

**ENHANCING AN ENABLING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNERS WITH
VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN A RURAL LESOTHO SCHOOL**

By

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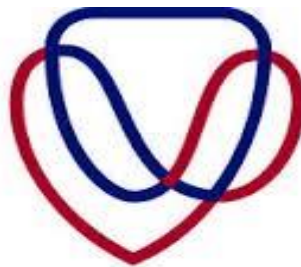
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Declaration

I, Mamochana Anacletha Ramatea, sincerely declare that this dissertation with a title: *“Enhancing an enabling learning environment for learners with visual impairment in a rural Lesotho school”*, submitted in fulfilment of the degree:

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY WITH SPECIALISATION IN PSYCHOLOGY OF
EDUCATION

Is originally and entirely my own work except where other sources have been acknowledged. I also confirm that this dissertation has not previously submitted for a degree purposes at any other university. I further declare that, all the references that I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

M Ramatea

Dedication

This study is a special dedication to my late mother, Matanki Ramatea a Mosotho woman who spent the rest of her life being blind due to sugar diabetes. All her challenges made me realise how important she was and helped me to gain an in-depth knowledge and skills of living with people with visual impairment.

The study is also dedicated to all people who live with visual impairment in my country, Lesotho, especially learners whose learning is conducted in rural schools. My encouragement to them is that they should know that to be visually impaired is not the end of life and does not mean incapacities. My passion for doing this research is to share the light in the lives of those whose eye conditions made them vulnerable, especially learners whose quality provision of education in rural schools of Lesotho appears to be associated with many problems.

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Abstract

Ideally, an enabling learning environment (hereafter, ELE) is more important if it reflects improvement in the learners' learning and their general wellbeing. School should be enabling environment that nurture the holistic development of learners. However, in rural communities in Lesotho, learners with visual impairments remain a bone of contention because the effects of poverty, poor infrastructure, lack of trained teachers and inconsistency in the implementation of inclusive policies and practices have increased. The majority of literature on visual impairment highlights its severe impact on learners' education as a global concern. Literature reports numerous challenges faced by Learners with Visual Impairment (LVIs), especially those in Lesotho rural schools. The right to education for all, including learners with visual impairments accentuates agency to enhance an enabling learning environment for learners with visual impairments in Lesotho. In particular, teachers are placed at the forefront and have significant roles to play to ensure that schools are enabling space for all the learners. In response to lack of research in this area, this doctoral study sets out to explore pathways that can enhance an enabling learning environment for learners with visual impairments in the rural school in Lesotho. This qualitative study was situated within the interpretive paradigm, guided by a participatory case study research design that facilitated generation of data with the participants. To respond to the key research questions of this study, the researcher employed two methods for generation of data, namely the online focus group discussions (OFGDs) and photovoice - a participatory visual art-based method (PVA). Data were generated with ten participants, involving both male and female teachers, and who were purposively and conveniently chosen, first because of their knowledge on the phenomenon under study, and secondly, based on their experience of more than three years of teaching within the Lesotho rural mainstream school that admits LVIs. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The findings in the current study revealed rural secondary school teachers' diverse understanding of an enabling learning environment (ELE) for LVIs. These are linked the value of the environment, learners' equal access to education, enabling learners' diverse needs, and capacities. The findings also show that the enhancement of ELE for LVIs in rural schools is constructed through a school-based collaborative support and

point to the importance of a school collective agency to enhance LVIs' learning environment. Furthermore, the findings revealed factors that enable and constrain the enhancement of ELE in rural school in Lesotho. Three themes that emerge as enablers indicate the importance of involving LVIs as agents with capability to influence their learning, enhanced interpersonal relationships, and resourceful materials to enhance ELE for LVIs in rural schools of Lesotho. However, ELE constraints include factors such existing poverty in rural schools, poor school infrastructure, to insufficient teaching and learning resources, ineffective inclusive education policy and ill perspectives on visual impairments in school and rural communities. The study concludes by suggesting that enhancing ELE for LVIs need a more nuanced understanding withing the rural context. Such understanding can facilitate more collaboration among rural schools about how to enhance ELE for LVIs. The researcher recommends for a meaningful collaboration of all the stakeholder, parents, teachers, learners, and government, public and private organisations. In addition, there is a growing need to consider the enhancement of ELE not from the perspective of the individual agent but emphasising collective agency to enhance schools in relation to learners' holistic development and growth. Notwithstanding its tensions, the researcher concludes that participatory arts-based methods can be a powerful to enable rural participants to identify their own agency, as well as reflecting on broader opportunities for a collective agency to enhance ELE, and therefore making inclusive education a reality for LVIs in Lesotho and beyond.

Key concepts

Enabling learning environment, inclusive education, participatory visual art-based method, rural schools in Lesotho, learners with visual impairment.

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Abbreviations

ACT	Agentic Capability Theory
CRPD	Conventions of the rights of persons with disabilities
EFA	Education for All
ELE	Enabling Learning Environment
IDEA	Individual Disability Education Act
IE	Inclusive Education
ISSET	Inclusive Special Education Theory
LIEP	Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy
LSEND	Learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
LVI	Learners with Visual Impairments
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
OFGDs	Online Focus Group Discussions
PVA	Participatory Visual Art-based method
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEU	Special Education Unit
VILs	Visually Impaired Learners
VI	Visual Impairments

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter presents the background to the study where the global, continental, and national literature, pertaining to children with visual impairments, is reviewed, highlighting the lacunae in the knowledge that the current study attempts to close. Other essential components of the thesis presented in this chapter are the problem statement, research objectives and key research questions, and the significance of the study. Overviews of the research design and, methodology, as well as the theoretical frameworks are presented in this chapter. Definitions of keys terms are also given, in order to understand their operationalization in this study. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis and provides a concise summary.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Globally, there is recognition of inclusive education; particularly developing countries are experiencing a growing number of learners with disabilities in mainstream education. The recognition stems from the global commitment of providing equal and quality basic education to all children (Landsberg & Kruger, 2011). The right to education is one of the fundamental human rights that are ensconced in almost every international declaration (UNESCO, 1990). International policy frameworks, such as Education for All of 1990 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015, placed the right to education as fundamental to all, including learners with visual impairments (Mosia, 2014). For example, SDG 4 aims to: *Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. This goal calls for building and upgrading education facilities that are non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments, with a view to specifically include learners with visual impairments. Furthermore, the

Conventions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2006, ensures that persons with disabilities receive quality education without any form of discrimination on the basis of equal opportunity (CRPD, 2006). For example, Article 14 –Education, mandates that State Parties should ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning (United Nations, 2006). This Article has five goals that incorporate different, but interrelated aspects of inclusive education. Specifically, goal two and three emphasise that State Parties shall ensure that: *Effective support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development to the fullest potential of persons with disabilities* (United Nations, 2006). This is consistent with the goal of creating enabling learning environments for all learners (Themane & Osher, 2014)

At the national level, the Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2008) guarantees the right to basic education for all through the culmination of the Lesotho Education Act 3 of 2010 (MOET, 2010). In particular, Section 4 of the Education Act sustains that free and quality education should be provided at all levels of learning. Premised on inclusiveness, the Lesotho Education Act 3, Section 4b of 2010, clearly states that:

Learners with disabilities should be provided with proper education as required by their condition (p.163).

Moreover, Section 4C affirms that all learners must also receive an education free from any form of discrimination at all other levels of learning (p.164). Learners with Visual Impairments (LVIs) in rural areas are not an exception in this case. Rightfully so, Section 4 of the Lesotho Education Act of 2010 reaffirms the impetus of The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted on the 13th December 2006, to ensure that visually impaired learners in rural areas also enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

It is worthwhile to assume that the implementation of the Act could be cumbersome, therefore requires the full participation of civil society and other stakeholders. In the education context and in response to the Act, the Ministry of Education and Training in Lesotho introduced inclusive education teachers' guidelines on how to interact with and support learners with disabilities (Mariga & Phachaka, 2011). However, these guidelines created a lot of confusion and received a backlash from the majority of teachers and

other stakeholders. One glaring issue was the fact that there was no policy on Inclusive Education that could have been used to inform these guidelines. Mosia (2014) indicates that there was a compelling action needed for the de/redevelopment and de/redesign of the policies, in order to provide frameworks and guidelines to assist in access to education for all.

In response to the criticism of the teachers' guidelines of 2011, the Ministry of Education launched the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP) in 2018 (MoET, 2018). This policy placed the right to education for all learners, including those with visual impairments in rural areas and schools, as enshrined in the international framework and the Lesotho Education Act of 2010. One of the principles of LIEP is to, "introduce acceptance among learners irrespective of their diverse educational needs" (LIEP, 2018:6). Furthermore, the policy was formulated based on the principle of child-friendly schools (MoET, 2010). Specifically, Chapter 3, Section 3.1, highlights the operationalization of LIEP (2018), which incorporates different aspects of a friendly school, one which emphasises enabling teaching and learning environment. Therefore, ensuring equal access to quality education for all learners, including LVIs in rural areas, who are often left out or ignored. This current study aligns with the inclusion mandate of building a conducive and friendly school, including enabling learning environments in rural schools.

Notwithstanding the good intentions of inclusive education policies to ensure that all children have equal access to education (Landsberg & Kruger, 2011), it has been observed that in many developing countries the benefits of inclusive education are yet to be realised. For instance, the acceptance of inclusive practices has not been translated into reality in most mainstream classrooms in South Africa (Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht & Nel, 2016). In Ghana, a study conducted by Asamoah, Ofori-Dua, Cudjoe, Abdullah and Nyakrko (2018) revealed that "out of 288,868 school-aged individuals with visual impairments, only 6.5% have attended secondary school education, while 40.1% have been left behind in mainstream schools". In Lesotho, the country in which the current study is situated; there has been a decline in the enrolment of learners with special education needs in mainstream secondary school education.

For example, in 2013 the total enrolment was 8 602, while in 2016 the number dropped to 7 395 (LIEP, 2018: 23). Al Shoura and Che Ahamad (2015) postulate that the mainstream education is meant to support the broader principles of an inclusive philosophy to educate learners with and without disabilities together in public schools. The authors postulate that LVIs form part of mainstream learning across the world.

While the creation of the inclusive education policy in Lesotho has a clear direction and is intentional towards providing universal access to basic education, LVIs' access to education is often truncated by, among other factors, scarcity of resources in rural areas and negative stereotypes towards rurality and disability. For example, according to Johnstone (2017) and Hlalele (2012), lack of special education curriculum and resources within rural schools, found to pose insurmountable challenges to good quality education. Also, Thamane and Osher (2014) confirm that school settings can sometimes be enabling, but also constraining, especially with regard to the existing perspectives on rural education and inclusion of learners with disabilities, which often associate rurality and disability with challenges (Urwick & Elliott, 2010). Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht and Nel (2016) opined that the acceptance of inclusive education has not been translated into reality in most mainstream classrooms in South Africa. These challenges may lead to an inability to respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse society (Moloi, Morobe & Urick, 2008; Mosia, 2014), including LVIs. This may discourage LVIs from accessing quality education and thriving to their full potential. Therefore, more needs to be done in order that learners in the rural areas, including those with visual impairments are not only able to access education, but support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion, as emphasised by the CRPD of 2006. (United Nations, 2006).

Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the ways in which an enabling learning environment could be enhanced for LVIs in a rural school in Lesotho. The study aims to explore teachers' understanding of how an ELE for LVIs in a rural school in Lesotho can be enhanced.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

On the basis of rationale for the current study, I draw from my personal and professional experience, as I have been a teacher in a primary school in deep rural areas of Lesotho for the past 16 years. This school provides basic and free education for learners and currently has LVIs. From my observation and experience, this school has very good relationships in the community, because it is one of the few mainstream schools to include LVIs. As a teacher in this school, it became clear that I came across learners with diverse visual impairments, from mild to severe impairments. Equally, the school can only accommodate those with mild visual impairments and can refer those with severe visual impairments to a special school for the blind in Maseru, the capital Town of Lesotho. Furthermore, being the only teacher with a qualification in Special/Inclusive Education, namely the Advanced Diploma in Special Education, which I obtained in 2010, and realising the challenges that other teachers are facing in teaching within these rural schools, especially interacting with LVIs, I furthered my studies and obtained a Bachelor of Education Honours in inclusive education in 2015 and a Master of Education in Educational Psychology in 2018.

In my Master's dissertation, I aimed to explore how an asset-based approach could be used to improve the wellbeing of LVIs in selected rural primary schools in the Berea district of Lesotho. The findings suggested that improving the wellbeing of LVIs involves identifying and mobilising local resources and assets (Larranaga, Valls-Perez, Cardo-Miota, Botello, Lafuente & Hernan, 2020) that can be used to solve rural community problems (Kretzmann, & McKnight, 1993). Furthermore, the findings revealed that mobilisation of assets within local communities are good, but may not be enough within the context of limited resources (Mette, Biddle, Jr & Mercado, 2019; Myende, 2014). Lastly, the findings provided various pathways in which rural primary schools can use to improve the wellbeing of LVIs. In particular, teachers emphasise factors related to quality teaching and learning (Garcia, Doña-Toledo & Higuera-Rodriguez, 2020). Due to the experience and knowledge that I acquired during my postgraduate studies, I was able to improve my teaching and interaction with learners, and hopefully assisted other teachers. Due to these improvements in the teaching approach and relationship with

these learners, many LVIs have graduated and transited to the secondary mainstream school, which is also in the deep rural areas, and close to my primary school. In other words, this school indirectly or directly serve as the feeder school to this secondary school.

Against the backdrop of the above discussion, I was motivated that these learners can continue with their studies, and improve their holistic wellbeing (Ramatea & Khanare, 2021). In the current dissertation, I therefore, wanted to understand ways in which teachers in rural secondary schools use to create a conducive and enabling learning environment for LVIs. The current study focuses specifically on three core points: teachers' own understanding of ELE; existing means in which teachers employ to create the ELE; constraints of ELE, and finally, enablers of ELE, with the hope of recommending enhancement of ELE, which is responsive, in particular for LVIs in a rural school in Lesotho.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is a plethora of international policy frameworks and guidelines that affirm and sustain inclusive education; in particular, the inclusion of LVIs, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was adopted in 2006 and came to force in 2008, to which Lesotho is a signatory. Research shows that learners with disabilities continue to experience challenges, such as acceptance in mainstream schools (Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht & Nel, 2016), negative stereotypes towards rural areas, and disabilities (Urwick & Elliott, 2010), thus lowering the quality of education provided in these contexts (Shikalepo, 2020). Rurality is often associated with a lack of resources (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), which may lead to many learners, including LVIs of not attending school and/or receiving a quality education. As discussed above, Lesotho only introduced the National Inclusive Education Policy, known as LIEP in 2018, eight years after the adoption of the CRPD. This implies that many learners were still left behind. In addition, teachers had many challenges to maximise their support for learners with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, as there was no specific policy on inclusive education which can provide teachers with better understanding of ELE. Mosia

(2014) points out that, this promotes more challenges in the inclusive education implementation and practices in Lesotho. Another worrying point is that there are currently no district-based policy frameworks, aimed at addressing the needs of LVIs in Lesotho. Therefore, the challenges created the needs, including enabling learning environments, can be found in an examination of their schools and communities these learners live in. Some scholars have argued that, context and participation of people of that locality are essential to make inclusive education a reality (Sefotho, 2020; Oliveira & de Barba, 2021). For example, Myende (2014) argued that rural schools would succeed if community members dedicate themselves as agents or assets of change. Premised on international policies on IE, rural communities, including teachers and LVIs have a fundamental right to participate in the matters that affect them. The ways in which LVIs are treated varies from context to context, and in rural areas, it is often associated with deficiency (Urwick & Elliott, 2010).

The above discussion suggests that creating enabling environments for the LVIs must be understood within the context in which they live in, in this case, rural areas. These necessitate teachers' agency and participation, using their existing knowledge, skills and abilities to provide an enabling learning atmosphere for their learners. The researcher aligns with the belief that local people and communities possess their unique knowledge, skills and capabilities that they may use to address challenges within their rural schools and communities (Nel, 2017; Mansvelt, 2018; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). There is evidence from the reviewed literature that there is no study in Lesotho that explored the understanding and enhancement of the ELE for LVIs, and more so in rural areas in the Teyateyaneng district. This gap and the above discussion motivated the researcher to undertake this study. In particular, the study focuses on teachers' understanding of ELE, enabling and constraining factors to contribute in the enhancement of ELE for LVIs in rural secondary in Lesotho. To bring the research problem into a clear focus, the following aim, objectives and research questions were formulated.

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Aim of the study

In the backdrop of the above problem statement, this research aims to explore how an ELE for LVIs in a rural secondary school in the Berea District of Lesotho can be enhanced.

1.5.2 Objectives of the study

To achieve this aim, four objectives of the study were developed,

- Explore the teachers' understanding or interpretation of an ELE for LVIs within a rural secondary school of Lesotho.
- Examine the kind of support that teachers render to enhance an ELE of LVIs within a rural secondary school in the Berea District of Lesotho
- Explore factors that could impede the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in the Berea District, Lesotho.
- Explore factors that allow the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in the Berea District, Lesotho.

1.6 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In alignment with the research aim and objectives, the current study is undertaken with the following key research questions.

1.6.1 Main research question

The main research question of the present study is: How can an ELE for LVIs in a selected rural secondary school in the Berea District, Lesotho be enhanced?

1.6.2 Secondary research questions

The four secondary research questions derived from the main research question are as follows:

- How do teachers understand / interpret an ELE for LVIs in a rural secondary school in Lesotho?
- What kind of support do teachers render to create an ELE for the LVIs within a rural secondary school in Lesotho?
- What factors could enable the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho?
- What factors could impede the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho?

1.7 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.7.1 Inclusive special education theory and agentic capability theory

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks are important components of research. The current study uses two theories as theoretical frameworks, which were positioned within the positive psychology discipline. The inclusive special education theory of Horny (2014; 2015), indicates that the diverse needs of all learners, including those with visual impairments can be effectively addressed by having equal consideration of both inclusive education and special education. According to Raguindin and Bulusan (2020), Hornby's perspectives have some bearing on working with all learners with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) by making sure that their special educational needs are effectively met in the most inclusive setting. This theory is used in this study to explore how enabling learning environments for LVIs (being among those with special educational needs) can be enhanced. Additionally, it is complemented by the agentic capability theory of Bandura (2006; 2012), which views humans as an agency. In this context, triangulation of these theories are done based on the fact that LVIs are regarded as agents and active human beings, who do not exist in a vacuum, but within a social structure (Khanare, 2012), where their teachers, peers and parents, within their

rural communities and school, can have influence in the enhancement of their learning environment. The researcher therefore, considers the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment as the responsibility of everyone within their school.

1.7.2 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework to the current study is an enabling learning environment. Different scholars have given different meaning to the concept 'enabling learning environment', which most of them emphasised has a positive contribution to the learners' learning, growth and development (Thamane & Osher, 2014; Haidari, Karakuş, & Koçoğlu, 2020; Cassum & Gul, 2017). Hence, an enabling learning environment is considered significant in this study to offer supportive, caring, safe and inclusive learning for LVIs, in order for them to successfully achieve their desired goals.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant to the development of a positive psychological and inclusive education field in several ways. Firstly, for teachers participating in this study, this study allowed them to gain various understandings of enabling learning environments, constraints, and enablers. This will allow the school to improve the existing resources and identify the missing ones with the hope of working with other stakeholders, such as the principal, parents, learners, and other stakeholders to improve the learning environment for the LVIs. Furthermore, this study sheds light on how to implement inclusive education policies in Lesotho that are informed by the rural context, as the reviewed literature revealed rural schools continue to be marginalised, and therefore compromise LVIs to maximise their full potential like their counterparts in the urban or affluent schools. From this standpoint, the study becomes a vehicle for policymakers, in particular, Lesotho's Ministry of Education and Training, and Curriculum Designers, to develop and implement district-based policies that can help teachers in rural schools to create conducive and enabling learning environments for all learners, including LVIs. Moreover, the framework of this study is beneficial to teacher training institutions (for

pre-service teachers) and MoET teacher professional development (for in-service teachers) to the broader understanding of rural and rural areas as a fluid space not only with challenges, but with resources (Tseeke, 2021; Ned, 2022). These can be used or be improved to enable quality education for the LVIs in their own rural context. This study is significant to provide a nuanced understanding of rural schools, LVIs, and enabling learning environments from the perspective of teachers in their host rural school context, and this allows a better appreciation of the voices and participation of the rural people within an inclusive education, of which Lesotho is a signatory (LIEP, 2018). The idea of including all voices, and understanding rural areas from positive thinking, as opposed to deficit thinking (Ebersohn & Ferreira, 2012), is enormously useful in inclusive education. It also helps to bring attention to the diversity of voices and encourages rural schools and communities as agents of change, and as enshrined in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which emphasises that *no one should be left behind* in matters that affect them (UN, 2006). Due to the scarcity of resources, especially in rural areas and deprived contexts, the methodology of this study is essential and sheds the light on many stakeholders (teachers, learners, school leadership, and researchers) to become creative and imaginative. The use of the participatory visual methodology in this study helps teachers to be able to use diverse teaching materials in order to meet diverse needs of a diverse group of learners, including those who need special attention. Also, photovoice, as a data collection method, bridges the literacy divide when doing research with many other people who can express themselves creatively and beyond words (Mitchell, Naydene, de Lange & Moletsane, 2017).

1.9 THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Both research design and methodology are important aspects in any research, because they are valued in the smooth facilitation of research (Cohen, Manion & Morison, 2011). The current study therefore, adopts a qualitative and an interpretive approach to examine how an enabling learning environment for LVIs can be enhanced. Maree (2016) asserts that a qualitative mode of inquiry enables an in-depth understanding of a

phenomenon being studied. In alignment with the following possible reasons for using this research design, with the aim to gain a deeper understanding of how the enabling learning for LVIs can be enhanced, the researcher therefore used qualitative research approach.

1.9.1 Qualitative Research Approach:

A qualitative research approach is the description and interpretation of social groups, used for understanding social and cultural contexts where the focus is on the learned patterns of actions and ways of life (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that this is about generating rich data in depth. As part of qualitative research, a qualitative research approach is found appropriate to this study, as it enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon being studied from the participants' perspectives (Maree, 2016) and because the focus is to gain an in-depth understanding and explore how an ELE for LVIs can enhance a rural school of Lesotho. This was done by exploring the teachers' understanding of an ELE and how they can become enablers in the teaching and learning environment of the LVIs. Hence, qualitative data provide non-numerical information, which allows numerous methods of data production (Yin, 2018) within which the researcher gathers information during the interaction with the participants (Maree, 2016).

1.9.2 An Interpretive Research Paradigm:

In line with a qualitative research approach adopted in this study, an interpretive paradigm is also employed to explore how the enabling learning environment for LVIs in a selected rural secondary school in Lesotho can be enhanced. Within an interpretive paradigm, the emphasis is to describe, understand and examine human behaviours, interactions and experiences within and around the social and cultural context in which they occur (Maree, 2016). This study therefore, employs an interpretive paradigm in order to describe, understand and examine how an enabling learning environment for LVIs can be enhanced, by enabling teachers to share their views regarding their understanding of ELE for them within their natural setting (Mhlongo, 2017). The natural

setting in this case is the mainstream school classrooms where the teaching and learning for LVIs occur.

1.9.3 Participatory case study research design

To make sure that this study is in accordance with the theoretical framework used to framing it, the appropriate research design is adopted. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2012), research design defines the procedures on how to conduct research, and similarly, Creswell (2016) asserts that research design is a set of methods and procedures that enable the researcher to collect and analyse data. Based on these definitions, this study therefore uses participatory case study research as a mode of research design that involves the participants, local groups or community to reunite and conceptualise the study to understand the wholeness of the case (Punch & Oancea, 2014). This implies that participatory case study research design calls for the involvement of the whole research community (the researcher and the participants) in defining research problems, and engaging as active participants in a designed partnership (Cober, Tan, Slotta, Tan, So & Konings, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to explore how participants within their rural schools could enhance an enabling learning environment of the LVIs and realising that LVIs' special educational needs are everyone's business. Thus, they need collaborative support, and a participatory-case study is employed to help the rural schools to re-connect and examine issues experienced as problems by participants (Bana, 2010). Bana (2010) confirms that participatory case study research is designed to address issues identified and results are directly applied to the problems at hand. Mouton (2017) indicates that a case study is based on a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular situation, in order to generate knowledge. The study therefore, employs a participatory case study design to describe in-depth ways of enhancing enabling learning environment for LVIs. This is because the focus is also to explore teachers' understanding of enabling a learning environment, the kind of support needed by the LVIs and how can such teachers' interpretation and support can contribute in enhancing enabling learning environment for the improvement of the LVIs' holist wellbeing.

1.9.4 Research context and sampling

In the context of this study, one of the mainstream schools, a rural mainstream secondary school in the Berea District of Lesotho was the location in which this research takes place. The researcher conveniently chose this location based on the perceptions that convenience sampling is usually used to select the location that is easily accessible (Cohen et al., 2011). This school was chosen based on its accessibility that is a neighbouring school around the researcher's place of work and was purposively selected in order to get in-depth and rich data, as it also integrates all learners, including those with visual impairments (partially sighted). Through purposive and convenience sampling, the rural mainstream secondary school in the Berea District and the participants (teachers) were selected to participate in this study, because of their in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2015). This is in line with what Cohen et al. (2011) meant by purposive sampling, namely that it involves knowledgeable people who have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the problem investigated.

Ten teachers were purposively selected, because of their in-depth knowledge of working with LVIs on daily basis (Crossman, 2018). The participants were also chosen as the sample size to ensure that only teachers teaching from Grade 8 to Grade 10 and working within a selected rural school that practiced inclusion of all learners, including LVIs, participated in this study. The participants from both sex (males and females) teachers with three years and more teaching experiences, were purposively selected to provide rich information needed for an inquiry (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This research therefore, used both purposive sampling and convenience sampling techniques (Cohen et al., 2011), in order to obtain a detailed description, as well as rich information concerning the participants' understanding, ideas, skills and knowledge of how an ELE for LVIs in a selected rural secondary school in Lesotho can be enhanced, as well as to locate participants and the research site, which was easily accessible (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

1.9.5 Data generation methods

As indicated earlier, qualitative research enables multiple methods for data production. Cohen et al. (2011) also agrees that qualitative research is flexible enough to allow use of various data generation methods, which include interviews, focus group discussions, focus group interviews, participatory visual methodology, etc. This study therefore, employs OFGDs through use of WhatsApp and the photovoice method to generate data. Cohen et al. (2011) explain a focus group discussion as a research technique that enhances the collection of data through group interaction on a specific topic. The use of WhatsApp points at the new possibilities for conducting online and mobile focus group discussions (Colom, 2021). Anderson, Garcia, Koss, Castro, Garcia, Lopez, and Ernst (2020) assert that WhatsApp is a free, popular social media platform that is a secure, low-cost and quicker way of obtaining valuable data. Besides, this method of data generation is suitably used and considered less risky while traditional face-to-face focus groups are risky within safe Covid-19 guidelines (Anderson et al., 2020). OFGD was used in this study to enable the participants to engage in the discussions without close contact with one another, which enabled them to freely share their ideas, experiences and knowledge, while on the other hand, remain safe from the prevailing Covid-19 infection. Meanwhile, the photovoice method was also used to complement OFGDs with participants.

