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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this dissertation- *Challenges in mainstreaming learners with visual impairment in Botswana secondary schools*, submitted for the degree Magister Educationis (M.Ed.) at the University of the Free State, Faculty of Education, is my own original work and that I have not previously submitted the same work for another qualification at any other institution of higher learning. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

Researcher's name: .....Boitshoko Makeme.....

Signature: .....Bm.....

Date: .....12 November 2013.....

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother WatshimoMareme, who has made lots of sacrifices to see me where I am today, for the many years of dedication in being the best parent and for setting the perfect example of how life should be led. She is the most inspirational person in my life.

I also dedicate this work to my husband Aaron Makara and daughter NthabisengMakara for their support and encouragement. It means a lot to me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SUMMARY

This research explores the challenges experienced by learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools. Data was collected from learners with visual impairment and their teachers in Molefhi Senior Secondary School in Botswana. A qualitative research methodology was employed to interpret data from interviews and questionnaires. Participants were selected using purposive sampling procedures.

The literature study investigated key literature themes including the developmental difficulties caused by visual impairment; international and national declarations that led to inclusive education in Botswana; challenges in implementing inclusive education policies and how the Strength Based Approach can help learners with visual impairment to be resilient and thrive in mainstream schools despite their impairment.

The key findings of the research were that the learners with visual impairment are faced with various difficulties and needs but with support and focus on personal strengths these setbacks could be successfully dealt with. It was also found that, despite the challenges, the learners prefer to be in mainstream schools. The research emphasized the need for modifications and adaptations of the entire curriculum and the provision of resources. The need for trained teachers is also viewed as essential.

KEY TERMS

Disability, inclusive education, integration, learning disability, mainstreaming, policy, resilience, resources,special education needs, strengths and visual impairment.

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LIST OF ABBREVATIONS

CRC: Central Resource Center

DSE: Division of Special Education

EFA: Education For All

IDEA: Individuals with Disability Education Act

IEP: Individualized Education Plan

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

MoESD: Ministry of Education and Skills Development

NCE: National Commission on Education

NDP: National Development Plan

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

NPA: National Plan of Action

NPE: National Policy on Education

RNPE: Revised National Policy on Education

SIT: School Intervention Team

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Emergency Fund

USA: United States of America

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

According to the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) (Republic of Botswana, 1994:11) government is committed to the education of all children including those with disabilities. This is further echoed in the Inclusive Education Policy Draft (Republic of Botswana, 2011:4) which states that "Botswana will achieve an inclusive education system which provides all citizens with access to relevant education, which will enable them to learn effectively regardless of their disabilities."

Even though mainstreaming and inclusion are not the same, they are used interchangeably in this study because according to Hendricks (2009:5), both of them are "processes of integrating of formerly segregated and/or stigmatized people into mainstream society." Learners with special needs, including those with visual impairment, should as far as possible be prepared to compete with their peers in mainstream schools.

Sorrels, Rieth and Sindelar (2004:29) describe mainstreaming as the "practice of placing learners with disabilities in general education classrooms with their non-disabled peers for some or all of the school day." All learners should follow the same curriculum but with adaptations if necessary. The Botswana government's stance is that no separate curriculum should be offered for special education learners.While the policy guidelines and recommendations have been clearly articulated, the implementation of inclusion has been fraught with numerous challenges such as lack of resources and qualified teachers (Republic of Botswana, 2001:1).

Visually impaired learners are viewed to be learners with special needs and the Ministry of Education has observed with concern that they are not achieving academically as they should (Matale, 2005). Consequently, very few access tertiary education or qualify for University studies as admissions to Universities are based on merit.

This study will explore the challenges in mainstreaming learners with visual impairment in Botswana. Although the focus will be on learners, the study will also reflect on the problems faced by teachers in teaching the learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools. The researcher assumes that the challenges to the teachers eventually affect the learners in one way or the other. In conclusion, possible solutions to the problems were alsoexplored.

1.2BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In Botswana, the need to educate learners with disabilities was not the priority of the government until 1994 when the education system was reviewed. The first step in recognising the need to educate children with disabilities came in 1994 when the Ministry established a Special Education Unit (Fidzani&Mthombeni, 2009:2).This is in line with the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs (UNESCO, 1994:6) which stated that schools should "accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions." Botswana's first provision for learners with special needs adopted the "open" system of special education in 1994, whereby children with special educational needs are taught in mainstream schools (Hopkins, 2004:89).

Historical factors have affected education of visually impaired learners because facilities for educating blind children were only set up in 1969; not by the government but by non-governmental groups (Republic of Botswana, 1993:309). In 2001, Botswana population

and housing census confirmed dominance of visual impairment over other impairments in the country (Brandon, 2006:28, Republic of Botswana, 2001:496-501). Even though this impairment is dominant, Matale (2005) lamented that current enrolment of learners with visual impairment is low.

Dart, Didimalang and Pilime(as cited by Hopkins, 2004:98), observed that most learners with visual impairment "graduate to their homes" after competing primary education. Hopkins (2004:98) said since Botswana gained independence in 1966, the Government records in special education has compared unfavourably with that of non-governmental organizations in academic attainment. This is further supported by Matale (2005) by denoting that it was only after 1994, following the Jomtien Conference, that the Botswana public became conversant with disability matters and attached importance to education for all. Consequently, school enrolment of children with visual impairment increased over the years. However, the author laments that these learners perform badly compared to other learners in national examinations. This could be an indication that the government is not doing enough to support mainstreaming of learners with visual impairment.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

To find more information about the challenges in mainstreaming learners with visual impairment in Botswana, I reviewed inter alia academic books, journals, articles and policy documents. In doing so I attempted to extract that which I thought is necessary and useful for this study. Literature was reviewed on international and national policies relevant to special education in Botswana. Literature also focused on developmental challenges brought about by the impairment and how they affect the education of the learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools. According to the literature reviewed, the learners need to be resilient in order to cope with the challenges they

experience in mainstream schools (Marshak, Dandeneau, Presant & L'Amoreaux, 2010:136)

Friend and Bursuck (2002:15) assert that in mainstreaming, learners with disabilities attend ordinary classrooms but with accommodations and adaptationsin the curriculum and also in the way learners are taught. This is in accordance with the recommendations of the National Commission on Education (Republic of Botswana, 1993:319). Mainstreaming learners with visual impairment does not only deal with education, but also includes the social, emotional and psychological aspects that plays a role in the education of visually impaired learners. When learners with visual impairment are mainstreamed, they interact with and befriend their non-disabled peers and reach a degree of human dignity (Helander, 1993:90-9, Mavunduvere&Magweva,2002:12). Engelbrecht and Green (2007:7) therefore advised that teachers in inclusive schools should "act as facilitators of a network of support" and focus on the learner's societal and educational requirements. Hendricks (2009:17) further agrees that mainstreaming is done based on the perception that people with disabilities, like visual impairment, deserve equal treatment and equal rights as those without disabilities.

Even though RNPE (Republic of Botswana, 1994:11) states that the Botswana government is committed to educating all children, there are still some challenges in mainstreaming learners with visual impairment such as lack of specialists like psychologists and ophthalmologists to aid in identifying learning disabilities (Republic of Botswana, 2000:15). These specialists can assist the teachersin understanding the nature and type of visual impairment a learner experiences. By understanding the implications of the impairment, teachers can attempt to ensure that the learner gets the appropriate intervention to overcome classroom challenges.

It must be borne in mind that although learners with visual impairment can learn as much as their sighted peers, they may require instruction and practice in other areas

that their sighted peers do not require. Therefore, specialists have the responsibility todetermine whether the learners are gaining as much knowledge as their sighted peers. If not, they have to determine what could be done in order for the learners to have fair educational opportunities.

It is not always easy to identify learning problems encountered by learners with visual impairmentsbecause of the wide variations. However if educators are informed by specialists, they may be able to take the necessary steps to render support to these learners. For example, Batshaw (2002:166) distinguishes between congenital and acquired visual impairment. Farrel (2005:25) identifies refractive errors like myopia, hypermetropia and astigmatism as types of impairment. Among children with impaired vision, there are those who are totally blind, legally blind and those with varying degrees of partial sight (Westhood, 2007:40). Nallasmy, Anninger, Quinn, Zetola and Nkomazana (2011) found refractive errors to be the most common cause of visual impairment in Botswana. With all these variations in visual impairments, it becomes necessary to have the learners examined by qualified specialists to establish the nature of the impairment in order to prevent the learning problems that may be caused by each one of these variations.

If schools in Botswana had enough specialists and resources to help with early diagnosis of vision problems, early intervention and academic success of learners with visual impairment could be accomplished. However, expertise in educating children with visual impairment is mostly found in special schools (Mason, McCall, Arter, Mchinden and Stone, 1997:10). Consequently, parents may prefer to send their children to such schools rather than mainstream schools. Such action defeats the aim of inclusion which is "to pave way for a more inclusive society" (Westhood, 2007:3).

Inclusive education has emerged to be one of the dominant issues in the education of learners with disabilities (D'Alessio, 2011: xi). Nevertheless, the concept of inclusive education is viewed asproblematic both conceptually and practically. For instance the lack of specialised resources may lead to underachievement for learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools. Mainstreaming learners with visual impairment requires availability of resources such as Perkins Braillers, Closed circuit Televisions, Embossers, etc certain computer software, etc. As Hunt and Marshall (2006:27) notes, inclusive education advocates that learners with visual impairment be placed in a mainstream school, but emphasizes however,that it can only be effective with the appropriate resources available. With the right support in terms of availability of resources, some visually impaired learners can succeed in mainstream schools (Mason, *et al,* 1997:15). The problem is that Botswana government schools do not have enough suitable resources (Matale, 2000).For example, even though efforts have been made in the past years to include learners with visual impairment, Mbaakanyi (1987:10) reports deficits in library and information services for learners with visual impairment. With the right intervention strategies and support, challenges that learners with visual impairment encounter in mainstream schools should never become a barrier to their learning and development.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Learners with visual impairment tend to struggle with developing their full potential (Lieberman & Houston-Wilson, 1999). This could lead to frustration and failure in normal learning activities. It becomes clear that in order for the learners to overcome difficulties experienced, as well as their frustration, it is important that teachers meet both educational as well as emotional needs of such learners. As Reilly (2001:34) says: learners with visual impairment should be validated, supported to understand the learning process and also enjoy applying the knowledge gained.

This study will provide an overview of mainstreaming learners with visual impairment by employing the Strengths Based Approach. McCashen (2005:7) defines this approach as "practice based on strengths." Everyone has strengthsthat could assist in dealing with difficult situations or challenges in life. If the visually impaired learners take advantage of their bad experiences in mainstream schools and use it to their advantage, it can lead to personal growth. For example, if the learners are discriminated against in schools, they may learn to have tolerance and endurance which can help them in other aspects of life.

The Strength Based Approachwas chosen for this study because it can offer a practical approach to helping learners with visual impairment, as it focuses on what one can do rather than what one cannot do. The teachers' role is to usher them in the right direction (Fosnot, 1996:113-114) by making necessary accommodations and adaptations in the classroom.

1.5 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS

According to Mukumbira (2005:12) Botswana education has consistently enjoyed a favored position in the allocation of the national budget. However, seventeen years after the revision of the national policy on education, very few resources have been provided for learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schoolsresulting in inter alia poor performance in final examinations (Matale, 2005). As an educator who specializes in visual impairment, I have been prompted by this concern to investigate challenges in mainstreaming learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools and to explore possible intervention strategies.

Based on the above information, the following questions are raised:

1. What are the challenges encountered by learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools?
2. What problems do teachers come across in teaching learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools?
3. How can the challenges encountered be addressed?

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

My purpose is:

1. To identify the challenges encountered by learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools.
2. To find out what problems teachers experience in the teaching of learners with visual impairmentin Botswana mainstreams schools.
3. To explore solutions to the problems encountered by learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In addition to the earlier mentioned sources of literature (see 1.3) I also examined international laws that support inclusive education, educational laws of Botswana and materials published by the Ministry of Education to determine the stance of official policies regarding education of learners with visual impairment. Even though I had intended to examine the school documents like progress reports and enrolment registers, they were not available for this study.My study was undertaken as a qualitative case study in which the researcher is an integral part of the design and analysis. According to Simons (2009:20) "what defines a case study is singularity of phenomena being studied." This definition is supported by Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg (1991:2) by saying that it is "an in-depth, multifaceted investigation using qualitative

research methods of a single social phenomenon." A case study can further be defined by its special features of being particularly descriptive and heuristic (Merriam 2009:43). In a case study multiple sources of data collection are used.

I chose a case study because data was collected from the only mainstream senior secondary school that admits learners with visual impairment in Botswana. A group interview with 17 learners followed the literature review. I conducted two group interviews with the 17 learners separately, one with 9 form 4s and another with 8 form 5s. The interviews lasted for approximately an hour. They were conducted during afternoon study. Lastly, even though the focus is on learners, teachers will also be given a questionnaire with open ended questions to establish the problems teachers encounter in teaching learners with visual impairment in the school.

1.7.1 STUDY POPULATION AND DEMARCATION

Schools in Botswana are grouped into 10 administrative regions. This study was carried out in Molefhi senior secondary school in the South Central Region in Mochudi village. According to Miles and Hubberman (1994:27) sampling is crucial for later analysis of data. The senior secondary school was selected because the researcher assumes that the learners, whowent through primary and junior schools, are in a better position to articulate the challenges as compared to those who are still at primary and junior secondary schools. The selection of the research population was based on17 learners with visual impairment and 7 teachers who teach learners with visual impairment in MolefhiSeniorSecondary School in Botswana. This brought the total number of participants to 24. Non-probability purposive sampling was adopted for both learners and teachers. Merriam (2009:7) said purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned.

1.7.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the application of one or more techniques to a set of data that emerged from the research problem. Hall (2008:2160) is of the opinion that the main purpose of data analysis is to answer the research questions. Two group interviews were conducted with learners with visual impairment and one set of questionnaires was given to the teachers that teach learners with visual impairment. The interviews were videotaped and then transcribed. Doing my own transcriptions gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself with the content of the interviews. The transcriptions from interviews and the questionnaires were then organized according to themes that emerged. Similarities and differences between the themes from the interviews and the questionnaires were examined and compared. This is what Miles and Hubberman (1994:11) called "data reduction." Data reduction was necessary to extract the essence and aid to data analysis which provided the basis for building the discussion on the findings and drawing of conclusions. The results were reported and verbatim statements were quoted to add strength to the discussion. Below is an example of a model for data analysis.

Figure1: Components of data analysis: interactive model(Miles and Huberman 1994:12)
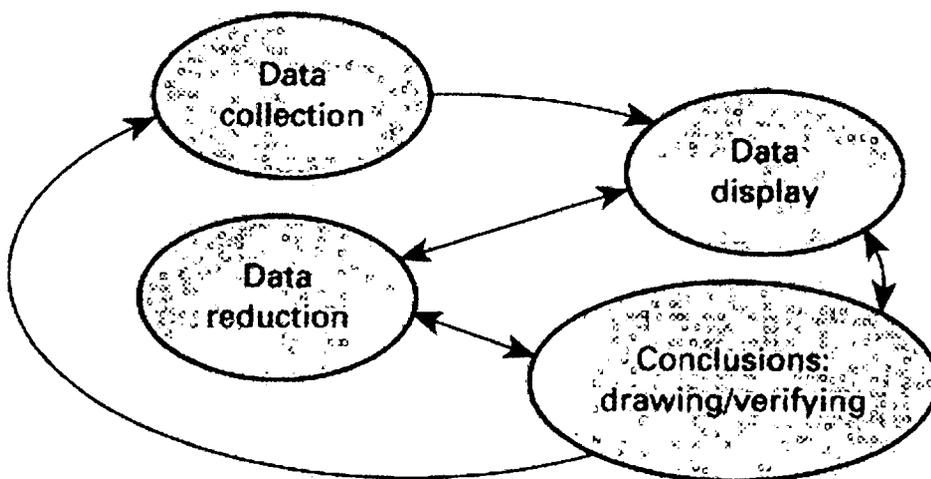
1.7.3 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The interviews were videotaped' but I also made notes in order to make sure that the quotes are accurate when I report the findings. During the interviews, I kept on rephrasing and repeating the information that I obtained from the responses and requested the participants to confirm whether it was correct in order to determine accuracy, credibility and validity. In the instances where answers were not clear, I asked the same question in different ways or repeated it at a later stage in order to get maximum information.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following are definitions of specific terms used in this study.

Special education: education of learners who have special needs (Chan, 1998:126).

Mainstreaming: a system of educating learners with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers (Friend and Bursuck, 2002:15).

Learning disability: disability which manifests in problems in learning (Friend and Bursuck, 2002:3).

Visual impairment: any limitation in visual functioning that cannot be corrected (Winnick, 2010:234).

Special schools: schools that provide education and other related services solely to learners with special educational needs and is staffed by specially trained teachers.

Special needs teacher: a teacher trained to assist learners with special educational needs

Inclusive education: Is the idea that learners with special needs should be educated in regular schools, alongside their peers with necessary support as needed (Hick, Kershner & Farrel, 2009:1).

Strengths: Applies to positive traits of a person

Educational policies: Laws, principles and rules that govern the operation of education system.

Resilience: Means to bounce back and be stronger. According to Deveson (2003:6) It is when someone has had a bad past and has bounced back, put the bad past behind and moved on with life.

Resources: Are materials, money, services staff or other asserts that are transformed to produce benefit.

Disability: The lack of being able to do something to the same ability as others. Bell (2011: 1-2) describes disability as the consequence of an impairment that may be physical, cognitive, sensory, emotional or some combination.

Primary school: From standard 1 up to 7

Junior secondary school: Forms 1,2and 3

Senior secondary school: Form 4 and 5

1.9 VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

Whilst the findings of this study can act as foundation for my further research in education, those who will conduct research on a similar topic can make use of this study for critical analysis. Besides, teachers in mainstream schools can be made aware of the challenges experienced by learners with visual impairment and thus seek out ways to alleviate them where possible. Information from this study may also be used in workshops to address the problems of learners with visual impairment. While the conclusions drawn from this study are not intended to be generalized, it is envisaged that they might be relevant and applicable in some similar settings and therefore some lessons could be shared.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Mouton (2006:238,239) the ethic of science is about what is "wrong and what is right in the conduct of research". It is therefore my responsibility, to ensure that this research is conducted in a morally acceptable way. According to Johnson and Christenssen (2008:103) the researcher has to guard against "fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism in proposing and reporting research results." I also obtained written, informed consent from research participants as well as ensured that the research is free of harm to anyone who was participating in this study (Strydom, 2007:56-79).Finally, I obtained ethical clearance and adhered to the set ethical principles guiding the researcher as laid down by the Faculty of Education's Ethical Board.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although inclusive education has been rapidly gaining acceptance in Botswana, Mukhopadhy, Nenty and Abosi (2012) have observed that empirical studies in this area have been scarce and the small amount of published literature consists of personal opinions. Hopkins (2005:98) also affirmed that hard copy data pertaining to special education in Botswana is meager. This made it difficult for the researcher to get hold of relevant data from literature promptly and therefore delayed progress. Again, the researcher has a small population of respondents as the study will only be carried out in Molefhi Senior secondary school. As a result, this limits generalization to the wider population. Records such as progress reports, final examination results and admission registers were not readily available.

1.12 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1:   Introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of study, significance of the study, method of investigation and definition of concepts.

Chapter 2:   Including learners with visual impairment.

Chapter3:   Theoretical perspective on mainstreaming learners with visual impairment

Chapter4:   Research design and methodology.

Chapter5:   Findings, interpretation, recommendations and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: CHALLENGES AND POLICIES: THE INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on the challenges experienced by learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools as well as policies implemented by Botswana to achieve the goal of education for all. It is important to discuss developmental challenges imposed on the learners by visual impairment,which calls for educational intervention by teachers. As such, there has been a need for the government of Botswana to come up with legislation that supports the education of such learners. I consider it necessary to provide a brief background of inclusive education in Botswana, in order to help the reader identify with the concept of inclusive education in the country. Although the policies seem to be in place, there are also challenges that are encountered when implementing the policies.

Many international declarations have legitimated the idea of inclusive education. This is affirmed by Levers and Magweva (as cited in Magweva, 2007:13) accentuating that a number of comprehensive inclusive education policy guidelines exist internationally and nationally. Most of them are derived from United Nations Conventions and treaties like the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and World Conference on Education For All (EFA). With these declarations, and the need for educational reform in Botswana, the Ministry of Education adopted inclusive education as a matter of policy. Consequently, the idea of inclusion has guided the development of policy and practice for the inclusion of all learners (Hick, Kershener&Farrel, 2009:1), and those with visual impairment are no exception. Because of this new development, it became necessary for Botswana to come up with

its own comprehensive policy on inclusive education to include learners with disabilities, as was the case with many other countries. Thepolicy aims at including all children in the mainstream education system.

Botswana has had many educational policies, but only an overviewwill be given on those to appreciate the complex history that underpins the development of inclusive education in Botswana. A concrete discussion of one significant policy, the Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 (RNPE) will be made. This policyisremarkable as far as inclusive education in Botswana is concerned. According to MacLeod, Hookey, Frier and Cowieson (2003:89)the RNPE is important because ithas guided the activities of the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) in terms of curriculum reforms and ongoing improvements in education, including the mainstreaming of learners with visual impairment. Because the RNPE embraces inclusive education, it became a dominant policy in the education of all learners in Botswana. It may be questionable as to whether the RNPE really reformed what is viewed to be 'normal', but at least it has been successful in challenging the boundaries. Mainstream teachers are increasingly required to have skills that will enable them to meet the diverse needs of all learners (Forlin&Lian, 2008:6). This initiative has the potential to provide effective, well planned support and services for learners with visual impairment.

