. The effects of ignorance and, if not addressed, stigmatisation and exclusion of disabled people might be prevalent. Therefore, the social model of disability explains a plethora of non-medical dimensions to enhance the understanding of disability and the related causes; however, not undermine the presence of impairment. The intervention highlighted the need for dialogues with disabled people to enhance skills development among tourism educators. The implementation mentioned above can reduce internalised exclusion among disabled people and the creation of inclusive tourism education programmes and the environment. More significant numbers of disabled people can be enrolled in tourism programmes, leading to employment and work placement. The inclusion of disabled people in tourism education is essential for sustainable, accessible tourism.

## Ethics considerations

This paper forms a part of a comprehensive Doctoral study conducted by Makuyana (2020), the authors.

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