1.9.5.1 *Online focus group discussions (OFGDs)*

In this study, an online focus group discussion method is therefore employed to facilitate an open discussion between the researcher and the participants without interactions. This enabled the participants to speak out and in their own words and allow the researcher to generate rich descriptive data (Yin, 2017). This method is employed from the participants' perspectives in answering the first and second key research questions on: 'How do teachers understand / interpret an ELE for LVIs in a rural secondary school in Lesotho? What kind of support do teachers render to create an ELE for the LVIs within a rural secondary school in Lesotho? This method is employed in this study, in order to enable the participants to engage in the discussion through open-ended

questions, and to reflect and produce rich and in-depth data (Cohen et al., 2011). The OFGDs was done in three sessions, which lasted for 1 hour and 30 minutes under the participants' consent that their WhatsApp voice clips can be recorded and field notes used to capture all the information from their discussions.

1.9.5.2 Photovoice Method

Supporting the use of OFGDs is the use of the photovoice method (Mitchell, 2011; Fouche & Delport, 2016). The photovoice method is a participatory visual art-based methodology of research, used to stimulate discussion among participants (Mitchell, 2011). It is also used as a powerful photographic technique that enables critical dialogue and enhances communication skills among participants (Wang, 2009). One of the advantages of using photovoice in this study, was that participants were able to take control of their own experience through photographs (Mitchell, 2008), and while presenting data, exchange ideas and enhance their communication skills (Wang, 2009). This method enabled the participants in this study to see themselves as co-researchers and photographers (Mitchell, 2011). However, although the participants might encounter problems in presenting their ideas during photograph interpretations (Bagnoli, 2009), the researcher draws on Mitchell's (2008) guidelines of using photovoice as a method of data generation. This provides the researcher and the participants with a smooth engagement in the use of photovoice techniques.

In an effort to get a sense of what can be done to enhance enabling learning environment for LVIs, the participants were requested to take photographs of their own choice using prompts like: "What factors impede the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho and what factors allow the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho". Six photographs were taken by each group of (five teachers per group), which make a total of 12 photographs. Creating a space to get rich and accurate description of data, the participants were asked to make photo-interpretations, which enabled them to reflect on their lived experiences (Khanare, 2012), using photographs about what they view as suitable to enhance an enabling

learning environment for the LVIs. Using both methods to generate data contribute to the credibility of the study.

1.10 DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of data in this study is done following thematic analysis guidelines as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2021). The analysis of data takes place once data have been generated through online focus group discussions and photovoice. Textual data (written, visual and verbal), obtained from the photovoice interpretation and verbatim transcription of OFGDs, which was audio recorded, are analysed through a conventional thematic analysis technique (Clarke & Braun, 2017). For Clarke and Braun (2017: 297), driving the thematic analysis, is an aim to “identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meanings within qualitative data”. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend familiarisation with data, identifying codes, and formulating meanings, grouping themes, developing meaning of segments and finally generating a report as processes in data analysis. Driving thematic analysis in this study, the researcher first started by organising data to make meaning of it, then identified codes from the online focus group transcripts and photographs interpretation, as well as repeatedly reading the transcripts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014), so as to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ description of an ELE and how it can be enhanced for LVIs. This is done by grouping similar codes identified into categories (themes and subthemes) that enable the researcher to understand how an ELE for LVIs within their rural school, could be enhanced.

1.11 ISSUES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

Normally, issues of trustworthiness in qualitative studies are central to ensure reliability and validity of the study. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014) validity in qualitative research is essential to measure the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world. Meanwhile, the current study aims to explore how an enabling learning environment for LVIs can be enhanced

in rural secondary school in Lesotho. As a result, in ensuring issues of trustworthiness in this study, four issues of trustworthiness that demand attention were then monitored, as indicated in the next sections:

1.11.1 Credibility

It is used to test the accuracy of the findings in a study to show the realities and trustworthiness of participants' lived experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Therefore, the credibility of this research is addressed by employing the following techniques. Initially, the researcher with participants' permission used field notes to take record of everything that participants share during their discussions and photovoice sessions, as well as using audio recorder and WhatsApp voice clips to record what participants are saying and ensuring not to miss any information shared during the sessions. Additionally, the researcher recruited a competent field worker for assistance in the transcription of data from the voice clips and audio recorder. Lastly, the researcher uses validity and reliability to check for consistent patterns of themes and to determine whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2016), by taking the transcripts back to the 10 participants to check for the accuracy and verify if the researcher has missed or added something else from the participants' responses.

1.11.2 Transferability

According to Maree (2017), transferability limits the applicability of the findings and transmits it to another context. The researcher ensures transferability in this study through contextualisation of the related literature to this study drawing from international and local perspectives.

1.11.3 Dependability

Dependability establishes the accuracy of the study's results (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). To this issue, the researcher ensures dependability in this study by explaining in

details how data are generated, how the analysis of data is done and which procedures are followed when conducting the study. This is supported by Maree (2017) who confirms that dependability reveals the quality of the results on the analysis of data and procedures used in conducting qualitative research.

1.11.4 Conformability

The issue of conformability is used to measure the extent to which the findings are supported by the original data from the participants' perceptions, rather than the researcher's unconfirmed claims (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). In line to this view, the researcher guarantees the authenticity of research findings by using enough evidence to support the generated data that substantiate the participants' voices and not her own interest. The researcher also uses two instruments to generate data for the enhancement of conformability in this study.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics remain an important consideration in any research, for it ensures that one's standards are reasonable and well-founded (Clark-Kazak, 2017), and this prescribes what humans ought to do to refrain from any unacceptable behaviour (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). For this reason, the entire process of research mandates the researcher to protect the participants from any harm that may occur as a result of the research process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In the context of this study and to adhere to this custom, necessary ethical issue were put into consideration. The researcher asked and obtained permission to continue with this research, as well as adhering to the University of the Free State's code of ethical practice under the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee. Additionally, permission was sought and obtained from the Berea District Education Office, from the principal of the participating school and teachers before conducting this research. Moreover, prospective participants were issued informed consent forms (letters) that explain and contain details of the study to sign.

The consent letters were made to ensure that the participants understand the details of the entire research process before the study commences. The participants were also made aware of the right to participate or withdraw at any stage of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). During the data generation methods (photovoice and OFGDs), it was ensured that the rights of the participants are not violated throughout the research process (Clark-Kazak, 2017). Pseudonyms were used to refer to the participating school and participants. The researcher also made sure that the participants chose names that hide their identities (Maree, 2016). Allowing the participants to choose names that would not reveal their identities was done not only for ethical issues, but also to enable them to become experts in their participation (Mitchell, 2011) during photovoice sessions.

Additionally, ethical issues were taken into consideration during photovoice sessions. For example, participants were trained not to take pictures of people, signs and symbols of names that might reveal other people's identities. Although it was not easy to guarantee confidentiality in visual ethics (Mitchell, 2011), and if at any stage during photovoice photographs that reveal participants' subjects were taken by mistake, the researcher blurred such photos. In addition to the signed consent forms by participants, they were also given photographs consent forms (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001) to sign for issuing permission of the use and publishing of their photographs as indicated in Appendix G.

1.13 CLARIFICATIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

This section provides an overview of how the operational key concepts and terms were used in this study.

1.13.1 Enabling learning environment

The term 'Enabling Learning Environment (ELE, hereafter), has been explained in diverse ways. In line with this view, Nwokedi (2019: 10) affirms that it is "a multifaceted

concept” with numerous interpretations and meaning. That is the reason why, Thamane and Osher (2014) define it as a caring, supportive and respectful space where learners are both secured from physical and emotional harm. Additionally, Cassum and Gul (2017) concur with Thamane and Osher’s view that it a physical space where learners’ educational demands are effectively met and critical thinking skills promoted. This clearly indicates that when the learning environment is enabling, learners feel secured, supported and experience improvement in their academic performance. This is also supported in Isomöttönen, Ville; Daniels, Mats; Cajander, Åsa; Pears, Arnold; and McDermott, Roger’s (2019) opinion that ELE is significant in supporting learners to positively reach their educational standards. Haidari, Karakuş, and Koçoğlu (2020) agree and define it as a safe positive learning space where learners are encouraged and supported not only physically, but also emotionally and psychologically. In the context of this study, ELE therefore refers to not only the contribution that the physical factors have, but also from the inherent (hidden and outside) factors that could be drawn to enable LVIs to learn and develop holistically.

1.13.2 Learners with Visual Impairment

The term ‘Learners with Visual Impairments (LVIs)’ does not have a homogeneous definition. LVIs refer to the learners who experience difficulties in performing tasks that may require the use of sight. According to Sefotho (2020), LVIs experience some limitations in the eyes’ functioning. Alali (2017) also describes these learners as those having a reduced vision. Waldron, Steer and Bhargava (2014) further affirm that LVIs include those with low vision and those who are blind. This clearly shows that visual impairments have two categories. Therefore, the term ‘LVIs’ is frequently used interchangeably with Visually Impaired Learners (VILs) in a global context. In the context of this study which was conducted in one of the rural secondary schools in Lesotho, and which only integrate learners with low vision or partially sighted, LVIs referred to the partially sighted learners who can use vision for learning and are generally dependent on low-vision aids and environmental modifications for assistance.

1.13.3 Visual impairments

There are different impairments that impact negatively on an individual's normal growth and development. Among a variety of impairments, there is visual impairment. According to Paul and Barnhill (2019), visual impairment is the reduced vision caused by eye disease, an accident or an eye condition from birth. They further indicate that an individual with this kind of sensory loss experience limited access to their environment. In this study, visual impairment is referred to the learner's eye condition with limited light perception, not blind, but they can use their vision under varying conditions, depending on the amount of light, contrast and individual differences.

1.13.4 Rural school

History has proven that quality provision of education within rural schools is not easy. The common emphasis is on the view that rural education is of limited access (Liu, Li, & Zhao, 2021). This contributes to the perceived concerns that rural areas are "under-resourced and rural people are marginalised" (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019: 1). It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of what rurality constitutes. Although there are no common definitions of the term 'rurality', it has been stated in a study of Tiekens and Montgomery (2021) that the term 'rurality' has no exact meaning, showing its ambiguity. Abdulweel (2017) confirms that people living in rural areas are faced with more problems than solutions. Similarly, Shikalepo (2020) explains that most rural schools offer education of low standards. However, Sefotho (2020) contends that in Sub-Saharan African countries, such as Lesotho, rural communities and rural schools are essential resources by having a contribution in the country's economy and by having support in the children's growth and development. In the context of this study and in alignment with Sefotho's view, the selected rural secondary school in Lesotho should therefore be considered as an enabling learning space that is anticipated to have a positive contribution in the learners' learning and development, rather than a constraining environment that hinders the learners' learning, growth and development.

1.14 STUDY DELIMITATION

Drawing from the focus of this study, reveals how LVIs learn and develop within enabling environment. The current study is specifically located in positive educational psychology and driven by the belief that individuals are active potential agents of change. It is therefore within this premise that teachers within Lesotho rural schools are regarded as active agents who can contribute knowledge into how enabling learning environment of LVIs could be enhanced. This study only used teachers from a selected rural secondary school in the Berea District of Lesotho. Hence, the yielded findings from it presented teachers' voices only.

Use of OFGDs and photovoice as methods employed in this study during data generation, enabled the participants to participate fluently and express their different viewpoints concerning how LVIs' learning environment could be enhanced. Additionally, use of these methods were also significant and enabled me to explore how the participants could contribute as an agency in making learning environment for LVIs enabling. However, the study is delimited to a selected rural school, because of the costly regular visits to the research sites and limited access to the study participants. The study therefore, encompasses a sample of ten (10) teachers (both males and females) who have three or more experiences working within the selected school. More notably, as a research within the discipline of educational psychology that promotes the importance of teachers' voices about the enhancement of LVIs' enabling learning environment, use of these methods, more specifically photovoice, brings contribution to the literature on enhancing enabling learning environment for LVIs and by confirming its practicality, especially in a rural context.

1.15 SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS

The study is arranged in six chapters, which are outlined as follows:

Chapter one: The introduction and background of the study

This chapter presents the introductory background to the study through contextualization of the problems identified for the construction of ELE for LVIs. The background to the study indicated useful information concerning inclusion of LVIs in rural schools, revealed the extent to which rural schools provided support to these learners, to make their learning enabling, and why their inclusion remains a cause of disagreement up to now. In addition, this chapter also provides aims and objectives, the research design and methodology with this study, employed in details.

Chapter two: Review of related literature

This chapter outlines a detailed account of the 'enhancement of an enabling learning environment' as a phenomenon being investigated. Additionally, a strong support for the choice of the theoretical framework is included and definitions of all key concepts used in the study presented, where various international and national existing works of literature related to the study are analysed by the researcher to support the study. In this chapter, the researcher also explores literature relevant to the study and makes an in-depth assessment of their findings. Current knowledge regarding development in schools learning environments to make them enabling to LVIs and the constraints in the enhancement of such ELE, are also discussed. The gap identified in the promotion of ELE is drawn upon.

Chapter three: Conceptual and theoretical frameworks

This chapter presents the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underpin this study. The conceptual framework reveals the researcher's conception of the literature relevant to this study as presented in Chapter 2, and further delivers an understanding towards the enhancement of an enabling learning environment for LVIs in rural schools. Inclusive special education and agentic capability, as the theoretical framework, are widely conferred in this chapter. The history behind the inclusion of LVIs in schools is

reviewed to indicate the relevancy of the two theories in the current study, and reasons for the triangulation of these theories are also presented.

Chapter four: Research design and methodology

This chapter provides the discussions of the research approach, paradigm, research design and methodology used to conduct the research. The participants, methods of data generation and analysis are discussed, followed by social validation and verification of data to explain how it is done. A qualitative research method is employed in this study and the researcher provides brief information about the method and an explanation for its choice. The use of the participatory case study research design is discussed, as well as why it is selected for the purpose of this study. In this current chapter, details of adherence to ethical consideration of the study are also provided.

Chapter five: Data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study and sets out the participants' understanding of how an ELE for LVIs can be enhanced in their rural school. The findings in this study are outlined, interpreted, and discussed.

Chapter six: Presentation of summary of the findings, recommendations and implication for future research

This chapter concludes the study by providing a summary of the findings in relation to the perception of what teachers within rural schools in Lesotho, view as appropriate for the enhancement of the LVIs' learning environment, providing a discussion of the contribution that this study will make, followed by limitations and recommendations for further research.

1.16 CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter presented the research by making an impact in the informed strategy for the enhancement of an enabling learning environment for LVIs. It began by providing a brief background to the study and explained in detail the research problems, which resulted into the research aim, purpose and key research questions. This chapter

also outlined the major aspects of research, which include the research design and methodology, data generation and analysis, issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations and two theories (inclusive special education theory and agentic capability theory) triangulated in framing this study. The next chapter provides the discussion of the reviewed literature relevant the current study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 conveyed an overview to the study. The current chapter contextualizes the study by reviewing the literature related to it. A literature review can be defined as a methodology of conducting research, based on a critical and analytical account of the existing scholarly sources on a specific topic (Snyder, 2019). This chapter reviews literature related to enabling a learning environment of LVIs as a specific topic, which its restriction emanates from the constraining factors mostly found within the school learning environment globally. The review of literature provides an overview of the inclusive education management system, which created gaps in making schools' learning environment enabling. A discussion on the influence of the learning environment among VILs is provided to enhance the understanding of the past and present practices employed to improve their learning. The overall purpose of reviewing literature in this study is to provide information related to understanding how LVIs' ELE is enhanced in rural schools. Hence, global perspectives on visual impairments among learners affected are reviewed in the first section of this chapter.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS ON LEARNERS AFFECTED

Globally, visual impairment is being related to challenges, which limits an individual's effective use of sight. According to Alali (2017), visual impairment exposed the learners affected to obstacles that could make them feel less independent and or equal to their sighted peers. In line with this view, Naipal and Rampersad (2018) define visual impairment as a condition of reduced visual performance that cannot be remedied and corrected, however, can result in functional limitation of an individual's visual system. Drawing from this definition, it is clear that visual impairment has a remarkable impact and can severely affect the learners' quality of life (Munaw & Tegegn, 2021) if not

handled with inordinate care. Consistent with this view, a number of scholars across the world have detailed evidence on impacts of visual impairments on learners in schools. The review of literature below is therefore provided to show the prevailing state of visual impairment among learners in schools internationally.

Various researchers (Maria, 2013; Vojtech, 2015; de Verdier & Ek, 2014) observe that schools where LVIs are enrolled in Europe identify visual impairment as a condition that have a direct impact on their personal, social, emotional and psychological wellbeing and negatively affects their learning. Visual impairment experienced by learners in European schools has not only advanced to the level where it affects only their learning, but has progressed to the extent that it negatively affects their health and wellbeing, which results in preventing them to be socially included (de Verdier, 2016) in their respective schools. A study conducted in UK comprising an integrative literature reviewed from 17 academic articles published during 1998 and 2018, revealed that learners with visual impairments often experience emotional problems and encounter difficulties in maintaining social relationships (Manitsa & Doikou, 2022) in schools. Another study conducted in India reports that the prevalence of visual impairments is estimated to be around 2.2 billion in the world as per World Health Organization (WHO) (Kaiti, Shyangbo, Singh & Pandey, 2020) and learners experiencing this condition were found to be victims within their learning environment.

Besides learners' condition of visual impairment posing threats to them, it also embraces inclusive plans and practices ensuring their effective and successful learning and development. Despite several efforts made to manage visual impairments in schools, lack of clear guidelines on the inclusive policy implementation, still remains a problem (Korir, 2015) in signatory countries of inclusive education. Schools in Germany have also provided a report that German LVIs' inclusion exposed them to the perceived barriers in their schools and encounter social-emotional problem in relationships with their fellow peers and teachers (Giese, Greisbach, Meier, Neusser & Wetekam, 2022). Koehler and Wild (2019: 2) observe that due to the inclusive education school arrangements and practices made to ensure the inclusion of LVIs in US, that they receive instruction in the general education classrooms, "the situation is complicated"

and not only disturbs the LVIs' acquisition of quality education, but also challenges their teachers as collaborators to become critical and resourceful. In another study, Binmahfooz (2019) reports that in Saudi Arabia, quality provision of education to all learners, including those with visual impairment, remain a top priority within their inclusive education system. However, despite many inclusive educational initiatives being made, attaining full inclusion of all learners (LVIs included) through the implementation of inclusive policies still remains a challenge.

The above literature has proven that visual impairment is a continuous problem internationally. Nationally, problems caused by visual impairments similarly exist. Visual impairment is a perpetual problem that has been challenging schools in Nigeria as well (Kamolafe, 2020). Gambo, Adelokun, Gambo and Afolayan (2021) state that it is reported that visual impairment among learners, makes learning challenging in Nigerian schools, and many LVIs are expected to perform well, yet there is no adequate provision of education for them to learn effectively. Andrew (2015: 131) notes that in tertiary Nigerian institutions of learning, "quality provision of higher educational opportunities to LVIs is sometimes controversial due to unfriendly learning environment, limited and or inadequate materials for the improvement of their teaching and learning. It is clear that quality provision of education to LVIs in Nigerian schools is inadequate, hence the need in the appropriate use of facilities" (Andrew, 2015:131). Linked to the impact of visual impairment on the LVIs' learning in Nigerian schools, Nnama-Okechukwu, Chikwuka and Okoye (2020) recommend engagement of relevant stakeholders as a solution to improve LVIs' wellbeing and to offer support services for the enhancement of their learning.

Like in Nigeria, learners experiencing visual impairment are exposed to similar problems in Kenya. Korir (2015:28) recognizes the increasing number of challenges faced by LVIs, such that LVIs are viewed as a 'burden' in Kenyan schools and established possible means like providing necessary learning materials to them to advocate for such challenges in Kericho District, Kenya. The findings of the study recommend proper training of teachers on special education and informative campaigns about disabilities at community levels. Similarly, in South African schools, visual impairment is a

phenomenon that is seriously distressing the quality provision of education (Landsberg, Kruger & Swart, 2019). Despite several interventions made by the South African Government through the Department of Basic Education, slight progress has been reached (Morelle, 2016). To attest to the serious impact of visual impairment among learners affected, as described by Naipal and Rampersad's (2018) study, which reports an increasing number of people who have visual problems. According to Naipal and Rampersad's report, more than 90% of people living with visual impairments reside in geographical areas attributed to a higher prevalence of poverty related conditions. This aligns with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) world report on vision (2019), which observes that people with vision impairment, including learners, live in low-middle-income countries. The situation is aggravated to the extent that a large number of schools, particularly those in rural areas, fail to successively meet the learners' educational needs (Myende, 2014). Sefotho (2018) also confirms that the prevalence of visual impairments is a constant problem that affects many schools, especially those at rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, in the context of quality provision of education. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) explain that LVIs' quality provision of education is not only negatively affected by problems associated with their eye problems, but also by the prevailing poverty within South African rural communities and schools. South African schools are not the only ones hard stricken by problems linked to visual impairments and poverty, but a similar case happens in Lesotho rural schools.

In a study on visual impairments in rural schools of Lesotho, Tseeke (2021) claims that it is unfortunate to note that problems faced by LVIs have become a day-to-day concern in most Lesotho rural schools. Mosia (2022) locates the problems faced by LVIs with gaps identified within the Lesotho inclusive education policy, which fails to provide clear direction, which defines the appropriate procedures needed to accommodate their special educational needs and what such special education needs entail. According to Mosia (2014: 292), this contributes "threats to the inclusive education and practices applied in Lesotho schools" and most learners, including those with visual impairments fail to attain a good education due to lack of basic resources and poverty (Mosia, 2022). It is clear that visual impairment, if not well maintained, can act as a barrier to these learners' learning, especially those at disadvantaged schools and can cause constrains

in their learning environment, thus preventing them to receive a quality education of equal standards to their peers. The above literature reveals international, national and local perspectives of visual impairment among learners in schools. The impact of visual impairment has nurtured the need to enhance an enabling learning environment of LVIs. Globally, policy makers are now enlightened of the prevalence and serious impact of visual impairment on learners' learning, which needs to be properly addressed. Given the international, national and local assertion that visual impairment has a negative impact on the LVIs' learning; the next section therefore provides discussions of who are these VILs?

2.2.1 Defining Learners with visual impairment/visually-impaired learners

- *What do we understand by visually-impaired/ learners with visual impairments?*

Several literature (Mary & Gavin, 2018; Meyers & Pitikoe, 2021; Landsberg, Kruger & Swart, 2019) reveal that the concept 'visually impaired learners' do not have a uniform definition. This implies that there are varied definitions of the term 'visually impaired learners' (VILs, thereafter). In a study of Parvin (2015: 3), VILs are defined as "a highly heterogeneous group whose most common characteristic is some degree of visual loss". This is in line with the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018), which support that VILs' heterogeneity status demands special attention as they function differently in their host learning environment. In the case of what is meant by VILs, in Namibia, a study of Josua (2013) refers to them as a heterogeneous group, ranging from those who are blind to those with a slight visual impairment. Similarly, another study of Morelle (2016) in Klerksdorp, described VILs as those with limited light perception, not blind, but those who are unable to read print even when using a magnifying devices or when the font is enlarged. Ralejoe's (2021) study, which was conducted in one of the secondary schools in Lesotho, observes that VILs are described in diverse ways by different scholars. According to Ralejoe (2021), VILs are referred to those with a condition of low vision and being blind. Additionally, VILs are also discussed as learners with visual impairments by other scholars. This indicates that to some scholars, both the concepts (visually impaired learners and learners with visual

impairment) mean the same thing. For example, Ramatea and Khanare (2021: 2) refer to them as “LVIs”. Sefotho (2020) similarly refers to them as those learners who have been affected by blindness or low vision. This implies that there are varying categories of visual impairments. Mays (2020) approves that visual impairments cover a range of vision loss; from normal vision, low vision to total blindness. Additionally, Bornman and Rose (2017) also refer to them as learners with visual impairments and define them as individuals with eye problems, who fail to detect what is happening within their immediate environment. Driven by the diverse meaning of VILs or LVIs, clearly positions them at the centre of challenges. This is indicated in the discussions drawn from different scholars in the section below.

Several studies (Furze & Phillips, 2018; Modisi, 2019; Guo, Wang, He, chen & Zheng, 2017) have indicated that LVIs are subjected to negative environmental factors that deprive them of opportunities to access learning. Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) also add that LVIs, experience social exclusion in their educational setting. According to Viljoen (2020), the experience of social exclusion can be attributed to the school setting and environment, as well as human factors within VILs’ school learning environment of not accepting and respecting them as they are. Mariga and Phachaka (2011) described LVIs as those with limited visual ability to learn. This shows that LVIs are mostly seen as individuals full of problems in most studies. Although LVIs are mostly seen as a heterogeneous group of learners whose visual systems inhibit them easy access of learning, recent studies suggest harnessing of the LVIs’ inherent capabilities and realizing that the heterogeneity status that other researchers regard as a challenge, makes them unique individuals with potential to learn (Myende & Hlalele, 2018; Ramatea & Khanare, 2021) whose special educational needs only need to be properly addressed. Meyers and Pitikoe (2021) also assert that LVIs are unique individuals with capabilities whose needs require special care in order for them to learn and thrive. It is therefore in the context of this study that LVIs are considered as potential agents with unique skills whose enabling learning environment needs to be enhanced. According to Sefotho (2020), for the LVIs’ learning environment to be enabling, there has to be a clear understanding of what their condition entails, which will enable their smooth

teaching and learning. It is therefore important to initiate the reviewing of literature in the next discussions of what researchers mean by a condition 'impairment'

The concept impairment does not have a monolithic definition. This means that it has differing explanations, which other authors mostly associate with a negative impact on an individual's life. Orgogozo (1994) refers to impairment as a conveyed loss of structure or abnormality of function at the organ level. Similarly, Barbotte, Guillemin, Chau and Group (2001) assert that an impairment is any temporary or permanent loss of a body structure that causes disturbance in functions that are essential in human's body. A study of Meyers and Pitikoe (2021) highlights that impairment and disability has a similar impact on a person affected. This is similarly identified by Mariga and Phachaka (2011) in viewing inclusive education teachers' guidelines, on how to interact with and support learners with disabilities in Lesotho. They showed no difference in the impact of an impairment and disability. However, the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018) clearly states the difference in the meaning of the two concepts (impairments and disability) to enable a clear understanding and differentiation between the two. Therefore the diagrammatical representation of how the two concepts differ is shown in figure 2.1.

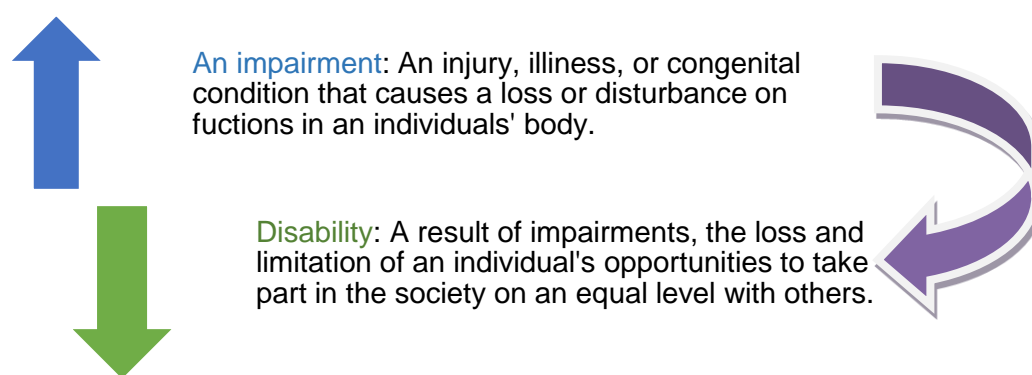


Figure 2.1: Diagrammatical representation showing differentiation between an impairment and disability (adopted from LIEP, 2018: 1-2)

It is therefore important to understand that an impairment and disability differ in meaning, but exposed individuals are affected to similar impacts. Therefore, a disabled person is the one with impairment who experiences the disability (Barbotte et al., 2001). In the context of this study, the researcher considered and define LVIs as individuals who have visual or eye impairments who experience a disability or some limitations of not properly seeing like their peers and whose learning can be made possible by enhancing their enabling learning environment. As it has been previously stated that LVIs are described as a diverse group of learners whose diversity only shows commonality in vision loss, the next section provides a detailed discussion of the different types of visual impairments.