While Botswana came up with a good policy towards the reform, the implementation of the policyhas been a challenge (Botswana Federation of trade Unions, 2007:10). In an attempt to reduce the challenges and make a success of the educational aims and objectives of the policy, it is important to confirm the implementation strategiesand stipulate what is expected from all the stakeholders. Rieser (2011:111) advised that there is a need for policies on inclusion to clearly illustrate how implementation is to be carried out. Hence, Botswana policy makers were expected show clear guidelines in educational policies in order for them to be a practical reality for learners with disabilities

as well as visual impairment. They had to furthermore lay down the nitty-gritty during policy formulation because the fine details of any policy could be critical to its success.

If the policy implementation process on inclusion is not clear, it could result in inadequate provision of resources for the education of learners with disabilities. Comprehensive and clear policy statement might help to illustrate the differences in educational needs. For example it is necessary to acknowledge that visual impairment, like other disabilities, vary greatly; as thus, learners deserve to be known individually. No common set of expectations can be made for these learners (Reynolds & Birch, 1988:253), which is stressed by Salisbury (2008:6) that no "one size fits all" solution is available for them. As such, the education policy could reflect the commitment to accommodate visual impairment in order for the schools to be genuinely inclusive, other than just generalizing the disabilities as it is currently the case with the policy. Ainscow (in Gabel and Danforth,2008:56) argue that "merely placing learners with disabilities in mainstream schools without clearly outlining the inclusive education policy is not what inclusion means."

The next section will consider the developmental difficulties that are brought about by visual impairment necessitating the need for sound inclusive education policies.

2.2 DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFICULTIES CAUSED BY VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Visual impairment has a negative impact on many aspects of development. This is supported by D'Allura [in Gargiulo&Kilgo (2011: 261) when postulating that the presence of visual impairment has the potential of having adverse effects on socio-emotional, cognitive and perceptual motor development. At this point, each one of the above aspects of development will be discussed in relation to the challenges they pose to learners with visual impairment attending mainstream schools.

a) SOCIO-EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

Often, when we speak of the success of learners with disabilities in a general education classroom, we think of good academic performance. While this is true, socio-emotional success is equally important. The importance of the socio-emotional suggests that educators should also consider social inclusion of learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools. The importance is necessitated by the fact that visual impairment may cause social development problems which will affect the emotional well-being of the learner. According to Miller (2002:15) visual impairment affectssocial development as much of social learning occurs through watching and modeling behavior. From an early age, therefore, children with visual impairment can be at a disadvantage for developing social skills since vision plays a role in early development of social behavior. Paris (2008:150) asserts that compared to their sighted peers they interact less and the development of social skills is delayed. Learners with visualimpairment also have difficulty in expressing or receiving affection, struggle with social isolation and must work harder than their sighted peers to make and maintain friendships (Begum, 2003:26). Learners with visual impairment are at a disadvantage when it comes to learning appropriate social skills due to less exposure to shared experiences and common interests. It therefore becomes critical for teachers of learners with visual impairment to teach the learners skills to add to the success of social inclusion in mainstream schools.

Possibly, one of the biggest social difficulties of learners with visual impairment is dealing with the conduct of the sighted learners around them. For example, some individuals with visual impairment engage in repetitive body movements referred to as "blidisms" (Fein, 2011:375). Although not usually harmful, such stereotypic behavior can position a person with visual impairment at great social disadvantage because these actions are eye-catching and may bringa negative perception about the person. Tobin(2012:28) maintained that disability is not a pathological characteristic of a person; rather it describes more precisely our collective negative reaction to human differences.

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In Botswana mainstream schools the reaction of sighted learners to the learners with visual impairment could be more of a problem than the impairment itself because learners without visual impairment are not accustomed with how to treat their visually impaired peers. The teachers are also mostly concerned with meeting the demands of the syllabi in their subject areas and have little concern about the social interaction of learners with visual impairments. Not many teachers, if any, would actually devote their time to teaching learners with visual impairment social skills, or about visual impairment, if that does not appear in the syllabus.

Miller (2002:15) has observed that lack of vision can lead to fewer social contacts which may lead to withdrawal from peers and dependency on family and friends. Overprotection by family, friends and teachers can also lead to withdrawal and dependency in learners with visual impairment (Porter, 2002:83). Learners with visual impairment face tremendous challenges in school both academically and socially. While struggling to keep up academically in inclusive schools, the learners many not deem it necessary to work towards developing social skills. Social difficulties in learners with visual impairment may be caused by lack of information about interacting with others. Often when they offend the teacher or break the rules, they may be ignored and not punished in the same way as their peers. This unfair treatment does not benefit them much since they do not learn how to behave in certain situations. Furthermore, Porter (2002:83) cautions that treating them differently may lead to a feeling of isolation and lack of acceptance. In Botswana, most teachers tend to overlook unwanted behavior by the learners with visual impairment through misplaced sympathy when constructive criticism could be more beneficial. Lawrence (2006:36) maintains that a lack of opportunity to develop appropriate social skills through social interaction may lead to diminished self-esteem which has a negative impact on self-concept.

Ferguson (2007:58) laments that people with visual impairment have long been denied rights like the right to education and free association. This has its origin in the

misconception of visual impairment, especially if it is severe, that justifies unequal treatment. The sighted public treats them as outcasts, judging them by the limitations caused by the impairment. According to Salend (1990:36) even learners without disabilities demonstrate negative attitudes towards their peers with disabilities. The Learners with visual impairment are rejected by or less accepted than their regular education peers. This unfavorable condition can further have a negative impact on socio-emotional adjustment, behavior and attitude-problems towards the self for learners with visual impairment.In addition, Marshack, Dandeneau, Frezant and L'Amoreux (2010:16) assert that when learners with disabilities are placed in special education, they may think that it is because they are lacking and cannot function normally and that may worsen the socio-emotional difficulties such as being stigmatized against by the sighted population.

The learners with visual impairment need to be able to retain a sense of academic self-esteem even if their learning styles differ from those of their typical classmates. Social competence may facilitate independent living and boosts one's self esteem.Friend and Bursuck (2002:495) describesocial skills as the behavior that helps learners to interact successfully with their peers and teachers and gain social acceptance. It is important to develop social skills so that one can make friends and be socially competent. Most social skills are learnt by repeating visual observation (like facial expressions and body language). Mainstreaming learners with visual impairment thus has the potential to create anopportunity for learners with visual impairment to learn social skills from their sighted peers. Having social skills may in turn help them to interact well with others, and by interacting, they maybecome aware of their own strengths and limitations. As Stanley (2004:326) asserts "it is important for learners with visual impairment to feel that they are part of the sighted world" and understand that being normal and being disabled are subjective. What may be normal for one person may not necessarily be normal for the other, so the visually impaired could all be normal in their own way and the "normal" learners "abnormal" in some ways.

The Government of Botswana'saim for learners with visual impairment is to furnish them with knowledge about the realities around them and the confidence to cope with daily demands, but emphasizing their limitations makes it difficult for them to identify and pursue goals. Labels ("He's blind.") can hinder people's self-perception and usually negatively shape beliefs about what is possible. Separating the person from the diagnosis acknowledges that disabilities do not define the person, but are merely conditions the person has.Gabel and Danford (2008:507) nonetheless asserted that labeling cannot be avoided in special education. This is because labeling ensures that a learner with special needs receive appropriate services needed to overcome the barriers to their learning. For example, it is important to specify the disability when developing IEPs. The problem however, is that visual impairment, like other disabilities, is often associated with stigmatization, isolation and stereotyping individuals. Marshak*et al* (2010:31) cautioned that diagnostic labels may have a powerful impact on perception, especially if the label is a stigmatizing one like calling them 'the blind'. A label can be the genesis of a range of unintended and unfortunate reactions like prejudice, confusion and misinformation (Marshak*et al,*2010:31). In this regard Mukhopadhyay *et al* (2012:2) believes that labeling a child as "handicapped" reduces the teachers' expectation for him/her to succeed.

b) DIFFICULTIES IN COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

"Cognitive development is the development of a person's mental capacity to engage in thinking, reasoning, interpretation, understanding, knowledge acquisition, remembering, organizing information, analyzing and problem solving" (Mwamwenda, 2004:84). Cognitive development is responsible for the way human beings obtain knowledge and information. According to Duckman (2006:5) visual inputs are responsible for between 80-90 percent of what we learn. The challenge of learners with visual impairment is also to learn information that sighted learners acquire through vision.

Shumway-Cook and Woollacot (2007:62) observe that vision plays a vital part in the identification of things and procedures and provides the foundation for acquisition of concepts related to the structure of physical space and spatial relationships. As people with visual impairment acquire this information through other senses, they may use a different cognitive style compared to sighted individuals. This might put learners with visual impairment in Botswana's mainstream schools at a disadvantage of misinterpretation because teachers do not usually bring a variety of teaching aids to class for the learners to manipulate. Wilson (2003:114) cautions that a lack of exposure to varying learning materials could have a negative effect on their cognitive development since learners with visual impairment rely on other senses such as touch and hearing, save for sight, to learn.

According to Winnick (2010:67) learners with visual impairment may or may not exhibit cognitive delays but there are considerations that may not be obvious. Learning challenges exist because the learner with visual impairment is not able to learn from what he/she sees. In most cases, learners with visual impairment depend on sighted individuals to meditate and help integrate the environment (Shacks and Wolffie, 2006:64). Even the teaching assistants are very few in Botswana mainstream schools, MolefhiSeniorSchoolfor example has only one, and the learners mainly depend on whoever is willing to help. Dawn (2011:114) has observed that children with visual impairment lag behind their sighted peers in class tests. This is because vision is important in helping one to obtain accurate information about the world and therefore children with visual impairment experience delays in early concept development, permanence, conservation and classification (Karr, 2011:85). Cognition is largely a matter of developing concepts. Because many concepts are learned through visual means, learners with visual impairment have difficulty learning some concepts.

Bearing the above factors in mind, it is easy to conclude that the intellectual ability of people with visual impairment is, in most instances, similar to that of their sighted peers.

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There is no reason to suspect that vision loss results in lower intellectual ability but there are challenges that may lead to poor cognitive development and consequently poor academic performance. Gargiulo and Metcalf (2012:121) concur that learners with visual impairment often experience significant academic delays. One reason for this is their limited opportunity to acquire information visually. Unlike sighted peers, incidental learning obtained from interacting with the environment is severely restricted in children with visual impairment. Conceptual development is therefore dependent primarily on tactile experiences rather than vision (Deiner, 2012:448). Good development of cognitive skill is therefore essential.

c) DELAY IN PHYSICAL AND MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Learners with visual impairment typically show delays in motor development. Physical constraints have been found to be an important factor that results in developmental delays in motor skill and physical competence (Dawn, 2011:63), probably due to uncertainty about the surroundings which may lead to lack of confidence in mobility, more especially if moving around in the past resulted in painful contact with the environment. Lack of confidence in moving may result in insufficient motor activity and consequently poor physical and motor development. Houwen, Visscher, Lemminkand Hartman (2010:1) believe that poor motor skills may lead to poor performance in physical activities which in turn may reduce the learner's sense of competence. The authors further assert that lack of confidence regarding mobility may lead to refraining from physical activities, something that could in turn, lead to limited opportunities to practice motor skills as well as participating in social activities which require physical skills. Gray and Silver-Pacuilla (2011:288) hypothesize that the trend of poor motor development of children with visual impairment can be attributed to the absence of incentives which sight presents.

Houwen, Visscher, Lemmink and Hartman (2010:1) observe that many children with visual impairment, blindness in particular, exhibit immature posture and gait. As for "stable" motor milestones, it is believed that they are delayed in reaching thesedevelopmental tasks such as sitting, standing andwalking (Strickling&Pogrund, 2002:288; Pogmund & Fazzi, 2002: 288). Even after reaching such milestones, many severely visually impaired learners have continued motor difficulties related to low muscle tone, decreased balance and poor posture of the head (Weiner, Welsh and Blash, 2010:150). According to Webster and Joe (1998:111), other motor developmental deficits are linked to lower grip strength, less body flexibility and poorer static and dynamic balance. They furthermore assert that learners with visual impairment cannot easily monitor movement and therefore hardly ever take part in physical activities often resulting in them being overweight.

Another factor that may contribute to learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools lagging behind in motor development is that sometimes schools are reluctant to involve learners with visual impairment fully in general physical activity. An eminent reason for this reluctance is that learners with visual impairment are not well catered for in some physical activities such as ball sports and athletics (which are the most common physical activities in Botswana mainstream schools). Consequently, teachers are uncomfortable to engage them because it could be risky for them to partake using unsuitable equipment. In addition, Physical Education teachers in Botswana lack confidence in teaching learners with visual impairment because they do not have any training on how to teach learners with disabilities, visual impairment in particular, in professional preparation courses unless they specialized in special education. Although, the learners with visual impairment could be engaged in after-school sports and games like swimming, wrestling and gymnastics, there are no facilities like swimming pools and gym rooms at the schools that learners with visual impairment can use to improve fitness.

On account of the above mentioned deficits in motor development that presents as a result of visual impairment, it can be concluded that visual impairment may interfere with the learning process. A significant and immediate consequence of visual impairment is restriction in one's ability to travel through physical and social environments and to anticipate and exercise control over potentially hazardous situations. As such, learners with visual impairment struggle with a lot of challenges in mainstream schools. Schools are challenged to serve the learners in spite of the disability. The concern is not whether to provide inclusive education for learners with visual impairment but to implement inclusive education in ways that are both feasible and effective in insuring high-quality education for all learners including the ones with visual impairment. Consequently, governments, including the government of Botswana, have come up with inclusive education policies. The next section will give a brief background to inclusive education in Botswana.

2.3 BACKGROUND TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BOTSWANA

In Botswana, special education can be traced back to 1969 (Revised National Policy on Education, 1994:13). Before then, there was no formal educational provision for learners with disabilities. Learners with visual impairment, like most learners with disabilities, did not attend public schools. They could only attend segregated and special schools which were built by different organizations like Non-GovernmentalOrganizations (NGOs) and churches (Republic of Botswana,1994:13). However, a large percentage of these learners, could not access the education programs offered by the Government of Botswana because of lack of special services like assessment by specialists, equipment and technology (Winebrenner, 2006: 37).It must be kept in mind that the first National Education Policy (NPE)was endorsed in 1977 but it was not until the second policy on education (RNPE) of 1994, that special education provisions were specifically introduced. RNPE consider access to basic education a fundamental human right and among the objectives identified was the concept of inclusive education.

The NPE of 1977 did not set any explicit goals for provision of education for Botswana learners with special needs but rather emphasized the philosophy of "Education for Kagisano" which means education for social harmony (UNESCO, 2010). Provision for special needs became a concern of the government in the 1994when the government established the Division of Special Education (DSE) as per the recommendations of the RNPE of 1994 (Mukumbira, 2005:1). DSE was given the responsibility to plan, supply, advice and manage services for children with disabilities across all levels of the education system. One of the goals of the Division is to mainstream special education services in the regular education system and where necessary set up separate special education units for learners with special education needs in regular schools (Mukumbira, 2005:1).

It was only after 1994 that the Botswana government found it necessary to develop special education as part of the regular education system (Republic of Botswana, 1997:8). As mentioned earlier, the program was adopted mainly from international policies, specifically the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs (UNESCO: 1994) and were restated at the Dakar World Education Forum (UNESCO, 2000). At this forum, governments re-affirmed their commitment to achieving Education For All (EFA). According to Mda and Mothata (2000:66) it was only then that learners who had "problems" of some kind, who experienced difficulties, or were likely to experience difficulties in the mainstream system, like those with visual impairment, were generally referred to as those who had special needs and hence required some form of specialized intervention to enable them to participate in the learning process.

2.3.1. INTERNATIONAL DECLARATIONS THAT LED TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BOTSWANA

Degener and Dreese (1995:132) explain that the advocacy of people with disabilities has transformed the debate about inclusion and localized it firmly as a human right. The rights were derived from a range of UN declarations and conventions and Common and Stagl(2005:300) assert that the latter embodies a legally binding commitment to implement and make arrangement for international monitoring. Botswana, like other countries, is one of the signatories to the declarations and so she emulated the declarations when coming up with her own national policies. This part will therefore discuss some of the international declarations that influenced inclusive education policies in Botswana. The discussion will unfold in this approach:

1. World Declaration on Education for All of 1990
2. Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education of 1994
3. Millennium Development Goals of 2000

2.3.1.1 WORLD DECLARATION ON EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA)

"Education for All" was the theme of the World Conference held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 (Watkins, 2000:72). According to Beiter (2006:207) the Conference pronounced commitment to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the participants of the Conference adopted a rights based approach to the provision of Education. The Article in part says "Everyone has the right to education...education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." Although the Article articulates the right and access to education, Tomasevski (2003:93) is in disagreement. The author has argued that the Jomtien Declaration "did not affirm education as a right but spoke about access to education and meeting learning needs" thereby planting a seed of doubt as to whether the right to education was endorsed by the participants. Nonetheless, the Article seems to be clear on the issue, making learners with visual impairment the beneficiaries of the Declaration.

According to Clarke and Feeny (2007: viii) ten years later, many countries were far from having reached the goal of the Jomtien Declaration. Consequently, the international community met again in Dakar, Senegal (on the 26th – 28th April 2000) and affirmed the commitment to achieving Education for All by 2015. They identified educational goals which aim to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015, and further endorsed good quality education for all children in the mainstream setting, not only education for all.

The World Declaration of the 1990 Jomtien Conference and later the Dakar World Education Forum of 2000, found Botswana in the middle of implementing her own goals towards provision of basic education to all her citizens. The conferences therefore paved the way for the Botswana Education for All (EFA) National Plan of Action (NPA) of September 2002. Besides, the objectives and strategies described in the Botswana EFAwere developed on the basis of other policies that came before it like RNPE and the Ministry of Education Strategic Plan (Republic of Botswana, 2002:21); which were also influenced by in the World Conferences. Following World Declaration of the 1990 Jomtien Conference, another conference was held in 1994 Salamanca, Spain (UNESCO, 1994) and it served as a renewal of the pledge by the World Conference on Education for All. It came to be known as the Salamanca Statement.

2.3.1.2 THE SALAMANCA WORLD CONFERENCE ON SPECIAL NEEDS

According to Garner (2009:23), the Salamanca Statement which was published in 1994 following a World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality held in Salamanca in June 1994, is one of the major actions that landmarked the rise of interest in inclusive education. The Statement set forth the challenge to participants to provide public education to all children including those with visual impairment (UNESCO, 1994).Not only was this commitment made; the provision of service was to be made in "ordinary schools". As such, the Salamanca Statement had a major impact in shaping

inclusive education policy development in many developing countries (Hicket al, 2009:1) such as Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia.

The Salamanca Statement provides a policy direction which states that "every child has a fundamental right to education" and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. Children with special needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within child centered pedagogy capable of meeting their needs (UNESCO,1994:iii). Following this statement, the Ministry of Education (Botswana), embraced and promoted the idea of inclusive education (Republic of Botswana, 1994:307). While the Salamanca Statement declares the right to education for all children, another declaration called Millennium Development Goals was agreed to in September 2000.

2.3.1.3 MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS)

In September 2000, world leaders came together at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York to adopt the UN Millennium Declaration with a deadline of 2015(UNESCO, 2009). The Declaration came to be known as Millennium Development Goals in 25 August 2008. While the MDGs do not specifically mention disability, one of its goals (Goal 2)calls for member nations, including Botswana, to achieve universal primary education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2009). There is no way in which universal primary education can be achieved unless all children are in school including those with disabilities. This means that even the learners with visual impairment should be included in order to achieve universal primary education and consequently accomplishing this goal.

UNESCO (2009) explains that because of Goal 2 of the MDGs, more attention is now being paid to children and young people who attend school but are being excluded from learning because they are not provided for. This is basically the spirit of inclusive education. MDGs are a roadmap for development, bringing the dawn of a new century (Republic of Botswana, 2010). Like the EFA, MGDs have major international

commitment to the achievement of universal primary education for all children (Rieser,2011:xi). Although Matale (2005), mentions that learners with visual impairment are amongst learners who do not benefit from early childhood education, Botswana Millennium Development Status Report (Republic of Botswana, 2010:14) postulates that Botswana has made good progress towards achieving universal access to ten years basic education for all its children because of the MDGs.

Having discussed three international declarations that influenced the formulation of inclusive education policies in Botswana, the next section will discuss some of the national policies that are in place to support inclusive education. Although other policies are mentioned, the focus will be on the Revised National policy on Education of 1994.

2.4 BOTSWANANATIONAL POLICIES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The basic planning documents in Botswana are the National Development Plans (NDPs). They outline the government priorities for the period, policies, programs, and projects that the government will implement including all education policies. Some of the policies that are outlined in the NDPs and are relevant to inclusive education are Vision 2016, Inclusive Education policy (which is still a draft) and the RNPE. According to Vision 2016, "Botswana will be an educated and informed nation and all Batswana will be able to have good quality education that is adapted to the needs of the country. Schooling will be universal and compulsory up to secondary level." (Republic of Botswana, 1977). Like Goal 2 of the MDGs, this goal will be impossible to realize without the inclusion of children with disabilities including visual impairment because it articulates that "all Batswana" should be included.

Botswana like other countries is gradually moving away from segregation practices of special schools towards inclusive education and to some extend this has been achieved. The move is facilitated by the new policy (RNPE) which has given priority to

the education and training of children with special education needs. Building on the RNPE, the government has initiated the Inclusive Education Policy. In 1994, the government gave increased access and equity to the education of all children including those with special needs; and a degree programme in special education needs was introduced at the University of Botswana (Denbow& Thebe, 2006:19). According to the NDP 9, during NDP 8 a notable achievement was the establishment of additional special educational units within the conventional school system to ensure inclusive education provision (Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, 2007). The NDP 8 had earlier on addressed the priority areas of improving access to education services for children with special needs.

Although the Inclusive Education Policy is still at draft level its goal is "to achieve an inclusive education system which provides children, young people and adults with access to relevant, high quality education which enables them to learn effectively, whatever their gender, life circumstances, health, disability, stage of development, capacity to learn or socio-economic circumstances" (Republic of Botswana, 2011:4). The policy aims at successfully catering for all those that need to be included in the education system and among those are learners with visual impairment.

Of all the education policies mentioned above, the most prominent one is the RNPE. In view of that, the policy will be discussed in the next section in order to express its significance in the development of inclusive education in Botswana.

2.4.1 REVISED NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION (RNPE)

The RNPE came as a response to considerable changes in the country's socio-economic situation since the National Plan on Education (NPE) of 1977. Mukumbira (2005:1) asserts that the NPE had come into effect only twelve years after

independence when most of the country's work force had a few of the essential skills. The country was therefore faced with the challenge of preparing the workforce for the international market, and so it was necessary to amend the education policy that has been in operation in order to align it with the country's goals and aspirations, to compete with other countries and to focus on new priorities, hence the birth of the RNPE.

Like the NPE, the RNPE was a product of a presidential National Commission of Enquiry into the education sector. The Commission was appointed because there had been a lot of socio-economic changes since the 1976 review (Chhabra, Srivastava&Srivastava, 2009:2). For instance, Botswana was now faced a new challenge of preparing the workforce for the global economy (Mukumbira, 2005:1). Hence it was necessary to revise the education policy which had been in operation to align it with contemporary concerns. The Commission reviewed the NPE and convened a number of studies to investigate key issues in education. The Jomtien Conference declaration was an important source of information for the Committee in that it provided the bases for aligning the goal of Botswana education with global initiatives for providing education for all world citizens. Also considered as part of the deliberations of the Commission were the recommendations of the Conference on Education For All (EFA).

The RNPE identified the goal of education as preparing Botswana for the transition from a traditional agro-based economy to an industrial economy in order to be able to economically compete with other countries of the world (RNPE, 1994). The RNPE, which is themost important policy guide for the division of education in Botswana, emphasises the improvement of access to education at the primary level, assurance of the quality of education provided, and the relevance of education to children and their communities. The policy ensures that all citizens of the country, including those with visual impairment have access to education. Subsequently, this would ensure that learners with visual impairment have the same quality of education as their peers so that they are ultimately prepared to be economically independent.

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In the RNPE (Republic of Botswana,1994:24) the goals of special education are expressed thus:

a)   To ensure that all citizens of Botswana including those with special needs have equal educational opportunities.

b)   To prepare children with special educational needs for social integration by integrating them as far as possible with their peers in ordinary schools.

c)   To ensure a comprehensive assessment this is followed by individualized instruction.

d)   To promote the early identification and intervention that will ensure the maximum success of the rehabilitation process.

e)   To enable all children with special educational needs to become productive members of the community, to enhance their employment opportunities and to promote self-reliance.

f)   To ensure the support and active participation of the children's parents and community through an education and information programme.

Key recommendations of the RNPE worth noting state that each school should have a senior teacher responsible for the handicapped children and tocoordinatea School Intervention Team (SIT). In addition, all teachers should have some element of special needs education as a part of their pre-service or in-service training. The RNPE furthermore raises the concern that many children with disabilities, including those with visual impairment, are excluded from receiving education because they have limited access to schools (Republic of Botswana, 1994:370). Other policy initiatives aimed at ensuring that disadvantaged children are not excluded from the school system include: provision of free transport for children with disabilities to and from school, sponsorship programs that are offered outside the country (Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, 2007:) and provision of materials used by learners with visual impairment in schools (Karr, 2011:2). Furthermore, the Division of Special Education was established. One of its duties is to advice departments in the MoESD (e.g. Department of Curriculum

Studies and Development, Department of Secondary Education, Department of Primary Education and Department of Teacher Training and Development)) on issues concerning learners with special needs.

The RNPE however, seems to be rather silent on the practice at the classroom level, that is, on learning itself. Its overall aim is "to increase access to education of learners with special needs" (UNESCO, 2010).The Draft Report (Clough & Corbett, 2000:6) states that the most crucial part in the implementation of inclusive education is what happens in the school and it is in the classroom that the aims and objectives of the policy are transformed from the ideal to the reality. For inclusive education to be realized, it is imperative that the teaching approaches are clearly defined. It should be acknowledged however, that even with well-articulated policies, implementation may still not be successful because there are other factors that are necessary for effective implementation and if not fulfilled, may still impede good performance. The following section will therefore focus on some of the factors that may hinder mainstream teachers from effectively implementing the recommendations of educational policies pertaining to mainstreaming learners with visual impairment.

2.5 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN IMPLEMENTING THE POLICIES

Presently in Botswana, successful mainstreaming of learners with disabilities, including learners with visual impairment, still remains in the realm of theory other than practice. Teachers of learners with visual impairment, like other special needs educatorsare still grappling with problems of policy implementation. Garuba (2003:194) denotes that at the level of policy provision, it can be said that special education has fared better. It is however problematic when it comes to the implementation of what the policies proclaim. At this point, some of the challenges encountered in implementing the policies will be discussed.

๏ Shortage of support services and specialized equipment

The aim of policy on inclusive education is to achieve a well-balanced and accessible instructional system based on a modified curriculum adapted for the needs of all learners with diverse backgrounds, including visual impairment. However, Hopkins (2004:88) has noted the following as factors that negatively affect the implementation of the RNPE as far as support services are concerned:

a) The Central Resource Center(CRC) in the Division of Special Education is overwhelmed with too many tasks. It has the responsibility to identify, assess and support across the whole country.

b) There are cases where resources such as sophisticated equipment for learners with visual impairment are underutilized.(For example, there was an incident whereby equipment was kept unpacked for months after being purchased, waiting for the right person to come along and set it up)..

c) The Braille Production Unit at the CRC is severely hampered in its work by outdated software and non-functioning hardware which can only be purchased from outside Botswana.

d) Adapted teaching materials in schools are not in adequate supply..

e) Infrastructure in schools is inadequate and need to be revamped.

f) Lack of special material and equipment in schools. This is due to the fact that such materials are not available locally and they are very expensive.

Provision of resources is important for any policy implementation. In this case, it is the responsibility of the MoESD to support implementation of education policies but shortage of support services and specialized equipment appear to be lacking. Guental and Stone (2005:215) are of the opinion that it is because implementation costs are often difficult to forecast and systems invariably cost more than anticipated. This brings about a discrepancy with the recommendations of the RNPE which calls for "a comprehensive assessment that is based on each child's learning needs and not group norms".

While all these challenges in policy implementation are experienced, the learners with visual impairment suffer most because unlike their sighted peers, they are unable to benefit from the sense of sight and so learning from observation is not applicable. For example, learners with visual impairment have difficulty moving around when they are new to an environment and therefore need orientation and mobility lessons on arrival in a school. Additionally, Liebermann and Houston Ornstein-Wilson (2009:8) state that regular teachers can, with consultation and in-service training, learn how to accommodate learners with visual impairment in their regular classrooms if the learners have previously learnt Braille and orientation and mobility. It may be beneficial for the learners if the government could effectively and efficiently implement its policy because the policy has taken cognizance of difficulties posed by the disability during its formulation. The policy recognizes the curriculum that is compound to the needs of the learners, so attention must also be directed to the implementation to make sure that the intentions of the government are being carried out as enshrined in the policy documents.

Challenging circumstances affect all learners in schools. The use of all senses for learning is beneficial to learners particularly to those with visual impairment because they cannot gain by visual information (Soni, 2003:167). Similarly, all learners, especially if they are visually impaired will benefit from adequate support services in an educational setting. According to Kekes (2010:22) insufficiency of support services can result in poor conditions of service and therefore frustrate educators. Frustration may lead to poor performance of teachers and consequently of the learners, especially those with disabilities. Their poor performance could be ascribed to the fact that learners with disabilities experience challenges related to their disability in addition to the problems experienced by a typical learner in the school environment; if there are insufficient resources and services in a school, they are likely to suffer more than others. It is therefore, of the utmost importance that services such as specialized equipment and specialist teachers are made available for learners with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairment in mainstream schools. Some countries, more especially

developing countries, may have no educational services available for children with visual impairment. In others, education for children with visual impairment may be to attend special schools where there are better services and resources. The same circumstances prevail in Botswana thereby defeating the concept of inclusion. However, sometimes the situation cannot be avoided depending on the extent of the disability and availability of support services, but a lack of resources remains a significant impediment to the implementation of policies.

According to Hardman, Drew and Egan (2010:26), orientation and mobility services are currently included in the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA)description of related services. The definition makes it is obligatory to provide learners with visual impairment with training, and therefore instruction in orientation and mobility is quite commonly included in the Individualized Education Plan(IEP) of learners with visual impairments. Botswana, however, does not have programs for preparing support services like that (UNESCO, 2009).Furthermore, UNESCO asserts that Botswana does not have tertiary education institutions to train therapists including speech-, occupational-, low vision-, and physiotherapists, as well asbraillists and vocational rehabilitation technicians. Matale (2000) attributes this to the fact that specialized equipment and material for training the specialists are not available locally. Unavailability of such important services is a serious problem for learners with disabilities, including those with visual impairment, because the ultimate goal of any educational program is to enable the learners to become as independent as possible, and to take their place as fully fledged members of the class and eventually of the community (Scott, 1982:192).

Another challenge is that Special Education functions as a division under the Department of Curriculum Studies and Development and therefore it is not autonomous in decision making as it is supervised by the Department. The Department has to attend to other departmental duties hence it cannot always attend to the needs of the Division

of Special Education. As such, the effectiveness and efficiency of the Division is at stake. Learners with disabilities, including those with visual impairment are at a disadvantage because whatever happens in the Department affects them in one way or the other. Although Kernghan, Marson and Borins (2000:174) disagree that decision making is easy and coordination is simpler at department level, a Department enjoys autonomy in respect of human and financial resources, a Division does not.

The government of Botswana needs to seriously look at ways of increasing capacity in all respect at this Division or even upgrade it to a Department. Mukumbira (2005:1) echoes that the government of Botswana still has a mammoth task of financing the expansion of existing educational facilities and to construct new institutions to cater for the ever rising number of learners. For example, the RNPE (recommendation 93b) had recommended that more resource centers should be built in all educational regions but to date there is only one resource center. Botswana is a large country with a diverse population and so it is simply not feasible to have one resource center catering for the whole country.

The ideals of all government policies including the RNPE are realized through NDPs which provide the framework for the country's development. However, the implementation of plans may be delayed due to various reasons like global financial crises. Somolekae and Hope (1998:83) note that many donor countries are now pulling out of the country because of the global financial crises and that may delay the start of policies. For example, the NDP10, which was supposed to start in April 2010, was delayed by one year (*The Botswana Gazette,*31 October 2012). This meant that all government policies that were to be implemented during that NDP period could not be implemented on time. That is to say resources that were budgeted within that NDP were not procured in time to facilitate inclusion, especially new technology like computers and computer software.

According to Hoffmann (2005:7), the use of technology should be reinforced where possible as it provides better individualized instruction. The computer, for example, does not mind repeating the same instruction many times until the learners have really acquired the requisite information or skill. The recent development of voice activated computers has added a new window of hope to the learners (Reynolds & Fletcher-Jansen, 2007:514). This makes the learners excited about their ability to participate in school activities and therefore material for learners with visual impairment should be in a variety of formats like twin vision books, in both Braille and print, tape recorded books and video tapes with an audio prescription of the on-screen action (Farrell, 2011:257).Lack of such technologies may delay the implementation of policies that support the successful inclusion of learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools.

✿ Shortage of qualified teachers

Inclusive education demands that the regular teacher should be able to meet the needs of the learners with disabilities in an ordinary classroom. Gargiulo and Metcalf (2012:477) have observed that in the field of special education shortage of qualified teachers remain high in the United States of America (USA) and the same is applicable to Botswana. On the other hand, recent legislative enactment and legal imperatives have resulted in a growing number of learners with special needs being taught in regular classrooms (Gargiulo& Metcalf, 2010:xvii). Because of this growing trend, general educators are confronted with creating learning environments that are responsive to the needs of all learners especially those with visual impairment. Success in this endeavor calls for, among other factors, a well prepared teacher. Regrettably, some general educators feel inadequately prepared to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of learners (Gargiulo& Metcalf, 2010:xvii). How teachers are prepared is intrinsically linked to the quality of education provided in schools (Mukhopadhyay, Molosiwa and Moswela, 2009:52). This means that good teacher preparation could help in achieving the intended outcomes of educational policies.

My observation, with concern, is that teacher trainees at primary colleges of education in Botswana are introduced to special education in the second year and only in general terms. Specialization takes place in the third year but on an optional basis. At secondary colleges, special education is done only for awareness purposes. This further makes the implementation of inclusion a slow and difficult one because for the mainstream teachers to be able to teach all learners, they need to be equipped with additional knowledge and skills on how to teach learners with disabilities, including those with visual impairment.

According to Mooney, Knox and Schacht (2011:250) teachers trained in special education are almost twice as likely to leave the teaching profession as general education teacher due to insufficient and sometimes dwindling resources. Insufficient resources may lead to poor results among learners with disabilities. Guarino, Santibarez and Dalley (2006:174) postulate that teachers exert an influence on achievement and may therefore be demoralized by poor performance. FurthermoreChhabra*et al* (2009:226) is of the opinion that the number of teachers trained in special education is inadequate, and therefore, there is a lack of expertise to provide support for diverse learners in schools. The authors further assert that many mainstream teachers feel unprepared and fearful to work with learners with disabilities in mainstream classes. Accordingly, they display frustration, anger and a negative attitude towards inclusive education because they believe that their lack of expertise could negatively affect the learners' performance and consequently the school pass rate.

An adequate amount of teachers has been prepared in this field in order to reduce class sizes. Reduced class size may allow the teachers to give the learners with visual impairment in a class the attention they need. If the teachers are few, they may have to take a large number of learners per class and would not be able to focus on individual learning needs. Richardson, Morgan &Fleener (2012:256) say, special needs learners "need specific and extended attention". It would be easier to get the attention of learners

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if the teacher-learner ratio is low. For example Cornoldi, Terreni and Mastopieni (1998:353) assert that in Italy, class sizes cannot exceed twenty if there is one student with a disability in a mainstream class. In Botswana, Abosi (2000:50) says the National Commission in Education (NCE) Report of 1993 recommends that children with disabilities be taught in small groups, a ratio of one teacher to eight learners. In practice, this has not materialized due to the shortage of special education teachers. The huge class sizes raise questions about the quality of education for all children, but they are likely to be even more disadvantageous to children with visual impairment since they may restrict the opportunities for individual attention.

It is important that the services of specially trained teachersare available to schools, as resource teachers or itinerant teachers. These teachersmay requirethe backing of the official responsible for special services in the region in order to stay motivated and by providing the teacher with the needed resources in order for him/her to execute his/her duties diligently. Although teachers can take steps individually to preserve their professional satisfaction and morale, they must also be nurtured, supported and valued by the broader community. If special education teachers are provided with what they need to remain inspired and enthusiastic in the classroom, the problem of shortage of specialist teachers could be alleviated and the learners would benefit from getting the attention they need.

Although higher salaries would encourage better performance(Odden, 2011:189) improvements in conditions of service may also be important in promoting job satisfaction, motivating teachers and promoting retention. From my own experience as a special education teacher, I can attest that teaching learners with disabilities is a taxing job. It requires a lot of patience, commitment, selflessness and sacrifice in order to remain in the profession. The morale of teachers can therefore have far-reaching implications for learners.

● Lack of early access and pre–school education

The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action advocates for countries to ensure that all persons with disabilities should be able to choose inclusive and accessible education in their own community, including access to early childhood pre-school education (Beiter, 2006:137)). However, learners with disabilities, those with visual impairment in particular, still face the challenge of lack of early access to pre-school education in Botswana. An assessment by UNESCO on "Pre-primary Initiations" revealed that while daycare centers play a role in socializing children and providing custodial care, they are not effective in preparing children for school. There is no prescribed curriculum for this level and the quality of leadership in many centers is inadequate (UNESCO, 2010:12).

The early years from birth to about age 6 are especially critical for the development of children with visual impairment (Koenig & Holbrook, 2003:227).Given the importance of the early years for children with visual impairment, early intervention is necessary. In spite of this, Matale (2005) asserts that children with visual impairment in Botswana are among learners who can benefit from early childhood education. She further states that it is difficult for the children to catch up with their sighted peers later in life. Even though the government resources may not be adequate to provide early childhood education, it is critical that early childhood education be provided for children with visual impairment. The importance of early learning for children with visual impairment cannot be overemphasized. Common sense alone dictates that early intervention is more likely to be successful if it is put in place before the point where any early difficulties associated with visual impairment have become compounded by social and emotional stress. The stress may be a result of failure to learn or relate well to others, low self-esteem, peer rejection, frustration, anger and despondency (Gross & White, 2003:83).Therefore, lack of intervention as early as pre-school can make inclusion very difficult at a later stage.

The success of inclusion depends considerably on early identification, assessment and stimulation. Howell and Peachey (in Porter, 2002:93) advise that the children's vision skills can be promoted during early childhood education. The authors further assert that vision problems are often subtle yet very significant educationally. When children are assisted before their vision problems become entrenched and before they have experienced failure, detrimental effects on their self-esteem, negative attitude to themselves and teaching and learning can be avoided. The government should therefore try its best to address the issue of early access.

❹ Bureaucracy

Etzion-Halegy (1983:85) defines bureaucracy as "a hierarchical organization of officials to carry out certain public objectives." This refers to all the rules and procedures followed by government departments. The rules and regulations are often complicated and cause delays. In a bureaucratic organization, member roles are defined. Success in the implementation of many policies often requires less bureaucratic rigidity, not more (Edwards, 2009:325). Bureaucracy is detrimental for strategic management and efficiency because, in my opinion, it prevents employees from taking responsibility as there is always some rule that makes someone else responsible. In fact, Lunenburg and Ornstein (2011:30) claim that "there is no evil that has not, at some point, been attributed to bureaucracy".

Dealing with day to day pressure of paperwork, red-tape, rules and regulations, formalities and official pressure is what prevents educators from sitting back and taking stock of long term issues. In Botswana schools, authority stems from the Ministry of Education and Skills Development and it goes through many departments before it reaches the classroom. Curriculum and resource provision for schools are made at ministerial and head office leveland then implemented in schools through regulations and directives. These mandates have been transmitted and monitored through the

bureaucracy. Thomas (2008:89) asserts that the more people involved, the more likely is it that something will go wrong or that the entire process will take long. He adds that "too many hands spoil the broth".

As a policy implementer, by the virtue of being a teacher, I have always found it difficult to exercise autonomy to apply my skills in adapting curriculum and instruction to meet learners' needs especially learners with visual impairment because of bureaucracy. I have had to chase after deadlines, meet pre-determined goals, complete the syllabus and prepare learners for the examination that is written at the end of a pre-specified period. This does not help when working with learners with visual impairment as teaching them requires instructional modification and more time than "normal" learners. I am of the opinion that the first requirement for effective policy implementation is that those who are to implement a decision must know what they are supposed to do before they are presented with tasks, so as to prepare themselves and forecast possible hiccups like the ones teachers experience in their job. This does not necessarily imply that the implementation will be smooth but at least the challenges can be alleviated. Edwards (2009:9) shares the same sentiments and reiterates that even though policy implementers may know what to do and have sufficient desire and resources, they may still be "hampered in implementation by the structures of the organization which they serve".

My assumption here is that nobody enjoys bureaucracy and so the process could be tightened by either eliminating a step or by removing a person from the loop. Thomas (2008:89) suggests that tightening the process could happen by authorizing stronger decision making at lower level. The government should have a system in place that raises standards and promotes inclusion of learners with visual impairment without depending on the heavy weight of individual plans and paper work (Gross & White, 2003:119). With that, the focus will be more on the teaching and learning outcomes rather than the procedures and processes.

Lack of monitoring

According to Mukumbira(2005:1) operational policies in Botswana are comprehensive; the main weakness is a lack of monitoring and stock taking. Stock taking could avoid contradictory ideas and legislative dissonance. During formulation of the policies, there has to be someone who is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that the policy is being successfully implemented. That is to say; there has to be a leader and the leader should be accountable for the outcomes of the documented policy. According to Sands, Kozleski and French (2000:391), laws serve to protect and guarantee certain rights. On the other hand, implementation of these laws may not reflect the spirit to a certain decree if there is lack of accountability. Consequently, rights of those who are supposed to be protected by these laws would be violated in a way. In this case, the right of learners with visual impairment will be infringed if those who are supposed to ensure that they receive appropriate educational intervention are not careful or strict about maintaining good standards.

Smith (2011:115) suggested that progress towards inclusion should be carefully monitored through the collection of statistics capable of revealing the number of learners with disabilities who benefit from resources intended for inclusive education. As discussed earlier (See 2.2.2.1), the RNPE set out to guarantee inclusion of learners with disabilities including those with visual impairment, however, there has been reason to question if this is successfully achieved as management of inclusion and special education needs continues to be a challenge (Rayner, 2007:47).

Scott (1982:192) believes that for the programme of mainstreaming learners with visual impairment to be successful, certain components are necessary. The first one is administrative leadership and commitment to the principle of inclusion. Strong leadership and accountability are vital for moving beyond words to concrete action. Top officials who are part and parcel of policy formulation should take the lead and be

accountable to ensure successful implementation of policies. Hesselbein and Goldsmith (2011:115) insists that leadership must start at the top and be reinforced at all systems of the school level. The principal of the school is therefore the most critical person in making inclusion work at the practical classroom level. The Department of Curriculum should report annually to the Minister of Education on progress in implementing the policy recommendations of inclusive education.