2.2.2 Types of visual impairments

Visual impairment is essentially an umbrella term used to describe the loss of sight that can result into its classification. According to Landsberg, Kruger and Swart (2019), the classification of visual impairment is used in accordance with visual acuity “as a measure of the eye to distinguish shapes and the details of objects at a given distance” (Marsden, Stevens & Ebri, 2014: 1). This indicates that the types of visual impairment which a learner experiences can be classified into vision loss determined by his or her visual acuity. Kaiti, Shyangbo, Singh and Pandey (2020) also confirm that the diversity of learners, who experience visual loss, ranges from those with low-vision to those with blindness. This means that LVIs are classified into two main groups (learners with low vision and blind), according to Sefotho (2020). In the background of the two stated groups of LVIs, a detailed description of the two groups is provided next.

2.2.2.1 Learners with low vision

According to Kaiti et al. (2020: 208), “learners with low vision refer to those who have an impairment of visual functioning even after treatment or refractive corrections”. Mariga and Phakacha (2011) also refer to them as those whose clarity of sight is limited to an extent that they are unable to perform visual activities. Morelle (2016) similarly defines

learners with low vision as those with limited light perception, not blind, but those who are unable to read print even when using a magnifying device or when the font is enlarged. This clearly indicates that learners with low vision are educationally affected but, require appropriate teaching and learning materials and environmental modifications to ensure their academic assistance. In the case of learners with low vision, the use of a combination of vision and other senses is required to aid their learning. This is also supported by the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018), which states that learners with low vision dependent on low-vision aids and require environmental modifications for the promotion of their teaching and learning. However, according to Kaiti, Shyangbo, Singh and Pandey (2020) and in line with the inclusive education teachers' guidelines (as state by Ministry of Education and Training (MoET, 2011) in Lesotho, the degree of low vision a learner experiences, may determine the kind of modification he or she may require. This is also supported by Marsden, Stevens and Ebri (2014), who state that learners with low vision may be referred to those with partial sight if the degree of their vision loss is mild and their visual acuity is between 6/12 and 6/18.

2.2.2.2 *Learners with blindness*

Learners with blindness are those who cannot see a light at all, according to Komolafe (2020). Gambo, Adelokun, Gambo and Afolayan (2021) also link the learners who are blind to those who cannot see, but can rely on their ability to hear and listen to any speech to gain information quickly and effectively to aid their learning. However, even though learners, who are blind refer to those who “cannot see at all” (Komolafe, 2020: 12), they also have the right to basic education like their counterparts. Therefore, their inability to see does not mean they are incapable to learn, but only need appropriate and suitable strategies to address their special needs. Hence, Sefotho (2020) concurs with the above view and claim that learners with blindness cannot read and write print, even after all corrective optical measures have been taken, however, using braille as a medium of expression aids to their learning.

In the case of the current study, which aims to explore how the ELE for LVI can be enhanced and drawing from the above types of visual impairment, it is evident to take into account that there are various degrees of visual impairment, which covers a range between low vision and blindness, which table 2.1 below indicates:

Table 2.1: Classification of visual impairment

Classification	Degree of vision loss	Snellen Visual Acuity
Normal vision		6/6
Low vision	• Mild vision loss	6/12 to 6/18
	• Moderate visual impairment	6/18 to 6/60
	• Severe visual impairment	6/60 to 3/60
Blindness	• Profound	3/60

(Adapted from Sefotho, 2020: 42)

Although there are numerous classifications of visual impairment to which diverse group of LVIs belong, the researcher in the current study realizes the importance of having a clear understanding of the classification among vision losses experienced by learners affected, as they may require diverse approaches and strategies to be implemented to make their learning enabling. Marsden et al. (2014) indicate visual acuity of a learner with normal vision as 6/6, showing that such a learner can read or see at a distance of 6 meters away from a standpoint. Bornman and Rose (2017) further indicate that for those with low vision, visual acuity is 6/18; while for those who are blind is 3/60.

In view of the classification of visual impairment indicated in table 2.1 above, it is clear that the degree of visual impairment a learner experiences, covers a range from mild, moderate, severe and profound. Hence, in this study LVIs refers to those with low vision whose degree of visual loss ranges between mild to moderate and who may require special education for the adaptation of their learning environment. It is also important to note that types of visual impairment are different as a result of their different causes, which the next section discusses in detail.

2.2.3 Causes of visual impairments

Several studies identified various degrees of visual impairments as a result of numerous causes. Bornman and Rose (2017) indicate that causes of visual impairments are numerous, “including not only congenital and acquired conditions but also systematic diseases with ocular complications in an individual’s life” (Kaiti et al., 2020: 210). This is supported in the Individual with Disability Education Act (IDEA, 1997), which gives an explanation that there are many diseases of the visual system; of which many appear at the first few years of life. According to Kaiti et al. (2020), the causes of visual impairment among young children are different from those of the adults, and vary widely from region to region being largely determined by the country’s economy. This is in alignment with Mariga and Phachaka (2011), who argued that visual impairment is one of the common problems, of which its cause varied from country to country. This is also evident in a study of Kaiti et al. (2020), who report cataracts and refractive errors as the main causes of visual impairment globally. Similarly, in a study conducted by Guo, Wang, He, Chen and Zheng (2017) in China, it was reported that cataracts, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration and cornea opacities are the main cause of visual impairment in the country. It was also confirmed in a study conducted by Naipal and Rampersad (2018) in South Africa, that the main cause of visual impairment in children include, retinitis pigmentosa, cataracts, glaucoma, albinism, nutritional causes, infections and inherited genetic disorders. However, Mariga and Phachaka (2011) indicated that even though there are various causes of visual impairment among learners in all countries and some low-economic countries like Lesotho, LVIs’ learning remain a major concern within their host country. In this case, the present study is therefore conducted to enhance an enabling learning environment of learners with low vision whose degree of visual loss ranges between mild to moderate within a selected rural secondary school in Lesotho. The researcher also positions herself with the above stated perspective that LVIs’ learning remains a top priority within their country. Hence, the next section shows significance influence of an enabling learning environment on LVIs’ learning.

2.3 THE INFLUENCE OF AN ENABLING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ON LVIs

Since the introduction of an inclusive education system, an inclusive education plan and practices have radically transformed, with a focus on a learner's right to education, as enshrined in the Children's Protection and Welfare Act (7 of 2011) and the Education Act (3 of 2010) of Lesotho. The inclusive learning had been the accepted form of an enabling learning environment for all learners, including LVIs in Lesotho schools. The Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018) was therefore, implemented and considered likely to benefit the country's quality provision of education. However, since implementation of an inclusive education system, literature reveals that LVIs experience numerous challenges in their host learning environment (Mosia, 2017) that affect their learning, growth and development. Sefotho (2018) argues that learning can be enjoyable, only if it is inclusive and conducted in an enabling learning environment. Although, the effective operation of LIEP (2018:13), relating to the quality provision of education to all learners states:

Learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN), including LVIs', require accommodating teaching and enabling learning environment that can allow them to access quality education.

Mosia (2022) observes unrealistic work plans that the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET, 2009) introduced to promote inclusive education in Lesotho. Relejo's (2021) study, which was conducted to investigate learners' (with and without visual impairment) perceptions about inclusive education relating to creating enabling learning for LVIs, reveals that learners in Lesotho expressed their displeasure by pointing out that the inadequate resources and unwelcoming infrastructure result in the ineffectiveness of their learning environment. To this view, Suhlane (2017) also points out lack of resources and limited support as the most challenging barrier, especially to teachers in Lesotho schools. This challenges teachers and even compelled them to realise that the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET, 2008) in Lesotho was overlooking the depth of inclusive education and this contributes to a plethora of challenges. In the backdrop of the reviewed literature above, the researcher conserves that an enabling learning environment can be of good benefit to LVIs' learning, only if

the inclusive education practices are designed and implemented in a practical, realistic and idealist manner.

2.3.1 The influence of the school learning environment

In terms of Section 4(2) of the Lesotho Education Act, the provision of education relies on each and every school's learning environment. Although the concept 'environment' may be translated as physical space that can either hinders or enables learners' learning (Cassum & Gul, 2017). Additionally, this is supported by Themane and Osher (2014), who claim that the school environment can either have a negative or positive influence on the learners' education, depending on the impact of several environmental factors. Authors (Andrew, 2015; Otyola, Kibanja, & Mugagga, 2017) also identify that negative factors, such as inaccessible school facilities and infrastructure may have a negative impact and create challenges to LVIs if not properly managed. However, the Lesotho Education Act (3 of 2010) makes it clear that the school learning environment is not just a mere physical space with both impeding and enabling factors (Ellström, Ekholm, & Ellström, 2008), but views it as a smart, caring, supportive, conducive and enabling space that provides a learner with opportunities to learn (Oliveira & de Barba, 2021). This is in support with Ozerem and Akkoyunlu's (2015: 64) view in considering the school learning environment as "the surroundings that make it possible for learners to find solutions to their own problems and to have access to the materials that help them to achieve their academic goals". Drawing from these views, it is important to note that the school learning environment implies not only physical structures and spaces where teaching and learning can be conducted, but goes beyond the parameters to navigate learners as active beings who are able to solve their own problems (Myende & Hlalele, 2018). This shows that the school learning environment plays a vital role in enabling learners' learning.

Based on the indications made by the Ministry of Education and Training through the Education Act and the Inclusive Education Policy (2018), it is clear that negative environmental factors found within the school learning environment should be minimized to avoid an influx of their negative impact on the learners' learning. In view of

overcoming an environmental negative influence on the learning, (Isomöttönen, Daniels, Cajander, Pears, & McDermott, 2019) schools should be regarded as enabling spaces where all learners' diverse educational needs are effectively addressed. Rutherford (2015) concurs with Isomöttönen et al.'s (2019) perspective and indicates that there has to be effective considerations in the arrangement of a school learning environment to enable learners to effectively learn. To this end, Alsadoon (2017) asserts that the enabling school learning environment promotes learners' success and access of learning. In the context of this study, the researcher therefore claims that, although it might be impossible to reverse the negative influence of the school learning environment on the learners' learning, as discussed in this section, the focus should be that of diminishing negative environmental factors in order to promote a school learning environment that only yields positive results.

2.3.2 The influence of rural school context

It is widely acknowledged that all learners have the right to formal education as their fundamental human rights (Landsberg et al., 2019), which has to be conducted in schools regardless of their geographic location. Mosia (2022) and Myende and Hlalele (2018) point out that the context in which the school is located has a significant influence in recognizing the educational needs of learners. However, Martin (2015) indicates that due to the mostly shared perspectives about rurality, which is uniquely characterised by being generally remote and relatively underdeveloped, majority of rural residents continue to live in extremely poor conditions (Khanare, 2015). Further to that, Myende (2014) mentioned that even though rurality may be characterized by different negative impacts, its influence may vary from context-to-context and country-to-country. Evidence to note from the perspectives above is that influence of rurality or a rural school in one country is different from another. For example, what counts to be the effect of a rural school context in Lesotho is not how rurality is perceived to be in another country.

From an American perspective, Mette, Biddle, Jr and Mercado (2019: 78) reveal that rural schools in America are branded as limited in resources and hard to reach, which

yields failure in providing educational opportunities that drive to the country's economic development. On the other hand, a study conducted by Shikalepo (2020:128) in Namibia, indicated that much of the rural school population are at "risk for low motivation and lack of success as their specific learning needs are rarely met". Shikalepo (2020:128) further revealed the significant impact of rural school education on learners by saying:

The standard of education at most rural schools worldwide is defined as low, owing to the geography of the rural areas and rural-based dynamics which disrupted with learners' learning endeavour.

Considering the notion surrounding rurality and the rural school influence, as discussed above, it is evident that the majority of learners in these rural schools continue to receive an inferior education. It is also clear from the above perspectives that rurality or the rural school impact is associated with all negative aspects that become a hindrance in the learners' educational accomplishment, resulting in experiencing low motivation, low academic success, as well as being at risk of receiving below average results (Sefotho, 2020). This is related to the fact that there is an increase in the number of researches in Sub-Saharan African countries, including Lesotho, focusing on the impact of rurality in schools, showing the significant impact of living in rural areas on the lives of the learners and their teachers (Liu, Li, & Zhao, 2021). The notion of rurality surrounding people living in rural areas, is subjected to rural schools' deficiency (Hlalele, 2012), indicating a scarcity of resources (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), such as lack of transportation, insufficient infrastructure and health care facilities within the school contexts, which might lead to rural residents not participating to their outmost best (Ned, 2022). This perspective, according to Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), frames rurality's impact as often devastating in terms of enabling quality provision of education to all learners, especially those whose learning is normally affected by vision related-problems.

The perspectives above are challenged in Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane's (2008) work that consider rurality as evolving, sufficient and generative, but not as deficient and also disrupted by the notion of rurality stated within African countries like in Lesotho

where rural communities and schools are seen as contributory factors of the country' economy (Hlalele, 2012) for all their learners' holistic development. The transformative state of rurality through African countries' view however, indicates rural communities and rural schools as agents of change. Interestingly, in the context of this study, which was conducted in a rural school context, the researcher, in alignment with the aim and theoretical framework of this study, considers positioning of rural communities and schools as being able and as in possession of unique strengths and abilities to be drawn for societies' development. Thus, the study explores how an enabling learning environment for LVIs in a rural school in Lesotho can be enhanced.

2.4 ENABLING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

A growing body of literature has explored how the teaching and learning of LVIs has been conducted in their host schools. Some of these studies (Furze & Phillips, 2018; Modisi, 2019; Guo, Wang, He, chen & Zheng, 2017) have focused mainly on how these learners' learning has been negatively affected by their host learning environmental factors, such as individual, social, financial, cultural and their school geographic location, while other studies have discovered and indicated a success in the learning of LVIs as a result of realising potential agency within their host school learning environment and community agency. According to Ozerem and Akkoyunlu (2015), LVIs' learning becomes a success and effective only when it is conducted in the environment that is enabling. Additionally, Beyene, Mekonnen and Giannoumis (2020); Themane and Osher (2014) emphasise the significance of an enabling learning environment, as it has been stated in the theoretical framework of this study that it is branded with several enabling factors that makes it safe, welcoming, as well as engaging to all learners whose learning is conducted within. The above literature has demonstrated the uniqueness of an enabling learning environment that it is composed of enabling factors to be drawn and tapped into while overcoming an array of various impeding factors available within the school environment. The next section examines the numerous impeding and enabling factors of LVIs' enabling learning environment.

2.4.1 Factors impeding the enabling learning environment of Learners with Visual Impairment (LVIs)

LVIs and many challenges they experience, which are associated with their eye condition in schools have become a concern of many scientific studies. Numerous challenges as a result of several impeding factors (such as individual, socio-economic, socio-cultural and geographical location factors) show an increase daily (Miyauchi, 2020). Consistent with this view, Korir (2015) shows lack of clear guidelines on the inclusive policy implementation as a global phenomenon and a major source of all these challenges. The international studies' debates prove that the governments, including all the education sectors' (education departments, policy makers and school managers) efforts in dealing with access and quality provision of education to all learners, including LVIs, has many loopholes (Jabulan, 2018; Moghadam, Khiaban, Esmaeili & Salsali, 2017). This indicates a reason why a number of researches across the world, find the learning environment of LVIs constraining. The aim should be for the governments, through their education sectors, to set clear guidelines and practicable inclusive education practices to ensure smooth access of learning to all learners. The impeding factors, which contribute to the enabling learning environment of LVIs to be constraining, are discussed below.

2.4.2 Individual factors

There is considerable proof that individuals' empowerment and development is the result of their educational engagement (Moghadam, Khiaban, Esmaeili & Salsali, 2017). Research which considers individual factors as important elements that can positively influence learning (Themane & Osher, 2014), suggests that it requires consideration of inherent capacities (Code, 2020; Ramatea & Khanare, 2021) personal appreciation and acceptance (Ralejoe, 2021) through interactive and collaborative support (Bandura, 2018, Makhasane & Khanare, 2018). This is in line with the aim of this study and what has been said earlier in harnessing the agentic capabilities in order to enable effective teaching and learning of the LVIs. However, according to Andrew (2015), many countries, like in Nigeria, are still struggling to accommodate LVIs' special educational

needs and realizing them as active individuals with a unique ability to influence their learning (Mustapha, 2021). This is supported by Kizilaslan (2020:81), who indicates that “life of individuals who are not able to acquire visual information in the environment” is difficult.

Several studies reveal that visual impairment has a negative effect on LVIs’ state of mind. (Ishtiaq, Chaudhary, Rana, & Jamil, 2016) Due to visual impairment condition, LVIs develop anxiety and depression. Similarly, Mubanga and Annie (2019) in Zambia, report that LVIs have some difficulty in using their eye sight due to their visual impairment. Agesa (2014) went further and indicates that psychological problems experienced by LVIs in South African schools, were caused by them as individuals’ inability of adjusting to the new school academic practices, leading to lack of interest in schooling. Hornby (2015) conducted a study on inclusive-special education and concurs that many countries do not fulfil good practices of inclusive education in schools, leaving LVIs in agony of vulnerabilities. Presently, in Lesotho, particularly in rural schools, most learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN), including those with visual impairments do not participate fully and meaningfully in their learning environment. This is observed by (Mosia, 2022: 59), who proposes a model within which “an effective education support can be developed” to overcome challenges on learners facing barriers to learning and development. In the case of the aforementioned challenges, it is clear that LVIs, as individuals, feel excluded, marginalized, and not forming part in their learning, due to constraining factors found within their learning environment.

2.4.3 Socio-economic factors

Consider the fact that provision of education to LVIs requires “heavy funding” (Andrew, 2015: 131) as per their special educational need. Several studies reports LVIs as a heterogeneous group of learners whose provision of education causes financial constrain (Moletsane, 2012) in their host country; hence, they experience various kinds of economic constraints globally. In Ethiopia, Negash and Gasa (2022) report that LVIs’ greatest challenge is their country’s insufficient funding towards their educational support. Temesgen (2018) also reports that, the reason for LVIs of experience financial

impediments in their country is because their country struggles to fully fund their educational demands. Like in Ethiopia, some studies conducted in South Africa, particularly those with a focus on LVIs' provision of education in rural school context by Morelle (2016), Naipal and Rampersad (2018) and Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), have reported that LVIs do form part of the rural mainstream education. Yet, their country still finds it difficult to financially respond to their academic needs in a manner that their learning is effectively enabling. This is in particular to those whose learning is on the other hand affected by vision-related problems in rural school context. Supporting these scholars' ideas, Sefotho's (2020) study reported lack of resources in rural schools of Lesotho, due to the inadequate provision of funds as a result of a high rate of poverty prevailing in the country (Hlalele, 2012). Thereafter, LVIs' learning becomes negatively affected. Evidence can be drawn from these perspectives that without any proper financial support to aid LVIs' education within their host country, their vulnerability, which leaves them as incapable, disabled, and lacking, will still continue. Therefore, the researcher in this study claims for sufficient financial support in respect of enhancing an enabling learning environment for these learners; in order for them prosper like their peers in schools.

2.4.4 Geographical location

Being visually impaired, as well as living and attending school in a rural areas, have many challenges. It has widely been acknowledged that most LVIs especially those whose learning is offered in rural schools, experienced an array of challenges associated with lack of appropriate educational resources suitable for their special needs (Tseeke, 2021), lack of well trained teachers (Gambo, Adelokun, Gambo and Afolayan (2021) and vision-related problems, which inhibits them from effectively using their sight and leaving them less active (Alali, 2017). It is clear that the impact of visual impairment is particularly overwhelming in terms of these learners' school interest. In the context of studies conducted by Hlalele (2012), Makhasane and Khanare (2018), rural areas are perceived to be habitats of economic-related challenges, linked to poverty. Due to these ill perspectives, Myende (2014:26) indicated that positive aspects

of rural communities are even “ignored and overlooked”. In this context, the key issue in the current study is that a rural school in which LVIs are enrolled is considered as a place for their active participation, socialisation and belongings and for promoting collaborating relationships (Bandura, 2018). However, low academic achievement of LVIs in schools, is a key contributor connected to the geographic location of their school, which deprived them of an opportunity to academically succeed.

2.4.5 Socio-cultural factors

Socio-cultural factors may be understood as structures that emphasise the responsibility of social and cultural context in human learning (Danney, Griffin, & Stachon, 2021). While rural schools and communities are marginalised and disadvantaged, potential factors that rural residents can consider appropriate in the enhancement of their learners’ learning environment in their schools, are socio-cultural factors (Williams, 2015). This is also supported by Masovic (2018), who points out succinctly that socio-cultural factors play a critical role in an individual development and functioning. Even though socio-cultural factors have been described by the above mentioned scholars as in possession of a significant role to play in the promotion of learners’ learning in schools, literature in the global context are in contrast, and has highlighted LVIs, particularly those in rural areas, as the most disadvantaged group of learners, due to the negative nature of social-cultural factors within their community. Ishtiaq, Chaudhary, Rana, and Jamil (2016) briefly explained that LVIs’ learning is negatively affected by lack of social support from their community members and families. Similarly, Mustapha (2021) also reveals LVIs as the most vulnerable group of learners whose inclusion has become a thorny issue towards access of education, as its effective attainment seems elusive (Sefotho, 2020) and obstructed by many negative factors, such as poverty, a restrictive learning environment and unavailability of adequate resources within their rural school context. Drawing from the different perspectives above, it is clear that socio-cultural factors are constituted by being both positive and negative of which the researcher acknowledged. However, the researcher considers construction of an enabling learning environment for LVIs within a rural school context,

as stated in the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018); to be in a position that needs best management. Therefore, the next section discusses factors identified to enhance an enabling learning environment for LVIs in their rural school context.

2.4.6 Factors enhancing the enabling learning environment for learners with visual impairment in the rural school context

An enabling learning environment is composed of several factors that make it enriching, supportive and accessible, if well considered. Hence, the study at hand aims to propose its enhancement to enable effective teaching and learning of LVIs. The greater focus of this study is positioned on ‘enhancing the enabling learning environment of LVIs’, because when a learning environment is enhanced, it could motivate the effective provision of education to all learners (Landsberg & Kruger, 2011). Ned (2022) proves that this can be possible when rural community members, including LVIs within their rural schools, are appreciated as having capacity to influence their learning. This indicates that the success in the quality provision of education to all learners is influenced by realizing rural community agencies, which in this study, is classified into non-human and human agency and indicated in *Table 2.2* below:

Table 2.2: Representing classification of rural community agencies

2.4.7 Non-human agency	2.4.8 Human agency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers’ attitudes, knowledge and skills
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-community partnership

2.4.7 Non-human agency

2.4.7.1 School climate

Despite negative challenges faced by LVIs, caused by many factors found in their school, school climate is one of the important factors that might influence and determine

the success of the teaching and learning process at schools (Hadiyanto, 2018). Chirkina and Khavenson (2018) define school climate as one of the significant factors determining learners' educational achievement. Similarly, Ripti (2012) asserts that expectation, values, faith, relationships with staff, the school leaders, teachers and learners' behaviors create school climate as an important component in school effectiveness. This shows that the social characteristics of a school determine a climate of such school in terms of relationships among teachers and learners. Maxwell, Reynolds, Lee, Subasic and Bromhead (2017) also indicate that school climate is a psychosocial school atmosphere and inter-group interactions. However, they further argue that the way teachers/staff and learners feel about their school climate, underlies their individual perceptions. In connection with the above scholars' definitions of the school climate, it is evidence in the context of this study that it is through LVIs' interconnections with teachers and other learners within their school that determines their school climate, which is important in ensuring the enhancement of their learning. This also concurs with the agentic capability framework of the current study, which states that each and every individual is an asset/agent, who has capacity and who is able to engage and influence what is happening within the environment. The researcher therefore recognizes the school climate as an important element in the context of this study to consider, because for the enabling learning environment of the LVIs to be enhanced, might be determined by their school climate.

2.4.7.2 School infrastructure

School infrastructure has significant influence in the school functioning and effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes. This is certain in the study of Sowiyah, Pangestu and Nurahlani (2021), which implies that a school infrastructure is a supporting key element that assists in the facilitation of the teaching and learning process of the school. In alignment with this definition, Rasheed, Ahmad and Azam (2020) confirm that the school infrastructure holds all the designs, facilities and services that produce a supportive environment for all learners, ensuring their smooth academic journey. This is also certain in several studies globally. Mokaya's (2013:10) study, which

investigates the influence of the school infrastructure on learners' performance in public secondary schools in Kenya, finds "the improved academic achievement of learners as a result of more adequate and resourceful school infrastructure". However, it was indicated in a study of Assoumpta (2020) in Rwanda that though the academic achievement of learners is viewed as the result of the school's availability of infrastructure, such as adequate classrooms, appropriate teaching and learning resources, sanitary facilities etc., the level of learners' academic performance in Rwanda is currently affected by the shortage of school infrastructure.

According to Assoumpta's (2020) perspectives, school infrastructure is confirmed as significant in the improvement of the teaching and learning processes, hence, its inadequacy affects learners' effective progress in school. This also evident in a study of Rasheed et al. (2020), that was conducted in Maldives, which indicates that school infrastructure is resourceful only if it has adequate resources. Additionally, the South African school guidelines (2021), which was created to plan for public school infrastructure through the Department of Basic Education, shows that the school infrastructure, which exposed learners to conditions, such as lack of access to sanitation facilities, unsafe building structures, overcrowded classrooms and inadequate fencing, are considered to be inadequate. The above literature reveals the importance of school infrastructure and recommends its adequacy for quality provision of education to the diverse group of learners, which consists of LVIs in rural Lesotho schools. The researcher therefore, perceives the success in enhancing an enabling learning environment of LVIs as understanding the significance of the school infrastructure and the influence it may have for their academic success.

Literature in the above section has proven potential in non-human agency as enabling factors that might make the enhancement of an enabling learning environment possible. However, drawing from several literature (Mboshi, 2018; Rasheed et al., 2020; Myende & Hlalele, 2018), which claims that non-human agency are useful, but their usefulness becomes manifested when appropriately used. Mboshi (2018) confirms that the appropriateness or usefulness of material or non-human agency, such as school climate, school infrastructure, facilities and classrooms can be influenced by human

agency. It is therefore considered in the context of this study and in alignment with the agentic capability theory adopted that, human agency are identified as factors that have capacity and potential to influence what is happening within their environment. The next section provides these in details.

2.4.8 Human agency

2.4.8.1 School leaderships

Kunyonga (2018:11) defines the concept 'leadership' "as a process of influencing people or society to act in a direction pointed by a leader". Rapti (2012) views leaderships as a special component of management, which forms part of the effectiveness of the school. Based on these views, it is evident in this study to note that school leadership is a process whereby school leaders plan, organise, lead and empower themselves and others to ensure the efficient functioning of the school. There is also an indication that the efficient functioning of the school is the result of a well organised leadership that, through the process of school leadership (Bush, 2011), becomes able to operate and fulfil the institutional tasks through other people. This study indicates school leadership as in possession of agency. According to Cenciotti et al. (2020:2), human agency means "individuals' capacity to act, plan and manage their behaviors, in order to reach personal and professional goals". In a true sense, individuals being school leaderships based on this view are considered as powerful agents who can act and make decisions (Code, 2020) to empower themselves and other people. It is therefore considered in the present study that the effective functioning of LVIs' rural schools, require school leadership as enablers to help in the enhancement of their learning environment.