⦿ Inflexible curriculum

The word curriculum was derived from a Greek verb which means "the running of the race" (Lemmer&Badenhorst, 1998:259). In Botswana, curriculum is a plan with pre-specified objectives. Content of what is to be taught is formulated by experts on behalf of teachers and learners. Frankland (2007:105) is of the opinion that the skills of curriculum design and deliberation have been marginalized so much that what is to be taught is out of teachers' hands and learners only assume the role of object of study. They do not participate at any level in the planning process. Cole (2009:203) posits that because of the lack of participation of teachers and learners in curriculum design and development, what is to be taught and how it is to be taught, may not be in line with what the learners need.

Mbengwa (2010:56) has observed that the curricula used in many countries, including Botswana, are not accommodative to learners, especially those experiencing barriers to learning. She further asserts that countries adopted inclusive policies while often still using the same curricula that were used during the traditional era. For example the curriculum insolates subjects from one another, imposing barriers between disciplines and diminishing learners and teachers from joining ideas and knowledge from mutually compatible areas. This makes the Botswana curriculum a body of knowledge and skills that has no relevance to the lives of the children and does not meet their needs.

According to Matale (2000), one of the issues that Botswana is still battling with is making curriculum accessible to all children. For many learners with visual impairment, a careful balance has to be achieved in covering the broad curriculum whilst also paying attention to more specialized curricular needs like social independence and braille (Webster and Roe, 1998:175). The fact that the majority of the teachers are not trained in meeting the needs of all learners could mean that they are not able to develop or choose learning objectives that are appropriate to individual children, especially those with visual impairment. That is to say; they are unable to adapt the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of the learners in their classes. Adapting the curriculum according to Power-deFur and Orelove (1997:160) involves:

- Changing the way teachers teach
- Adapting the learning and teaching material
- Adapting curricular content
- Adapting assessment practices

Adapting the curriculum involves differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all learners. According to Schumm (2006:75) regular teachers have been expected to teach diverse learners with relatively few accommodations made to the curriculum to meet the learners' educational needs. Educators now recognize that learners with visual impairment need both expanded and core curriculum to thrive in the mainstream classroom (Shacks and Wolffe, 2006:52)). For visually impaired learners, an expanded curriculum includes teaching them how to navigate the school, socialize with classmates, learn independently and the usage of various types of assistive technologies to help them assimilate into the mainstream class (Kirk, Gallagher, Coleman &Anastasiow, 2009:384).

Botswana curriculum is examination-oriented, schools focus on tests and examinations so much that it is very difficult to accommodate the learners with special needs without lagging behind and missing the deadlines. Learners write examinations at the end of a

specified period and all learners have to follow the same curriculum. This prevents teachers from focusing on the areas of content that are not in the syllabus. Since assessing learners with disabilities in some subjects may be complicated, it is important for the teacher to be flexible, creative and open to new changes. To achieve that, Heacox(2002:131) asserts that differentiation is the best instructional response to all learners needs. Differentiation advocates for the adaptation of teaching and learning material to account for learning style and it is wary of methods that standardize teaching and learning. Flexibility is required on the part of the teacher in order to use recommendations and information presented in the IEP, to adjust expectations and adapt to the learners needs. As Gargiulo and Kilgo (2011:163) contend, the IEP goals are not to be limited by "placement options or the availability of services". That is what is expected but as a teacher I have always faced the challenge of how to best facilitate learning for all learners, particularly those with visual impairment in the classroom without going against the demands of the syllabus. After all, every class represents an incredibly diverse group of learners and each one of them has needs that must be accommodated in the classroom.

Marshak*et al* (2010:49) contend that many teachers have an understanding of equality based on the notion that "everyone gets the same thing" which can result in disregard of disability in order to promote uniformity. "Sameness is not fairness(Marshak, *et al,* 2010:50). Ideally, fairness would be the idea that everyone get what they need. For example, learners with visual impairment may need tactile material while those who do not have visual problems do not need them. Therefore, during formulation of policies, policy makers should also take full account of individual differences and situations should be considered so as to make things easier at a later stage.

✪ Teacher's negative attitude towards inclusion

According to Clarke and Fleery (2007:59), inclusive education advocates for equal rights and acceptance for all learners. In order for this to be implementation successfully, stakeholders who resent inclusion should change their attitude from resentment to acceptance, from discriminatory to respect and recognition. Schools have a responsibility to teach positive attitudes.Spodek and Saracho(2006:412) affirm that teachers play one of the most important roles on implementing and successfully maintaining inclusive education in schools because they are in direct contact with the learners and interact with them on a daily basis and they are often role models to learners.

Horne (1985:19) views mainstreaming learners with disabilities into regular schools as a way of encouraging positive relations among disabled and non-disabled learners. However, Turvey and Petheric (2009:401) have observed that some classroom teachers and peers may reject handicapped learners in their classes. Westhood (2007:20) also articulates that many students with disabilities are receiving intervention in general education classrooms but they are not accepted by their peers. Henderson and Bryan (2004:205) observe that teacher acceptance of students with disabilities could lead to an "atmosphere of acceptance" in the classroom. The assumption here is that if the teacher demonstrates a positive attitude towards learners with disabilities, classmates will follow suit. Unfortunately, Abosi (2000:49) laments that many teachers have expressed reservations about the integration of people with disabilities despite the advantages.

Teacher attitudes towards inclusion seem to be affected by the quality training they acquire prior to joining the teaching fraternity. Teachers with training on issues of disability appear to hold more positive views towards inclusion (Weiner, 2007:5). Similarly to this, Avramidi and Norwich (2002:134) believe that teachers who have no training in inclusive education have strong negative feelings about inclusion and feel that decision makers are out of touch with classroom realities.

According to Avramidis, Bayblisss& Burden (2000:193), in order for inclusion to be effective, the school personnel who will be most responsible for its success –the mainstream teacher- should be receptive to the principle and demands of inclusion. Professional attitudes may facilitate or constrain the implementation of policies. Horne 1985:22) found that teachers can influence the attitudes peers have towards learners with disabilities. In order to deal with negative attitudes, teacher awareness could be developed through workshops and seminars on the influence on learner attitudes and interaction in the classroom.

The challenges in implementing the policies pertaining to mainstreaming of learners with visual impairment seem to be endless. Personally, I admit that change is challenging and may be perceived as either a threat or an opportunity. One element necessary for the development of successful inclusive educational practices is the commitment of teachers to this goal of inclusive education, since teachers make learning possible. Their own attitude, beliefs and feeling with regard to what is happening in the school and classroom are of fundamental importance.

2.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed developmental difficulties experienced by learners with visual impairment. The areasviewed as important include socio-emotional challenges,

difficulties in cognitive development and delay in physical and motor skills. The chapter also highlighted international and national perspectives on inclusive education. Reviewed literature indicates that inclusive education in Botswana came as an answer to the international call for "Education For All" and the Salamanca Statement (Republic of Botswana, 2002:21). In my own opinion, the concept of quality education is inseparable with inclusion. Quality education can only be achieved if the needs of all learners are addressed so that each and every learner is allowed an opportunity to succeed. It is important that the government translate theoretical commitment into actual practice. In order for Botswana to achieve successful inclusive education, critical challenges of inclusion will have to be addressed at grass root level. The chapter, in additionhighlighted the unavailability of support services and the lack of general supervision for inclusion of learners with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairment in Botswana schools. Even though there are currently still problems in implementing the policies for inclusion of learners with disabilities, it must be acknowledged that the program is not a total failure because some achievements, though not pertinently mentioned, have been made.

It must be understood that the main focus of education is to support an individual towards achieving independence and self-actualization. My philosophy as a teacher is that all children can learn and achieve regardless of disabilities, but only if they are determined and believe in themselves. Individuals are experts on their lives, their strengths, resources and capabilities. The Strengths Based Approach can therefore be applied when dealing with challenges experienced by learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools. Despite the challenges in implementing inclusion policies, a move towards this approach reflects a move away from focus on deficits towards practice that enhances possibilities. In the next chapter, thistheoretical perspective will be addressed.

CHAPTER 3: THE STRENGTH BASED APPROACH AND RESILIENCE IN VISUALLY IMPAIRED LEARNERS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I start by giving the definition and overview of visual impairment.Significance is made to classifications that carry legal as well as educational implications of visual impairment, legitimizing the learners' eligibility for special education services in Botswana mainstream schools. According to Webster and Roe (1998:115) many individuals with visual impairment have been described in terms of low self-esteem, passive attitude, learned helplessness and limited assertiveness. This study therefore contends that educators can contribute to the visually impaired learners' success in mainstream schools by adopting a Strength Based Approach and by focusing on the strengths of learners, in order for the learners to increase their resilience. This chapter includesa discussion on ways teachers can build resiliency skills in learners with a visual impairment.

Literature on the Strength Based Approach sheds light on how learners with visual impairment could capitalize on their strengths in order to succeed in mainstream schools. Ysseldyke&Algozzine (1995:392) advise that learners with visual impairment need to get affirmation from significant adults on aspects they are good at in order to develop adequate confidence to combat the challenges they face. Focusing on their strengths rather than weaknesses can boost their confidence to rise over the setbacks they may encounter in mainstream schools (Greef, 2005:10). Agreeing with this, Goldstein and Brookes (2005:246) suggest that a critical factor in overcoming problems is self-understanding, acceptance and the feeling of control over one's life. The Strength BasedApproach, when adopted by educators, has the potential to change the way the teaching profession approaches learners with disabilities and also change the way in

which the learners perceive themselves and their potential. Working from the Strengths Based Approach, I recognize that every person has strengths and weaknesses. Learners with visual impairment come to the learning environment with a large disadvantage emanating from their faulty vision (Mason & McCall, 1997:148). It is therefore, very important that teachers support their other senses (taste, smell, touch and hearing), that is, capitalize on their strengths. Learners with visual impairment should also be encouraged to use their residual vision together with the other senses. By fully employing all the senses, they will gain in effectiveness and efficiency.

3.2 OVERVIEW OF VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

According to The United States Department of Education (as cited by Miller, 2002:15), visual impairment, including blindness means impairment in vision, that even with correction, adversely affect a child's educational performance. This means that when a learner is described as visually impaired it does not necessarily mean that the learner is blind, but rather that the learner has a serious defect in his/her vision. According to Ysseldyke & Algozzine (1995:391), the nature and severity of the impairment will determine academic performance. Koenig and Holbrooke (2003:88) support this view by indicating that the impairment may range from mild to severe. The nature and extent of the disability is usually ascertained following an assessment and diagnosis by an eye specialist. Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried and Larsen (2010:174) explain that such assessments describe the symptoms that support a particular diagnosis and such description helps educators understand the history, background and the effect of the condition on the learner. The available support and resources to manage the disability are usually included. In Botswana, an assessment is usually carried out by the Central Resource Centre (CRC). At the CRC, there are different specialists including those who specialize in visual impairment to assess learners who are visually impaired.

In learners with visual impairment assessment determines the degree of the disability, functional vision and appropriate placement. Chang (2008:250) describes functional vision as "what persons use when engaged in real-life activity". Functional vision involves looking at how learners with visual impairment utilise their remaining vision in activities such as reading, writing, activities of daily living and mobility. According to Ysseldyke and Algozzine (2006:6) learners with visual impairment could also be assessed as part of their educational programs to determine what they already know and to keep track of their progress. Assessment therefore is a part of each facet in the special education process. Goodman and Wittenstein (2003:44) advise that when the learner is being assessed, the purpose and possible outcomes of the assessment should be explained to the parents and learner.

According to Bishop (2004:335) vision is a major sense used in learning and if learners have no functional vision it is difficult for them to become effective in the learning process, more especially in the absence of appropriate intervention strategies. Whether the learners have some or no functional vision, the impairment is usually classified for educational intervention. Although the CRC usually classifies learners with visual impairment as either having low vision or being totally blind, different authors indicate that there are many other classification systems for individuals with visual impairment that are used by education professionals to determine intervention strategies. Batshaw (2002:166), Farrel (20011:25), Westhood (2007:40) and Patel, Greydanus, Omar and Herrick (2011:279) identified three of these classifications as:

- Legal blindness

To be declared legally blind an individual must have visual acuity of 20/200 or less, or have a field of vision restricted to 20 degrees or less at the widest point.

- Impact of visual impairment

The way in which individuals use whatever vision is available to process visual information may be affected by the following:

➤ Low vision – although the learner has reduced vision, sight is used as primary sensory channel for learning because the learner still has some usable vision and can learn to use the best of it.

➤ Functionally blind - vision is used for functional tasks and many alternative techniques are also used to perform tasks that are ordinarily performed with sight. However, tactile and auditory channels are needed for learning purpose.

➤ Totally blind – A learner may have light perception but he/she has to use other means (for example tactile and auditory channels) for learning and functional tasks.

Friend and Bursuck (2002:168) claim that most learners with visual impairment are partially sighted meaning that they have some measure of vision that can support the learning process.

• Age of onset

A third classification is based on the advent of the visual impairment itself. Vision impairment can be:

➤ Present at birth.

➤ May occur at any time from diseases and accidents, or it could alsobe a medical condition like myopia and hypermetropia.

In an ideal world, educational intervention for a learner with visual impairment should begin at the point of identification. Usually a learner may be suspected to have vision problems by parents at home or teachers at school. Upon identification it is necessary to refer the learner to specialists at the school for screening. The problem is that in Botswana there are no school nurses or technicians to who identified learners can be referred to for screening,so learners identified to have vision problems are advised to go to clinics or hospitals for an eye examination. The clinic or hospital may then refer the learner to an eye specialist. Depending on the nature of the condition, more invasive

procedures may be warranted (Moore, Graves & Peterson, 1997:34) and that is when the school, working with the parents, may take the learner to CRC for diagnostic and assessment procedures.

If not detected before, assessment usually takes place if the learner has difficulty meeting the demands of the school curriculum. Under the circumstances, the learners are referred for consideration for special education services (Rotatori, Obiakor, & Burkhadt, 2008:30). Assessment is mostly used to support teachers in designing the most appropriate teaching programs for their learners and so the teachers use the assessment information to make sound instructional decisions (Wong, Graham, and Berman, 2008:167). In Botswana mainstream schools teachers may fail to identify the learners with slight visual impairment and consequently not implement appropriate classroom accommodations for learners with visual problems because they are not qualified in such specialized education. Many learners themselves do not understand that they may have a visual impairment as they have nothing to compare their sight with, making it difficult for learners to self-advocate.

Usually when children make mistakes in school work, teachers tally the mistakes and assign a grade for the work. Bishop (2004:254) has observed that few teachers want to know the reason why the child made that error. The author therefore suggests that the teacher should look for the "why" of errors because of the strong influence of vision on learning. If vision problems are perceived to be the possible cause for the learner making mistakes, the teacher maybe prompted to take immediate action such as referral for screening.

Botswana does not have many teachers in mainstream schools that are trained in visual impairment. However, the condition has signs and symptoms which teachers, if trained in visual impairment, could easily identify and then refer the learners for screening.

According to Scheiman and Rouse (2006:213) the signs that teachers often observe in learners include:

> squinting or frowning

> excessive blinking or rubbing of eyes

> red eyes

> holding objects very close or very far to see them

> turning or tilting head when looking at objects

> continuously poking eyes

> feeling for objects on the ground instead of looking for them with eyes

> reaching in front or beyond an object when trying to get it

> covering an eye

> bumping into objects

> difficulty copying tasks

The teachers' ability to identify these signs and symptoms in learners with visual impairment is necessary as numerous types of errors like misreading, miscopying, and omissions may be brought about by one or more of these problems. Considering the above signs and symptoms, it can be concluded that learners with visual impairment are faced with adversity and struggle in mainstream schools which may be deemed a risk factor. For example, Hunt and Marshall (2006:143)state that learners with disabilities have a lower self-esteem and perceive themselves in more negative ways as compared to their non-disabled peers. This suggests that learners with disabilities are more prone to learned helplessness; they may attribute failure to uncontrollable causes such as lack of ability. Learned helplessness may lead to withdrawal, unwillingness to approach new tasks, depression and lack of persistence (Hughes, LaGrega&Conoley, 2001:425).

Learners who have developed learned helplessness may apply this maladaptive behavior to new situations where they should be capable of academic success, but instead believe that their efforts are futile. Unless the learners are viewed from the Strengths Based Approach, the teachers are likely to miss resiliency factors associated with the learners, and are less likely to build on their strengths to solve problems that confront them. Even if the learners are visually impaired, they may still have inherent strengths that they could be made aware of in order for them to develop and use the strengths to rise above their problems, bounce back and thrive. Allowing them to build on their strengths will also help them to avoid discouragement and academic struggles to succeed.

Attention has been given to the definition, classification, and the signs of visual impairment as well as the negative consequences that visual impairment may present. At this point information about the StrengthsBased Approach to mainstreaming learners with visual impairment will be provided.

3.3 WORKING FROM THE STRENGTHS BASED APPROACH

The StrengthsBased Approach is situated in Positive Psychology which enhances the ability to identify and apply resilience-informed interventions and practices. According to Teater (2010: 39), it was developed by social work academics such as Dennis Saleebey and Charles Rapp as a counter movement to the problem-focused approach to social practiceduring the 1980s. Ward, Polashek and Beech (2006:298) assert that the approach has its philosophical roots in Aristotle's theory of human flourishing as it is characterized by positive and optimistic view of people confronted by life's challenges. The primary goal of this approach is to maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses and by so doing empowering the individual. According to Saleebey (in Teater, 2010:14) strengths can be framed within a triangle with three points C,Pand R. The triangle is referred to as the CPR of strengths and it can help teachers identify the

learners' strengths under each of these three headings. The graph below signifies the dynamic core of the Strengths Based Approach.

CPR of Strengths

```
                        P


                    Strengths


  C                                          R
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C= competencies, capacities, courage, character and
P= promise, purpose, possibility, positive expectations and
R= resources, resilience, relationships, resourcefulness, resolve, reserves
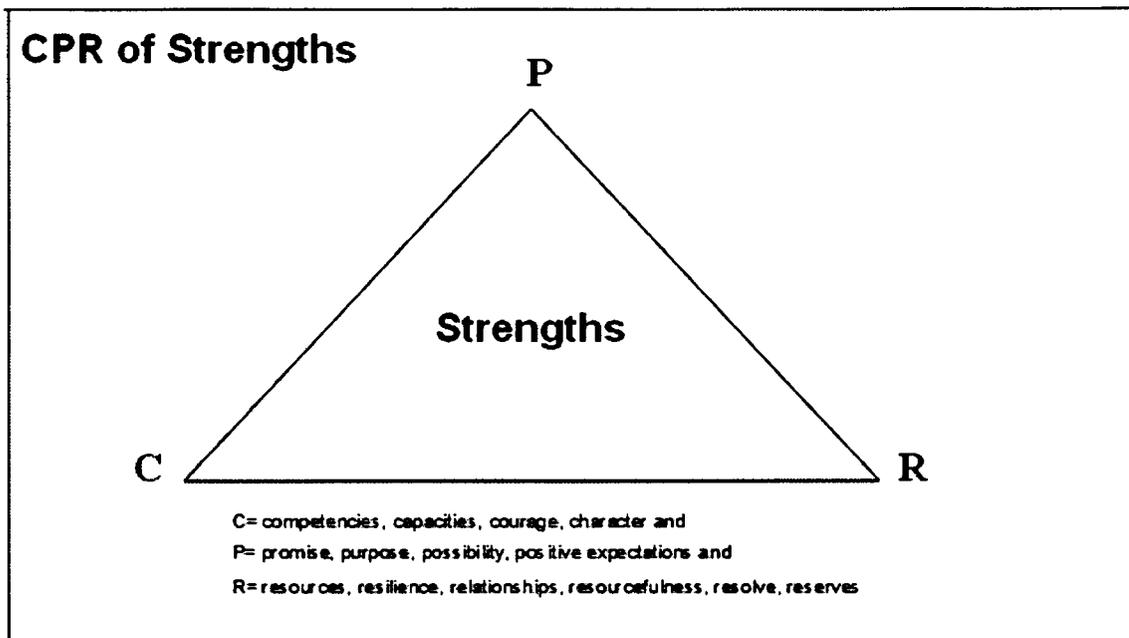
Figure 2: Dynamic core of the Strengths paradigm

In the original sense of the CPR, we help someone who cannot breathe into someone until they can breathe by themselves (Lopez, 2009:10). In this CPR we believe in the learner until they can believe in themselves.

3.3.1 OVERVIEW OF THE STRENGTH BASED APPROACH

A teacher is the key person in a learners' life and has the opportunity to assist the learners in acknowledging, enhancing, developing protective factors and to be aware of their strengths (Grant, 2009:49). According to Jones-Smith (2011:214) awareness of strengths leads to positive emotions, which broaden and build complex thinking on the learners' part. The author further articulates that the complex thinking on the learners

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then leads to a response repertoire that contains feeling of self-efficacy which in turn increases motivation to excel. Learners with visual impairment have the capacity to learn new skills in order to become resilient and when the teacher helps with directing the learners, they may succeed in mainstream schools.

From a Strengths Based Approach, visual impairment, as with other disabilities, poses unique challenges. Berger-Werger (2010:104) maintains that many of these challenges are conventional and should not be perceived as if they are some kind of disease. Learners with visual impairment should have the insight to see beyond the challenges they experience. It is important to appreciate the strengths the learners have and to grasp opportunities as they occur.

The objective of this approach is to support the learners in applying their abilities in the learning process and develop successfully despite being challenged by a variety of risk factors in the schools environment. McCashen (2005:7) define Strength Based Approach as "practices based on strengths, whether or not we are aware of them, or appreciate them" and emphasize that "we all have strengths and capabilities that can help transform our lives." The author further asserts that the Strengths Based Approach focuses on what is right with people rather than what is wrong. In addition to this, Saleebey (2006:97) says that Strength Based Approach means believing that people are capable of making their own choices. This suggeststhat when teachers work from the Strengths Based Approach, they consider the learners as having the ability to make their own choices and establish their own plans of what they would like to achieve in school as problem solvers and not as problems to be solved. Believing in the learners' strengths could make them feel valued and competent. For this reason, the Strengths Based Approach is particularly useful for working with learners with a history of disability (Gilman, Hueber and Furlong, 2009:73).

Lickery and Powers (2011:2) assert that in the Strengths Based Approach, teachers observe the learners' means of learning and the natural strengths that they bring to their own development process. It is important that teachers do not compare learners with others but rather with themselves, and identify those strengths that are stronger than others. Weiner, Welsh, and Blasch (2010: 214) maintain that learners with visual impairment also differ from one another from day to day depending on personal factors like motivation, fatigue and attention span. Teachers must be cognizant of these learners' strengths and work with these strengths when planning (Browder and Spooner, 2011:246). As Saleebey (2006:82) asserts, "almost anything can be considered strength under certain conditions. Some strength can be found in what people have learnt about themselves and others. People can learn from the challenges they endure as well as from their accomplishment".

The Strengths Based Approach focuses on what is positive for the person and not their failures.Gilman*et al* (2009:73) assert that it is frustrating and difficult to focus on only weaknesses and it would be more fulfilling to employ the strengths, manage weaknesses and overcome obstacles. Tilstone, Lacey, Potter and Robertson (in Westhood,2002:130) suggest that: "Before embarking on curriculum planning for pupils with learning difficulties it is important to map their relative strengths and needs". In that case it is important to know the learners' strengths, resources, their goals and aspirations for the future.

If the learners' strengths are known, their capability of dealing with their challenges and barriers will be enhanced (Saleebey, 2006:11). With that, they can set their goals for the future and start working towards them. By emphasizing the learners' inherent strengths and building on them can aid effective learning and teaching. According to Gilman *et al*(2009:73) learners often give up or become defensive about their problems when confronted with them but if intervention starts with the things they are good at, this can build rapport and increase motivation. Learning about and planning around learners'

strengths and interests allow teachers to actively engage learners so that they become active participants in their own learning (Lickey and Powers, 2011:24). If implemented in Botswana mainstream schools, the Strengths Based Approach could increase the learners' positive life- and academic experiences.

It is important to understand that the Strengths Based Approach does not deny that the learners in mainstream schools experience difficulties and challenges, and that these issues need to be addressed; the point to remember is that the issues should not be the primary focus. While the Strength Based Approach recognizes and acknowledges obstacles such as physical disability, it also views these as challenges that need to be addressed, not as deficits or character flaws. Zhang, Sternberg and Rayner (2012:339) assert that the Strengths Based Approach is in line with the approach of celebrating diversity of learners and learning styles. The authors further indicate that the approach "is completely in line with the notion of teaching and learning through multiple intelligences" which is the essence of inclusive education. More specifically, the Strength Based Approach resonates strongly with the Multisensory Approach to teaching and learning (Winnick, 2010:223).According to Saleeby (2006:13) the strengths perspective is built on a series of the following core principles:

- **Every individual has strengths**

Jones–Smith (2011:3) asserts that the concept of strengths is based on each person's unique biological and environmental make up. Strength Based Approach is founded on the concept of doing what one does well naturally. Despite the disability, learners with visual impairment still have their own unique resources, strength and ability. After all, every one of us is born with inherent strengths and positive personality characteristics (Jones-Smith, 2011:16). Individual strengths can include educational background, problem solving and decision making skills, personal qualities, positive attitude and financial resources (Zastrow& Kirst-Ashman, 2010:15). It is therefore important to

appreciate the strengths you have and grasp opportunities as they occur (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010:12).

Teachers who employ the Strengths Based Approach identify, mobilize, and respect the resources, assets, wisdom, and knowledge that learners have. Teachers view learners with disabilities as able to channel their strengths into achieving their objectives and link the learners with the resources they need in order to succeed. A teacher can bring a smile to a learner's face by simply showing them that they also have strengths. For example; if a teacher points out the fact that a learner with visual impairment has made it to form 5 despite the impairment, the learner will have a sense of self-worth. All human beings want to be appreciated. At the same time we must recognize that the Strengths BasedApproach can be applied to not only academic tasks but also to other aspects of life. In this regard Jones-Smith (2011:3) attests that when we fully develop and use our strengths to overcome the challenges, we attain a higher level of success and happiness.

- **Trauma, abuse, illness, and struggle, while sources of difficulty and challenge, can also be sources of opportunity for growth and change.**

"That which does not kill us makes us stronger"by Friedrich Nietzsche

The Strength Based Approach is an alternative to a preoccupation with negative aspects of people and society. Negative experiences by learners with visual impairment can yield knowledge, wisdom, insight, and concern for others. Learners with visual impairment can use their coping skills and learn from their experiences. Individuals are not damaged or injured by adversity; it serves as a way of strengthening one's hidden capacities and resilience (Zastrow&Kirst, 2010:5). Being visually impaired may mean going through all kinds of painful emotions that may be overwhelming at times and many learners with visual impairment may forget how much they have accomplished.

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Here are some of the accomplishments identified by Evertson and Weistein (2006:396) and Kourkoutasand Erkman (2011:105-107) which learners with visual impairment could be proud of.

> Being able to call someone for help when they need it.
> Protecting themselves and keeping themselves safe.
> Never giving up on them even when others do.
> Helping others when they need help.
> Accepting help from others.
> Good academic achievement.
> Having plans for the future.
> The ability to think about what they want.
> The ability to deal with people in different settings.

The learners have been able to progress through different school grades up to where they are despite the significant obstacles in their learning process. This demonstrates a tremendous courage and motivation to address issues that need to be remedied. It proves that human beings have such tremendous capacity for growth and change even in the face of adversity. It also shows that they have a creative and resilientmind. Glicken (2006:6) confirm that resilience exist when learners "heal" on their own and when they have strong social and emotional support. However, teachers should always remind learners with visual impairment that they have potential even when they do not perform well in class. Reynolds, Miller and Weiner (2003:35) advise that there are "multiple intelligences" which one could be good at, not only academic. According to Thomas (2009: 153) the concept of multiple intelligences states that a person has more than one type of intelligence. Some are stronger in a person than others but each of us has strengths and weaknesses in our though process. The concept of multiple intelligences is especially good model into looking at teaching strength as well as examining areas needing improvement. In order to succeed in what one is good at, it is important to set individual goals.

- **Individual goals matter.**

"It seems impossible until it is done."Nelson Mandela

Goal setting is an important factor in individual achievement because goals guide and motivate. Goals are objectives for change or improvement even though they do not always work out. People frequently forget or ignore their goals or allow them to become a cause for stress, frustration and a sense of failure. If the learners with visual impairment align their hopes, values, aspirations, and vision with their goals, possibilities of good academic achievement could be enhanced. Moreover, without goals both good and poor performances might go unnoticed.

Learners' personal goals are about becoming active learning participants in the learning process, empowering learners with visual impairment to become independent and motivating them to achieve their full potential in spite of their visual impairment. Anderson (2008:50) states that optimism may help the learners with visual impairment to succeed. The idea of optimistic thinking may be extended include attitude of hope for future condition as optimal as well. Strength Based Approach begins with a new way of thinking about learners with visual impairment and setting goals that can be achieved based on the learners strong points.

According to Truancy (2010:69), when assessing a situation by analyzing your starting point, you are forced to be honest with yourself. This enables learners with visual impairment and their teachers to set goals that are believable and achievable rather than setting goals that are unattainable and self-defeating. Self-defeating goals may make the learners to have negative perceptions about themselves or that they are not adequate.

- **Professionals serve people best by collaborating with them as colleagues on the intervention team.**

Intervention strategies for learners with visual impairment need to include identification of strengths for the learners. The strengths identified may then be utilized improve the academic life of learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools. According to Kam-Shing (2008:5), the role ofspecial education professionals should not be toimpose, construct and supervise learners with visual impairment in the intervention process; instead professionals should collaborate with learners with visual impairment, regarding them as co-partners with abilities, capabilities and strengths to solve their own difficulties and problems.

Teachers should try their best to search and identify relevant resources in terms of supportive network, facilities, materialistic support and knowledge. It is essential that teachers can reactivate the caring and caretaking capacity of individuals, groups, families and communities. Teachers who use a Strength Based Approach may have proficiency and experience to offer but are also open to the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of the learners and other professionals.

- **Every environment is full of resources.**

The Strength Based Approach views visual impairment only as a setback and seeks to help such learners to find more suitable ways to learn effectively and have coping skills. It views their impairment as a challenge that needs to be addressed by identifying, building upon and amplifying their strengths, resources and resilience. Regardless of how disadvantaged the situation may seem, every environment has individuals, families, informal groups, associations, and organizations that may be willing to provide help. Given the opportunity, communities may contribute needed assets and resources for learners with visual impairment. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2010:12) task the

teacher with the responsibility to link the learner with the resources they need in order to succeed in school. For example, learners with visual impairment may need the help of a psychologist to help them accept their condition and teachers are the very people to help them with the necessary arrangements. Learners also have books, parents and friends to take advantage of in this regard.

According to the Strength Based Approach, a critical aspect of mainstreaming learners with disabilities is determining their awareness of self-advocacy and self-advocacy skills (Burns, 2006:92). Learners need to be able to understand their disability, their specific strengths and areas of need and they should be informed about the accommodations that enable them to function optimally by being self-motivated and interested to do whatever it takes to succeed. Burns (2006:92) maintain that it requires that the learners with visual impairment self-advocate by clearly articulating what they need to function and to seek out the needed services. In order to achieve this, programs and schools for learners with disabilities should recognize that one of the functions of learners with visual impairment is to support the learners emotionally,physically, academically and socially. It is the identification of the learners' strengths that can provide clues on how to support them to deal with their problems and so improve their life situation (Zastrow&Kirst-Ashman, 2010).

According to Moss (2004:38) the Strength Based Approach believes that human beings are resilient. In spite of learners with visual impairment experiencing problems with their education, they can try to compensate for lack of vision with whatever strengths they have. This may result in what Gregory (2008:43) calls "survivor pride" – a well-deserved feeling of accomplishment that results from persisting in the face of hardships. The concept of resilience is discussed below.

3.3.2 RESILIENCE

"Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated failures. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent." by Calvin Cooledge

Life is full of people who have been able to overcome adversities to become high achievers and live successful lives. An example is Helen Keller, who was able to overcome deafness and blindness and become a "triumphant symbol of human resilience" (Herrmann, 1998:310). Keller demonstrated remarkable resilience and learnt how to communicate in spite of being deaf-blind. This demonstrates that having visual impairment does not limit learners from doing well in mainstream schools. Overcoming the challenges associated with visual impairment may give learners a great deal of encouragement to fight back instead of passively conforming and surrendering to the adverse situation. Blaisure, Saathoff, Pereire, Wadsworth and Domboro (2012:86) described resilience as a strengths based concept. It provides strength to stay strong in the face of adversity. Finding means to use your strengths can improve well-being in many ways. People who are resilient use their inner strengths to face life's problems because they can use their coping skills and strengths to survive.

Learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools frequently face disappointments and need additional skills to bounce back. Although this is changing, the learners have been referred to by their diagnosis, "He is blind" or "She is myopic." The disability is only one part of the person's being, yet the person's identity is seen as being best described and explained by the disability. If learners with visual impairment have resilience as per the Strength Based Approach, they can tap into their strengths

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and be able to keep their motivation even when conditions are not favorable to them. According to Greeff (2005:10), we are born with an innate capacity for resilience, a so called "self-righting capacity" which enables us to adapt to challenging circumstances and develop social skills, problem solving skills, analytical thinking skills, autonomy and sense of purpose. Resilience can help learners with visual impairment to find meaning and purpose in what they do, knowing how to deal with their disability. MacNally (2005:2) posits that resilience equals strength because the ultimate test for any person is how they respond amidst adversity. Deverson (2003:9) posits that "with strength comes action; without strength come weakness and victimhood".

People with resilience are able to bounce back even when it is tough. The resilient personality trait and success of persons with disabilities could serve as a learning experience for learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools. Pulley and Wakefield (2001:7) compare resiliency to elasticity, buoyancy and adaption. Developing resilience means that the learners should pay attention to the complexities of prior experiences and be able to learn from mistakes and successes. This calls for accepting the self, rising above adversity and accepting it as a stepping stone towards success. The resilient learner therefore, takes criticism seriously but not personally, sees the learning as life enhancing rather than a trial. Nonetheless, being resilient does not mean that one is tough, invincible and insensitive, but rather that one is committed to persevering despite being vulnerable (Greeff, 2005:11). King, Brown and Smith (2003:20) warn that social attributes can be more disabling than the condition itself.

Learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools need resilience to maintain their self-esteem when faced with social exclusion, rejection and discrimination. King et al (2003:20) indicate that to some individuals, social barriers feel insurmountable and so children may withdraw from or limit their interactions with other people. To others these negative experiences create responses of anger and

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determination to "prove them wrong".Greeff (2005:11) echoes this when he states that hardships and life's challenges can be either used to grow "wiser and better or cynical and bitter". Depending on how the learners look at the disability, they make much needed changes in their life to enhance character development and success. My assumption is that adversity can develop us and that behind the success of every person could have been hardships endures and obstacles conquered. The important thing is to focus on the positive side. Learners with disabilities may be able to deal with their challenges and still acknowledge that other people have challenges too. Rapp and Goscha (2006:27) maintain that there is strength in vulnerability and the application of the Strength Based Approach makes a positive difference in the lives of learners with visual impairment.

3.3.3.1 BUILDING RESILIENCY SKILLS

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired and success achieved" by Helen Keller

Learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools are exposed to a number of challenges as earlier mentioned (see Chapter 2) and therefore are considered at risk to adversity and accepting negative consequences such as being discriminated against because of their condition. According to Khatoom (2012:224) teachers could make a difference in their lives by teaching them to deal with stress and support them so that they can bounce back from disappointment, despair, anger and fear. Resiliency development helps foster the persistence and hope that all learners need to achieve and succeed in life (Marshak*et al,* 2010:14). As important as this is for all learners, learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools have a heightened need for resilience; as such it is essential for mainstream schools to foster resilience in learners with disabilities. Resilience is part of the genetic makeup of humans; it is a norm rather than the expectation (Glicken, 2006:6) and for resilience to

be initiated the person's whole being must be nurtured and strengthened by engaging learners with visual impairment in helping activities with supportive others.

It is possible to support learners with visual impairment by increasing resilience characteristics. Normally people are convinced that compassion is ideal but compassion alone does not build resilience qualities into a learner. Encouraging the timid, helping the weak and giving hope to those in needs by giving them support can make a difference. Hoult (2006:119) points out that one caring adult can often start developing the resilience process in learners. This suggests that resilience can be instilled and nurtured in the lives of learners with visual impairment and they may demonstrate some resiliency characteristics in mainstream schools.

3.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has covered the basis for understanding the definition, classification and symptoms of visual impairment. It also covered possible causes for visual impairment and facts regarding diagnosis. The chapter further discussed the Strengths Based Approach in relation to mainstreaming learners with visual impairment, and such need to enhance resilience in the learners. Based on reviewed literature, it is logical to accept that the Strengths Based Approach and the concept of resilience are closely linked and complimentary.

For every child with visual impairment there is a professional responsibility to discover as much as possible of the individual's strengths and weaknesses. The Strength Based Approach has to do with coping with and overcoming problems. The idea of Strength Based Approach is that compensation may be possible even if cure is not possible. Hence an overview of implementing the Strengths Based Approach for mainstreaming

learners with visual impairment has been provided. Special emphasis is made to resilience as an aspect of the strength paradigm. Both positive and negative school experiences shape learner's perceptions and contribute to their academic self–concept. Unfortunately for many children with visual impairment, their lowered self-perceptions and self-concept are influenced by difficulties in both the academic and social aspects of schooling while they should be resilient and "bounce back" in order to pursue their goals. As Pettus (2006:293) cautions, "change the mind - it is all in the head".

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I put forward my choice of research design, an explanation of my understanding of the design and justification for using it. I also discuss the methodology I use in this study. My intention is to describe the methods of data collection and data analysis and their appropriateness to this study. My attention will also fall on the sample selection and research questions. Lastly, ethical considerations relevant to this study will be discussed.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The design for a research project is the plan of how the study is going proceed. According to Maxwell (2005:3) "design in qualitative research is an ongoing process that involves 'tracking' back and forth between the different components of the design, assessing the implications of goals, theories, research questions, methods and validity threats". Punch (2009:112) further asserts that the design of the study refers to the way a researcher guards against, and tries to rule out alternative interpretations of the results. This means that the research design is a plan for collecting and analyzing evidence that will make it possible for the researcher to answer critical research questions and achieve the objectives of the study. By making use of the research design, the researcher visualizes how the study will be carried out and what the end product should achieve.

The research design in this study is carried out using a qualitative approach. A qualitative design is chosen for this investigation so as to enable exploration of the challenges experienced by visually impaired learners in mainstream schools in

Botswana, and how the learners confront specific problems and get a holistic view of the situation (Offrey& Vickers, 2010:87). In view of the number of participants available for the study, only two group interviews with the learners were held and a questionnaire with open ended questions was handed to the teachers. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour.

The key research questions are exploratory and descriptive. Group interviews with learners allow for the production of data and insights that would perhaps be less accessible without the interaction found in a group (Flick, 2007:36). In addition, it allowed for more views to come to the fore within the time constraints of this study. Another reason why a group interview is adopted is that it would have been difficult to transcribe a questionnaire into Braille for the learners who use Braille for reading and writing. As Flick (2007:36) alludes, the design must not only fit with its use but also with the situation and conditions of the study as it touches all the aspects of the research. A qualitative approach usually gives the participants the opportunity to express their needs without the researcher imposing her assumptions on them (Maxwell,2005:3).

4.2.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:315) qualitative research is an inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected participants in their natural settings. This is because qualitative research aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the factors contributing to the behavior (Hicks &Nicols, 2011:29). In this study, the aim is to highlight the challenges experienced by learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools. Typically, detailed descriptions of the challenges and the opinions of the participants' interpretation of the challenges are involved. It must be noted that human behavior is shaped in context (Thymer, Dalmus&Soer,and 2012:16) and therefore

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events cannot be understood if they are isolated from their context. This consideration is important in establishing the nature of the challenges experienced by learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Botswana and how they perceive and deal with challenges.

As this research is devoted to develop an understanding of the challenges encountered by learners with visual impairment in MolefhiSeniorSchool, it was conducted in their natural setting, (in the school that the learners attend). Weirsma (1995:12) asserts that "qualitative research follows a naturalistic paradigm", meaning that the research is conducted in the participant's setting as was the case in this study. This approach furthermore follows a holistic interpretation of the natural setting (Collins &O'Brien, 2011:314). In this research, the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning learners with visual impairment have constructed to their experiences, how they make sense of their circumstances and the challenging experiences at school.

The researcher opted for a case study approach in qualitative research. This approach allowed the investigation to maintain meaningful characteristics of a real-world events and processes which are too complex for other research methodologies like surveys and experimental strategies. There was no proposition to the research but rather an aim to explore key dynamics in mainstreaming learners with visual impairment in Botswana schools thereby making the approach an ideal one. In order to bring out dynamics and issues, the researcher considered using a focus group interview and consequently new factors were discovered during data collection. There were unexpected issues that only became evident while conducting research. This study is relevant as a case study because a "case study favours the collection of data in a natural setting" (Yin 2012:3) with a primary purpose of exploring the peculiarity and uniqueness of a single case. However, reference was made to other cases like

Lentswe Primary School and Lentswe Junior Secondary School in order to determine the uniqueness of the case.