2.4.8.2 Teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills

Numerous studies have provided evidence that teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills are crucial elements needed for the success of inclusive educational practices (Rodin, 2015; Ozkcu, 2017; Kizilaslan, 2020). Successful inclusive educational practices and the creation of ELE for all learners (Themane & Osher, 2014) rely on teachers'

readiness, commitment and wiliness to acknowledge, appreciate and accommodate all learners, including LVIs' diverse needs (Ozkcu, 2018, Landsberg & Kruger, 2011). However, negative attitudes, limited knowledge and lack of special skills among teachers have been considered as a major barrier towards inclusion of learners' particularly those with visual impairment (Houston-Wilson, 2002). Ozkcu (2018) defines attitudes, knowledge and skills as ability and capacity an individual possesses to perform tasks. Building on the same idea, and driven by the agentic capability perspective, which values the capability and agency of individuals, the researcher in the current study sees secondary teachers as human agents of change who through their inherent strengths, skills, knowledge and ability can exercise their agency to contribute to change in the creation and construction of an enabling learning environment for LVIs. Furthermore, the existence of agency is essential for these teachers to deliver quality education for LVIs.

2.4.8.3 School-community partnership

The practice of school-community partnership is viewed in a study of Malatji and Malatji (2018: 72) as a "notion of working together to solve some of the challenges that the schools and community are facing". These partnerships may serve to strengthen support and transform individual partners to improve. The concept 'school-community partnership' is also defined by Myende (2012:13) as a connection between schools and individuals, as well as organizations to jointly or collaboratively work together to achieve collective goals. There seem to be positivity in the way the concept is been defined by the above scholars. This provides evidence of the positive influence owned by the school-community partnership. Driven by this perspective, the researcher situates this study within the premises of Bandura's agentic capability framework as explained in Chapter 3 of this study, with a belief that learners in the case of this study LVIs are positioned as valued within one African adage as expressed in a Sesotho proverb: "*kopano ke matla*" (simply translated as unity is power) (Sefotho, 2018), which points to a positive community and school collective response for finding solutions to a problem at hand. The suggestion here is that the construction of ELE for LVIs requires the whole

community, the rural school and community to collectively or jointly exercise their agency, because while exercising their agency, every individual is enabled to share experiences, skills and knowledge to produce the desired results.

2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF ENABLING A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ON LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN THE RURAL SCHOOL CONTEXT

It has been indicated that the life of LVIs' schooling is difficult, due to multiple impeding factors found within their learning environment. LVIs have the right to attain basic education as a fundamental human right (Landsberg & Kruger, 2011). Themane and Osher (2014) even add that for the LVIs' learning to be effective, so as to acquire basic education the same way as their peers, their learning environment needs to be enabling. Similarly, Sithole (2017) concurs with this view and claim that this calls for consideration and understanding of LVIs' unique learning needs. Sithole (2017: 2) went further and indicates that "usually, learners who attend a school which can provide ELE to them, they tend to perform better". This clearly indicates the importance of an ELE and aligns with Oliveira and de Barba's (2021) description of an ELE, which confirms its importance in the learners' growth and development. Alsadoon (2017) confirms that ELE provides learners with opportunities to learn safely so as to actively achieve their academic goals.

However, even though several literature has shown the importance of ELE (Rutherford, 2015; Isomottonen, Daniels, Cjander, Pears & McDermott, 2019; Beyene, Mekonnen & Giannoumis, 2020) in ensuring easy access of education to all learners, evidence has shown inaccessibility and inadequacy of a learning environment in rural schools of Lesotho (Ralejoe, 2021). Insufficiency of Lesotho rural schools is a phenomenon that is increasingly disturbing and hinders the quality provision of education to all learners, including LVIs (Sefotho, 2018), regardless of the initiatives and all the efforts that the Government of Lesotho made to instil inclusive education plans and practices (Mosia, 2022). Whilst the inclusive education policies were implemented to curb the situation, very slight success was noticed in the case of enhancing learning of LVIs. The situation became worse to an extent that a large number of schools in rural areas of Lesotho

were struggling to maintain educational standards of learners. It is therefore for these reasons to note that the success in realizing the importance of an ELE of LVIs is through understanding its key characteristics, such as: safety, supporting and engaging (Themane & Osher, 2014; ALSadoon, 2017; Osher, Penkoff, Sidana & Kelly, 2016), appreciating and harnessing of rural communities and school's agencies. This may contribute to a success in enhancing LVIs' learning. The next section provides a description of key characteristics of an ELE.

2.5.1 Safe learning environment

In accordance with the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018), schools are encouraged to maintain safe learning for their pupils (Children's Protection & Welfare Act (7 of 2011)). Further stipulations for the maintenance of children's safety is found in Section 4(2) of the Education Act (3 of 2010) of Lesotho, where stipulations are made for the ministry, principal secretary, teaching service commission, proprietors of schools, teachers and school boards to ensure and develop safety plans that can be used to foster school safety, which is enabling to all learners. Hence, an ELE is mostly acknowledged for effective learning and teaching (Rutherford, 2015), because safety is the most important characteristic of a school, which offers effective teaching and learning. Senkus (2020: 3) indicates that the concept 'safety' comes from the Latin words "sine cura", which means "lack of worries". Driven by the meaning of the concept 'safety', according to Senkus' definition, it is clear that safety has got some elements of being free of danger. Meaning, when learners' learning is conducted in a safe learning environment, they feel secured and protected from physical harm, such as peer violence and substance abuse (Haidari, Karakus & Kocoglu, 2019) and from emotional harm, such as teasing, discrimination, harassment and humiliation (Osher & Kendziora, 2010). Themane and Osher (2014: 1) also note that "safety is affected by the school learning environment, as well as the physical and social environments in which the school is nested". This insight coincides with Osher and Kendziora's (2010) opinion that elements of safety involve physical safety, emotional safety and intellectual safety, which also aligns with Osher, Penkoff, Sidana, and Kelly's (2016:4) study, which

indicates that “a safety school environment fulfils learners’ core psychological needs, including the need to belong, be autonomous, and be physically secured”.

According to the above scholars’ perception concerning safety within learning environment, it is significant to notice that a safe learning environment enables learners to effectively learn and develop holistically, because when learners learn in a safe school environment, they are able to share a sense of mutual trust and respect (Osher et al., 2016). This is also supported by a study of Haidari, Karakus and Kocoglu (2019:444), which reveals that “nurturing a sense of emotional and psychological safety is essential in every learning environment to facilitate learners’ opportunities to teaching and learning”. In the context of this study, the researcher therefore realizes that, for the LVIs in rural schools of Lesotho to feel physically safe, emotionally and psychologically protected, their teaching and learning environment needs to be safe and enabling.

2.5.2 Supportive learning environment

Learning is a dynamic process, which its efficiency requires ELE. Meanwhile, literature has proven that an ELE is characterized as an environment that supportively promotes learners’ learning (Cassum & Gul, 2017). This view concurred with the World Health Organization’s (WHO) consolidated guidelines (2 of 2019), which stipulates that a supportive learning environment is essential to facilitate access to and uptake of products and interventions that can improve the health and wellbeing of learners. Meaning, once learners’ learning environment is facilitated and uplifted, they might be able to succeed. Hence, Osher et al. (2016) claim that a supportive learning environment comprises the availability of help to meet learners’ social, emotional, behavioral and academic goals. The availability of assistance possessed by a supportive learning environment is thus equally important to enhancing learners’ ability to learn. Therefore, it is significant to notice that despite learners’ learning to be conducted in an environment that is supportive, their learning outcomes might not be achieved (Miyachi, 2020).

A study of Ozerem and Akkuyuhlu (2015) reveal that it is essential to conduct learners' learning in a supportive learning environment, which is not only designed to enable them to learn, but designed to support and accommodate their different learning styles. This view indicates that learners need a supportive learning environment, which can promote their diverse learning needs. In view of this, Osher et al. (2016: 6) define a supportive learning environment as "an enabling to enhance learners' sense of connection and attachment to their community members and of being cared for, treated well and respectfully". This shows that a supportive learning environment could be considered as enabling and positively correlating with this is a consideration of agentic capabilities (Bandura, 2012), which is motivated by the theoretical framework of the current study. The views of the abovementioned authors demonstrate the importance of an ELE, which is influenced by the support of people such as teachers, peers and parents in promoting learners' learning.

2.5.3 Engaging learning environment

According to Osher et al. (2016:12), the term 'engagement' means "energizing learners' interest in the educational process". In view of this, literature reveals that an environment that actively engages learners produce improved learning, better academic performance and enhance their creative skills (Cassum & Gul, 2017). Ali and Hassan (2018: 2161) observe that "good engagement is defined by the quality of engagement linked to the kind and context of attachment". This indicates that learners' active engagement is determined by what their environment provides to them. Hence, their level of engagement proofs their participation in school activities, recognition and appreciation of their school context (Kannabiran, 2016). Additionally, Gray and Diloreto (2016) concur and also confirm that an environment that allows learners engagement is imperative for their increased participation so as to accomplish meaningful learning. The principles of learners' engagement (as stated by UNICEF Lesotho & the Department of Basic Education) and stipulated by the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018: 6) indicate that:

- Meaningful learning occurs in an environment where creative engagement, awareness, inquiry and critical thinking are part of instruction;
- Conducive learning environment adapts to the individual's educational needs and encourages learning by promoting collaboration rather than isolation of learners;
- There needs to be a shared understanding that a learner is provided with opportunities and facilities to enable him or her to develop physically, mentally, spiritually and socially in a healthy normal manner and in the conditions of freedom and dignity;
- Learning environments, whether classrooms, schools, or other education systems, should be structured to promote engaged teaching and learning; and
- Learners must be given a voice in ensuring that they are free from discrimination in accessing education and are availed all educational opportunities provided.

For the above perspectives, it is clear that an environment that is engaging is regarded as being able to provide learners with the opportunity to achieve their academic goals (Ali & Hassan, 2018). Therefore, it is important for the rural schools in the context of this study to have shared common understanding that learners' active engagement in their learning processes assists in the promotion and enhancement of their learning (Kannabiran, 2016). Additionally, and in alignment with what has been stated in the theoretical framework chapter, which is Chapter 3 of the current study, that the diverse learning needs of LVIs require their active involvement and adaptation of their learning environment (Hornby, 2020), the focus is that rural schools should consist of engaging all learners, including LVIs as assets or agents in the making, creating and strengthening of their capabilities, which is essential for their learning and development. Hence, an ELE is considered as an important environment that actively and effectively engages its learners.

2.6 DISCUSSIONS RELATED TO THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter started by providing the review of related literature to this study. An understanding of visual impairments in a global context was used as a point of

departure in this chapter, followed by a discussion on the influence of an ELE on LVIs. What counts as a significance in this section is a need in the enhancement of LVIs' ELE. The enhancement in these learners' learning environment was as relevant and appropriate in enabling their effective learning. This was also considered essential in the development of their rural school though, in a global rural context it has been seen as being inhibited by an array of impeding factors. The enabling factors followed in the discussions as a solution to overcome challenges identified as a result of the impeding factors. Use of these enabling factors generated solutions to overcome such barriers associated with a deficit community mentality towards rurality. This yielded significant perspectives of realising a rural community agency, which in the current study was seen as putting more emphasis on collaborative work. Driven by the belief that community development is the result of interdependence efforts, according to Bandura, (2006) his theoretical framework was adopted in the current study. A significant belief is built on the evidence that within local communities and schools there are an ample array of resources or agents who may influence learners' learning better if they join efforts. It is within this very premise that these agents will be able to contribute solutions within the whole community if they can draw on other community members' expertise. This is a leading principle of collective agency, which promotes active participation, engagement, and collective thoughts in sharing of ideas, skills and knowledge for the purpose of achieving desired goals.

Although, several perspectives revealed a vast number of factors that inhibit successful engagement of the existing agency, the literature identified some gaps in the success and usefulness of local agency. However, it is therefore considered in the context of the current study, which explores how the enabling learning environment for LVIs in a rural secondary school of Lesotho can be enhance that, local agents should collectively provide rural schools and communities with agentic possibility engagement in the promotion and development of the learning environment of their learners.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed related literature to this study through the discussion and explanation of an ELE for LVIs in a rural school context. It has also drawn from the current local and international literature by exploring the state of LVIs and how their education is conducted within their host schools. In addition, literature was also reviewed; firstly, by exploring the influence of ELE on LVIs, and secondly, by examining inhibiting and enabling factors of LVIs' ELE. Further to this, significant reasons of why these learners need an environment that is enabling, conducive, and supportive to accommodate their special educational needs were also explored. Lastly, the discussion was drawn from the relevant literature to dwell much on local agents' availability and agentic engagements towards local community and school development. In this section, there appears to be a positive hope that, collective engagement and involvement of rural schools and communities may yield positive results in the promotion of their learners' learning environment. Based on this perspective, the next chapter presents the conceptual and theoretical frameworks used to underpin this study through examining how the ELE for LVIs in a rural school can be enhanced.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK INFORMING THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE ENABLING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented a review of literature relevant to this study. The present chapter aims to serve as a spine upon which all the aspects of the research are joined, while on the other hand showing how this study is constructed. All the aspects of this study are therefore linked to this chapter, highlighting the conceptual and theoretical frameworks used. Enhancing an ELE of LVIs is conceptualised and highlighted to ensure that the researcher is able to identify how and why variables may be related (Bezuidenhout, 2014) to the theories and phenomenon being investigated. Hence, the conceptual and theoretical frameworks in this study are used as the lens to guide the investigation. This chapter therefore, incorporates the two theories, and their relevance and application to the current study are discussed, showing how they are substantiated to the research findings.

3.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Osanloo and Grant (2014); Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) define a conceptual framework as an umbrella term linked to the way the researcher uses it to comprehend his or her ideas based on the research problem. This clearly indicates that a conceptual framework provides the direction the study intends to take (Osanloo & Grant, 2014). It is therefore significant in the context of this study to gain an understanding of how the enhancement of an ELE can lead to the effective teaching and learning of LVIs in rural schools. Another important point of consideration is a look at the kind of support provided by teachers within their particular schools and how it effectively contributes in the enhancement of LVIs' ELE for the promotion of their general wellbeing. Based on Isomottonen et al.'s (2019) definition, which states that an ELE ensures the effective

teaching and learning of all learners (LVIs included) by encouraging them to actively adapt and become creative in their learning. It is thus important to realise that, if an ELE for LVIs is enhanced, all their desired goals can successfully be achieved. The below section provides detailed information concerning ‘the enhancement of an ELE as a conceptual framework adopted to frame the current study.

3.3 CONCEPTUALISING AN ENABLING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR LVIs’ HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

According to Adom and Hussein (2018), a conceptual framework is significant in any research for it explains the path of research that provides the researcher’s explanation of how he or she has explored the research problem. It is therefore important in this study to begin this section by giving an explanation of the concepts used to frame it. Initially, a clear definition of what an ELE means is highlighted, followed by a detailed explanation of why it is important, as well as outlining reasons why it needs to be enhanced to cater for the LVIs’ general development during their time of schooling.

3.3.1 Enabling Learning Environment (ELE)

The development of the inclusive education in the current global era calls for a shift from the general education practices to a true accommodating and enabling learning space at all educational levels. The implementation of inclusive education practices in Lesotho, under the inclusive education policy (2018), necessitates full inclusion of all learners in an enabling school learning environment. In this context, the term ‘ELE’ has been seen linking to positive improvement by various literatures in the learning of all learners. A study by Sithole (2017) defines it as a positive learning environment where learners’ pastoral care is provided for them to perform better. Haidari, Karakus and Koçoğlu (2019) support this view by stating that it is a safe learning climate where teachers are approachable, peer relationships promoted, learning processes and physical characteristics of learning environment enhanced. Ozerem and Akkoyunlu (2015) also

state that an ELE is a designed environment, according to learners' needs to improve their motivation and success by using different learning materials.

Evocatively, an ELE refers to working conditions and practices that are likely to improve the balance between the child's reproductive and developmental learning, according to Ellström, Ekholm, and Ellström (2008). This implies that learners learn and develop well in an ELE. Evidence has shown that the employability of an ELE is significant in the learners' school life. Olveira and de Barba (2021) indicate that ELE provides learners with opportunities to interact with learning materials in a customised way, appropriate to meet their learning objectives. In addition, Rutherford (2015) argues that it is very important for learners to learn in an environment that is enabling for their effective teaching and learning. In a similar vein, Alsadoon (2017) adds that in an ELE, learners' behavioural problems are minimised and learning outcomes maximized. Similarly, Nwokedi (2019) confirms by expressing her views that an ELE is very resourceful and encourages the integration of all learners.

Moreover, Cassum and Gul (2017) assert that learning in an ELE is essential for the promotion of learners' critical thinking. This indicates that not only is learners' physical environment enhanced within an ELE, but also their level of thinking ability is elevated. In addition, Isomottonen et al. (2019) confirm that an ELE ensures that all learners, including those who have been marginalised and regarded as vulnerable, are encouraged, adapting and becoming creative in their learning. This study therefore, realises the importance of enhancing ELE of LVIs and the reason why their enabling environment needs to be enhanced is outlined in the following section.

3.3.2 The need to enhance an enabling learning environment for LVIs

Globally, the perspective in relation to the implementation of inclusive education practices, according to UNESCO (2001), is meant to ensure that all educational systems are open to include the greater diversity of all children. This perspective is driven by the belief that all learners, irrespective of any form of impairment, need to develop holistically and learn in an ELE. In the context of this study, it is significant to

give the meaning of 'enhancement' in order to have a clear understanding of why LVIs' learning environment needs to be enhanced. Consider the fact that research proposes that in practice, the concept 'enhancement' is identical to concepts such as, improvement, strengthening and enrichment. Meanwhile, due to its varying definitions, the researcher considered 'enhancement' as the applicable concept to be used in the current study. The definition is conveyed by Nagel (2014), who claims that enhancement is generally understood as being intended to improve individuals' wellbeing. Rahnawati, Utomo, Sukri, Yasinta and Al-Aidrous (2020) also confirm that enhancement got some element of development. Drawing from these scholars' perspectives, the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs is therefore considered significant in order to assist in providing them with equal opportunities of learning and development so as to effectively and successfully prosper.

Recent studies have indicated that all learners need an ELE, which is accessible to feel welcomed, safe, supported and engaged in their learning activities, so as to improve their social, physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. (Beyene, Mekonnen & Giannoumis, 2020; Themane & Osher, 2014; Cassum & Gul, 2017; Gae, 2016). To Beyene et al. (2020), when an environment is accessible, means that it provides quality and is easily used by individuals with and without impairments. This implies that all learners whose learning is conducted within an environment, which is enabling, feel accommodated, secured and develop a sense of belonging (Nwokedi, 2019). In the context of the study at hand, one of the most emphasized views about an ELE is to be enhanced so as to effectively meet all learners' diverse needs. Mboshi (2018) in her study even agrees that LVIs learn better when their learning environment is conducive, easily accessible and or enabling. Florian (2015) argues that when the learning environment is conducive, any learner's educational demands are properly addressed and their special educational needs effectively met. Mboshi (2018) further asserts that LVIs' special educational needs are therefore effectively met when their teaching and learning processes are modified and accommodating. However, a study of Ferreira (2020) contends that there is still a lack of sufficient support at a school level for LVIs in South Africa. It is therefore for this reason that this study proposes an enhancement of an ELE of LVIs, drawing from Mays' (2020) indication that an ELE for LVIs needs to be

enhanced as a solution to overcome their challenges, which the below section highlighted and provided the information used for a theoretical framework and its relevant use in the present study.

3.4 THEORIES FRAMING THE STUDY

Literature has proven that there is nothing more practical and important than a theory in any research. Hence, it is important to begin by giving an explanation of what a theory is. There are varying views of scholars based in the definition of a theory (Thomas, 2017). According to Longo and Soto (2016), theories are good and practical. This is in line with Collins and Stockton's (2018) view that theories are used as lenses through which the literature and data in the study are viewed and the nature of science's (2016:10) definition that, "it is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, assumptions, and generalizations that systematically describes and explains regularities in behaviour in educational organisations". Similarly, Osanloo and Grant (2014) further elaborate that it is through theories that all aspects of research are supposed to connect. This clearly demonstrates the significance of theories; that they are the backbone of any research. However, different scholars have established that the importance of theories is not enough without theoretical framework in research. Reyes and Netcoh (2015:3) confirm that theories provide the "foundation" for theoretical framework, while Adom and Hussein (2018) highlight that a theoretical framework serves as research guide or map in showing direction for theory development. Additionally, Thomas (2017) refers to theoretical framework as a building block from what theories are created. Based in the above scholars' definitions, this clearly indicates that theories are essential aspects in research and it is evident that social science researches are theory driven (Nwokedi, 2019). Hence, this study is located in the area of positive psychology and engages the inclusive special education theory of Hornby (2015) and the agentic capability theory of Bandura (2006). Hornby's Inclusive special education theory has often been used, especially to determine teachers' and schools' readiness for inclusive education practices (Hornby, 2020; Cenciotti, Borgogni, Consiglio, Fedeli, & Alessandri, 2020). Correspondingly, when transforming learning systems, Bandura's agentic capability

theory (1986) sees humans as agents or assets with capabilities who can contribute change within the system (Khanare & de Lange, 2017). In this view, both theories appeared to be ideal frameworks to address how an ELE for LVIs can be enhanced within their rural schools.

In the context of this study, Hornby's (2015) inclusive special education theory was employed to assist to meet the LVIs' special educational needs in a broader inclusive perspective and as a guide to explore teachers' understanding of an ELE for LVIs within their rural schools, while on the other hand, agentic capability theory was identified as ideal in realising rural community members as agencies who can contribute change in the learning environment of these learners. From the researcher's perspective, as a specialist teacher teaching at one of the mainstream rural primary school in Lesotho, considers having a clear understanding of how the ELE for LVIs can be enhanced, as a best strategy that would require rural community agencies' (in this case being rural secondary teachers, learners, parents etc.) collaborative participation. Hence, the concept "teachers are agents of change" (Bourn, 2016:63) is a base of agentic capability theory. This shows the results of its significance in the current study. Therefore, the explanations, roles and justifications of using these two theories in the context of enhancing an ELE, are detailed in the next session.

3.5 THE INCLUSIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION THEORY (ISET)

The inclusive-special education perspective has emerged from a blend of inclusive and special education approaches (Hornby, 2015). The theory's major focus is on synthesising philosophies, policies and practices from both inclusive and special education to ensure a clear vision for quality education for all (Garcia & Toledo, 2020). It is a theory that is meant to effectively address the diverse needs of all learners with SEND. According to Hornby (2020), ISET involves the implementation of a well-established inclusive educational practice, through collaborative commitment between special schools and mainstream schools. It is therefore evident that the diverse needs of all learners cannot be effectively met in a vacuum, but through an interactive commitment.

3.5.1 The origin of an inclusive special education theory

The ISET is dominant in the education development of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and was proposed and developed in 2015 by Garry Hornby. The work and the theory of Hornby have been adopted to ensure the quality of and the right of education for all learners (Al-Shammari, Faulkner, Forlin, 2019). It embraces the best teaching strategies for learners with SEND. The concern here is the adoption of evidence-based methods to effectively teach learners with SEND (Hornby, 2014). This theory merged the two concepts: inclusive education and special education to a sound and effectiveness of inclusive education for all (Florian, 2008; Hornby, 2020). According to Hornby (2014), Francisco, Hartman and Wang (2020), the inclusive special education theory has been introduced to transform the special education practices that were used in the special schools that performed to their best, into the mainstream schools that currently integrate all learners with and without any form of impairment.

Garry Hornby, the founder and proponent of ISET was born in England (Hornby, 2015). He first developed a passion of working with children with SEND after he graduated with a degree in physics from Leeds University in 1970. He gained four months' experience in Rhode Island in the USA, supporting elementary school-age children diagnosed with emotional disturbance and few adolescents diagnosed with autism, childhood schizophrenia, and mental retardation (Hornby, 2014). Hornby, as a teacher, educational psychologist, researcher and university professor, also pursued his work of working with children with SEND, their parents, and teachers in mainstreams schools and special schools for 44 years. His work is centred towards the maximum inclusion of learners with SEND in their host school (Hornby, 2020). This implies that the holist development of a learner with special educational needs, including those with visual impairments, requires a well-organised school learning environment (Stakes & Hornby, 2000), which involves a number of human and environmental influences. These include teachers, peers and friends, parents, community and schools. Florian (2014), Rapp and Granados (2021) claim that maximum inclusion requires institutions that recognise and include diverse needs of all learners. According to Hornby (2021:11), "an ISET form a

close interconnection between special and mainstream schools practices” by ensuring excellent education provision for all learners (Dovigo, 2017). Hence, his theory has been contributory in showing how a diversity of needs of all learners can be met, by recognising the significance of the connection between these schools and the influence they may have in the learners’ learning and development.

Prior to the adoption of the ISET, special and inclusive education approaches were used to address the special educational needs of all learners. Figure 3.1 depicts a model of an ISET as a solution from the previously criticized (special and inclusive education) approaches used for addressing the diverse needs of all learners. According to Florian (2008), the provision of education to students with disabilities was drawn from special school practices as a designed instruction to meet their special educational needs when they failed to adjust to the regular education system. In contrast to this claim, Francisco, Hartman, and Wang (2020) identified some fragments within this education, providing that it encourages separation among students with disabilities from their age-mate peers without disabilities. Tomlinson (2017: 2) in his study also discovered that special education provision was initially for “elite groups” and that some were offered basic education while many were excluded.

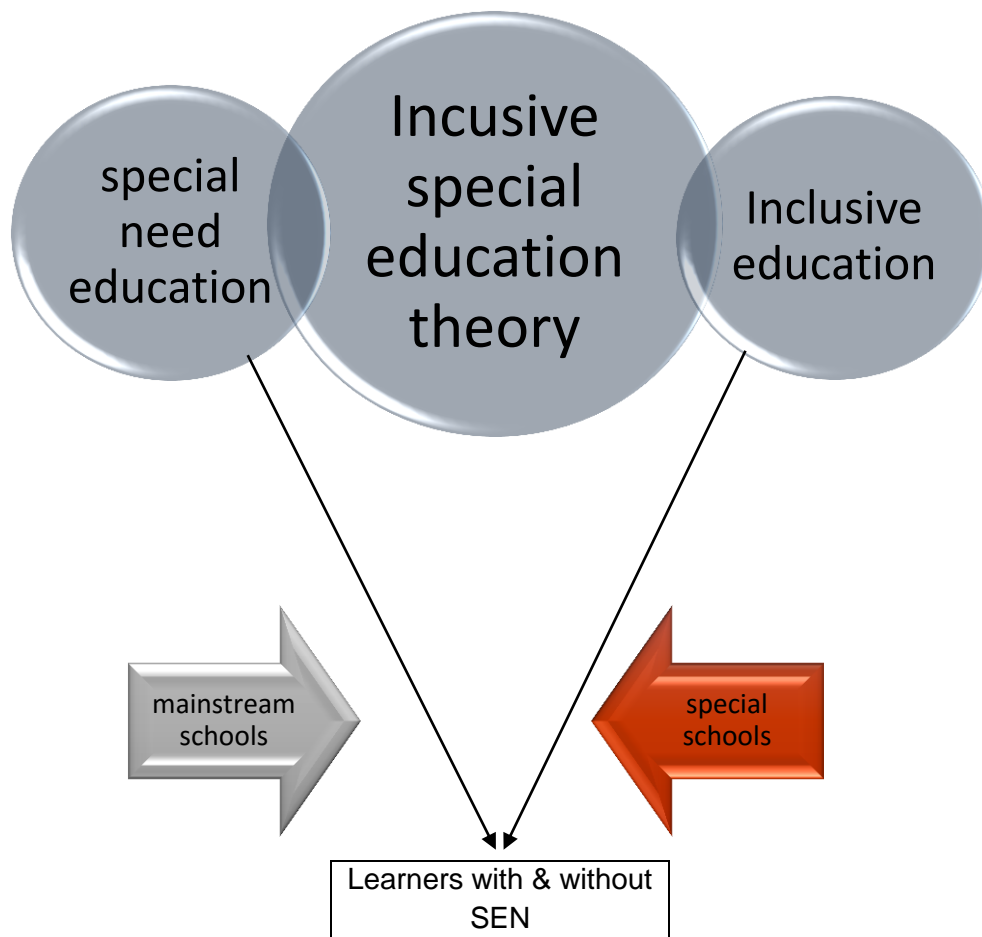


Figure 3.1: The shift from special education and inclusive education to the inclusive special education theory (adapted from Hornby, 2015: 14)

In the case of quality provision of education to all learners, a study of Nilholm (2021) implies the introduction of inclusive education as a solution from the segregated educational practices identified within the special education system. Hence, the inclusive education was then included in the education system with the intention of overcoming barriers for the learning and development of all learners (Chhetri, 2019). Most literature, for example (Al Shoura & Ahmad, 2015; Beyene, Mekonnen & Giaoumis, 2020; Hauwadhanasuk & Karnas, 2019; Shareefa, 2016) on the

implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools, has shown increase worldwide. The debate on the meaning, purpose and aims is embedded in inclusive education as an alternative pedagogical approach that has good intentions in reducing education inequalities among all students (Florian, 2015). However, Al Shoura and Ahmad (2015) revealed that the idea of an inclusive education is still unclear in Jordan's context that learners with SEND are still educated in segregated settings. Malik, Rashid, Awan and Alvi (2018) also identified lack of appropriate school infrastructure as the greatest impediments in the implementation of inclusive education in Pakistan. As a result, ISET is used to transform provision of education between special and inclusive (mainstream) schools into the best teaching and learning practices for all learners (der Bij, Geijsel, Garst & Dam, 2016).