According to Dayman and Holloway (2011:11) qualitative research is based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social world. Beebe (2001:29) emphasizes that it is the perceptions of those being studied that are important, and as such, qualitative researchers would like those who are studied to speak for themselves. The author further asserts that qualitative research has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel or live it. Ross (inShermann and Webb, 1988:7) further says that qualitative descriptions should "transport the reader to the scene" and "convey the pervasive qualities or characteristics of the phenomenon".

The qualitative method of inquiry investigates the why and how of decision making not just what, where and when (Seel, 2011:2742). In this study, the learners are confronted with challenges in acquiring education and how they deal with the challenges is important. Denzin and Lincoln (2011:353) note that qualitative research is not as prescriptive and structured as the quantitative research design. The aim of qualitative research is not a verification of predetermined ideas, but discovery that leads to new insights (De Leeuw, 1997:103), therefore the researcher should be able to accommodate emerging research needs and improvise where necessary during the course of the research. Decisions on how to proceed may be deferred to later stages of the research to allow "multiple realities". There is a concern for the uniqueness of a particular setting and participants in qualitative research (Locker, Myers& Herr,and . 2001:482) and therefore it is not necessarily assumed that the findings of the study maybe generalized easily to other settings. This study provide information on the challenges in mainstreaming learners with visual impairment in Molefhi, Botswana, and any general conclusions will be assumptions. According toLeka&Houdmont (2010:270) the selection of the research method is crucial for what conclusions can be made

about the phenomenon as it affects what the researcher can say about the cause and factors influencing the phenomenon.

The research methodology supports a variety of approaches for this research project. As Glidden (2008:153) assert "when selecting appropriate methodology, the researcher needs to be cognizant of the complexity of the issues that influence his or her decision". In addition, Silverman (2010:9)says research methods should be chosen based on the specific task at hand, so I chose the research method which is within the limits of what I can do (e.g. time, resources and general feasibility). The following are some of the factors that influenced my choice of the method:

➢ My choice to do a qualitative study is a product of both personal taste and a sense that the themes in which I am interested in can best be explored though qualitative approaches.

➢ As a special education teacher, I believe qualitative research provides more insightful perspectives on the various issues in special education; therefore a qualitative approach can be used to explore the feelings and experiences of the learners and what lies in the core of their lives in mainstream schools.

➢ Qualitative methods are, typically, approaches to gather process and report verbal data. I used questionnaires and focus group interviews to collect data. Qualitative analysis is most often applied to verbal data from sources such as interviews used to obtain detailed information about feelings, perceptions, and opinions of people.

➢ This type of research describes a population without attempting to quantifiably measure the variables. In consideration of the fact that I had a relatively small

population of study, it was the ideal method to employ. I was able to have two group interviews with the learners and gave questionnaires to the teachers.

Under research design and methodology, it is crucial to examine the data collection techniques as well as the other importantfeatures of research. For this reason, methods of data collection adopted in this study are discussed next.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUESAND LIMITATIONS EXPERIENCED

In McQueen and Puska (2003:170) data collection is described as any process of obtaining useful information. My purpose of data collection was to have a factual basis for decision making regarding the topic. For instance, instead of basing conclusions on what I think, I based them on what the data suggests, thereby focusing on objective information about what is happening rather than on my subjective bias. In this study, both primary and secondary data sources were used. According to Churchill and Lacobucci (2010:171) a primary source of data is the source that originated the data, whereas the secondary source is the source that secured the data from the original source. I reviewed relevant literature as secondary data to provide the background necessary to understand the problem. As for primary data I distributed a questionnaire to teachers who teach learners with visual impairment and interviewed learners with visual impairment in a selected school. I collected the primary data,therefore it is original and up-to-date, giving me the chance to interact with the learners and the teachers and get the information that I could not get from outside sources. The data focused on the challenges experienced by learners (from both the views of the learners and the teachers) with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools. As Collins (2010:124) commends, primary data is more authentic and reliable and gives the research essence. Following are the two techniques of primary data collection that I used:

Interview

Lankshear and Knobel (2004:198) describe interviews as "planned, prearranged interactions between two or more people, where one is responsible for asking questions pertaining to a particular theme or topic of formal interest and the other (or others) are responsible for responding to these questions". This means that an interview is basically a discussion in which the interviewer intends to get specific information from the person being interviewed. This is why Lichtman (2009:140) refers to an interview as "a conversation with a purpose". The author identifies three types of interviews from which a qualitative researcher can choose as guided, in-depth and causal interviews. For this study seventeen visually impaired learners were interviewed in a face to face semi-structured group interview using open ended questions. A semi–structured interview allowed the researcher and the participants to be more flexible (Greeff,2005:296) by probing for more information to elicit specific information concerning the learners' perceptions, while still allowing the exploration of unfamiliar information. Therefore, with this technique I hoped to get detailed and desired information which enables me to investigate the topic in an in-depth way.

The interview with learners was videotaped. According to Lankshear and Knobel (2004:199) interviews are recorded in three ways: by taking notes, by audio recording and video recording to ensure an accurate recollection of their opinions. For this research, the notes and video recording were preferred. This enabled me to capture a good deal of participants' intonation, voice quality, hesitations, self-corrections, facial expressions and body language.The interviews went well but there were some limitations. There were some learners who were very eloquent and outspoken - so much that they almost dominated the conversations but I was vigilant enough to involve others by calling their names and asking for responses. However, it is still possible that outspoken learners influence the responses of others. The other limitation was that the learners had to be probed to elaborate on the answers they gave in order for me to get the desired information. That consumed a lot of time considering that we only had one hour for each one of the two interviews.

In addition to the two group interviews that I had with the learners, data was also collected from the teachers by means of questionnaires to compliment data from the interviews.

Questionnaire

According to Brace (2005:4) a questionnaire is a medium of communication between the researcher and the participants. In a questionnaire the researcher articulates questions that the researcher wants answers to and through the questionnaire, the participants' answers are conveyed back to the researcher. A questionnaire provides standardized questions to all participants (Wood & Ross-Kerr, 2011:182). All the respondents are asked the questions that are appropriate to them, and when those questions are asked, they are always asked in the same way. However, according to Wood and Ross-Kerr (2011:183) there is always the possibility that the written questions will be interpreted differently by different readers as the researcher may not be around to clarify the questions to the respondents. The questionnaire was designed to determine what the teachers experience, know, think and how they act with regard to the challenges experienced by the learners they teach.

According to McNabb and Sharpe (2008:136) questionnaires are less costly in terms of money and time which suited me because of financial and time constraints, so a questionnaire was in addition to the interviews with learners, used to collect data for the study. In this study I personally distributed the questionnaires with open ended questions to teachers who teach learners with visual impairment. I intended to collect the questionnaire after a week so as to give the respondents enough time to complete the questionnaire. However, there was a delay from the side of the teachers and they did not complete the questionnaire in a week. Despite several visits to the school in an attempt to get back the completed questionnaires, I was only able to get back most of

the questionnaires after three weeks. This indicates that even though questionnaires are usually quicker (Sapsford&Yupp, 2006:102) they also have some limitations.

As with all methods of research, I note the importance of sampling and therefore present a discussion of sampling in the following section.

4.4 SAMPLING

As Punch (2005:187) puts it "we cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything" and so, researchers need to get a representative sample. According to Holloway and Wheeler (2010:137) sampling is an intentional selection of a segment of the whole population to gain knowledge and information from each population selected.A sample is selected to save time and effort but also to obtain consistent and unbiased estimates of the population status of whatever is being researched (Sapford&Yupp, 2006:26). The sample can be selected in two major ways: probability and non-probability sampling (Marlow, 2007:14).The author further explains that in probability sampling one selects a sample where each element in the population has a known chance of being selected for the sample. On the other hand, with non-probability sampling the researcher "handpicks" the sample according to the nature of the problem and the phenomenon under study. This method is often the sample choice in qualitative research where generalization of results is less important (Marlow, 2007:14).

For the purpose of this study, non-probability sampling was adopted. Connaway and Powell (2010:117-119) identify six kinds of non-probability sampling namely: accidental sample, quota sample, snowball sample, purposive sample, self-selected sample and incomplete sample. Among these, purposive sampling is preferred for its suitability to this study. In purposeful sampling, the selection of participants entirely depends onthe choice of the researcher (Agarwal, 2010:186) and as such, it is easy and convenient for

the method to be implemented. It must be borne in mind that in my sampling, I was guided by principles of ethics and of gaining access to people whom I can interview in depth and from whom I can obtain rich data, hence my sample population being visually impaired learners and their teachers at Molefhi Senior Secondary School.

My targeted population of study was the learners with visual impairment inMolefhiSeniorSecondary School. The total number of learners that I interviewed in theschool was seventeen, nine form fours and eight form fives. Teachers who participated in the study are ten in number, six female and four male. Two of the teacher participants are totally blind, one male and one female.All the participating teachers have learners with visual impairment in their various classes. Learner participants were selected because the study's focus is mainly about the challenges they experience in mainstream schools, the defining character is the fact that they are visually impaired so no other group of learners in the school experience the same challenges as they do. Teacher participants were also purposely selected because they deal with the learners with visual impairment on daily bases and so they were better placed to answer the research questions.

After gathering the data through the above mentioned techniques, it was important to make sure that the data have some meaning and make sense. The exercise of giving meaning to data was achieved through data analysis.For this reason the next section presentsan elaboration on data analysis for this study.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Schutt (2009:362), in qualitative research data analysis begins as soon as the researcher starts collecting data. Data analysis consists of segmenting the data and assembling it with the aim of transforming the data into findings (Boeijie, 2010:94). The findings can consist of descriptions that are more or less theoretical as well as

interpretive explanations of the research participants. The idea of analysis implies some kind of transformation (Gibbs, 2007:1).In theanalysis phase, data is sorted, named, categorized and connected. All these activities entail interpretation.

Data analysis according to Tesch (1990:86) involves organizing what is seen, heard andread so that one can make sense of what is learnt. "Working with data can pose hypothesis, develop theories, create explanations and link one story to another" (Tesch, 1990:86). In order to accomplish this task, researchers must categorize, search for patterns, synthesize and interpret data collected. The data for this study was analyzed using comparative analysis (Rodrigues, 2010:103). Through the analysis I could assess the data I received from interviews and questionnaires in order to make sense of what I have learnt. I looked for the emerging themes that are common among the learners' and teachers' experiences.

The interviews were captured on a video camera and transcribed manually. I did my owntranscription as that gave me the opportunity to know the content of the interviews and it also restrained the issue of confidentiality. I had to go over the video recordings several times to check for accuracy. The transcriptions were then categorized by themes. Tesch (1990:86) advices the researcher that analysis is a process of manipulating and interpreting collected data so that it makes sense. Rubenson (2011:235) further asserts that it highlights and prioritizes patterns, trends and relationships and it is based on the search for differences and gaps. With all that in mind, the data was analyzed in stages and was revisited as necessary for clarification and category development. After categorizing the data, I came up with words that could be used to facilitate the making of connections and understanding of patterns. Analysis of the data obtained in this study was done using words and phrases.

Boejie (2010:95) says that when analyzing, the researcher distinguishes the themes or categories in the research data and names them. According to Samaras (2011:208) creating themes allows meaning to come forth. The themes are then grouped into similar concepts in order to make them more workable.

For data analysis I started by transcribing interviews and questionnaire data. As I wastranscribing the data, I indicated along the left side of the script who was responding. The detailed notes that I took during interviews entailed the participants' names and so they helped me to correct the transcripts as needed. I carefully read the transcripts and questionnaire notes many times until I was familiar with the contents. As I was reading through them I managed to identify portions of text that yield rich information related to my research questions. I organized the responses from interviews and questionnaires question by question.I then assigned themes to different pieces of text which were the key words and phrases that I identified as I was reading through the data, and I put them along the wide margin that I left specifically for comments as I analyzed data.The themes provided me with the basis for building the discussions of the findings.

After gathering all the data, analyzing and reporting it, there still is an issue of validityand reliability. The following is a discussion on this topic.

4.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

By validity MacBurney and White (2010:173) clarify that researcher's conclusions are true or correct. Validity is therefore about truthfulness and accuracy of what was observed and whether the procedure met the requirements of what it was intended for. Validity goes hand in hand with reliability which according to Connaway and Powell 2010:63) is a study that can be duplicated in a different setting. If the design of the research study is reliable, then its findings should be repeatable, replicable and generalizable beyond the study.

The methods of inquiry in this study are valid and reliable because the researcher used recorded interviews and questionnaires to collect data. Only the standard procedures and approved methods were used so it is possible for others to establish how the research was done to satisfy them that the research was done honestly and carefully.During the interviews, I went over the information gathered and askedparticipants to confirm if it is true in order to determine accuracy, credibility and validity.However, Cohen, Manion and Marrison (2007:133) cautioned that threats to validity and reliability can never be erased completely. I therefore paid attention to all factors that may compromise the quality and integrity of my study throughout the research to make sure that I minimize threats to validity.

One other important aspect in research isto make sure that the research is ethical.

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Mouton (2006:238) the ethic of science concerns what is "wrong and what is right in the conduct of research". Firstly, the researcher ensured that this research is conducted in a morally acceptable way. According to Johnson and Christenssen (2008:103) the researcher has to guard against the "fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research or reporting research results". Secondly, the researcher got ethical clearance (see appendix A) and adhered to the set ethical principles guiding the researcher as laid down by the Faculty of Education Ethical Board.

Secondly, confidentiality is important in research.Confidentiality is similar to the principle of privacy as everyone has the right to privacy.However, confidentiality was difficultin this research because I had to ultimately report the research findings. Despite that, I could not ignore it as there are ways in whichconfidentiality may be achieved, for example, through participant anonymity. According to King and Horrocks (2010:117) "anonymity refers to concealing the identity of the participants in all

documents resulting from research, therefore actively protecting the identity of research participants".

In this research I preserved anonymity by referring to learners as "learner" or "learners" and assigning numbers to names of teachers to ensure confidentiality. I have kept all raw data under lock and key in my private location and I will destroy it when it is no longer needed.Finally, I observed the treatment of research subjects and informed consent (see appendices A-E) as advised by Strydom(2007:56-79). Therefore this research is not expected to cause any harm to research subjects directly or indirectly (Knight, 2002:142).

4.8 CONCLUSION

In summary the chapter has included the review of the research methodology and design. Justification for each one of the research and methodology has been adhered to. In addition the chapter also discussed population and sampling procedures, data collection methods and ethical considerations adhered to in the research process.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides findings and a discussion of the results of this study. It reflects on the findings of two group interviews held with visually impaired learners of MolefhiSeniorSecondary School and a questionnaire answered by the teachers who teach learners with visual impairment in the school. Background information on the participants is given before the results are discussed.

The results and interpretation of the findings are discussed according to the main themes that emerged from the data. The report takes the format of a narrative essay, which at times is supported by direct and appropriate quotations from the transcribed interviews and statements from questionnaires. Where possible, the findings have been compared and contrasted with the relevant literature. In order to maintain anonymity, reference is made to the participants by using letters and numbers. For example, teachers are referred to as T1-T7. Learners will be referred to as "learner" or "learners" without mention of any names.

5. 2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

a) Learners

I interviewed seventeen learners in two group interviews. Among the learners that I interviewed two of the form 4s are totally blind while three of the forms 5s are totally blind. The rest have varying degrees of partial sightedness. For each of the two streams, the learners are confined in three classes so in most cases one will find

more than one learner with visual impairment in a class. The learners that I interviewed come from different classes of the two streams. All the learners except one reside in the school and go home only during school vacations. They come from different parts of the country, the furthest being Maun, which is about 890km from the village of Mochudi, where the school is situated. The learner who is a day scholar lives a stone throw from the school. The following table summarizes information about the participants.
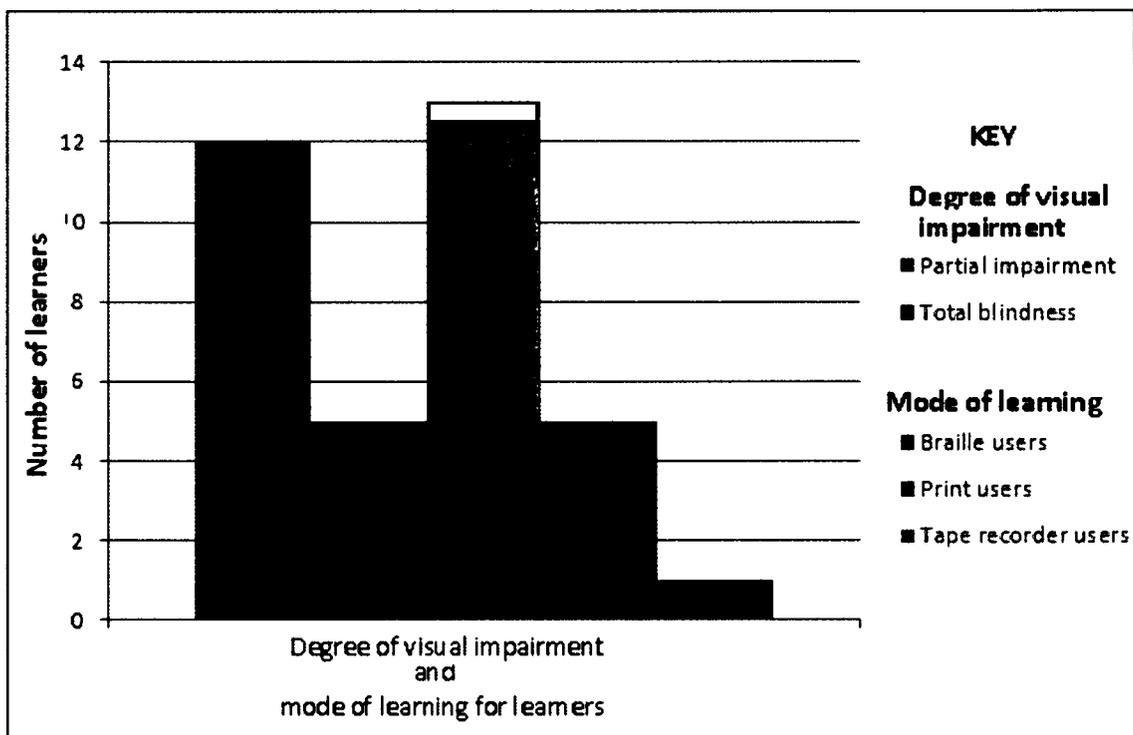
Figure 5.1 Information about participants

One learner uses both print and Braille but he uses print for Mathematics only.

b) Teachers

Of the ten teacher-participants, five teachers are qualified visual impairment teachers while two of the teachers who answered the questionnaire are not trained

in special education but do teach the learners with visual impairment. One teacher is totally blind. Most subjects do not have specialist teachers and those who have mostly have one specialist teacher. Subjects that have specialist teachers are Chemistry, English, Geography, Religious Education and Setswana. The two unqualified teachers who answered the questionnaires teach Art and English.

5.3 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Findings from interviews with learners and teacher questionnaires are presented at this point. Various categories, which are grouped into themes, emerged from the coding of the raw data. Some of the themes and categories overlap.

5.3.1 FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH THE LEARNERS

Table 5.1 is the summary of the themes and categories around which the analysis of the interview results revolves and then a discussion follows.

Table 5.1: Themes and categories obtained from the interview with 17 learners with visual impairment.

Themes	Categories
1.Transition from primary to junior to senior school	a) Increase in the number of subjects and incompetent teachers b) Prejudice from teachers and other learners and sighted learners

Themes	Categories
2. Negative attitude	a) Lack of support from the teachers and other learners b) Anxiety about perceived danger
3. Curriculum	a) Syllabi b) Choice of optional subjects c) Adaptations and modifications d) The physical environment
4. Resources	a) Special education equipment b) Support staff c)Learning and teaching materials

Theme 1: Transition from primary to junior and senior schools

The learners face a challenge of transition from schools. They have not been prepared in advance for new situations in the next school so that they can anticipate what they will be encountering. For example, it might have been helpful if they were aware of the number of subjects they will be taking, the number of teachers they will have and the general situation of the school. The learners had a hard time adjusting to new situations they were confronted with. Not all the learners have the same transition requirements butanxiety may be decreased if the learners are prepared for transition. Green (in Dall'alba2009:66) stated that transition is the process of moving from the known to the unknown. The author further stated that during transition from one school to other learners may face social, curriculum and psychological challenges. The outcomes of interviews with learners in this study support this.

Category (a): Increase in the number subjects and incompetent teachers

The learners indicated that they were taught by one teacher in all areas of the curriculum inprimary school. Those who were already visually impaired in primary school went to the same school, which is LentswePrimary School. Their teachers in primary school were visual impairment specialist teachers and were much more understanding and helpful. They started experiencing challenges when they went to junior secondary school as the number of teachers increased. One learner assumes that *"some of the teachers at junior school seemed not to be trained in special education"*. Even though the learners started experiencing problems at junior school they said that it was still better as compared to senior secondary.

At junior school there were a considerable number of teachers who had training in special education and therefore could help them in different subject areas. When the learners came to senior school they found that things are far too different from primary and junior schools. Learners lamented that *"things got worse when we came here; the subjects that we do are too many"*. The learners also said that in primary school; a considerable amount of work was given to them since they were doing fewer subjects and the teachers were very good at their job. They also alluded to the fact that they have a hard time working with some teachers in the school. Another factor that made things easy for them is the fact that some of the subjects they did at primary school were not included in the final examination but at secondary school everything they do is written in the final examination.

For some subject areas there are no specialist teachers at all and the regular teachers are incompetent in helping to teach them. One learner said *"some teachers always say they will help us during remedial lessons and then they do not turn up"*. The learners have observed that some of the teachers do not want the learners to follow them up for help. For example, if they said they will help them during afternoon study and they do not turn up, the learners sometimes look for them in the staffroom and the teachers get annoyed. When linking this to the Strength Based

Approach, teachers seem to fall short when assisting in helping learners build on their own strengths. Teachers come over as uncaring which could lead to the learners feeling that they are not worth helping.

Category (b): Prejudice from some teachers and sighted learners

i) Teachers

The learners indicate that they have experienced some prejudice from their teachers which seldom happened at primary school but started at junior school and now it has become worse. Some teachers in their current school would quite often come to class without having prepared anything for the learners with visual impairment. One learner alluded that teachers tend to forget that they are in class. He said when the teachers give other learners class work they always tell them that they forgot to prepare something for them and so they sit in class with nothing to do.

Quite often when other learners write class tests, the learners with visual impairment are told that they will write later and by the time they write other learners would have already got their test scripts back and revision was done in class; that does not benefit them much. One learner has observed that even if they do write in time, usually the teachers would mark other learners' work and leave theirs to be marked at a later date or never. What the learners have revealed is in line with what Smith (2010:63) has observed and said that general education teachers frequently pay less attention to students with disabilities in their classrooms.

The learners said they get punished for not submitting their homework even though they have done it but it is still with the braillist who is overwhelmed with work. They have to personally give their work to the braillist and it takes time before it is transcribed. The teachers know about this but they are not helping in anyway. One

of the learners alleged*"even if we ask if we could read out what we have written, teachers would refuse saying they are not sure if what we are saying is what we have written. Senior school is a problem".* This was supported by another learner who mentioned that *"sometimes other students would have been punished for not submitting so we would also be punished so that it does not look like we are being favoured even though our situations are different".*Some teachers even go to the extent of telling them that they are lazy and taking advantage of their condition which hurts the learners.However, the learners indicated that there are some teachers who are really helpful like their Setswana teacher who personally takes their work to the braillist and ensures that it is transcribed in time. The teacher always gives them their work in time.

ii) Sighted learners

The learners experienced prejudice from other learners when they started senior school. One learner recalled that one of the sighted learners had said *"these blind people are increasing, just look at them. If they happen to bump into me I'm going to hit them".* Other learners do not want to befriend them because they are "blind" so most of the times they befriend each other as learners with visual impairment. However, the learners indicated that there are some "normal" learners who treat them well and are very helpful and understanding. Most of these learners are those that attended the same primary or junior secondary with them. This is in line with what Hugher (2011:7) and McPherson and Welch (2012: 74) found out that when different groups of people interact, prejudice and negative attitude may lessen. This could mean that awareness is a factor in understanding and acceptance of learners with visual impairment by other learners in mainstream schools.

Some of the learners in the school, more especially those that do not have visually impaired classmates are scared of visually impaired learners in the school. Some learners recalled a time when *"one of them fell into a trench"* trying to run away from