Hornby (2015) therefore, realises the use of ISET as appropriate to fill the gap identified from the special and inclusive education approaches. The above model figure 3.1 is also used in this study to indicate that effective inclusion of all learners with and without SEND (LVIs included) is drawn from the collaboration between special and mainstream schools as a collective responsibility to supporting and meeting the needs of all learners (Ekins, 2012). This can be possible when the two approaches (special and inclusive education) are merged. In this view, the next section therefore, indicates the assumptions of ISET for the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs.

3.5.2 The assumptions of the inclusive special education theory

Hornby is known as a founder of the Inclusive Special Education Theory (thereafter, ISET). His theory considers an education system with a balance of special and inclusive education that produces optimal outcomes for all learners. According to Hornby (2020:1), "special education and inclusive education can be seen as equally important components of effective education system for all learners". This theory is meant to ensure that the diverse needs of all learners, particularly those with special educational and disabilities, are appropriately and effectively met. The ISET adopted an inclusive-special education perspective in order to present a clear vision of effective education for all learners. Hornby's theory opposes the disconnection made concerning the two

components. The study of Nilholm (2020) identifies the deconstruction of special education in order to construct inclusive education. Davigo (2017) also indicates that inclusion practice has been framed as an act of personal maladjusted. He further supports his argument by indicating that while promoting inclusion as an effort of providing quality education for all learners, most of the focus is based on the separation made between the disabled and those who are so-called normal. ISET therefore contrasts with the criticisms made and sees learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) as active human beings who have an inherent ability to make their own decisions (Khanare & de Lange, 2017).

Meanwhile, the theoretical assumptions of the ISET are based on the integrative knowledge and belief that positions a learner with SEND as a whole human being. The ontological positioning is a focus of this study as development of human beings and concerned with the kind of world being investigated, as well as what is the nature of reality (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). Hence, the ontological position of the current study was based on the definition of ontology and also based on the assumptions that the selected rural school in Lesotho as a research site, was viewed as the world populated with human beings (teachers, LVIs, peers and friends), who are able to express their thoughts, understandings and experiences. The researcher therefore was able to see how the participants, being teachers in a selected rural secondary school in Lesotho, interpreted their world based on the enhancement of ELE, as a phenomenon being investigated. Thinking about the construction of knowledge (epistemology) within the ISET, enabled the researcher to believe that what is truth about knowledge, is based on reality that knowledge is internal González (2021). This theory is meant to support learners who are considered as vulnerable, due to their different impairments. Again, driven by the knowledge and reality of life that, according to Crotty (2003:3), “epistemology is about a way of understanding of how we know about what we know”. Hence, in this context, the epistemological positioning of this study within ISET is based on the reality that knowledge is constructed and gained through personal experience (Steup, 2018). The researcher therefore, believes that participants’ understanding of LVIs’ ELE can be through how they feel worthwhile for its enhancement.

3.5.3 The attributes of the ISET

In order to understand how the education system can be effective to produce superior educational outcomes for all learners, Hornby (2020) identified two attributes or components: inclusive education and special education. These components are further explained as follows:

- *Inclusive education*: According to Graham (2020) and Hornby (2014, 2015), inclusive education aims to eliminate all barriers and enable equal quality education to all learners. This implies that schools that practice inclusive education; welcome, acknowledge, value and practice acceptance of all learners by educating them together and produce a high quality education.
- *Special education*: “Is composed of a range of teaching practices specifically designed for the needs of individuals with special educational needs and disabilities” (Francisco et al., 2020:98) that are implemented by well-trained special education teachers.

As indicated in the above, Hornby (2014) believes that having an education system with stability of both special and inclusive education, can effectively and equally address the needs of all learners. This can as well be suitable in the case of LVIs in this study. For instance, some studies regarded LVIs as vulnerable, because of different challenges, such as: discrimination, lack of social belonging, inflexible curriculum, limited resources, constraining learning environment, etc., that they experienced within their learning environment (Rapp & Granados, 2021; Nilholm, 2021; Shareefa, 2016; Al Shoura & Che Ahmad, 2015). Despite the challenges that LVIs are faced with, Hornby (2020) asserts that these core components rest as a base for an operative education system where all learners’ academic needs can be effectively addressed. Hence, LVIs might as well learn and thrive within the education system that is well established.

3.5.4 The role of the researcher and the participants in ISET

Learning is dynamic, however complex to concur individuals' holistic development. The researcher's concern for conducting this study is based on enhancing an ELE for LVIs. The inclusive special education theory of Hornby (2014; 2015; 2020) aims to respond to the educational needs of all learners, including those with visual impairments. Hornby (2021) argues that learners, particularly those with SEND, including LVIs, do not only learn in a simple learning environment however, they need to learn in an environment that is conducive, fully resourced and enabling to achieve their educational demands (Cassum & Gul, 2017; Haidari, Karakuş & Koçoğlu, 2020). As the ISET is concerned with how well the learners' educational needs can be realised within their society to assist them to prosper, the researcher therefore had to situate her interest in understanding how the rural schools and communities view an ELE, particularly to the learners with eye problems. In general, an ELE is viewed as "smart" (Oliveira & de Barba, 2021: 1) in the context suitable to meet the diversity needs of all learners by granting them emotional and physical support so as to feel welcomed, accepted and empowered. According to Sefotho's (2018) perspective, in order for us to successfully empower individuals, we should first start by considering the power dynamics from collective relations within their societies, because collective relations turn away for one to help one another.

Meanwhile, the study at hand was conducted to acknowledge that every individual's voice matters. Therefore, it became appropriate to this study to employ ISET that gives priority to all the voices, and participants' (teachers) voices were considered as significant to reveal their experiences and understanding of an ELE. Additionally, because the ISET perspective is based on the principles of supporting inclusive education practices, it helps the researcher to use it as a tool to develop good practices, guidance on accessible space to enable LVIs to have the same opportunities of the social experience as non-disabled siblings and peers (Korir, 2015). The researcher emphasizes the transition from the theory's practices and relates it to the application of important aspects of an ELE.

Considering the fact that LVIs are faced with numerous challenges (Binmahfooz, 2019; Asamoah *et al.*, 2018; Naipal & Rampersad, 2018) that might be through the negative impact of their social structures (such as; parents, peers, teachers, communities and etc.), which on the other hand might have a positive contribution in addressing them. Driven by the above mentioned perspectives, the researcher realised the potential in using ISET, which considers individuals being LVIs as potential human beings whose learning environment might be enhanced collaboratively and by listening to the participants' (in this case, teachers' voices).

3.5.5 The application of an inclusive special education theory in the rural context

The key issues in the ISET are that each of these components has influence in a learner's learning and development. Therefore, the concepts of maximum inclusion, best inclusive education practices, education in most appropriate settings, collaboration within and between the organisations that provide optimal education, are common ideas related to this theory. According to the inclusive special education perspective, effective inclusion means providing all learners with an appropriate education (Bendová & Fialová, 2015) that will enable them to acquire life skills, preferably accommodated in the regular mainstream school - the school they would attend with their age-mate peers if they did not have any form of impairments. This theory has some bearings in the quality provision of education to all learners to encourage an increased sense of belonging, lead to greater understanding and less prejudice in the local community, within the school and among learners (Florian, 2015; Majoko, 2019; Beyene, Mekonnen & Giannoumis, 2020; Shareefa, 2016; Pijl & Hamstra, 2005; Chhetri, 2019).

Rurality has been subjected to many challenges (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), associated with poverty, lack of resources and insufficient funding. The indication is based on the perception that rural schools and communities are unable to create opportunities for their learners to attain an equal quality education like their urban counterparts (Myende, 2014). However, Tieken and Montgomery (2021) contend that rural schools in America are much more diverse than what is usually linked to a rural context. Ramatea and Khanare (2021) also indicate that rural schools and communities

are potential assets to the country's economy in Lesotho. Hence, the major focus of the ISET is to construct and confront issues of inequalities and injustice that arise from exclusive practices within every learner's learning context. To achieve the objectives of this theory in the case of this study, which is the rural school context of the LVIs, maximum and effective inclusion of LVIs is ensured through the appropriate values, attitudes, knowledge and skills provided within their school (Hornby, 2014). This indicates that the effective inclusion of LVIs is essential and determines how best their school should provide to them (Takala, Pirttimaa & Törmänen, 2009). The researcher therefore in the context of this study, views the inclusive special education framework, close collaboration and contribution from mainstream schools in various contexts, special schools, professionals such special education teachers, learners, policies and parents, as significant.

Collaboration is an important "element of philosophy and practices of inclusive special education theory" according to Hornby (2014: 16). LVIs' effective inclusion places them in the middle of collective and collaborative support. Ekins (2012) points out that meeting the educational needs of all learners, including those with visual impairments, requires collective responses. This indicates that rural schools, within which LVIs are enrolled, have potential human and non-human resources with appropriate programs and strategies best to meet their needs. LVIs as individuals whose educational needs demand special attention are therefore, regarded as everyone's responsibility. Hence, the ISET is selected by the researcher, as the applicable theory to be used in this study for exploring and acquiring a deeper understanding of teachers' (in particular those working within the Lesotho rural school) experiences and understanding of LVIs' learning. These teachers are also identified as having the potential in enhancing an ELE of these learners.

3.5.6 The relevance of ISET on the current study

The present study is conducted with a focus on enhancing an ELE for LVIs in Lesotho. The aim is to explore how teachers within rural schools of Lesotho could contribute in the improvement of such an ELE. Using ISET as a lens and demonstrating its relevance

to the current study proves its potential that it can be applied for people who have been marginalised. In his account of what this theory entails, Hornby (2015) argues that it involves the consideration of human rights, celebration and valuing of individuals' diverse needs. Drawing from what this theory constitutes, the researcher might be able to understand how LVIs' learning environment can be improved, in order for them to learn and develop. This theory encourages social inclusiveness of all learners. Hornby (2021) affirms that the effectiveness of education provision for all learners, including LVIs, requires their maximum inclusion in their community. Hence, individual learners do not learn, grow or develop in isolation however, need to interact with others, teachers, parents, peers and friends for their educational development (Pilgrim & Hornby, 2018).

This theory is therefore considered relevant to this study to collaboratively engage LVIs in their learning with their teachers, parents, peers and friends, in the best teaching practices that acknowledge their special educational needs, rather than deficits (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016). ISET is driven by the belief that effective inclusion is about diversity and striving together (Malik, Rashid, Awan, & Alvi, 2018), by focusing on the diverse needs of all learners, including LVIs. Raguindin and Bulusan (2020) confirm that Hornby's perspective has some bearing on the principles of social inclusion where learners with special educational needs, including LVIs, are valued, considered and encouraged towards full participation in the most inclusive settings in which their special educational needs can effectively be met.

According to Hornby's theory, individuals with special educational needs are valued as active human beings with potential, who are capable of contributing positively to their society. This theory is therefore employed in this study to value these learners as active persons with potential (Khanare & de Lange, 2017) in their learning environment through the effective use of instructional strategies (Horny, 2014). The researcher therefore sees the enhancement of their learning environment as realising their potential through the collaborative support they may receive, by interacting with other learners, parents and their teachers to provide "excellent education for all" (Hornby, 2020:8). This emphasises the importance of working together, which is in line with one African adage

as expressed in a Sesotho proverb: “*kopano ke matla*’ (simply translated as unity is power) (Sefotho, 2018).

This is a cultural phenomenon dated back to the early pre-colonial era in Lesotho, and emphasizing a long-range of goals to have optimistic outlooks on life, as a result of collaboration. The proverb, as applied to the study, simply means that the learning environment for the LVIs can be enhanced by involving them, realising their potential and their parents, peers and teachers as stakeholders in teaching, and acknowledging the contribution they may have for their academic success. This theory is incorporated in this study, because of its ability to reduce educational inequalities among learners, including those with visual impairments.

3.6 THE AGENTIC CAPABILITY THEORY (ACT)

The agentic capability theory was developed by Albert Bandura in 1986, who formerly defined it as a psychosocial theory. Bandura has transformed this theory to what is now known as social cognitive theory. The agentic perspective of social cognitive theory has progressed from social learning theory developed by Bandura in 1977 and has been gaining increased attention in terms of human development, adaptation and change (Cenciotti, Borgogni, Cosiglio, Fedeli & Alessandri, 2020; Boerre, 2006). In social learning theory, a child’s learning is influenced and triggered by a number of environmental factors by observing other people. This is what McLeod (2011) calls observational learning. The social learning theory, described as observational learning with itself, can be used as a screen to reflect what has been observed and where new behaviours are learned. Within this theory, Bandura (2001) later realised some shortcomings, namely that it does not clearly describe how the new human behaviours learned, were developed. Hence, McLeod (2016) argues that social learning theory has influence only on observable and external human behaviour. To Bandura, social cognitive theory or agentic capability theory sees people as critical agents of change, to him “people are producers as well as products of social system,” (Bandura, 2001:1). In this context, people are active humans who can bring about a change and help to construct a system (Bandura, 2001, 2004, 2006). According to an agentic capability

theory, individuals are considered to have ability and power to make their own decisions (Bandura, 2001; 2004; 2006).

3.6.1 Understanding agentic capabilities

The concept 'agentic capabilities' is composed of two terms: 'agentic' and 'capabilities'. For this reason, it is better to start by defining what an agentic means and what capabilities mean, in order to have a clear understanding of what agentic capabilities mean. The term 'agentic' originates from the word 'agency', proposed by Bandura in viewing humans as having capacity to take control of their own life. The agentic perspectives embrace humans' capability to become actors influencing the environment (Alfaiz, Hidayah, Hambali, & Radjah, 2019). This perspective, according to Bandura (2001), places people in having more power of making decision of their own. Within this view, people are considered as self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulated. To Bandura (2006), the significant point of departure of the agentic persons is to be able to regulate their motivation and action, through planning, selecting and implementing their capabilities. These comprise an ideal content with the concepts of 'human agency' (Alfaiz et al., 2019) within whose capacity things are intentionally done. Similarly, Goller and Harteis (2020) confirm that human agency describes how human beings are agents of influence upon their life courses and their environment. Drawing insights from the positive psychology point of view (Nwokedi & Khanare, 2020) where human agencies are considered as active beings with capability and ability of influencing their growth and development, in this study therefore, LVIs are seen as agents and or human agency with the potential to act, make decisions of their own and plan together with other people within their host environment for their academic success.

The "agentic capabilities", according to the social cognitive theory of Bandura, refers to the basic capabilities of mind that allow people to proactively influence their functioning and external context (Cenciotti et al., 2020:1). In line with this definition, it is clear that the proper functioning of an individual is through the capacity of his or her mind. Capabilities, according to Nussbaum (2003), refer to what people are actually able to do

and be. Similarly, Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016:126) describe capabilities as “set of potential functioning that is achievable”. Robeyns (2016) concurs with Dalkili and Vadeboncoeur that the ability of people to properly function indicates that they have capabilities as real opportunities and freedom to achieve their functioning. In the context of this study, LVIs’ capacity to function lies in their hands, skills, potential and ability to decide, shape and thrive in their learning, while engaging and interacting with different assets within their learning environment, such as: teaching and learning resources, teachers, and peers to assist in enhancing their learning, growth and development.

3.6.2 Agentic capability within the Bandura’s human agency perspectives

Social cognitive theory is central to Bandura’s agentic perspectives (Bandura, 2018). His work has been receiving increased attention in terms of human agency. He views humans as contributors and life changers who have power over their immediate environment (Bandura, 2006). Shogren, Little and Wehmeyer (2017: 17) explain human agency as “the sense of personal empowerment involving both knowing and having what it takes to achieve goals”. This means that humans have capability to act and make choices of their own lives (Code, 2020). To Bandura (2018:130), human functioning is “the product of intrapersonal influences, the behaviour individuals engage in, and the environmental forces that impinge on them”, in other words, an agentic capability theory has been instrumental in showing individuals’ power and influence upon their lives within which behavioural, personal and environmental factors operate as determinants and influence each other. This clearly shows that an individual does not operate in isolation however; he/she needs meditative efforts of others and an interactive aspect from the environment to function (Code, 2020). Therefore, a diagrammatic representation of determinants in the causal model of social cognitive theory is shown in Figure 3.2

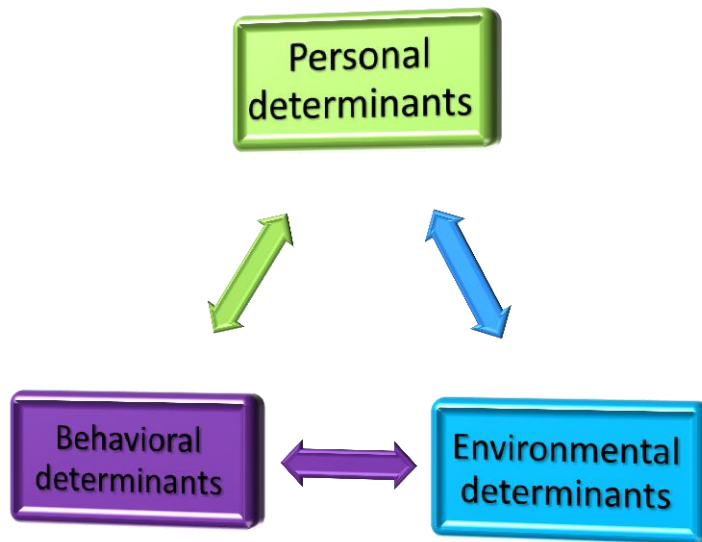


Figure 3.2: Casual model of interplay of determinants in social cognitive theory (Adapted from Bandura, 2018: 131)

Social cognitive theory draws attention in the belief of personal efficacy that people motivate and guide their action. The conception of ‘efficacy belief’ emanates from Bandura’s concern for human agency, which plays a key role in human functioning that people believe in having the ability to succeed (Nwokedi, 2019). Code (2020) explains self-efficacy as an individual’s (self) reflective belief in one’s capability to succeed in life. This is more so the case to Bandura (2008:4), in stating that efficacy regulates human functioning through cognitive, emotional, and decisional process. For Bandura, human agency is purposive, constructive and skilful; this clearly indicates that human functioning not only exists within an individual without planning.

3.6.3 Central pillars of the agentic capability theory

Understanding human agency is central to Bandura’s (2006) four pillars or core features that operates within the self: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. It is within human agency where people’s self-development and behavioural change are deliberated. According to Bandura (2001:6), these core features

of human agency explains clearly what it means to be human and are further discussed as follows:

- i.) Within intentionality, individuals form intentions that include their future planning and goal setting (Bandura, 2001; 2006; 2008). This involves their will to act in order to achieve their desired goals (Gow, 2021). In this form of human agency, individuals exhibit competence in planning their actions if they have capacity to select social settings that match their desired goals (Code, 2020).
- ii.) Forethought involves individuals' ability to anticipate the outcomes of their actions; this clearly shows that individuals within this form of human agency, set themselves goals, and guide and motivate their efforts in order to anticipate the results of their actions (Bandura, 2018).
- iii.) Self-reactiveness is another important component of human agency within which agents (individuals) are not only planners and forethinkers of their actions, but also motivators and self-regulators (Bandura, 2001). This shows that it is within self-reactiveness that agents as self-regulatory and not just passive individuals have the ability to construct their plans into success through their actions that require self-management of thoughts and motivations in order to direct them to their desired goals (Lima, Nassif & Garcon, 2020).
- iv.) In self-reflectiveness, most individuals' aims are not achievable without other agents, according to Nwokedi (2019: 38). Lima et al. (2020) add that this is a crucial form of human agency within which people believe in their capabilities; to examine and become aware of their abilities, reflect and check the appropriateness of their thoughts and actions. Thus, "people's belief of self-efficacy" Bandura (2001: 10). To Bandura, nothing is more crucial than people believe of self-efficacy as it sets the foundation to human agency.

The above mentioned central pillars or core features of human agency, according to Bandura (2008), show that it is through human agency that determines how people are conducted and how they conduct themselves. Hence, these core features when interrelated, work jointly and internally within an individual as foundations to support in the discussions of enhancing an enabling learning environment. For instance, LVIs are

considered as disabled, due to their eye conditions, which sometimes exposed themselves to many challenges in their host learning environment, such as: discrimination, stigmatisation, low self-esteem, lack of supportive resources, lack of social belonging, academic stress, restrictive learning environment, etc., and consequently become barriers in their learning (Sefotho, 2020; Atowa, Hansraj & Wajuihian, 2019; Korir, Viljoen, 2020; Landsberg & Kruger, 2011). Despite these challenges faced by LVIs, and drawing insight from the agentic capability perspective, people are agents of change who can have influence in their lives (Bandura, 2018). It is therefore important to understand the fundamental role that an efficacy belief plays, “as a mechanism of personal agency” (Lima et al., 2020:323) that LVIs might act as active agents and have inherent capabilities to influence their learning if they are empowered to believe, think and feel that they are in control of their functioning and life situation. Additionally, corresponding their ability with abilities of those within their school (teachers, peers and friends), might have a positive influence in their efficacy and enable them to successfully achieve their desired goals.

3.6.4 The role of the researcher and the participants within the agentic capability theory

In terms of the researcher and the participants' role within the agentic capability theory, it has been indicated in the above section that the main significance of the agentic capability theory is to deal with “human development, adaptation and change” (Bandura, 2006:164). This is in line with Cauce and Gordon's (2011) perspective in associating this theory with human agency within which individuals/people exercise their influence. According to Bandura (1999:21), “human agency operates within a broad network of socio-structural influences” as indicated in figure 3.3 below:



Figure 3.3: Three key modes of human agency (adopted from Bandura's (2006:165) agentic capability theory)

The researcher decided to have discussions in using the following three modes of human agency, because they are found within the environment where individuals function on an everyday basis. For example, within *personal agency*, individuals are influenced through the bidirectional influences (Bandura, 2006), exercised directly and indirectly between the person and the environment. Alfaiz et al. (2019: 380) claim that this form of agency “involves trained individuals to becoming more active in their environment by planning, working and taking actions to achieve their desired goals”. This clearly shows that individuals exercise their personal agency through the influence they have, by planning and taking actions for their lives.

The other form of human agency is *proxy* within which individuals' agency is exercised indirectly through other agencies (Bandura, 2008). According to Alfaiz et al. (2019), people exercise their agency by acting and achieving goals through other individuals.

This implies that individuals achieve whatever they want out of life through “interdependent efforts” (Bandura, 2000:75). This made Bandura (2018) to explain that, it is within proxy agency that people do not have direct control over conditions that affect their lives; however, they have influence on other people who have resources and knowledge to function on their behalf, so as to protect their desired outcomes.

The third mode of human agency that is found within the environment for people’s functioning, is *collective agency*. Alfaiz et al. (2019) assert that many of the things that people seek are achievable by working together through interdependent efforts. In exercising collective agency, individuals collectively share experiences, skills and knowledge to produce the desired results (Bandura, 2000). Hence, in this mode of agency, participants achieve unity of effort for common purposes (Bandura, 2018).

It is therefore for these reasons and evident in this study that in drawing from positive psychology perspectives, the researcher and the participants had a belief that every individual have an inherent capability (Ramatea & Khanare, 2021). Therefore, the enhancement of the LVIs’ learning environment may require recognition of their ability and recognition of other human agencies, which will assist them to adapt and develop holistically. This is also supported by Molekoa, Ubis, Sefotho and Ferreiras’ (2021) idea that the success of people within their host environment, depend on the collaborative role played by local community members (agencies). In this study, the participants (teachers) therefore, have a significant role to play in the learning of LVIs, to assist them in how to adapt and sustain their lives. Additionally, their engagement in this study is of great help as agencies who are knowledgeable of LVIs’ educational demands, because they interact with them daily. Bourn (2016) confirms that teachers are positioned as individuals, capable of bringing positive change in the lives of people within their society.

The researcher therefore, values teachers who participated in this study as agents of change and their roles as important to act upon in bringing about positive change in the lives of LVIs. This indicates that, in order for them to understand how the ELE for LVIs can be enhanced, they have to belief in their abilities, those of LVIs and other human agencies as well. These include rural schools, local communities, parents, and other

learners. Hence, LVIs', as assets or human agency, learning can be exercised through direct personal agency (self-agency), through proxy (other agency) and collective agency (group agency). LVIs also need these three forms of human agencies to ensure that their learning is enhanced within their host environment.

3.6.5 The application of agentic capability theory in the rural context

Agentic capability is a commonly used theory. It has been applied in numerous studies, because it is valued for among other aspects, "human development, adaptation and change" (Bandura, 2006: 164). This theory therefore, for this reason, has been applied in different fields of education (such as; in psychology of education, science education, business education, social studies education etc.). However, researches focussing on how this theory has been applied on enhancing an ELE of LVIs, especially in rural schools and in Lesotho, are limited. However, there are many studies that realise the potential in applying the agentic capability theory. One such study is the study conducted by Lima et al. (2020), which aims to analyse entrepreneurial behaviour from the components of psychological capital and cognitive social theory, and from a human agency perspective. The study by Pandee, Tepsuriwong and Darasawang (2020), which investigated the dynamic state of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy in Thailand, showed that teachers' self-efficacy is influenced through the complete interaction of Bandura's (2006) model of triadic reciprocal: behavioural factors, contextual factors and personal factors. Code (2020) also used this theory to develop a self-report instrument that measures how students enact agency through their ability to regulate their cognitive, effective, and behavioural processes, as they interact with factors within their learning environment.

Additionally, Cenciotti et al. (2020), used an agentic capability theory to design a new scale, "The Work Agentic Capabilities (WAC) questionnaire" in the organisational context in Italy, and the findings of the study suggested use of 'WAC' as reliable to measure agentic capabilities. A study of Hidayah, Hambali and Radjah (2019) also used the agentic capability theory with the aim to investigate and explain a relationship between personal agency and human autonomy in a social system by synthesising an

agentic approach to shape self-cognition of a human autonomous learning process. In a similar vein, the study by Nwokedi and Khanare (2020), applied the agentic capability theory as a lens to explore international students' experiences in South Africa. The study discovered that international students' holistic development is based on the different enabling learning factors found within their host learning environment.

Use of the agentic capability theory by various researchers in different fields of education, reflects the power it possesses in human development and that it can be used in different context as well. Hence, adopting the agentic capability theory as a framework to respond to the challenges faced by LVIs within their rural schools and to recognise them as assets or agents with potential in their learning, calls for the focus shifting from "deficit thinking" (Khanare, 2009: 24) and realising rural schools as resourceful rather than deficient (Khanare & de Lange, 2017) and that by tapping into these rural schools' environmental factors (such as, teachers, school learning spaces or classrooms, peers, parents, local community, etc.) might have a positive influence to enhance an ELE for LVIs. The researcher therefore, regards this theory as applicable to be used in the rural context in order to enable the LVIs as contributors to their life circumstances and not just a product of them (Bandura, 2008). Hence, to enhance their ELE may require their involvement and realising the influence that their rural schools may have to enable them to act independently and to make decisions in their learning (Bell, Lori, Redmann & Seng, 2016).

3.6.6 The relevance of agentic capability theory in the current study

The use of the agentic capability theory in this study is based more on its strengths than weaknesses. Even though it has been differently criticised by some scholars that it is not a fully systematized and unified theory that largely ignores the biological differences and hormonal influences on ones' behaviour and that it does not focus on emotions or motivations rather than through reference to the past experiences (Flamand, 2017; Lamorte, 2016). Lamorte (2019) further puts more emphasis on the weakness of this theory that it is loosely organised, based on the dynamic interplay between the personal behavioural factors and the environmental factors, which means that the theory does

not clearly specify the extent to which each factor is more influential than another. In consideration of these criticisms and realising the potential in this theory, it “gives prominence to a self-system that enables individuals to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings and actions” (Oden, Ward, Raisingani, 2019: 387). This signifies that the environmental system, within which an individual operates, enables his or her functioning. Thus, agentic capability theory’s relevance to the current study is vital.

This study aims to enhance an enabling learning environment for LVIs within their rural school. Employing an agentic capability theory as a theoretical framework in this study might create space for its application and realisation, especially in a rural school setting. Bandura (2019) asserts that within an agentic capability theory, individuals are motivated to make efforts to become people who are able to improve their lives. Hence, the application of this theory promotes LVIs who have been characterised as incapable, passive and vulnerable learners from passive perspectives to become active individuals with potential, who are capable of bringing solutions to their lives. To Bandura (2006), human agencies interrelate and interact with one another to meet their desired goals. In this sense, LVIs are therefore considered as human agencies and the enhancement of their enabling learning environment might as well be expected to be drawn from potential agents within their rural schools. Sithole (2017) in his study argued that the school environment mostly influences learners’ learning. This can be effective when the agents (teachers, peers, parents & local community members), together with structures (rural schools’ environment), bring positive influence to effectively address the special needs of LVIs. Hence, Khanare (2012) confirms that individual learners do not exist in a vacuum, but within social structures within which they can be supported.

The agentic capability theory in this study is therefore employed to consider significance of agencies within the Lesotho rural schools. The theory asserts and as also indicated in the above section that, by tapping into various factors within and outside LVIs’ rural schools, could have either a positive or negative influence in their learning. The researcher has therefore opted to elaborate on how such factors in terms of their

influences and importance could contribute to the LVIs' learning and general wellbeing in the following section.

3.7 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE AGENTIC CAPABILITIES

According to the agentic capability theory, individuals are seen as active agents with ability and potential in and on their environment where their behaviours are influenced by personal and environmental factors (Bandura, 2012). This indicates that this theory does not only consider an individual's development, but also goes beyond to identify several personal and environmental factors and by providing the influence these factors might have on an individual's development. Hence, the theory recognises the bidirectional influences that take place within an individual's environment (Bandura, 2006). The greater focus of the current study is therefore placed on the belief that the enhancement of LVIs' ELE might be through the influence between the agencies (LVIs themselves, their friends and peers, parents and teachers) and that of their social structures (rural community and school's environment). The following sections show clearly that (LVIs, peers, teachers and parents) being agents and their structures (rural schools and communities), have influence on one another, either positively or negatively.

3.7.1 Enabling factors of the agentic capabilities

According to Bandura (2006; 2008; 2012) within an environment there are some factors that have a positive influence on individuals' learning, behaviours, growth and development. It is clear that learners need these factors in order for them to succeed in school, to develop in a healthy manner and to thrive (Thamane & Osher, 2014). Ozerem and Akkoyunlu (2015) define enabling factors as resources that make it possible for learners to have access to them so as to succeed in life and finding solutions to their own problems. In line with this definition, it is clear that those LVIs as individuals in their learning environment can have access and be influenced positively by these factors within and outside their school. In the context of this study, the success and

development of LVIs are influenced by the factors (such as, individual factors, academic factors and social factors) within and outside their learning environment, which are therefore outlined in detail in the next sections.

3.7.1.1 Individual factors

Despite global perspectives concerning several challenges indicated as faced by LVIs during their time of schooling, it is significant in this study to consider LVIs as active individuals who have an inherent ability and capacity to influence their learning and development. There are various individual factors that can be drawn to influence every learners' way of learning. According to Thamane and Osher (2014), individual factors such as dedication, resilience and self-motivation are considered important elements in the holistic development of a person. Code (2020) identifies factors, such as cognitive capacity and coping skills as an inherent ability that assists learners to regulate, control and monitor their own learning. This view also resonates of what has been said earlier that these factors could contribute to the learners' ability to interact and engage with the people within their community to develop self-efficacy skills, self-confidence and resilience.

According to Cauce and Gordon (2011), self-efficacy is a major component of Bandura's agentic capability theory, which emphasises individuals' belief of having the ability of being able to perform tasks and becoming successful. This is also confirmed in a study (Makhasane & Khanare, 2018) that claims that learners as active individuals, have the cognitive capacity, being a personal factor and the ability to interact and engage with their community members (parents, teachers, other learners within and outside their school) to assist them to cope and perform well in their learning. This is in line with what has been discussed in the above sections that personal functioning is the result of interpersonal and external influences (Bandura, 2018). This clearly linked well with the aim of this study that examines the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment. In this case, it is considered in the context of this study that the success of the LVIs could be drawn from their capability influence they may have in working with their teachers and peers within their rural schools and communities.

3.7.1.2 Academic factors:

According to Moghadam, Khiaban, Esmaeili and Salsali (2017), education is a key to an individual's success. The inclusive education policy (LIEP, 2018) of Lesotho suggests that every learner's educational demands require interactive support within their learning environment. This is also in alignment with Ozerem and Akkoyunlu's (2015) view, which denotes that the school learning environment within which learners learn and develop, have a great influence on their ability to cope academically. Mutlu and Yildirim (2019) argue that within the school learning environment, there are plenty of academic factors classified as human and non-human resources that could be tapped into to influence the learners' ability to learn and thrive. This is highlighted in the context of this study that LVIs' success in education is a concern and responsibility of every member in their community. This also resonates with the frameworks of this study and is therefore believed that enabling the academic performance of LVIs is based on their influence and the influence among people within their rural schools and communities.

In the backdrop of the above discussions, it therefore assumed that LVIs' capabilities and abilities to learn are the result of collaborative partnership and the influence of the academic factors found within and outside their school. This is in line with Mohamad, Kesavanb, Razzaqc, and Khalifahd's (2013) view, who claim that collaboration among community members plays an important role in an individual's capacity building. Alfaiz et al. (2019) also confirm that every human agent is shaped by the academic factors found within their learning environment, whilst such agents have the ability to influence those factors. In the case of this study, LVIs are therefore seen as human agents with the ability to influence their learning.

3.7.1.3 Social factors

The implementation of an inclusive education policy and practices, embrace an element of social inclusiveness of all learners with and without disabilities. This is a global concern and reflected in the Lesotho inclusive education teachers' guidelines of 2011, in

identifying the benefits of inclusive education as to encourage all learners to learn to become more tolerant and patient in supporting each other. Human (2010) indicates that inclusive education practices require an education system that will enable all learners to have the right to attend the neighbouring schools, significant for their social reasons. Similarly, Krishnan (2010) merges this claim to his view and refers it to learners' social support, which is driven by the influence they may have in supporting one another. This is also drawn from Bandura's (2006; 2012) agentic perspectives that position a learner at the centre of social structures, which includes schools, families and communities. Hence, for the purpose of this study, enabling social inclusiveness of the LVIs requires not only their competency to participate in their learning, but also mobilising and harnessing of other people's capacities to ensure their full participation in an increasingly interdependent society (Human, 2010). The next section highlights and discusses inhibiting factors of the agentic capabilities.

3.7.2 Inhibiting factors of the agentic capabilities

An environment is considered as a significant basic factor in a human's learning and development. According to Khanare and de Lange (2017), it refers to an important place for children's growth and development. Thamane and Osher (2014) also note that an environment is a vital place that needs to be reconstructed and maintained to enable learners' success. This indicates that the environment can either have a positive or negative impact in the learners' learning. Hence, a rapid increase in a body of literature, reporting the inhibiting factors within learners' learning environment globally, remains unchanged. The next section therefore, discusses different factors identified within the learning environment as inhibiting, which are most dominant and categorised as social exclusion with the matching sub-categories (see table 3.1). These were presented in the context of this study as having a negative impact in the LVIs' learning, growth and development, within their ELE.

Table 3.1: Representations of inhibiting factors found within LVIs’ learning environment

Categories of inhibiting factors	Sub-categories
Social exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma and discriminations • Teachers’ negative attitudes • Peer/teacher rejections

3.7.2.1 Social exclusion

Social exclusion is a multi-faced concept with numerous definitions, associated to its complexity to explain (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013), since learners considered to have been going through or termed as excluded, may not necessarily be socially excluded (Matlosa & Matobo, 2007). The experiences of social exclusion can seriously affect the LVIs and can negatively impact their ability to learn. According to Parvin (2015), learners experiencing lack of sight are detached from physical and/or to some extent, from social environment. This is due to some limited access they possess in forming and maintaining social relationships within their learning environment (Manita & Doikou, 2022). However, Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) explain social exclusion as the result of a social process of stigmatisation and discrimination, prevailing among their community members, which can deny them effective access of the teaching and learning resources. Meanwhile, in the context of this study the inclusion of LVIs into the rural mainstream school education, exposed them to various kinds of challenges like stigma and discrimination, teachers’ negative attitudes and peer/teachers’ rejections, which are considered to be barriers to their learning and are therefore, discussed in the following sections:

3.7.2.2 Stigma and discriminations

Stigma and discriminations are common inhibiting factors that prevent most learners with special educational needs and disabilities, including those with visual impairments, from gaining quality education the same way as their age-mate peers. According to

Rohwerder (2018), stigma is the result of discrimination, exclusion and a low status, experienced by learners with different types of disabilities and their families. Trani, Moodley, Anand, Graham and Maw (2020) confirm that stigmatisation and discrimination are associated with challenges faced by LVIs especially those from low income countries. However, Mustapha (2021) argues that the act of stigmatisation and discrimination can be prevented through the initiation of public health awareness campaigns for the promotion of social awareness, enhancement of positive perceptions towards individuals with disabilities and promotion, as well as recognition of the capacities and abilities of those individuals. In the context of this study and in line with Jessup, Anita, Broom and Hancock's (2018) study claims that LVIs' social inclusiveness is highly considered as a tool to empower their sense of belonging in developing a spirit of respect and acceptance within their society.

3.7.2.3 Teachers' negative attitudes

According to Lieberman and Houston-Wilson (2002), teachers' negative attitudes are considered as a major barrier that particularly affects integration of learners with visual impairments. This is supported by Brain and Brown (2021), who refer to teachers' negative attitudes as a result of disability social exclusion barrier that makes it harder for LVIs to participate fully within their society. They further indicated that LVIs' level of educational attainments decline as a result of this disability barrier. Kizilaslan (2020) asserts that these teachers' negative attitudes may result into traumatic problems to LVIs. Therefore, Asamoah, Ofori-Dul, Cudjoe, Abdullah and Nyarko (2018) indicated that most teachers, especially those in underdeveloped countries are often negative towards the inclusion, particularly of the LVIs, due to lack of resources and the inadequate training they received. However, different debates concerning learning environment, which consists of negative factors, point to a negative impact on the learning and development of an individual. This shows that such an environment is constraining. A constraining learning environment refers to "conditions and practices that are likely to limit both reproductive and developmental learning of an individual" according to Ekholm and Ellström (2008: 86). In a similar vein, Obionu (2017) points out

that the constraining learning environment hinders learners' effective teaching and learning. Driven by these factors as pointed out as barriers that prevent the smooth learning of LVIs, it is therefore through these reasons that LVIs are identified as vulnerable learners who may require their ELE to be enhanced.

3.7.2.4 Peer/ teacher rejections

Peer/teacher rejection is another factor identified as having a negative impact on the learners' ability of effective learning as a result of social exclusion. According to the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018), all schools that practice inclusive-guidance and support are expected to successfully meet the special educational needs of all learners. However, recent studies have identified peer/teacher rejection, which impacts negatively on the learners' socialisation relationships within their school (Morelle, 2016; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Korir, 2015; Paul & Barnhill, 2019; Meyers & Pitikoe, 2020). The study of Martins (2015) identifies peer rejection experienced by LVIs within their school as the result of non-cooperative teachers caused by their teachers' neglecting their Special Educational Need (SEN). However, although most of the inhibiting factors are found within the learning environment where all learners, including LVIs spent most of their school life. This study therefore, realises the important roles of agents and the contributions they make in the lives of LVIs. Thus, the next section provides strategies to harness agentic capabilities.

3.7.3 Strategies to harness agentic capabilities

Despite several inhibiting factors identified as barriers within the ELE of the LVIs, it is appropriate to note that all learners, including LVIs, need their environment which is enabling for them to learn and holistically develop. For instance, studies by Lima, Nassif and Garcon (2020); Nwokedi and Khanare (2020) emphasise the importance of enhancing an ELE through strengthening agentic capabilities of community members. According to agentic capability perspectives, communities' agencies are challenged to transform what already exists for their development (Bandura, 2012; 2018). Myende

and Hlalele (2018) assert that adjusting and tapping into the unique skills, capacities and knowledge is the best strategy needed within the communities to ensure that all learners' educational standards are well reached. Hence, Mahlomaholo, (2012) confirms that harnessing agentic capabilities helps to empower learners' physical, emotional, social and psychological wellbeing. This is also drawn from the perspectives used in the agentic capability theory of Bandura (2006), as a lens adopted for this study, which views learners' engagement in the learning process as central in their behavioural change and cognitive development.

Ralejoe (2021) went in the same direction by stating that strengthening and harnessing learners' capabilities can assist them to feel motivated and encouraged in engaging in their daily learning activities. In line to this vein, Mustapha (2021) affirms the significance of harnessing the learners' agentic capabilities, particularly those with SEND as to enable their active involvement and contributions to their communities and schools. In line with the above scholars' perspectives, it is important to make an improvement in the learners' holistic life through harnessing their agentic capacities and abilities to learn. Therefore, this study views LVIs as human beings with inherent ability and capacity whom their abilities and capacities can be tapped into (Myende, 2014), through interacting and collaborating with their peers, teachers and community members to develop and effectively learn.

3.8 THE RELEVANCE FOR TRIANGULATING THE INCLUSIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION THEORY AND THE AGENTIC CAPABILITY THEORY IN THE STUDY

The advantage of the theoretical framework is to give insights in understanding the study. Two theories have been presented as lenses in framing this study to give insight in how an ELE for LVIs can be enhanced. The ISET and ACT through their complementary features, share several aspects which are significant to be used in framing this study. The above section has indicated that ISET is driven by the intention to offer equal quality education to all. This is accomplished through effective inclusion and critical recognition of the special educational needs of the marginalised society, in

this case LVIs in rural context. The inclusive special education theory involves the implementation of a well-established inclusive educational practice through collaborative commitment. Slee (2009) asserts that this shows the importance of togetherness, and of “inclusion” as a facilitator of acceptance and a tool of empowerment.

This theory is driven by the belief that effective inclusion is about diversity and striving together (Malik, Rashid, Awan, & Alvi, 2018) by focusing on the diverse needs of all learners, including LVIs. The inclusive special education perspective, as advocated by Garry Hornby (2015), emphasises that all levels of an inclusive education system should be seen as constantly improving and effectively enabling. In general, within an ISET, there is courage for collaboration and self-development within the local communities, since community problems are collaboratively solved (Raguindin & Bulusan, 2020). Subsequently, the Agentic Capability Theory (ACT) appeared to complement the ISET in that it claims that, the way people behave and function is through the direct influence within their environment. Meaning, the community development is based on people, individuals and the environmental influences. Hence, this theory indicates that learning and general development of the LVIs in a rural enabling learning environment could be based on their capabilities (individually and collectively) as agents of change and their rural school environmental influences.

The ACT, as developed by Bandura (1986), is used as a second theory in this study to clearly show that enhancement of an ELE is possible through the bidirectional processes of influence that exist between individuals/people and the environment (Bandura, 2006). This is in a way calling for interactive agencies’ influence from the local communities, schools, parents, teachers, learners and LVIs to support in the improvement of the ELE within their schools and communities. This is supported by Nwokedi’s (2019) views that, for the learners (as agents) need their learning environment to be enhanced in order to become active and critical agents with potential and capabilities that are able to achieve their desired goals. However, recent literatures have identified some limitations in the accessibility of rural community resources (Shikalepo, 2020; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021) where learners in these rural areas are seen as needy, poor and disadvantaged. This pathological attitude towards rural

residents impacts negatively on their holistic wellbeing and weakens their power to perform to their utmost best (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). The ACT therefore challenges this rural community's insufficiencies, however, sees rural community members as agentic to overcome the constraints within LVIs' learning environment. The ACT further reveals that agencies such as LVIs individually, by proxy or collectively can have a contribution in their learning development if assisted, however, challenged to perform properly in a constraining learning environment (Nwokedi, 2019).

Employing ISET and ACT in this study is seen as crucial for rural school development and intended to acknowledge and empower communities that are able to devise and implement strategies suitable to their societal needs. Thus, LVIs as assets and human agencies develop emotionally, physically, academically and psycho-socially, through different enabling factors' influence within their rural school environment. Hence, the reason for triangulating these two theories is based on their complementary features. The ISET highlights the social inclusiveness of the LVIs through the effective collaborative contribution in their rural school learning environment. On the other hand, an ACT is suitably used to ensure how an ELE for LVIs can be enhanced, by enabling the LVIs as individuals with capacities to have influence in their learning, behaviour and development as they interact with other agencies (peers, teachers, and parents) in their host environment and because when enhancing an ELE, we may need agency to count on. Similarly, enhancing an ELE for LVIs clearly links agency with the capacity, increased motivation, and adaptation within the collaborative support system. All of these might result in excellent achievement of LVIs as human agents of change in their host environment.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the discussions of the theoretical frameworks used in framing this study with the specific focus on enhancing an ELE. Firstly, this chapter began by describing concepts used to frame this study and gave a brief explanation of theories and how theories are important in research. Secondly, it discussed two theories (ISET and ACT) that were employed. The central philosophies of ISET presented in this

chapter as a theoretical framework reveals that there is still a hope for strengthening schools, particularly those in rural areas to collaboratively address their societal problems. Transforming rural schools to become enabling spaces for the sake of effectively addressing the educational needs of learners means successfully developing school systems that offer excellent education for all learners. This has been seen corresponding with some elements of the ACT as another framework used in this study that personal behaviour is motivated by how each person interacts with one another and the environment. Hence, in order for the Lesotho rural schools to enhance an ELE of the LVIs as the aim of this study, they have to assist their learners to develop self-efficacy skills to interact, interconnect and reciprocate one another and their environment (Bandura, 2006) for them to effectively learn.

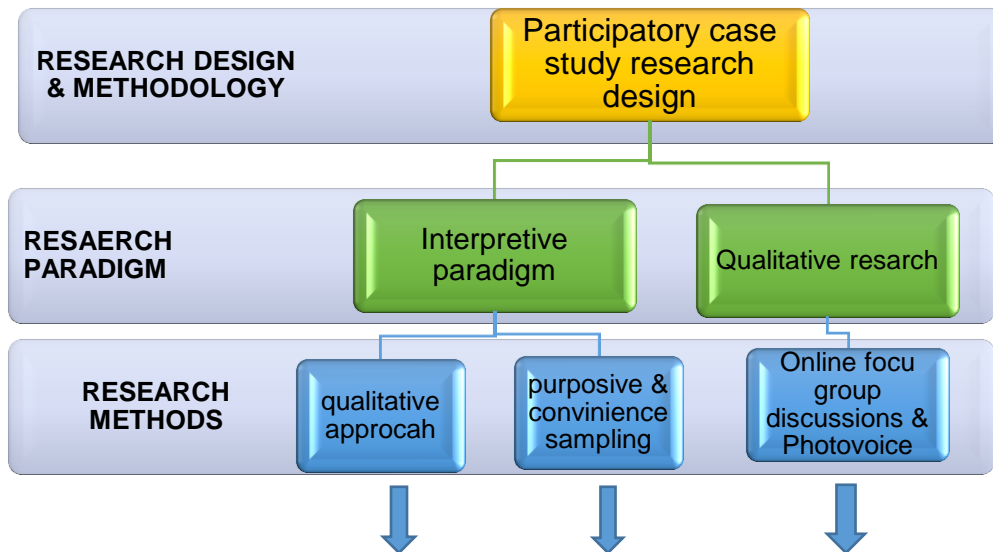
In the backdrop of the aforementioned discussions of ISET and ACT, this chapter presented the relevancy for theoretical triangulation. The following chapter presents the research design and methodology of the current study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPATORY VISUAL ART-BASED METHOD

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided details of theoretical frameworks used to underpin this study. The present chapter focuses on the research design and methodology employed in this study to determine how ELE for LVIs is enhanced in rural schools. During the process, the researcher clarifies the choice of qualitative approach and procedures followed, while engaging with secondary school teachers in a rural school context. At first, a discussion and justification for a choice of an interpretive paradigm is provided, followed by an explanation of a participatory case study research design and its relevance to the current study. Data generation processes, showing how the participants engaged in the study, are also presented. All the steps of data analysis, including validity, reliability and ethical procedures are also discussed in this chapter. The following diagrammatical representation provides an overview of the research processes highlighting the research design, methodology and ethical considerations of the study.



RESEARCH CONTEXT	A rural secondary school in the Berea district in Lesotho	
DATA ANALYSIS	Participatory analytic procedure	Thematic analysis
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permission to conduct research • Informed consent; voluntary participation • Anonymity & confidentiality 	

Figure 4.1: Diagrammatical representation of the research process

For this study, the overview of the major components of the research process which this study employed, are diagrammatically indicated in *figure 4.1* above to show the research design and methodology chosen by the researcher. The research design chosen is qualitative, participative and exploratory in nature. The study is also situated within an interpretive paradigm to allow a detailed description of the case being studied, which is the enhancement of ELE for LVIs in a rural school context. Within this case study, integration of research methods, which involves online focus group discussions, photovoice processes, interpretation and discussions, were employed to provide an in-depth understanding on different ways of how the rural schools of Lesotho can use in the promotion of an ELE for LVIs. This *figure 4.1* clearly provides an illustration of the researchers' choice of the research design, methodology, approach, strategies, data generation and analysis, as well as the ethical consideration, which are discussed in detail in the next sections.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The words 'research design and research methodology' are two different concepts which have been defined in diverse ways by different researchers. In this section, the researcher therefore intends to provide clarification of the two concepts by comparing different interpretations of what other scholars perceived them to be, before providing definitions from her own perspective.

4.2.1 Defining research design

As it has been stated in the above section, the concept 'research design' has been described in diverse ways and perceived to mean different things to different researchers. McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 20) define the research design "as a way in which a researcher uses to plan for, and provide justification of how the research has been conducted". They further state that a better understanding of this concept, 'research design' must not only be used when referring to general planning of a research, but also for approaches or strategies chosen by a researcher when selecting data generation and analysis procedures in order to investigate a specific research problem. Cohen et al. (2011) went further to provide some interesting views of research design by suggesting that, when a researcher is planning to conduct a research, he/she must first start by developing a research design, which according to them, is a sequential planning of a research, which a researcher has to follow such as, by making decisions on the purpose of the study, selecting a paradigm that suitably informs the study, the background within which the study is conducted, and lastly, developing justification for a research methodology and the methods that a study employs to generate data.

In the backdrop of the discussion concerning the definition of a research design provided by some scholars above, the researcher intends to provide her perception about the concepts and understands it as a is a set of methods to be used in a

research, and procedures to be followed that will enable the researcher to collect and analyse data.

4.2.2 Defining research methodology

As it has been explained in the above section, a research design is a sequential planning of a research, which involves justification of a research methodology and the methods that a study employs. This section provides an explanation of how some scholars view a research methodology. The concept 'research methodology' refers to "a design whereby a researcher selects data collection and analysis procedures to investigate a specific research problem" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 8). Punch and Oancea (2014) concur with the view and indicate that a research methodology comprises of research techniques, strategies and methods that are employed in a study for the collection of data regarding issues under investigation in order to allow further validity of the research findings. In the context of the description of research methodology drawn from the previous literature, it is evident from the researcher's point of view that a research methodology can be used as a guide that gives us direction of how the research has been conducted.

The next section of the study presents a detailed description of the research paradigm, in which this study is situated.

4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The word 'paradigm' has adopted different meanings from various scholars. Hence, the researcher has chosen to position this research study on the definition of a research paradigm as suggested by scholars in educational research, such as Bertram and Christiansen (2014) and Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), whose definition points to a common view of a research paradigm, as a researcher's worldview that guides the research. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) explain that a research paradigm reflects the researchers' belief about the world that they live in or want to live in. According to

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), this worldview constitutes a conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project in order to determine which method to use and how data will be analysed. This clearly gives a reflection that a paradigm as a lens can be used by all researchers to guide their studies.

From the above mentioned perspectives regarding the meaning of a research paradigm and how it is used to guide the research, the researcher is inspired to draw a conclusion that a paradigm in any research works as a base, and together with all the philosophical assumptions and beliefs of how the researchers perceived their world that inspired their research topic. It is therefore significant in this context that, each researcher builds their own ideas of what is perceived to be a research paradigm as a point of departure for the selection of the appropriate paradigms to suit their study. Based on the aim of this study, which is to explore how the ELE for LVIs can be enhanced, and with the basic assumption that learners, especially those with visual impairments from a rural school context, are active beings who are able to influence their world. Drawing from this assumption, the researcher positions this study within an interpretive paradigm.