him. They said some of the learners without visual impairment tend to pity them a lot and think they are not capable of looking after themselves and that makes them very uncomfortable. All the learners said the sighted learners even get frustrated when the learners with visual impairment score higher marks and give comments such as "how *can a blind person perform better than me. I must have been cheated"..* The learners said that they never used to hear such comments in their former schools. The comments make the learners with visual impairment more determined to prove to the other learners that disability is not inability.

Theme 2: Negative Attitude

Many of the problems that learners with visual impairment experience in the school are not caused by the disability per se but by the negative attitude of their sighted peers and the teachers. Learners with visual impairment in this study have had their share of negative experiences in mainstream schools and this generally makes the learners unhappy. Their negative experiences with the school include academic problems and social hardships. According to Beard and John (2002:135) "negative learning experiences significantly affect our outlook on life, how we interact with others and with our own experiences, and even the extent to which we are to venture into new learning experiences". As a consequence, negative experiences of learners with visual impairment can inhibit their future learning.

Category (a): Lack of support from teachers and learners

i) Teachers

According to the learners most teachers are not ready to help them accordingly. It seems that the teachers do not understand that teaching learners with visual impairment demands that you go an extra mile to help the learners. Most learners expressed that the teachers never suggest strategies for them to learn better. They feel that "*since some of the teachers are trained in special education they could give*

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us tips on how to learn better regardless of the disability". The learners were unanimous in their concern that teachers never spend any time with them outside teaching time, just to encourage and support them emotionally by asking them how they are doing or ask what they think can be done to help them to do well in school.

The learners said the teachers never give them any opportunities to express themselves. One learner lamented that some teachers do not allow them to manipulate objects *"or at least bring some presentations of the objects to class for us to manipulate. They always tell us that these things are expensive we cannot afford to break them".* The learners also said the teachers hardly ever prepare materials so that they can be brailled or large printed for them but instead they share educational material of the sighted learners. They also showed a concern that teachers never encourage sighted learners to help. One learner said *"they just leave us to struggle and beg for ourselves. That really makes us feel inferior".*

Their test scripts often go missing in the workroom because there are piles of work awaiting transcription. The few times that they manage to get their work back, it is usually after a very long time. One learner said their work can take up to about two weeks before it is transcribed and teachers just do not care. The form 5 learners said ever since they came to the school they have never got their Commerce scripts back after submitting them for transcription and marking so they always have an X for the Commerce tests and exams and it really discourages them.

Learners have also indicated that teachers never give them a talking calculator for Maths tests and exams. The form 4s said they only hear that there are such calculators but they have never used them. According to the learners the problem with talking calculators has been there since junior school. The form5s confirmed that the calculators are there in the school and some of them have had the

opportunity to use them but the problem is they usually power off in the middle of the test or exam because they have not been adequately charged. The calculators are kept in the senior teacher's office and can only be availed to them if their subjects' teachers have signed for them but this hardly ever happens. One of the learners expressed his concern by saying *"we cannot take them and use them as other learners often carry their calculators and use them whenever they want. Teachers always have excuses not to give them to us"*. This is a concern because according to the learners, they are going to use the calculators in the final examination and they are worried that they are not going to be able to use them properly since they are not familiar with them and those who have used them before, do not have enough practice. The reason why the learners cannot use the calculators is because they are not accessible to them. The calculators are in short supply and are kept in the senior teacher's office. This might lead to the learners' poor performance in tasks that require the use of the calculators. Poor performance might in turn negatively impact on the learners' sense of self-worth. It may also affect the learners' future aspirations because educational success is important in getting a job.

The school has a View Plus Machine (machine for drawing pictures and diagrams for learners with visual impairment) that is kept in the production room.The learners cannot freely access the machine but the teachers can. Usually the machine is used by the braillist to draw diagrams and pictures for the teachers. However, learners with visual impairment are always given notes that do not have pictures or diagrams while others learners' notes have them. Both the form 4s and form 5s have revealed that they only come across pictures and diagrams during tests and exams.

This is a challenge to the learners because it is difficult to understand the diagrams and pictures when they have never come across them before. The learners unanimously agreed that theyhave had this problem since junior secondary. One learner said *"what we don't understand is why the diagrams are missing in class*

work but are always there in tests because the same machine that is used to draw them for test should be used for class work". Another learner confirmed this by saying*"teachers always tell us that the photocopying machine is not working. We never get any diagrams except during tests"*

ii) Learners

When teachers give homework to their classes, they do not make any attempt to ensure that the learners with visual impairment understand what is to be done or at least ask the other learners to explain to them. The learners with visual impairment have to plead with their sighted classmates to help them at their own time and the sighted learners are not always willing to help. One learner lamented that the other learners help them *"only if they are in a good mood for that day".* Although most learners are not always willing to help, there are those who do want to help their visually impaired classmate but the problem is they do not know how to help them because they are not teachers and they are under a lot of pressure having to attend to their own work and help them at the same time. One learner alluded that sometimes the other learners *"run away and hide because they get tired"* of helping them and are under pressure. They also get impatient with them because they do not really understand how learners with visual impairment learn.

One learner who is partially sighted constantly experiences a situation whereby his classmates always wait for him to come and fetch a desk and chair for their totally blind classmate. Even if he is late for class the other learners will take their seats and ignore the totally blind learner instead of helping him. This is not fair to him because he wastes a lot of time looking for his chair and table and then has to go again and look for another chair and table while the classmates are just watching. He believes that the other learners think that because he is visually impaired, he has to look after the other visually impaired learner.

Category (b): Anxiety about perceived hazards

i)   Learning areas

The learners are not comfortable with Science subjects particularly Chemistry. They expressed their fear of the subject. One learner explained that they are scared because they think that the chemicals might explode on them. Consequently the learners take the back seat during Chemistry lessons and they end up not performing well in the subject. The other subject that they are not allowed to take is Design and Technology. They expressed that they are scared of the subject and believe it is too dangerous for them and therefore it is safer not to do it. Some of the learners indicated that they like the subject but cannot do it because they are not well catered for and as such, doing the subject can be dangerous for them. As a matter of fact, all learners with visual impairment in the school are not allowed to take Design and Technology and that defeats the essence of inclusion because inclusion is about changing the situation to meet the needs of the learners not vice versa.

ii)   Sport

Some of the learners are scared of going to the playground because they are scared of being hit by objects like shot-put, javelin, football and softball. They say they like sporting activities even though they cannot see properly because at least going to the grounds will give them the opportunity to interact with other learners. Learners said if there was a safer place from which they could watch they would go to the grounds and watch sport or even join the ones they like best but they cannot because "*as it is, sports are for sighted people only,*" said one of the learners. Most of them believe that if the ball hits them other learners will laugh at them like they sometimes do when they bump onto things. Extra-curricular activities encourage social integration and if the learners are left out they may become isolated and keep the company of other visually impaired learners, which does not benefit them much because they have to learn things that the mainstream population do. This is supported by Huger (2011:2)

by stating that "individuals need actual contact with those different from them to reap the benefits of reduced prejudice".

The physical environment of the school is not conducive for learners with visual impairment. It poses a danger to them because all trenches in the school are not covered. The learners said there are trenches all over and none of them are covered. Consequently, they have fallen into the trenches many times and it is really dangerous for them. They said if the trenches were covered like the ones they have seen somewhere, the school will be a lot safer for them. They also said that sometimes when there is construction taking place in the school, they just hear from other learners after they have bumped into objects and hurt themselves.

Theme 3: Curriculum

Access to the curriculum can be a major challenge to learners with visual impairment. Often simple adaptations can change the learning experience and make the classroom amore inclusive environment. The curriculum has not been modified to suit them. In most cases they are the ones who have to adjust to meet the demands of the curriculum and that is a challenge to them. It became clear from the interview that Botswana does not have an adapted curriculum for learners with visual impairment.

Category (a): Syllabi

The learners complained that since the course content is pre-specified in a certain order, some teachers follow the syllabi the way it is and forget to make necessary accommodations for them. They are mainly concerned about the length of time that they should spend on topics saying that sometimes it is too short for them. Despite this, the learners said they *"understand because we know that teachers want us to*

complete the syllabus before starting the exams". The learners are also concerned about topics of some subjects citing Geography, Mathematics and mostly the Sciences because of the nature of the subjects. The say that such subject have topics that include a lot of diagrams and drawings but they cannot draw or plot the graphs with a Perkins brailler so it becomes hard for them to learn as much as other learners. Even the diagrams that they sometimes get from the teachers are not clear enough for them to understand. The learners have said they mostly prefer humanities subjects as they are based on descriptions not experiments like the Science subjects.

Category (b): Choice of optional subjects

According to the learners they have a hard time choosing the optional subjects. This is because some subjects are class options while others are personal options. Sometimes the classes that they have been placed in have optional subjects that they personally do not want to take but do not have any other choice. Some subjects are compulsory to some classes so if they are placed in that class they just have to do the subject even if it is not preferable for them.

The learners raised a concern to the fact that they have been told that they cannot do certain subjects even if they want to. Those subjects are: Accounting, Home Economics, Design and Technology and Computer Studies. The learners find this a challenge because some of them have future aspirations that require skills from such subjects. For example, one of the learners aspires to be a businessman but cannot do Computer Studies or Accounting. He also said he wanted to do Commerce but found out that Senior School only offers Business Studies and he is not happy about that because he did Commerce at Junior School and wanted to continue with it. If the learners were well catered for, they would do any subject like all other learners.

The learners are fully aware of their limitations that is why they try to avoid subjects that may be unsuitable for them. They however acknowledge the fact that they still have to do the subjects they do not like. One of the things that influences the way they feel about subjects is performance. It is normal for learners, even those without disabilities, to like subjects that they perform well in. Teacher competency or incompetency can also affect the way learners feel about a subject like they do with Setswana and Mathematics. Even with visual impairment most of these learners still have faith in themselves and believe that they can go far. They want to pursue their dreams and this is demonstrated by their choice of subjects.

Category (c): Adaptations and modifications

Learners are experiencing problems with adaptations in teaching strategies. The learners said that there is not much as far as adaptations are concerned. The teachers hardly ever give them any diagrams, pictures or drawings in their class notes but they expect them to learn as much as other learners in the school. They are not comfortable with the types of questions that they get in their test. For example, questions which ask them to draw something or those that ask them to answer questions based on a drawing of some kind. One learner recalled a time when they were asked a question that was based on colour and said. "*I wondered how we are supposed to feel out the colour and answer the question*". They think that teachers do not consider them when they set tests because it has happened in many occasions that when they bring a question that they cannot doto a teacher's attention, instead of the question being modified to suit them, they are simply told to skip the question.

The learners said the periodic table that is in the print text book is different from the one that they have and that confuses them because what the teacher says in class is different from what they have in Braille. One learner is surprised that "*the periodic table in print is different from that one in Braille. I don't understand how come they*

are different". The difference in the periodic tables gives them a hard time because what the teacher tells them in class is different from what they can feel out when they revise and that confuses them. The learners who are partially sighted confirmed the allegation that the periodic tables are different because they can see the one in print even though it is not clear enough. They have a hard time answering questions from the periodic table because they do not know whether to base the answers on the braille or print periodic table.

There is one learner whodoes not know Braille so he uses a tape recorder. For tests teachers read the questions out to him and he says out the answers, and then the answers are written down. The learner said there are times when he failed to write the test because there was no one to read for him and he felt that if his test was tape recorded he could also tape record the answers for marking but that provision is never made. He is also very uncomfortable with saying out the answers to teachers because sometimes he wonders what the person is thinking if the answers are wrong. He gets embarrassed and wishes he could do his work alone like other learners.

Even the learners with low vision wish they did not have to go to the production room for CCTV each time they have to write a test. They wish the teachers could bring their test in large print to class. The learners are concerned because of the time they waste travelling from their classrooms to the production room and back. They say sometimes they do not finish the test in the available time because of the time wasted in moving between rooms. Another concern is that sometime the next lesson starts when they are still at the production room and the teacher just continues in their absence. They wish they could have a different schedule for tests so that they can do their work diligently without time pressures. However, they said that the situation is different in final examinations as they are always given extra time.

Theyappreciate the effort of other teachers who allows them to write tests during lunch time or study period as that does not interfere with classes.

The learners have expressed that some subjects are a challenges for them because of what needs to be done in those subjects. They cited Agriculture, Science subject and Literature. In Agriculture, they are supposed to make plots but that is one task that is too difficult for them. They say they cannot make proper plots. Even if the other learners help them with the making of plots, the general care of the plot poses another challenge. One learner recalled an incident whereby he removed all the seedlings when they were very small thinking they were weeds because all he could see was the green colour. Learners wish that adaptations and modifications could be made so that they do not have to make plots like all other learners but instead do something more suited to their condition.

Category (d): The physical environment

The learners have to change classes every now and then. Some of the classes that they use are not really suitable for them because the lights are broken and there is not enough light in them so those with low vision really struggle to see things, unlike in their base room where there is enough light. Even in the storeroom where they keep their study material the lights are broken. The learners said that nobody takes care of the storeroom and the tables and chairs in that room are usually not well arranged. When they go there to get their study materials they sometimes bump into the furniture. The learners said they would appreciate it if there could be someone who arranges the storeroom for them so that they know where to find their books.

Another concern of the learners is the distance between their classrooms and the production and work room. They have to travel to the production room after almost every lesson if they are given homework or class work for it to be transcribed. One

learner said *"in a day we travel along distance because we always have to go to get our material from the brailist. Sometimes when we get there we find that it is not ready and we have to check again later. We can go to the production room about 5 times for one thing and it is still not there".*

All the learners except one live in the hostels. The problem is that some of the dormitories are upstairs and it is not safe for them to be going up and down the stairs all the time. They share the dormitories with other learners who are not visually impaired and they tend to steal their stuff. The learners would prefer it if they had their own dormitories down stairs, and did not have to share with other learners because sometimes they want to study at night when the lights have gone off, but then the other learners complain that the noise from the braille machine is disturbing them.

Theme 4: Resources

There are generally not enough resources in the school for use by learners with visual impairment. The resources that are in short supply include the equipment that they and the support staff use. Without these necessary resources it becomes very difficult for the learners with visual impairment to learn as successfully as other learners in the school.

Category (a): Special education equipment

The following equipment is either in serious short supply or in a bad state: CCTV, Perkin braillers, tape recorders and computers.The learners said there are only three CCTV's for all of those who have low vision. Sometimes they cannot write test in time as they have to take turns using the CCTV's, especially if both streams are writing. Even where the CCTV's are kept, that is in the production room, there are

not enough tables and chairs so each time they have to write a test they have to bring chairs to the production room which is also used as a workroom by some special education teacher. They said that makes them uncomfortable.

Learners are faced with a situation whereby they have to use the Perkinsbraillers that are not in good condition. The machines are constantly broken. Both form4 and form 5 agreed that the machines that they use are very bad and they struggle to Braille properly with them. They always report to their teachers but they have been told that there are no trained technicians to repair the braillers. Another problem with the Braille machine is that it cannot perform some functions, like for example, draw diagrams or plot a graph. The learners feel that the machines should be replaced with something more user friendly.

The only learner in the school who uses a tape recorder said he is not happy because it is only one and sometimes when it has a problem he has to go without anything to use. This means that he cannot revisit what was taught in class at that time. The other learners indicated that they also need to have tape recorders because brailing takes time and sometimes they miss what the teacher was saying. Besides, they said the noise from the machine disturbs other learners in class. The learners said that they have asked for the tape recorders but have been told that there are not enough.

Learners said they need to use computers with JAWS but there are not enough computers in the school. The only one that has the software is in the workroom and it is used by the braillistand some teachers; so even though they have been told that they can use it, they never get the opportunity to do so. The only time they can use it is after school but then the room is locked when the braillist knocks off. There are

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some computers in the computer lab but those can only be used by learners without visual impairment as they do not have any software for visual impairment.

The learners said they have only heard about talking watches but have never seen them. Talking watches are necessary for the learners more especially when they write tests and exams. The learners complained that they always have to wait to be told the time and sometimes the invigilator would say the wrong time but they would not know since they cannot see the wall time. According to the learners the invigilators sometimes take long to announce the time and so they would be under pressure not knowing whether they will be able to finish in time or not.

According to the learners they cannot participate in ball sports because there is no suitable equipment for them. They only part-take in indoor games like chess. They also joined school clubs like the traditional dance group and the scripture union. One learner said he particularly likes table tennis but cannot play the sport because of his poor sight. Others said they like soccer but they never got the opportunity to play because the balls are dull in colour and if they have to play it would be with the rest of the learners because they are no playing grounds for them. Playing with the other learners is not very safe for them as they have low vision or total blindness.

Category (b): Support staff

i)   Braillist

The school has only one braillist to cater for all the learners and the teachers. The learners' big challenge is the transcription of materials. The learners said the braillist has to transcribe work from the teachers from print to Braille for them. She also has to transcribe what they have written from Braille to print for the teachers to mark. According to the learners the braillist transcribes their work manually by writing in

pencil on top of what they have brailed and it is a lot of work for her. One learner said *"that is a problem because there is only one braillist and we are too many. That puts her under pressure and in turn it also puts us under pressure because sometimes we are given homework that we have to submit the next day"*.

The learners said that despite the fact that there is only one braillist they are not allowed to submit work that is not transcribed so they have to find ways to get their work transcribed. To confirm this, one learner said *"we plan our own transcription with the help of other learners so that we can submit in time. We read out to them what we have written and they write for us. It is hectic because sometimes they are reluctant to help us but we do not have much of a choice"*.

ii)   Teacher aid

Concerning the teacher assistant, the learners said there is only one teacher assistant in the school. They are concerned that the teacher assistant only comes to class with the teacher who is visually impaired and never accompanies other teachers. They also said that she only helps them during class and does not help them with anything else. One learner wondered what is the role of the teacher assistant because according to him he thought *"the teacher assistant is supposed to help us with some work that the teacher could not help us with during class, for example, read out assignments for us, instead of us having to bother other learners all the time by asking them to read out assignments for us."*. The learners are of the opinion that the school need one or two more teacher assistants in order for them to be helped effectively and efficiently.

Category (c): Learning and teaching materials

The learners said the learning and teaching material is only based on learners without visual impairment. They are mostly concerned about text books. The learners said there are no brailed text books. This is a challenge because whenever they have to do school work they have to rely on other learners to read what is in the text book for them. As a result, they are poor in spelling because when they write in braille they use contractions. One learner explained: *"most of us have spelling problems due to the use of contractions when you make a mistake in spelling and keep on reading the same mistake from your notes you tend to think that it is the correct spelling but if you had the opportunity to read the correct word from a book you would realize that you had the wrong spelling all along we hear that there are talking dictionaries but we have never come across them even at junior or primary school. They could help us with our spelling problems"*.

The learners also said they are no brailed novels but they all do Setswana Literature. The ones that are available in the production room are very few and out of syllabus so they do not help much. They said the Central Resource Centre quite often bring brailed books when they are already out of syllabus. Learners believe that the reading of novels (both Setswana and English) could enhance their vocabulary and spelling, more especially for English, but reading is a challenge to them because they cannot read print. Spelling problems are exacerbated by the fact that teachers are not very helpful so as usual they get help from other learners. Most of the learners revealed that they cannot spell even simple words like "temperature" and that the sighted learners get surprised when they ask them to spell the words for them *"which is a little embarrassing"*.

According to the learners, the teaching materials are also based on the learners without impairment. The teachers always promise to bring something for them but to no avail. For example, in Geography they can bring a globe to show continents of

the world but this will only be for the sighted learners as the learners with visual impairment cannot see what is on the globe. Those with low vision said with them it is better because they can struggle and try to see what is there even though it is not clear but at least they can have a rough idea. Those who face a real problem are those who are totally blind because they mostly use tactile means to learn.

5.3.2 FINDINGS FROM TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

At this point, the results of the teacher questionnaires are discussed. The table below is a summary of themes and categories obtained from the questionnaires that was answered by the teachers. A discussion follows.

Table 5.2: Themes and categories obtained from teachers

Theme	Category
1. Classroom needs for learners with visual impairment	a)Effective classroom accommodations b)Placement within the classroom c)Teaching specific skills
2. Support to learners with visual impairment	a)Resources b)Parental involvement
3. Learner performance	a)Large classes b) Special education equipment

*From here forth, the teachers will be referred to as T1-T7

Theme 1: Classroom needs for learners with visual impairment

Learners with visual impairment struggle with a wide variety of challenges in a mainstream setting. While these learners can hear instructions and follow class discussions, they might easily miss material that is visually presented. According to the teachers, there are classroom needs for learners with visual impairment that are a challenge to both the learners and the teachers. These needs include effective classroom accommodations, lack of teacher aid, placement within the class and teaching of specific skills.

Category (a): Effective classroom accommodations

The teachers identified a number of challenging issues with regard to accommodation of learners with visual impairment in their classes. They said sometimes they find it hard to modify instructions without changing or reducing the content. T2 said *"it is hard to reduce the total amount of work for them and still remain with the items that are needed"*. Sometimes the learners find it hard to understand what the teacher is trying to put across because of the modifications.