4.3.1 Interpretive paradigm

This study is located and guided by an interpretive paradigm. Thanh and Le Thanh (2015:25) succinctly describe an interpretive paradigm by mentioning that “it allows interpretive researchers’ view of the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants”. This is corroborated by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), who state that unlike positive paradigm, an interpretive paradigm allows understanding of the individual rather than universal laws. Saunder et al. (2016) describe an interpretive paradigm as being primarily directed to the way humans or individuals perceived the world around them with the aim of providing insights of the phenomenon under study. This coincides with Bertram and Christiansen’s (2014) view, which positions the purpose of this paradigm within the belief that a deeper understanding of the way individuals understands their world, is gained through how they describe, interpret and examine the context in which they are located. Based on the significance of an interpretive paradigm

that is used to frame this study, as suggested by Maree (2016), it enables an in-depth understanding of an individual's lived experience in their natural settings. It is therefore evident in the context of this study that use of an interpretive paradigm assists the researcher to study in-depth diverse perspectives, experiences, attitudes, and behaviours of the participants concerning the enhancement of LVIs' ELE as a phenomenon under investigation. Cohen et al. (2011) and Bertram and Christiansen (2014) highlight particular assumptions as indicative of framing the research within an interpretive paradigm. Positioning the current study within this paradigm allows the researcher to acknowledge these assumptions:

- Humans/individuals through social interaction, generate meaning, experience and knowledge of their world
- Humans/individuals are influenced by their environment
- Knowledge is subjective and socially constructed
- There are multiple realities and single reality
- Reality is fluid and constantly changes

In line with the above mentioned philosophical assumptions, the aim of situating the current study within an interpretive paradigm is driven by the belief that to gain in-depth understanding, thoughts, knowledge and views of secondary school teachers about an ELE for LVIs, one should consider the following.

4.3.1.1 *Ontological position*

According to Saunderson et al. (2016), the key ontological question within social research is concerned with the nature of reality. Crotty (2003: 10) defines ontology as “a study of being”, which is concerned with the existence of people within their social world. Having discussed what is meant by ontology and based on Kivunja and Kuyini's (2017) assertion that, in order for interpretive researchers to understand how people construct and view their world, they should perceive them from inside their various experiences. It is now worth noticing that the ontological position of this study is essentially based on the social world of meaning with a belief that reality is socially constructed (Saunderson et

al., 2016). Hence, the researcher as an interpretive researcher in this study regarded the world (rural secondary) as a world populated by human beings who have their own thoughts, interpretations, understanding and meanings of how view an ELE for LVIs.

4.3.1.2 *Epistemological position*

Epistemology in general “are the assumptions we make in explaining how we know what we know” (Crotty, 2003:3). Al-Saadi (2014) confirms that epistemology involves knowledge, which is necessarily concerned with a certain understanding of what that knowledge entails. This is in line with Lyon’s (2017) notion that, epistemology is an act of knowledge. Similarly, Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) consider it as an internal factor within a researcher, which has potential to determine how such a researcher can distinguish between right and wrong. They further indicated that epistemology is also concerned with how a researcher is aiming to uncover knowledge to reach reality. Driven by an interpretive perspective and a belief that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed (Lyon, 2017), the epistemological stance used in the current study is therefore constructionism (Al-Saadi, 2014). The notion of constructionism in this study is on the belief that reality about knowledge depends upon human practices being constructed in and out of their interaction with their social context (Crotty, 2003). This is therefore considered in the context of this study that truth or knowledge about the experiences of secondary school teachers is subjected upon their practices as they interact with one another and interpreted their environment.

4.3.1.3 *Methodological position*

Methodological position or assumption refers to “key influencers of research methods, procedures or techniques used in the collection and analysis of data” (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020: 40). This is in line with Rehman and Alharthi’s (2016) assertion that methodology in any research guides the researcher in deciding about the type of data required and the best appropriate data collection tool to be used in the study. This affirmation concurs with Thanh and Thanh (2015), that interpretive researchers seek

methods that enable them to understand in-depth the relationships of human beings to their environment. In support of this view, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 28) state that, data generation tools, participants, methods and data analysis are aspects of the broad field of methodology. This suggests that interpretive researchers using this perspective will be able to gain access in a choice of research methods, deciding about the type of data and instrument that are most appropriate to address the research problem and meet the research purpose. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher situated this study within an interpretive paradigm so as to gain access to a choice of methods that best answered the research problem. Hence, the next section provides descriptions of the research approach, design, methods and data generation tools employed, while conducting this study.

4.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

Based on various aspects of the qualitative research approach, it enables an in-depth understanding of people's social world (Creswell, 2016) and to reveal their lived experiences in terms of a phenomenon under study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). The researcher located the current study within a qualitative approach, driven by the assumption that there are diverse ways to construct meaning of the world. This was done with the intention to understand in-depth and explore how secondary school teachers construct an ELE for LVIs in a rural school context, and why they perceived a need for LVIs' learning environment to be enhanced. Maree (2016) claims that qualitative research aims to allow for a richer dialogue and provides people with an opportunity to share their experiences and knowledge, based on the phenomenon of investigation. This view is supported by Patiño and Goulart (2016), who assert that, epistemologically and a qualitative research approach enable people to describe their lived experiences within their social context. On the other hand, Babbie and Mouton (2010) view qualitative research from the ontological position that qualitative researchers have to assume that the world they investigate is populated by human beings who have their own thoughts, interpretations and meanings. In this context, employing a qualitative research approach for this study, gave the researcher an

opportunity to attain access to the subjective constructions and interpretations in terms of an ELE as perceived from the secondary school teachers' own thoughts. Punch and Oancea (2014) reveal that realities about the qualitative approach are constructed through interaction between people and their social world. This clearly indicates that the personal interaction the researcher in this study had with secondary school teachers throughout the research process, enabled her to gain their realities.

In line with Bertram and Christiansen's (2014) perception about qualitative research approach as a process used to enable the participants to express their views concerning the phenomenon under investigation within their natural setting, and with Khanare's (2015: 86) suggestions that when all the research processes are conducted in people's immediate context, "they become more comfortable and are likely to provide as far as possible information that is accurate and honest", the approach relates very well with the intentions of a researcher in the current study, who aimed to find out meanings through social interactions with the participants within natural settings, perceived as a significant factor that will allow secondary school teachers to give meanings and understandings of an ELE for LVIs in a rural school of Lesotho.

In view of Creswell's (2016) assertions that qualitative research is flexible and allows multiple uses of research methods, this gave the researcher in this study an opportunity of using multiple data generation methods with secondary school teachers within their natural setting. In this case, the use of OFGDs and photovoice enabled the researcher to gain in-depth information that is accurate, honest and authentic. Putting the purpose of the current study in consideration, the researcher's intention was using these two methods to generate data with secondary school teachers in a selected rural secondary school as a natural setting where the teaching and learning for LVIs is conducted. Additionally, in an effort to gain rich information from the participants, the aim of a qualitative research approach is to gain understanding through social interactions that happen in particular context where participants share ideas about their feelings and thoughts and discuss together (Fouche & Delport, 2016).

Consequently, recent studies have shown that there are various designs to qualitative research, such as phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, historical research,

action and case study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Creswell, 2016; Maree, 2017). Hence, employing the qualitative research approach in this study, enabled the researcher to generate an in-depth understanding and get deep insights that indicate the participants' interpretation of the phenomenon being researched (Rule & John, 2011). This means that, situating the present study within a qualitative approach makes it easy for them to individually and collaboratively engage in the interpretation and sharing of ideas about how an ELE for LVIs can be enhanced. According to Fouche and Delport (2016), the advantage of a qualitative research approach is to assist qualitative researchers to produce rich and descriptive data through their broad prospective of thinking and their decisions in the selection of data generation methods and research design (Fouche & Schurink, 2016). The current study therefore used a participatory case study research design, which its specific focus to this study, is provided in the next section.

4.4.1 Participatory case study research design

It has been indicated in the above section that a research design is perceived differently by various scholars; these perspectives guide researchers to plan how to conduct their research (Mouton, 2001). This qualitative research is therefore conducted, using a participatory case study research design. A participatory case study research design is defined by Punch and Oancea (2014) as an approach that enables the participants, local groups or community to reunite and conceptualise the study and comprehend the wholeness of the case. Rule and John (2011) and Cober, Tan, Slotta, Tan, So and Konings (2015) support this view by further explaining that a participatory case study research design, as an approach and not a methodology, can be used to ensure active engagement between the researcher and the participants, regarding the phenomenon under study. To attest to this claim, Rule and John (2011) state that case study research design has been commonly used by qualitative researchers, based on its characteristics that: it is flexible and its flexibility enables the use of various data generation methods, it occurs in a bounded context, which indicates that it can be well managed, and it can also allow in-depth investigation by a researcher, more especially

in a natural setting (Maree, 2017). This aligns with Mouton's (2017) view that a case study is based on a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular situation so as to obtain rich information.

Qualitative researchers variedly employ different case study designs, such as: instrumental case study, explorative case study, descriptive case study, and participatory case study. Maree (2017) asserts that all case study research designs are in support of generation of data in a real world context and enable qualitative researchers to get intact data. This motivates the researcher to use a participatory case study research design to actively involve a specific group of participants (secondary school teachers) to engage and participate in a study within their rural school. A participatory case study research design helps in gaining in-depth information about a specific issue and results are directly applied to the problems at hand (Bana, 2010). Cober, Tan, Slotta, Tan, So and Konings (2015) concur and specify that participatory case studies require active engagement and involvement of the whole research community (the researcher and the participants) in defining research problems in a designed corporation. Hence, the case in the present study comprises a selected rural secondary school that manages provision of education to all learners, including those with visual impairment.

The intention of this study is to explore the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs in a rural school context. The adoption of a participatory case study research design is therefore considered significant, because as an example of case study designs, it has been gaining popularity within qualitative research. This research design is therefore valued for its ability to generate in-depth understanding and insights into a particular situation or a case. This is, according to Bana (2010), an approach that assists the researcher and the participants to re-connect and examine issues experienced as problems by participants. In this respect, a participatory case study research design was employed in this study to allow the participants being secondary school teachers, as expert of their own context, to re-connect with the researcher in this study, identify and examine possible means to enhance an ELE for LVIs. The significance of this research design is further related to giving the participants in the study as human beings or agents, an

opportunity of being actively engaged in the issues concerning them, and not just being passive. Therefore, it engages these participants and exploring their understanding of how LVIs' learning environment within their rural secondary school, provided an opportunity in the use of multiple data generation methods (Yin, 2018), which was informed by the assumptions of participatory case study research design. The next section provides a discussion of the research context and an explanation of how the participants, who participated in this study, were selected.

4.5 SELECTION OF RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

4.5.1 The research context

In the following section the researcher describes the research context - a rural secondary school located in the Berea District of Lesotho, where the school teachers' understanding of the ELE for LVIs, unfolded. While there is plenty of research on the inclusion of LVIs, studies on the provision of education to learners in rural schools are still based on deficit perspectives, which view these areas as far from being reached and lacking resources (Ferreira, 2020; Mosia, 2022). This continue to place all learners, including LVIs, whose provision of education is conducted in these rural areas, at risk of receiving inferior education (Ramatea & Khanare, 2021) and aggravate these learners' vulnerabilities to continue to be seen as needy and incompetent. However, this is contradictory to the notion of rurality in African countries, such as Lesotho, which perceives rural communities and rural schools as essential factors that have a crucial contribution to the country's finances. The current study was conducted in a rural secondary school in Berea District, Lesotho, which, according to Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018), practices inclusion of all learners, including those with visual impairments.

The Berea District, like any other districts in the country, has secondary and high schools, which enrol all learners, including those with visual impairments. Some of these schools are located in rural areas. One of these secondary schools is a rural secondary school where this study was conducted and was selected by the researcher

in this study, because it practices inclusion of all learners, including those with visual impairments. The researcher decided to include this school, because it has teachers with experience in teaching all learners with and without visual impairments. This school was selected, because it also follows the inclusive education regulations and practices as stipulated in the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018) and the Education Act (3 of 2010). This shows that the school thrives to successfully promote quality provision of education to all learners.

4.5.2 The research site

The criteria for selecting a secondary school in Berea District was the fact that it had to be located in a rural area where there are teachers with experience in teaching LVIs and who can provide rich information, as discussed in Chapter 1. The researcher conveniently chose this rural secondary school, because of its accessibility, as it is a neighbouring school to her place of work (see Chapter 1: 1.8.4). This is a government secondary school, located at about 1000 to 1500 metres away from a river in middle of rural communities, highly populated with people who earn their living through farming. The school learners who attend this school and their teachers are all Basotho, whose home language is Sesotho. Subsequently, the school enrolls a diverse group of learners who come from middle-poor families, which form part of the neighbouring communities. However, the school does not have hostels or residences located within its premises for teachers to stay, but it has one building for a principal. Therefore, all teachers shuttle to and from the school to their respective homes daily.

Teachers who participated in this study were predominantly qualified Basotho teachers with different speciality areas of education qualifications, and all residing outside the rural communities where the school is located. At the time of data generation with participants, the overall number of teachers was 18 (ten males and eight females) and three non-teaching staff (two cooks and one guard). The teaching staffs are made up of a principal, one deputy principal and 16 teachers. There were more teachers with general education qualifications than those with special education qualifications, and most of the work in assisting learners, especially those with special educational needs

and disabilities, becomes burden on those with qualifications on special/inclusive education.

4.5.3 Selection of research sites and participants

Cohen et al. (2011) posit that when choosing or selecting research sites and participants one intends to recruit, there should be defining characteristics to be suitably used in the study. The researcher in the current study employed convenience and purposive sampling to select the research site - a rural secondary school in Berea District Lesotho, because it integrates all learners with diverse special educational needs, including those with visual impairments. Based on Creswell and Plano Clark's (2017) indication that qualitative researchers mostly use purposive and convenience sampling to select research sites and participants who can yield rich and in-depth information, the researcher therefore intentionally selected a rural school as a research site in this study where teachers, who have experience teaching LVIs, work within and these teachers were purposively chosen, based on the belief that they would yield rich and in-depth information. During the selection of participants in this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- They had been working within this particular school for more than three years
- They had knowledge, skills and experiences of teaching in rural schools where LVIs are enrolled.

In alignment with Maree's (2017) affirmation that purposive sampling mainly consists of recruiting participants and selecting research sites with a purpose of responding to the research questions, and with Crossman's (2018) opinions that purposive sampling is judgemental, meaning it enables the researcher to give judgement for the research findings, and that the selective and subjective sampling technique, which the qualitative researcher uses to recruit participants, who can provide in-depth and rich information, the researcher therefore used a purposive sampling technique to select the research site and the participants, because of their diverse knowledge of the phenomenon being researched.

As indicated in the above section, a rural secondary school in the Berea District of Lesotho was conveniently chosen as a research site for this study, due to the following reasons:

- It is situated within the rural environment where the researcher in the present study works.
- It is accessible, and its accessibility makes it easy for the researcher to feel comfortable while visiting it and approaching the research participants.

This clearly shows the significance of using convenience sampling in this study. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), convenience sampling involves selection of research sites and participants closest to the researcher. In view of this, the researcher's passion of using convenience sampling in this study was based on the accessibility of the research site and the availability of research participants.

Table 4.1 below shows biographic information of ten purposively and conveniently chosen secondary school teachers. Details of the participants are outlined in this table with care taken to protect their identities. The participants' biographic information involves their age, gender, academic level of qualifications and experience of teaching in a selected school. Their innovative pseudonyms are used and acronyms were picked up by these school teachers to substitute their names, which depict their understanding of the phenomenon under study (enabling learning environment and inclusive education).

Table 4.1: Biographic information of participants

NAMES	ACRONYMS	AGE	SEX	EXPERIENCE LEVEL	LEVEL OF STUDY
Ability	AB	41	F	14 years	B.Ed.
Welcoming	WE	48	F	10 years	B.Ed.
Supportive	SU	38	M	8 years	B.Ed.(Inclusive education)
Love	LO	45	F	12 years	HONs (Inclusive education)
Accommodating	AC	44	M	10 years	B.Ed.
Inclusive	IN	42	M	13 years	DIPLOMA (Special education)
Collaborative	COL	45	F	16 years	B.Ed.
Flexible	FL	46	F	11 years	B.Ed.
Conducive	CO	40	F	10 years	B.Ed.
Protect	PR	38	M	9 years	B.Ed.

4.6 DATA GENERATION METHODS

The choice of data generation methods to meet the focus of the study was made in alignment with the research design and approach. It is based on the perceived advantages that multiple data generation methods can be used with the participants in qualitative research (Creswell, 2016) to talk about their experience in their natural settings. This qualitative research motivated the researcher to employ multiple methods of data generation, which enables interactive participation between the researcher and the participants and ensures participants' active participation and engagement within their respective school context. The choice of employing two methods, which involves the participatory visual art-based method assisted in enabling participants' active participation in expressing themselves for their voices to be heard. Nieuwenhuis (2016) and Creswell (2016) indicate that qualitative research allows for flexibility in using multiple data generation methods. Correspondingly, the researcher in the current study

employed more than one data generation method with the secondary school teachers to gain rich and in-depth information while addressing the main research question about their understanding of how an ELE for LVIs can be enhanced in their rural school. The researcher considered OFGDs (Yin, 2017; Cohen et al., 2011) and photovoice (Mitchell, 2011; Fouche & Delport, 2016) as the main data generation methods used in this study. OFGDs (Colom, 2021) with participants were used to generate data which yielded from secondary research questions one and two, and focus mainly on the participants' understanding of ELE for LVIs and how they rendered support to these learners in their rural school. In addition, the photovoice method was also used to generate data for secondary research questions three and four, which centre on enabling and impeding factors towards the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs. The participating teachers' photographs interpretations and discussions revealed their perceptions of why LVIs' ELE needs to be enhanced. The significances of using multiple data generation methods have been observed in qualitative studies and for obtaining rich data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Maree 2016). The next section provides details of how the researcher engaged with the research participants throughout all the steps of data generation processes.

4.7 DATA GENERATION PROCESSES

The researcher gained access to visit the research site and to negotiate with the research participants after receiving ethical clearance from the research ethics review committee at the University of the Free State (see Appendix B). According to Khanare (2015:105), "access to negotiation is a core component of research". Similarly, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) affirm that obtaining access to a research site and to negotiate with the participants are essential for research ethics and for research proceedings. In the case of the current study, attaining ethical clearance gave the researcher an opportunity to apply and get permission from the Department of Education at Berea District in order to conduct this study in a secondary school in Lesotho (see Appendix C). This was followed by telephone calls from a researcher by making arrangements with the school principal and deputy principal, and describing the purpose of the study.

During the first meeting the researcher was supposed to have a meeting with the school principal, but instead met with the deputy principal, because the principal was to prepare to attend examination workshop as it was time of examinations in schools. The deputy principal was familiar to the researcher as a former colleague while doing her Honours degree at the University of South Africa. The researcher gave her highlights about the study, but the meeting was postponed to the 8th December 2021 as the deputy principal insisted that it was principal's responsibility to give the researcher permission to go ahead, and not she. This made the researcher realise that her planned research schedule might not be a smooth and straightforward excursion, therefore, knowing about qualities in flexibility of qualitative research the researcher waited and met with the school principal. During the meeting with the school principal, he gave the researcher a chance to meet with the participants one-on-one and to brief them about the purpose of the research, describing the nature of the data generation process and providing reasons why they have been chosen to take part in this study. During the course of the first meeting, the researcher verbally explained to the participants the purpose of the research as to propose the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs in a rural school context. In addition, the researcher also informed the participants that the aim of the study was to explore how the ELE for LVIs can be enhanced. The participants were made aware of their voluntary participation and were issued consent forms to sign, which were obtained together with the principal permission granted to the researcher to conduct the research at the school (see Appendix D). After participants' consent had been granted, the researcher progressed in the generation of data with the participants through use of focus group discussions and the photovoice method. The first meeting gave the researcher and the participants a chance to get to know each other and the researcher used the opportunity to ask for the participants' cell phones numbers and their consent to form a WhatsApp group for the next meeting, which was to be via online, due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The participants were divided into two groups of five teachers each to participate (see *Table 4.2*) below:

Table 4.2: Two groups of teachers who participated in the current study

Group A	Group B
Ability (AB)	Inclusive (IN)
Support (SU)	Collaborative (COL)
Welcoming (WE)	Flexible (FL)
Love (LO)	Conducive (CO)
Accommodating (AC)	Protection (PR)

The reason for dividing the participants into the two groups was to allow easy communication and to enable the researcher's easy facilitation and moderation of the discussions through the formed WhatsApp group. The arrangement for the next focus group discussion meeting was done through the WhatsApp group and scheduled to resume on the 27th January 2022 after the schools re-open from December holidays. The participants were reminded in the evening next of the scheduled date of the focus group discussions and were provided with all the information pertaining to the study through detailed informed consent forms, which they signed. Additionally, they were also informed of the use WhatsApp clips and videos during their discussions and were made aware that their discussion would be recorded and field notes taken to ensure no miss of any information during the discussion. The meeting for first focus group session was scheduled and held on the 28th January 2022 during lunch hours from 12p.m. to 2p.m, while the second and third meeting was held on the 2nd and 3rd February 2022 during the same lunch hours.

Due to school midterm break and Covid-19 restriction, the photovoice session with participants, as it was to be conducted face-face in a safe and secure environment, convenient for the participants, was scheduled and held at the participants' respective schools on the 8th April 2022. While adhering to Covid-19 rules and regulations, photovoice sessions were scheduled on the Friday after school hours between 1p.m. and 4p.m. The first session was about the explanation of photovoice to the participants, using a PowerPoint presentation by showing examples of how to engage at different stages of a photovoice process, which involves photo-shooting and photo-interpretation

sessions. The next session engaged participants through prompts that guide them and make it easy for them to understand what photovoice is all about. Prior to the meeting, the participants were informed to come along with cell phones with clear cameras to take photographs. After a photo-shooting session, participants' photographs were uploaded in the folder created specifically for the purpose of safely storing their pictures on the researchers' laptop. Due to the incomplete session, as some of photographs had to be captured outside the school premises, participants' photograph-interpretation session was scheduled to take place after the photo-shooting session was completed and was rescheduled for another day, which was 12th April 2022. The generation of data for this study was thus conducted over a period of five months from December 2021 to April 2022.

4.7.1 Online focus group discussions

The researcher's view of undertaking the current study through use of Online Focus Group Discussions (OFGDs) has been driven by the premise that secondary school teachers in rural schools, at least through their diverse knowledge and skills, have a say in the discussion concerning their learners' quality provision of education (LIEP, 2018) in making their learning environment enabling. Although, different studies consider use of focus group discussions as significant in doing qualitative research, use of OFGDs is quite different from focus group interviews to investigate people's feelings, attitudes and behaviours (Cohen et al., 2011) in sharing ideas, skills and knowledge (Fouche & Delport, 2016). Anderson et al. (2020) assert that significance in use of OFGDs is observed during the generation of data on risky situations like in maintaining safe precautions in time of Covid-19 pandemic. According to Colom (2021), this data generation method provides the researchers with opportunities to discuss with several participants simultaneously without direct contact or interaction. This is also supported by Yin (2017) that, during OFGDs, researchers might be faced with the problem to observe nonverbal interactions among the participants but, instead are able to simultaneously work closely with various participants rather than individually (Punch, 2013). This is indicative that the method is suitable to be used in the present study to

enable participants to share ideas, as well as discuss together what they perceived to be promotion of the ELE for LVIs. Additionally, due to the fact that the generation of data was during the Covid-19 prevalence, this method enabled the researcher and participants' engagement in the discussion through open-ended questions, and to reflect and produce rich and in-depth data and to pick every detail or information that might not be captured during photovoice sessions, in particular during photographs' interpretation and discussion sessions.

During the focus group sessions, the researcher as the facilitator, initiated the discussions by first introducing herself and asked the participants to in turn do likewise and furthermore, explained to them that their participation is voluntary, and that they were free not to answer any question they felt uncomfortable with. However, she made them aware that if they have started participating in any session they had to finish all the sessions as it might be very hard to withdraw. The researcher went on by asking the participants to choose pseudonyms to substitute their names. Through the discussion with the participants, it was very interesting to realise that their preferred names revolve around their understanding of the phenomenon under study (inclusive education and enabling learning environment).

The introduction session was made with the purpose of breaking the ice among the participants. After realising that all the participants are relaxed and comfortable, the researcher reminded them about the aim and purpose of the study and engaged in the discussion about how the enabling learning environment for LVIs could be enhanced, to what extent were these learners supported and how could the existing factors be used to assist in the enhancement of the enabling learning environment of LVIs in a Lesotho rural secondary school setting. In the middle of the discussions, the researcher used probing techniques; this process helped the researcher to get a deeper understanding and yielded rich information from the participants (Creswell, 2016). Anderson et al. (2020) affirm that the advantages of engaging in the online focus group discussion process, is that it is a secure, low-cost and quicker way of obtaining valuable data and that participants, including the researcher have a chance to think and ask questions. Unlike in focus group interviews, this method enables interactions and critical dialogue

between the researcher and participants. Hence, in the current study, participants were given a chance to think of their rural schools and what they offered as support to enhance an enabling learning environment of LVIs. Meanwhile, the online focus group discussion was complemented by the photovoice sessions in this study. The online focus group discussion was conducted in three separate sessions. The first introduction session was done in a convenient place, selected by the participants, which was their respective school classroom, while the other two sessions were through WhatsApp platform and each of these three sessions took 1 hour 30 minutes with five participants in each group.

4.7.2 Photovoice

The photovoice method is one of the participatory visual arts-based research strategies that can be employed to promote critical dialogue and enhance communication skills among participants (Wang, 2009). Lorenz and Bush (2022) suggest that using photovoice with participants can help them produce pictures/images, of which the essence about their realities can be interpreted by participants themselves. This means that if qualitative researchers can use this method with their participants when generating data, the method can enable the participants to produce solid pictures that file their understandings or life experiences. According to Suprpto, Sunarti, Suliyanah, Wulandari, and Hidayaatullaah (2020), photovoice has been widely used as a method or strategy in problem-solving in a form of photography or documentaries. Similarly, Lorenz and Bush (2022) indicate the significance of photovoice as a health promoting strategy that can be used with vulnerable populations. This is supported by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001: 560), who defines it as a powerful photographic technique, which enables the use of images/videos by people who are discriminated and made vulnerable by negative issues to express their experience through sharing them with other people. The idea is that those negative issues raised through photographs, can help in getting policymakers' attention to either provoke or motivate for change (Nwokedi, 2019).

In the backdrop of the explanation of photovoice from the above scholars, it is evident that use of photovoice can strengthen participants' agency (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006). This suggests that engaging participants in photovoice processes might stimulate discussions among them and enable them to become active in the sharing of ideas (Mitchell, 2011). This also shows that using the photovoice method creates a platform for participants to become more creative and actively involved in the research process (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Additionally, Ebrahimpour, Esmaeili, and Varaei (2018:216) point out the three main goals of photovoice that, "it enables people to re-think, record and reflect on their community's strength and concerns, promotes critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs to empower and identify individual and social health needs in an effort to make changes that can inform policymakers". Based on these goals, the photovoice method is therefore employed to involve secondary school teachers as capable of contributing solutions to their society. Furthermore, also through participants' photographs that empowers them to become in charge of their pictures that enable the researcher to know about experiences, ideas and knowledge about the phenomenon being researched. The researcher in this study therefore, provided details of how participants were engaged in photovoice processes.

4.7.2.1 *Engaging in photovoice process in this study*

The photovoice sessions further explored how the ELE for LVIs can be enhanced in their rural school. The data generated in these sessions complement participants' responses from the research questions three and four about participants' identification of enabling and constraining factors that hinder the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment.