Learners with visual impairment need extra time to perform some of the tasks. The teachers said sometimes it is hard for them to provide that extra time because they have to attend another lesson. T3 gave an example of class assignments. She said time is never enough to allow step by step instruction or explanation for the learners with visual impairment so more often they just give the assignment and expect the learners with visual impairment to ask for help from other learners at their own time. She realizes that this is not fair to the learners.

The use of real-life materials is the most effective way of teaching the students but the teachers said they find it hard to have such materials in order to bring them to

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class for the learners. The reason why they cannot bring real life material to class is because it is unavailable so mostly they describe the objects for the learners. The teachers expressed a concern that even the models of objects are hard to get form the school. Teachers believe that if learners could "feel out" what they are talking about, they could understand better as compared to just imagining it.

The teachers indicated that the school has only one teacher assistant. The teacher assistant mostly helps teachers with visual impairment so she is hardly ever available to help the learners during class.T1 *"the teacher aid is usually too busy to help us in class. If she was available she could help with reading out the assignments to the learners with visual impairment as we continue with the normal ones".*

All the teachers indicated that despite these challenges, they support the learnersas much as possible. Their answers point out that they practice differentiation and help learners on individual bases. They say that they explain everything to them and make sure that they are fully involved. Here are some of their responses:

T1: Cater for them. Modification. Explain concepts on one to one basis.

T2: Increased contact, separate preparation. Demonstrate in class using different objects like chairs, desks, other students, etc.

T7: Creating sufficient working space and giving them more time to work as well as more assistance.

What the teachers wrote is ideal and it contradicts what most learners say. Learners have indicated that they mostly rely on their sighted classmates for help. None of the teachers said anything about encouraging the classmate to help the other learners. They give the impression that they do all the work by themselves. Learners also

pointed out that teacher seem to forget about them and concentrate on the "normal" ones.

Category (b) Placement within the classroom

T6 has a problem of a learner with visual impairment who does not like to sit in front because his friend sits at the back and he helps him whenever he needs help in class. The teacher said she finds it hard to force him to come to the front because of the reasons he advances. Sometimes learners without visual impairment decide to sit in front during lessons because *"it is noisy at the back."* When this happens, even the learners with visual impairment who want to sit in front cannot do so because they cannot all sit in the front row otherwise there will be no space to move about and they will bump into chairs and desks.

Sometimes when learners change classes, the furniture in the other room is not enough and they have to fetch it from other classes. The learners that arrive first in class sit at the preferred places and sometimes this is in front. When this happens, learners with visual impairment have to sit in the middle of the class where they cannot see the chalkboard very well. The teachers cannot tell the learners to change seat as they can disrupt the class and waste a lot of time.

Category (c) Teaching of specific skills

Most teachers are comfortable with areas that require them to explain and describe to the learners but experience difficulties with areas that require sight like reading and demonstrations like during practical. T1 cited *"grammar does not have long comprehensions and does not make them struggle"*. Language teachers are not comfortable with literature as it requires a lot of reading on the part of the learner.

However, there are teachers who indicated that they are fine with teaching anything in their subject areas. T2 says *"I can handle anything because I'm trained".*

This information from the questionnaire corresponds with what the learners said about novels and practical. Activities that require sight is a burden to the learners and is made worse by lack of resources. Teachers, just like the learners are not comfortable teaching learners with visual impairment practical and literature because of unsuitable learning and teaching materials.

Theme 3: Support to learners with visual impairment

Teachers have indicated that there is little support in terms of resources and parental involvement.

Category (a): Resources

There is no way learners with visual impairment can be included if there are no resources. In this case, it seems like the learners have been damped into a school with very scanty resources. All the teachers except one said they have problems with a lack of resources. Among the resources, the teachers said there is scarcity of funds to procure needed equipment and hire trained personnel like braillists. The teachers believe that if the school could have a good share in the government budget, it would be easy to procure the material they need.

The challenges range from shortage of skilled personnel to equipment. For example, T1 wrote *"lack of resources, e.g. brailled books"*. And T2 wrote *"lack of resources and skilled manpower".* The personnel most teachers refer to is the braillist. T6 wrote *"having to wait for the braillist to transcribe the material is a challenge because*

whenever one gives learners a class exercise, he/she cannot do the same for those with visual impairment".

This challenge is similar for both teachers and learners. Surprisingly, even the teachers who are trained in visual impairment also complain about transcription of scripts and class exercises when they should be transcribing for themselves, or using alternative means to help the learners if the braillist cannot transcribe for them. Instead they choose to let learners go without work or hassle for themselves. This is what causes some of the problems that learners have, like spelling mistakes, because they end up getting help from other learners. The classmates who help learners with visual impairment find themselves with an extra "burden" because they also have school-work to do, moreover, they are not professionals to be allowed to handle other learners. I think this is negligence of duty on the side of the teachers. It is not fair to blame everything on the lack of resources when they could do a lot to improve the situation.

Category (b) Parental involvement

Almost all learners with visual impairment in the school live in the hostels and only go home during school vacations and long public holidays. As a result, the parents are not really involved in their education. The teachers said that the parents get to know about their children's performance at the end of term when they come to collect their report. Other parents never come at all because the learners come from far away villages. One teacher feels that the learners are "too used" to them so much that even when they talk to them they just do not listen and it could have been better if the parents were always around to help the teachers by encouraging and motivating the learners to learn and do well.

One teacher feels that the learners' parents should be involved in the choosing of the subjects children with visual impairment take in school. The teacher (T4) opined

"I think students and parents should be involved in choosing the subjects they wish to do. I don't think it is fair enough for a student to do science subject when he/she cannot make sense out of them. Therefore they must be given a chance to choose subjects for themselves".

Parents' involvement, even for regular learners, is important but it may pose a problem when the parents and the learners' career interests are different. Moreover, some parents may not be educated and therefore not be very conversant with the contents of the subjects. What could probably work would be an awareness workshop that specifically deals with career opportunities to make the learners aware of what is in the market for them.

Theme 3: Learner performance

Poor learner performance usually reflects on the teacher. If learners do not do well people may conclude that the teacher did not do a proper job though this is not always true. This may tarnish the image of the teacher and hinder his/her progress and career opportunities. T4 believe that the performance of learners with visual impairment is generally poor. He said; *"according to my own observation, the performance of the learners with visual impairment is not good especially in Mathematics and Science".* Teachers attribute a number of factors to the learners' poor performance. Those are: large classes, lack of parental involvement and lack of specialised equipment. Teachers also indicated that learners struggle with concepts in the science subjects especially Physics and Chemistry. This was verified by the learners by alluding that it was difficult for them to do Pure Sciences because of the experiments involved.

Category (a): Large classes

According to the teachers, there are about 35 learners per class and the number is large considering that the classes have learners with visual impairment whom, they

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said, need a lot of attention form the teachers. For example T5 said "*smaller classes could afford us more time that can be given to individual students*". She also feels that if the learners were fewer in class, teachers could give learners feedback in time after writing tests and exams since there would be less scripts to mark. With the large classes that they are teaching, it is difficult to give the learners individual attention in areas where they experience difficulties, which they said can go a long way in helping the learners to perform better. The teachers are convinced that the quality of education is affected by class size.

Category (b): Special education equipment

The teachers pointed out that there is little specialized equipment for the learners to use which affects the teaching and learning process. For example T6 suggests that "*if there could be enough funds better equipment like computers, software and note taking devices could be bought*". The little equipment that is available is mostly out-dated and therefore does not offer much help. However one teacher (T5) is happy with the amount of equipment that is available. The teacher points out that there are brailed bibles for Religious Education so there is not much that is needed for the subject. The teacher asserts that she does the transcriptions for her learners and she is fine with whatever equipment is available.

The information correlates with what has been mentioned by the learners. Specialized equipment can help the learners to be self–reliant and not rely much on the help of other learners. Relying on the help of other learners may affect the performance of both learners, with and without visual impairment, negatively.

According to Plotnik and Kauyoudjian (2009:393) children develop resilience by watching resilient adults and peers. It goes without saying that high expectation teachers do not make their learners less important. Even though teachers say they treat

all learners the same, learners with visual impairment do not feel that way. This is evident in their displeasure about being given feedback after other classmates got theirs or teachers coming to class without having prepared anything for them. Findings suggest that efforts need to be directed at improving teacher attitudes towards learners with visual impairment in the school. Throughout the research the learners describe teachers as making them feel inadequate and not relating well with them.

The rationale for employing the strength based approach is the assumption that many teachers' attitudes towards teaching learners with visual impairment in mainstream classes play a critical role in predicting educational outcomes for those learners.Teachers should refrain from judging and labeling but understanding that the learners are doing their best out of a very unfavorable situation.Teachers should help the learners not to internalize the adversity in their lives and try to use the learners' strengths as the beginning point of learning, thereby tapping the learners' intrinsic motivation for learning. Teachers can convey loving support to the learners by listening to them, validating their feelings and demonstrating kindness, compassion and respect.

Resilient students are an outcome of a resilient school climate (Krovertz 2008:109) but the findingsfrom this study show that the school climate in Molefhi Secondary School is far from being a resilient one as teachers themselves seem disgruntled.Teachers protest about lack of resources and support from the powers that be. Administrators need to create a school environment that supports teachers' resilience as well. The teachers can then be able to focus on the strengths of the learners as well as assist them accordingly. They can specially empower seemly overwhelmed learners to use their personal power to transform from being victim to survivor. Teachers' high expectation can structure, guide and challenge the learners beyond what they believe they can do.Schools build resiliency in learners through creating an environment of caring and personal relationships. The foundation of this relationship begins with educators who have a resiliency building attitude.

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5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the final aim is to give the recommendations to the educators and the learners on how to surmount the challenges experienced by learners with visual impairment in Botswana mainstream schools. Following is a set of recommendations:

o To cope with the increasing number of learners with visual impairment in classes, the MoESD should train more teachers in special education so that learners with visual impairment do not have to be confined to a few classes. If more teachers are trained more schools may be able to admit learners with visual impairment; unlike the current situation whereby they are confined to a few schools with few teachers qualified in special education.

o Better instructional methods like individualized instruction are easier in an encouraging environment. More classes should be built in the school in order to reduce the number of learners per class and allow teachers to give individualized instruction.

o Teachers with a special education qualification should be motivated with good career opportunities and remuneration so that they stay in the teaching profession rather than look for greener pastures elsewhere, or go to schools that do not have learners with disabilities in order to get a promotion.

o Learners with visual impairment are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to working with printed material. As learners progress to upper grades, the demand of reading increases. Reading material should therefore be

supplemented with speech to increase access to information not only to compensate for depressed reading rates, but also because braille and large print materials have not always been available when needed.

o The Division of Special Education should be upgraded to a Department in order for it to be autonomous in decision making. That could broaden its scope and hence have more impact on its service delivery. The expectation here is that if it functions as a Department, it will have an independent and sufficient budget to allow it to procure necessary material and equipment for learners with disabilities. It may also be able to procure the needed human resource like braillists and teacher aids which could promote the learners' academic well-being and give them a sense of worth.

o To make learners with visual impairment feel part of the group, it is important that they spend time with their sighted peers. The use of cooperative learning and group assignments may lead to spend time with the peers. This will give them ample opportunities to display their strengths.

o Tests should be modified to make them accessible to learners with visual impairment. All these modifications should be considered keeping in mind the individual needs of the learners with visual impairment since they are not a homogeneous group.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study was to identify the challenges experienced by learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools in Botswana. The challenges that are experienced by the teachers were also investigated because they eventually affect the learners. To achieve this aim literature was reviewed, two group interviews were held with visually impaired learners of MolefhiSeniorSecondary School and a questionnaire was distributed to their teachers. This chapter has presented and analyzed the data gathered. The interpretation and analyses was carried in two sections. A cross analysis of the results from the interviews with the learners and questionnaires answered by teachers was conducted to test out the degree of correlation among them. Whilst there are some consistent responses across the sections, differences have also emerged which have been explored and discussed. From the information gathered from the data sources, it became apparent that learners with visual impairment are experiencing a set of challenges in Botswana mainstream schools.

The challenges experienced emanate from the implementation of the policies that are in place. The policies are only on paper but in practice the policies are almost impossible to realize. Other challenges that the learners are experiencing are due to the visual impairment. The challenges that come about as a result of the impairment could be alleviated by the use of special equipment relevant to the education of learners with visual impairment. However, this is not happening because the school is poorly resourced. Consequently, the learners struggle to "fit" in the school and therefore they do not perform to the best of their potential. The teachers are frustrated by the situations under which they have to teach the learners but here are no suitable teaching and learning materials to help them perform their duty diligently. The teachers are concerned about the needs of the learners with visual impairment which cannot be met with inadequate equipment and no support. It was found that

the school has some specialized equipment but it is not sufficient to support the needs of all the learners with visual impairment in the school.

Finally, the findings revealed that that the physical environment is not well laid to accommodate learners with visual impairment in the school. Consequently, the learners' movement in the school premises is limited as they are scared that they might get injured. Mainstreaming learners with visual impairment means that the learners are provided with the resources like suitable infrastructure not just being "dumped" in mainstream schools and be left to fend for themselves.

The findings tie with the theoretical perspective of this study which is the Strength Based Approach. This is because that the data that was gathered indicate that the learners strengths are ignored, the focus is rather on what they cannot do. The emphasis of the disability that the learners have makes them to feel desperate and hopeless. The Strength Based Approach advocates that the learners' strong points should be strengthened and be utilized to their advantage.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though the objectives of this study have been achieved, some limitations of the study should be mentioned.

- On the day of interviews, the form 5s had gone for assessment in Gaborone so I had to make arrangements for another interview with them on a different date which impacted negatively on my resources (time and money).

- The study population was derived from the only Senior Secondary School in the country that enrolls learners with visual impairment. Probably more

relevant and rich information could have been acquired had the study been extended to the other three schools in the country (2 primary schools and 1 junior secondary school) that have learners with visual impairment.

- The school management could not allow me to review the documents that I wanted to review, like school enrolment and learners progress reports.

- The learners were writing the tests at the time so I was conscious not to take too much of their time and stick to the agreed one hour. These limited my probing and follow up questions.

5.7 FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

Although insight into the phenomenon of the challenges in mainstreaming learners with visual impairment in Botswana is provided, transferability is not possible. This suggests that further research on a larger population is advisable. Another research possibility would be to include the views of learners without disabilities, parents and other educators. The researcher could also include other methods of data collection, like observation, to effectively compare the results.

5.8 FINAL REFLECTION

As I interviewed the learners, I realized that they have a lot of determination and are prepared to do what it takes for them to do well in the school. Although at some instances I could sense a lot of desperation, the learners are enthusiastic and have big dreams for the future. They have accepted their conditions and believe that it should not stop them from living a normal life. On the other hand, the response from the teachers showed a lot of despair because they feel that the government is not doing enough to support the education of the learners with visual impairment and that gives them a big burden; having to teach the learners with very little resources.

The research made me realize that mainstreaming of learners with visual impairment is not easy as it appears from the theoretical point of view. In my opinion, Botswana is still very far away from a point when we can even think of total inclusion. The government policy in this issue is unrealistic. Further research and evaluation is needed to subject special education in Botswana to scrutiny.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

24 February 2012

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION:

CHALLENGES IN MAINSTREAMING LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN BOTSWANA.

Dear Ms B Mareme

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence, is:

UFS-EDU-2012-0003

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension in writing.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise. At the conclusion of your research project, please submit a project report stating how the research progressed and confirming any changes to methodology or practice that arose during the project itself. This report should be under 500 words long and should contain only a brief summary focusing primarily on ethical considerations, issues that may have arisen and steps taken to deal with them during the course of the research. Upon receipt of this report, a final ethical clearance certificate will be issued to you, which will form part of your final dissertation.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Barclay
Faculty Ethics Officer
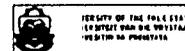
Appendix B

University of the Free State
Faculty of Education
P. O. Box 339
Bloemfontein
9300

21 May 2012

To whom it may concern

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST TO COLLECT DATA IN THE SCHOOL

This is to confirm that Miss Boitshoko Mareme is a Masters student at the University of the Free State, Faculty of Education in the Discipline Psychology of Education. One of the requirements of the qualification is the submission of a dissertation. To comply with the requirements she is conducting a research on: **Challenges in mainstreaming learners with usual impairment.**

Please give her the assistance she needs.

Thank you.

Yours

Dr Beyers
Supervisor

Appendix C

P.O. Box 202082
Gaborone
24 May 2012

The school Head
Molefhi Senior Secondary School
Private Bag 12
Mochudi

Dear Sir/ Madam

REQUEST TO COLLECT DATA IN THE SCHOOL

I am a student in the University of the Free State, Faculty of Education, Department of Psychology ofEducation, doing a Master's Degree. One of the requirements of the qualification is that I should submita dissertation. To comply with the requirements I am conducting a research on **CHALLENGES INMAINSTREAMING LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN BOTSWANA.**

This letter therefore comes as a request to collect data from your school.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely

Boitshoko Mareme

Appendix D

MOLEFI SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL
PRIVATE BAG 0012
MOCHUDI
BOTSWANA
SOUTHERN AFRICA
Telephone :(Headmaster):5748058 Switchboard:5777339
FAX:5777284

21/09/2012

TO: Ms B. Mareme
       P.O. Box 2082

Dear Madam,

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON CHALLENGES IN MAINSTREAMING LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIREMENT IN BOTSWANA

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 29th May 2012 in which you sought permission to conduct research in our school, on the topic above.

Permission is granted please observe the following:

- No interference with teaching time
- Information obtained, should be used for the sole purpose of the research.

Thank you.
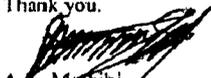
A.K. Morhibi
Deputy School Head

HEADMASTER
OR SEC. SCHOOL

1 SEP 2012

\G 12 MOCHUDI
77339 FAX: 5777284

Appendix E

My name is Boitshoko Mareme and I am a student at the University of the Free State, Faculty of Education, Department of Psychology. I am collecting data for my research project on: Challenges in mainstreaming learners with visual impairment and I would like to ask you for help by answering a few questions for me regarding the topic.

This research has been rev ewed and approved by the Faculty Ethical Board. These data will be strictly confidential and I will not record your name. Also, your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions you may find objectionable, and may withdraw from my study at any time, just by letting me know you would not like to continue any further.

CONSENT STATEMENT:

I have read the above comments and agree to participate in this survey. I give my permission to be videotaped under the terms outlined above.

_____ 29.05. 2012

(Participant's signature) (date)

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Appendix F

Nicola Bekker
General Language Practitioner
Algemene Taalpraktisyn

072 250 5835
nicolabekker@gmail.com

To Whom It May Concern:

I hereby acknowledge that I did the Language Editing of the dissertation "Challenges in Mainstreaming Learners with Visual Impairment in Botswana" as submitted by Boitshoko Mareme.

..........Bekker..............
N. Bekker

B.A. Language Practice - 2008

B.A. Hons. Language Studies (Linguistics) *cum laude* - 2009

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Appendix G: Interview Guide

I started by establishing rapport, explaining the purpose of the interview, laying ground rules and asking the learners to sign the consent form.

1. Are you happy in Molefhi school?
2. How many subjects are you doing?
3. Which subject is the most difficult? Why?
4. Which subject do you like best? Why?
5. Do you use any specialized equipment? Do you have any problems with this?
6. If yes, who assists you with the problem?
7. Who helps you with your work during and/or after lessons?
8. How do you relate with other learners in the school?
9. How do you relate with your teachers?
10. Have ever attended a special school? How was it like compared to here
11. What are the challenges that you experience in school? How do you deal with them?
12. Do you take part in any extracurricular activities? Which, and do you experience any problems when participating?
13. What improvements do you think should be made to improve your academic life?

Thank you!!!

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH TOPIC: CHALLENGES IN MAINSTREAMING LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN BOTSWANA MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

SCHOOL: MOLEFI SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

NAME OF REARCHER: BOITSHOKO MAREME

INSTRUCTIONS: PLEASE ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS IN THE SPACE PROVIDED. BE FREE TO GIVE AS MUCH INFORMATION AS YOU CAN

1. How many years have you been teaching in this school?

_____

2. What do you understand by the term inclusive education?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Do you feel that you are qualified to teach learners with visual impairment? Please elaborate on the type of training that you acquired.

_____

_____

_____

_____

4 Can you share some of the challenges that you experience in teaching learners with visual impairment.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. How do you think the challenges can be addressed?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. Are there any areas in your teaching area that you are not comfortable with teaching? If yes, which ones are they and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Do you have appropriate teaching and learning material? If not, what do you think should be done?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. What specialized equipment is available for the learners with visual impairment?

_____
_____

9. Can you describe the performance of learners with visual impairment in your classes?

_____
_____

10. What do you think of the social interactions between the learners with visual impairment and other learners in the school?

_____
_____
_____

12. How do you support the learners with visual impairment in your class?

13. Do you think the Ministry of Education and Skills development is doing enough to support the education of learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools? Support you answer.

_____
_____
_____

_____

_____

_____

14. What are your views about mainstreaming learners with visual impairment?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. What advice can you give about mainstreaming learners with visual impairment?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

16. Are there any subjects that learners with visual impairment are not taking? If yes, why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

17. When learners with visual impairment come to the school, what type of support is available to them?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your contribution!!!!!!!!