Three photovoice sessions, which were conducted with ten participants in two groups of five participants each, were allocated one hour each in three consecutive days at the participants' respective school. On the day of photovoice sessions, the researcher conducted the first session, which was an introduction workshop with all ten participants at their school - a safe and convenient place, in one classroom selected by them to

conduct all the research processes. This school classroom was big enough to allow the required distance among participants, as it was during the time of Covid-19. The researcher also had enough space to use her lap-top for a PowerPoint presentation and in taking the participants through the whole process of photovoice. While some of the participants had knowledge in using cameras, it was their first time of engaging in photovoice sessions. Therefore, it was done through the researcher's experience in using arts-based methodology in the area of qualitative research and also based on the knowledge gained from practical suggestions of some literature about participatory visual art-based method (Wang, 2022; Mitchell, 2011). Photovoice sessions presented in the sections bellow, provide an overview of how the participants' photovoice engagement were carried out.

a) Session 1: Photovoice training and workshop

This first session included the photovoice process. For example, the researcher had discussions with participants in explaining to them what photovoice means and showing them examples of photovoice processes and how to use cameras through a PowerPoint presentation. In this aspect, the researcher, in adopting Mitchell's (2011) ideas about how photovoice has been used across diverse cultural groups, technical issues around use of cameras and ethical guidelines for taking photographs in the rural school context were addressed. Based on Wang (2022) and Wang and Redwood-Jones' (2001), regarding perception on ethical issues around photographs, the researcher made the participants in this study aware of such as; photographs should not contain identifiable subjects however, if by mistake a person or place is taken, they should be blurred (Mitchell, 2011). Again, if taking photographs of identifiable subjects become their priority, such person should give them permission by offering him or her photograph waiver (see Appendix H).

b) Session 2: Photo-shooting

This session focused mainly on the photo-shooting process, and the plan was on the use of cameras whereby the researcher requested the participants to bring digital cameras if they have them, the day before the session began. The arrangement was done on the evening of 7th April 2022 at 5 p.m. online through a WhatsApp group, which

was formed during focus group discussions, to remind the participants about the photovoice sessions scheduled and which were to be held on 8th April 2022 on the Friday after school hours between 1p.m. and 4p.m. During the day of the photo-shooting session, none of the participants had digital cameras, but all of them had cell phones with a clear camera picture and the researcher brought one digital camera, which belongs to her. Since all participants had knowledge of using their cell phones while taking pictures and had agreed to use them during the process, it became easy for the researcher to handle training of using a digital camera as well. Having explored and engaged in the use of cameras and photo-shooting, the participants were guided by the researcher to critically decide and discuss the pictures they want to take before taking them. This helped the secondary school teachers to engage in the photo-shooting of the enabling and constraining factors that prevents the enhancement of an enabling learning environment for LVIs. The photo-shooting process was carried out in the participants' respective school. During the process, the researcher informed and prompted the participants in their two groups of five to:

Take three photographs showing enabling factors that aid the enhancement of an enabling learning environment for LVIs, and the other three pictures representing constraining factors that negatively impact in the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment within your rural school context. Making the total number of photographs taken to be 12 (see figures 5.2-5.13). However, please make sure that you think critically and decide before you take any picture, what do you see as an enabling learning environment, what is currently happening in your school context, how does it relate to our lives, why does the situation exist, what can we do about it.

It became very interesting for the participants to be given time to think about their experiences within their rural school context. This process took more than one hour as being the time catered for the session, it exceeded to one hour, 30min. While participants were busy going about the school premises to capture pictures that depicted enabling and constraining factors, the researcher opened one main folder which contained 12 labelled folders for each participant. On their return, the participants in their two groups were expected to have captured six photographs in each group, but one participant in group B requested more time as they had an intention for photo

shooting a picture in their neighbourhood, which they felt to be exactly what they wanted. On this note, while each photograph from the participants, was uploaded in a labelled folder per participant and safely kept for the next session, group B participants were given time to take a photo and send it the next day via the WhatsApp group, which was formed during the previous sessions. All the photographs were 11, with the remaining one, in total.

c) Session 3: Photo discussions and interpretation

This session, which was the last session after photo-shooting, involves a discussion process in which the participants start interpreting and giving meanings to their photographs. De Lange, Mitchell and Stuart (2011) describe photo interpretation as a process which enables participants to explain and tell a story about their photographs. This aligns with Wang (2022) who claims that photo interpretation or participants' discussions about their photographs as significant and has the potential in increasing their own understanding on the phenomenon being studied. The participants at this stage were expected to give clarity and provide meanings of their photographs. This process engaged participants in collective participation, rather than to provide their individual opinions (Simmons & Daley, 2013). Hence, the researcher realised the use of focus groups and framing this study within an agentic capability framework as appropriate in promoting collaborative participation (Bandura, 2018), to ensure that the participants exercise their agency in sharing their opinions about their photographs in a whole group.

During the photo interpretation process, the researcher requested the participants in their two respective groups to interpret their photographs. As Mitchell (2011) has indicated that photographs interpretation helps in promoting participants' critical thinking skills, the participants were asked to critically provide meaning to their photographs. During this session, which was done at their respective school in same classroom, the researcher brought two laptops and A4 sized sheets and asked the participants in their two groups of five to view their photographs and thereafter used the sheets that have headings, contents and captions on them, to complete while interpreting their photographs. This was an interactive session where the participants were asked to

critically give meanings to their photographs. The researcher facilitated the session guided by Wang's (2022: 207) following questions known as the SHOWeD acronym that guide the discussions: "what is shown in this photograph? What is really happening here? How does the issue raised relate to our lives? Why does the situation exist? What can you/we do about it?"

The aim of using the photovoice method in this study, was to encourage the participants' full contribution in the discussion and to critically reveal their understanding of an enabling learning environment for LVIs, indicate factors that enable and constrain the enhancement of these learners' learning environment, and the kind of support through the use of agency from which they draw towards the enhancement of LVIs' enabling learning environment. This method also works well with the agentic capability framework in which the participants are considered as active agents with the potential who are able to talk about their ideas, using artefacts, that is, the photographs they made.

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

This section provides details of how data generated in this study, were analysed. The analysis of data was done in alignment with Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic procedures. The researcher in the current study discussed all the details of the data analysis process used, to come up with the research findings and how the findings were re-contextualised within literature.

Data analysis is a significant point of departure in any research, because it provides a reflection of how the research findings have been formulated (Creswell, 2014). This is supported by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), who indicate that qualitative data analysis is conducted first by converting raw data that was generated, into meaningful information through use of appropriate techniques. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) concur with Creswell and Plano Clark and maintain that qualitative data analysis involves, organising, accounting for and explaining the data, in order to make sense out

of it according to the participants' explanation of the situations, revealing patterns, themes and categories.

Meanwhile, the data generated in this study were analysed thematically (Clarke and Braun, 2013). According to Braun and Clarke's (2021: 1) "thematic analysis of data as a process of identifying patterns or themes is widely used in qualitative education psychology studies". Based on two ways of doing qualitative thematic analysis of data: a top-down or theory driven and inductive or data driven approach (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013), the current study employed an inductive way of data analysis within the theoretical framework used to frame this study, so as to present an in-depth understanding of how LVIs' ELE can be enhanced within their rural school. In this study, the researcher used three ongoing stages (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) of qualitative thematic analysis of data Alholjailan (2012). The first stage of data analysis included the secondary school teachers who interpreted, expressed their own ideas, experiences and discussions, and who also created their own photographs in response to the issue under investigation.

Within the second stage of data analysis, the notion of an interpretive stance, cater for the engagement of the secondary school teachers to interpret and provide their understanding of the phenomenon through their discussions and photographs and how each relate to this study was provided. During this second stage of analysis, the researcher drew from some of the researchers' perspective that qualitative research data analysis, begins simultaneously with data collection rather than waiting for all data generation processes to be completed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Creswell, 2016), and from some who are working within participatory visual methodology (Wang, 2022; Lorenz & Bush, 2022) by directing the discussions through probes while using such methods. For example, the probing questions adopted from Wang (2022: 207) as a guide to enable each participants to describe his or her photographs, were as follows: "What do you see here? What is really happening here? How does this relate to our lives? What can we do about it?" The participants, being the secondary school teachers' active participation in this regard enabled enhanced interrelationships between the researcher and themselves. This is in alignment with Mitchell's (2011) assertion that this

stage of analysis enabled the participants to reflect, re-think, re-construct and re-connect meaning in relation to the theme being researched.

Employing a variety of data generation methods in doing qualitative studies, might lead to a massive amount of data, which might need careful management (Khanare, 2015). In this study, the secondary school teachers' diverse responses (visual, spoken, written, WhatsApp-recorded) and their interpretation in respect of the enhancement of VILs' learning environment enabled the researcher to engage in transcription of data, which was the third stage of data analysis. Doing a thematic analysis at this stage is an aim to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Within this stage the researcher arrange and classify the data following the first and second stage of data analysis, and transcripts from field notes and data interpretations to gain in-depth information (Creswell, 2016) from the phenomenon being investigated. In line with the following of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases' framework, the researcher formulated categories and themes that emerged from the research findings.

4.8.1 Become familiar with data

Reading through all data serves as an initial step to obtain a general sense of what is the actual meaning of the findings. The researcher starts organising data (visual, written and spoken) to identify common themes. By so doing, Fouche and Delpont (2016) call this activity as becoming immersed into data. At this level, the researcher looks at the secondary school teachers' transcripts from their different group discussions and photographs and subsequently read the transcriptions repeatedly to get their meaning and to become familiar with the whole body of data (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

4.8.2 Generating initial codes

This is a level of analysis whereby a researcher starts to organise the data into a meaningful and systematic manner in order to reduce it into small chunks or segments.

The researcher in this study identified and group data segments or chunks that reflect different meanings of a specific thought. This process involves arranging spoken, written and visual text gathered during the data generation process and classifying small units of meanings into categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This was done by hand initially, working through hard copies of the transcripts with pens and highlighters (see Appendix I).

4.8.3 Searching for themes/ patterns

After coding, Clarke and Braun (2017) indicate that the patterns/ themes had to be bound together based on their significance to the research questions. In the formulation of themes, Marshall and Rossman (2011) indicate a significant point of departure that the initial codes that have similar meaning, had be grouped together. This is supported by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), who assert that formulation of themes is based on the diverse perspectives from participants. In this context, the researcher, in trying to make sense of what participants were saying, collates codes with similar meaning from the participants' direct quotes, interpretation of their photographs and discussions and then attaches meanings to them.

4.8.4 Reviewing and defining themes

At this stage the researcher reviews, modifies and develops preliminary themes. The reviewing of themes lead to the final modification of themes, which enable the researcher to provide a clear description of what each theme, is all about (Braun & Clarke 2006). This makes it easy for a researcher to check what the emerged themes were saying, how they interacted and related to the preliminary themes.

4.8.5 Writing-up

At the final stage of data analysis, once the emerged themes were constructed into codes and refined (Braun & Clarke, 2021), the report was written based on the findings, which in this study presents and discusses in Chapter 5.

4.9 METHODS TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

Justification on the issues of trustworthiness is not direct, but central to the paradigm within which the research has been situated. Positioning this study within an interpretive paradigm does not necessarily mean to generate data to prove facts (Maree, 2016), but rather, to understand multiple truths and not just a single truth (Creswell, 2014) that includes the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena within the natural context and the realities of the world (Silverman, 2013). Hence, ensuring trustworthiness in this qualitative research study was a significant concern, because it ensures the reliability and validity. Nieuwenhuis (2014) posits that trustworthiness is valued for the researcher's assurance that their research findings can be trusted and their research study is valuable. A participatory case study research design also includes engaging participants to actively participate in a designed partnership (Cober, Tan, Slotta, So & Konings, 2015). The participants are therefore acknowledged in this context as active human agents and experts of their own context.

In qualitative research, the following four issues concerning trustworthiness demand attention: credibility, transferability, dependability and the conformability (Nieuwenhuis, 2014; Bartram & Christiansen, 2014). Consequently, this study aims to explore how an enabling learning environment for LVIs can be enhanced in their rural school context; identifying teachers' understanding or interpretation of such an environment; the kind of support they provide to these learners; factors that could enable and constrain the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment and lastly; why learners with visual impairment's learning environment need to be enhanced. In this case, in ensuring trustworthiness in this study, the researcher employed the following four strategies and procedures to meet the criteria of trustworthiness.

4.9.1 Credibility

According to Anney (2014), credibility is when a qualitative researcher manages to produce the research findings that reveal the realities of the participants' perspectives regarding the phenomenon under study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) also confirm that credibility in the study is determined by the results that are reliable and trustworthy. Nieuwenhuis (2014) further asserts that there are several strategies used in qualitative research while establishing credibility. For instance, qualitative researchers have to provide information and detailed descriptions about the lengthy meetings they have spent in the field, constant observation and description of their research settings, as well as proper techniques applied to avoid biasness during the course of the study. Therefore, the credibility of this research was addressed by employing the following techniques.

The researcher addressed credibility in the current study by firstly, as a teacher in a nearby school where the study was conducted was familiar with the school structures and secondary school teachers who participated in the study. This is also because the researcher spent a long time in the participants' context and has known the secondary school teachers and the school since 2014 when the researcher was chosen as Grade 10 invigilator of a school for five consecutive years. To overcome biases that are often associated with a single data generation method, the researcher employed two data generation methods to generate data on the phenomenon. These data generation methods complemented one another and were used to ensure credibility (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) WhatsApp clips and an audio recorder with the permission of the participants, field notes to take notes of participants' discussions during the three online focus group discussions and photovoice (Fouche & Delport, 2016), were all recorded. Moreover, the researcher, through the help of competent field workers, worked on transcribing of data from all the results recorded. The researcher also presented the results to the supervisor in our faculty seminars for Ph.D. cohort on a weekly basis. Lastly, the researcher ensured credibility of the research by taking the findings back to

the participants to review field notes and recordings for accuracy and to see if anything was added to their responses or whether any word was omitted.

4.9.2 Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of the research can be transferred beyond the research study to other settings and contexts (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). However, Cohen et al. (2011) contend that this does not mean that the results of the study can be generalised but, Marshall and Rossman (2014) indicate that a qualitative researcher ensures transferability of the results in order to enable other researchers to make judgments about the findings of this study so as to apply them in their own context. To enhance transferability in this study, the researcher provided a detailed account of the research context as a location in which this study was conducted, as well as the research site as a typical environment in which generation of data took place. The researcher also clearly provided descriptions of the research, challenges encountered during the data generation and how such challenges were mitigated. This allows other researchers to make judgments about the findings of this study to see if the results can be useful in their own context.

4.9.3 Dependability

It is argued that dependability is concerned with procedures employed by the researcher to ensure consistency and trustworthiness of the of the research results (Mhlongo, 2017). In the context of qualitative research, qualitative researchers provide an adequate track record and explain how data was collected, analysed and outline the procedures followed while conducting the research study (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). In order to address dependability in this study, the researcher ensured that the study included precise research questions, a specific research design and analysis procedures, and made sure that the research findings aligns with the research questions. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) with Cuba and Lincoln (1994) support the notion that dependability is evaluating the quality of merging theory, used with the data

generation process and analysis. In the context of this study, in an effort to report the findings of this study, the researcher represented the participants' voices by using their photographs, photographs' interpretations and discussions, and verbatim quotes without any alteration made to change their data.

4.9.4 Confirmability

Anney (2014) indicates that, qualitative researchers demonstrate how well the findings of an inquiry can be confirmed by other researchers. In the same vein, Coleman (2021) argues that confirmability is the process that establishes whether the researcher has been biased during the research process. In addition, Marshall and Rossman (2011) further mention that confirmability is attained through an audit trail as an approach for examination of both the research process and results by an external auditor. The researcher therefore, explained details of the research process. In addition, the issue of confirmability in this study was also addressed by making sure that strategies employed comprised involvement of a critical friend who assisted in critical questioning during data analysis. This enabled the provision of enough evidence to back the researcher's data interpretations.

In a backdrop of what confirmability entails in this study, the researcher do not make unsubstantiated claims about the research findings, however, in order to ensure that objectivity was maintained during the process of data analysis and interpretation, the researcher tried by all means not to impose her own ideas or personal issues to influence the findings of this research project.

4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Clark-Kazak (2017) ethics in research are essential aspects concerned with moral behaviours, most especially in educational research that had to deal with humans. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) suggest that it is the obligation of researchers to consider all ethical issues as outlined in the World American Medical

Association Declaration of Helsinki (2013) that involve their roles as insiders/outside to the participants, to protect participants from any harm that may occur as a result of the research process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014), consider careful assessment of the predictable risks, particularly in any research that explores personal experiences, establish and build positive relationships with participants without being bias, while on the other hand, acknowledging their voices. Considering and acknowledging the participants' voices motivated the researcher's choice of a participatory visual art-based methodology in the present study. Even though Mitchell (2011) indicates that there are numerous ethical issues of participatory visual methodology, Wang (2022) contends ethical significance of doing participatory visual art-based research as the notion of participants' identities' respect with the aim of doing no harm. This view is also supported by Mitchell, Naydene and Moletsane (2017), who suggest better than harm from participatory visual arts-based research. For instance, in the case of the current study, the main focus in using a participatory visual method (photovoice) is to enable participants not only to identify issues, but also to recognise solutions that they can bring through their photographs (Mitchell, 2011). Oakes, Ewald, Orsini, and Strack (2022: 250) state that "one of the major aspects of using photovoice in a research context is to ensure lawful and ethical decision making when selecting photographs and developing captions, thereby ensuring how to manage confidentiality and anonymity where photographs are concerned".

In the context of this study, the researcher therefore ensured that visual ethics were placed into consideration by reminding the participants about the significance of visual ethics during the photovoice workshop (Wang, 2022). It became clear to participants that care should be taken while taking photographs, which may include an identifiable subject. This means that photographs of subjects that might be identified, signs and symbols were not allowed in this matter. However, the researcher noticed that although visual ethical principles had been clearly stipulated to the participants of not taking photographs of identifiable subjects including people without their consent or by signing photograph waiver (see appendix H), they still decided to take photographs of people. The researcher therefore mitigated through blurring photographs (Mitchell, 2011).

The following proves that the researcher followed all measures of ethical considerations while conducting this research.

4.10.1 Permission to conduct research

To make sure that all ethical protocols were followed, ethical permission was first applied for and granted by the University of the Free State Research Ethics Review Committee before conducting this study (see Appendix B). This was done to ensure that the researcher followed and respected the University ethical code of conduct (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Upon recipient of ethical clearance to conduct this research, the researcher also sought permission from the Berea Education Department to carry out research in a selected rural secondary school in this District. Once permission was granted from the Berea Education Department, the researcher contacted the principal of a school that formed the sample for this study before the generation of data commences.

4.10.2 Informed consent

Informed consent is issued to the participants as a proof of fairness around all ethical protocols (Creswell, 2014). Lune and Berg (2017) assert that informed consent means participants' agreement to take part in research. In order to make sure that the research took all ethical protocol into consideration, the researcher in this study provided each participant with a written information that indicated the nature, purpose, as well as potential risk that may come out of the study. The issue of informed consent was made to ensure that the participants understand details of the study and sign before the study commences. Moreover, informed consent was also used to ensure the participants were made aware of their right to participate or withdraw at any stage of the research (Cohen et al., 2012). However, the assurance made to the participants of keeping all their private information confidential and to be anonymous, enabled them to freely and voluntarily offer their consent. Attaining a signed informed consent, provided assurance

that the participants have fully understood the purpose, significance and potential risk that may come out of the study, and how such risk may be mitigated.

4.10.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Coffelt (2017: 227) describes “confidentiality and anonymity” as ethical practices designed to protect the privacy of human subjects during data generation, analysis and reporting, however, often misunderstood by new scholars. Confidentiality refers “to protecting of the raw data and publishing the accumulated results that cannot traced back to subjects’ identities while anonymity means not collecting data that can identify or trace an individual” (Badampudi, Fotrousi, Cartaxo & Usman, 2022: 3). This is supported by Coffelt (2017), who indicates that is the obligation of a researcher to maintain confidentiality by separating or not disclosing participants’ identifiable information from the participants’ data. Any research that engages group participation, such as use of focus group discussions in generation of data does not guarantee confidentiality, according to the research ethics clearance guidelines (2014) of the University of the Free State. Participants who engaged in focus group are therefore, at risk of breach of privacy.

In this context, to ensure confidentiality, the researcher protected participants’ privacy and identity through the use of pseudonyms and security measures for video file and transcripts. Their names were securely separated from their answers with fictitious codes or pseudonyms. While there were several efforts made to ensure that participants will not be connected to the information they shared during focus groups, the researcher in this study made the participants aware that she cannot guarantee that other participants will treat information confidentially, but encouraged them to ensure that no data revealed any information, which may be linked to any participant (Badampudi et al., 2022; Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

Concurrently, in making sure that anonymity of the research context and of all participants who participated in this study was protected, the researcher removed all codes or marks that may reveal their identity and ensured that their personal information

were not placed anywhere near their data (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Furthermore, to make sure that the participants' responses remained anonymous (Lune & Berg, 2017), the researcher stored hard copies of their answers separately from coding keys in a safe locked place for future research or academic purposes and soft copy information was stored on a password protected computer where the identity keys were kept separately from the data.

4.10.4 Voluntary participation

Since the researcher facilitated this study, which focuses on the enhancement of an enabling learning environment for LVIs, secondary school teachers of LVI voluntarily participated in this study. This is due to the fact that the participants' voluntary participation guarantees ethical dilemmas (Schenk & Williamson, 2005). As matter of voluntary participation, participants were made aware that their participation is voluntary and that they are under no obligation to consent to participation (Rule & John, 2011). During the data generation methods (Online focus group discussion and photovoice), the researcher ensured that the rights of the participants were not violated throughout the research process (Clark-Kazak, 2017). They were also made aware that if they feel like not taking part in the study, they are free not to participate.

4.11 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the researcher discussed the research approach and paradigm employed in the structuring of this study. A discussion of research design and methodology and an explanation of how these were informed by the research questions, aim and objectives of the study, were also provided. Furthermore, this chapter highlighted a holistic description in the use of research methods and how data were generated and analysed in this study. The researcher then discussed and explained measures taken while ensuring trustworthiness in the research findings. Ethical issues the researcher considered relevant to the current study, were also indicated. This chapter has therefore presented significant information to permit

understanding in the presentation of the research findings as outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, a detailed overview of the research approach and methodology employed for data generation processes and analysis was provided. To respond to the research questions, aim and objectives of this study, this chapter focuses on the presentation of data, analysis and discussion of the findings. The four major themes that emerged from the findings of this study were presented. In presenting the findings of this study, participants' verbatim quotes were also integrated to affirm their active voices. The discussions and interpretations of the research findings were supported by the existing literature and theoretical framework, as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. The current chapter concludes with a summary.

5.2 DATA ANALYSIS: MAJOR THEMES EMERGED

This section focuses on the discussions of data according to the four major themes that emerged which are: ***Secondary school teachers' understanding of an ELE; Current support used to enhance an ELE for LVIs; Factors that enable and constrain the enhancement of ELE for LVIs and The need to enhance the ELE for LVIs.*** These themes are discussed separately with the corresponding sub-themes that are outlined in *Table 5.1* and are used as headings to present data in this chapter.

Table 5.1: The main themes and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Theme 1: The understanding of an ELE for LVIs in rural Lesotho schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attributes of an ELE
Theme 2: Current support used to enhance an ELE for LVIs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school-based collaborative support to enhance an ELE • Tangible support • Intangible support
Theme 3: Factors that enable and constrain the enhancement of ELE for LVIs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors that enable the enhancement of ELE. • Factors that constrain the enhancement of ELE
Theme 4: The need to enhance the ELE for LVIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for the enhancement of ELE to effectively address LVIs' academic necessities

5.2.1 Theme 1: The Understanding of an ELE for LVIs in rural Lesotho schools

In response to objective 1: *Exploring secondary school teachers understanding of ELE for LVIs*, the findings in this theme revealed a sub-theme and three categories, which are discussed in *Table 5.2* below. The inclusion and exclusion indicators for this theme are presented.

Table 5.2: Theme 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

THEME 1: The Understanding of an ELE for LVIs in rural Lesotho schools		
Sub-theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sub-theme1: Attributes of an ELE	Any reference made denoting attributes of an ELE	Anything that excludes attributes of an ELE
Category 1.1: An ELE as a kind of value	Any reference made showing an ELE as a kind of value	Anything that exclude description of ELE as a kind of a value
Category 1.2: An ELE as a habitat of resourceful materials	Any reference made which links an ELE as home of resourceful materials	Anything that does not determine an ELE as habitat for resourceful materials
Category 1.3: An ELE as creating and empowering behavioural change	Any reference made denoting an ELE as creating and empowering behavioural change	Anything that excludes classification of an ELE as creating and empowering behavioural change

5.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Attributes of an enabling learning environment (ELE)

This sub-theme signifies secondary school teachers' thoughts, understanding, and interpretation of an ELE. Participants' understanding of an ELE for LVIs revealed that a successful learning for LVIs is determined by the kind of learning environment at which the provision of education for them is conducted. This implies that understanding of an ELE is complex and varies from context to context. Therefore, participants' discussion and interpretation of an ELE for LVIs in this theme, point to its attributes, which are as follows: *an ELE as a kind of value, a place or habitat of resourceful materials, and as creating and empowering behavioural change*. The next section describes these emerged sub-themes.

5.2.1.2 An enabling learning environment as a kind of value

The secondary school teachers as participants in the current study clearly stipulated through their discussions that they understand an ELE for LVIs as a kind of value. Most of the participants associate an ELE with values that should be incorporated into school practices during the teaching and learning processes. They frequently mention providing easy learning access to every learner. This promotes LVIs' values and assists them to develop holistically. The following quotations from some of the participants clarify this:

LO:

"An enabling learning environment is conducive for learning where every learner feels respected".

PR also agreed by saying:

"According to my understanding this is a kind of value or learning space that makes LVIs' learning possible."

Some of the participants acknowledged that an ELE indicates values like respecting, accepting, appreciating and responding to LVIs' diverse needs. This indicates that it enables smooth learning and addresses a variety of their special educational needs. This is supported by the following comments from some of the participants:

SU stated that:

"An ELE is accommodative, supportive, inclusive, safe, and conducive for all learners regardless of any form of impairments".

AC supported SU's views and affirmed that:

"..Yah! It accommodates all learners' diverse needs. Meaning that within an environment that is enabling, all learners feel welcomed and catered for."

Similarly, another participant **FL** commended:

"I think it is an environment that suits the needs of all learners including those with visual impairment, this means that it responds to their special educational needs."

LO reported:

"I agree with my colleagues here, that when LVIs' learning environment is enabling it comprehends their special needs and ensures that their needs are well taken care of."

The verbatim quotations from the participants' responses above, link an ELE with kinds of values, such as realizing it as an accommodating environment for LVIs and which encompasses a wide range of their educational needs. Driven by the responses above, it is clear that an ELE is in favour of these learners' educational needs, in order to learn effectively and perish. The findings of this study resonate with Landsberg, Kruger and Swart's (2019) idea that LVIs' effective learning is influenced by the learning environment in which it is conducted. The findings of this study about the creation of a learning environment that is enabling to the demands of LVIs' educational needs reveal frequently mentioning of "*conducive for learning*" by the participants that seems to have become a defining term of an ELE. Defining ELE as "*conducive for learning*", reveals a level of argument of how the participants interpret it. Understanding of ELE may not be easy, because it is a complex concept, which its descriptions are not uniform, but very diverse depending on the context under investigation. In the context of this study, ELE was interpreted as certain values, such as all learners' including LVIs' equal attainment of education, valuing of their diverse needs, and capacities, which reflects an inclusive education perspective and collective agency. This was valued to be operative within the premise of realizing the significance of agency. The conception of realizing significance of agency in the context of the findings in this study demonstrates a move from deficit thinking (Khanare & de Lange, 2017) and acknowledges the contributions that local agents (in the case of the current study being, community members, parents, teachers, and learners with and without vision problems) may have for the promotion of all learners' learning. As a result, for these participants, it was crucial that creating and enhancing of ELE for LVIs need to have more nuanced understanding. For this reason, based on issues related to understanding of ELE, the findings of the study also reveal that patterns and structures become the initial stage, which appears in the context that the next section discusses.

5.2.1.3 *An enabling learning environment as a habitat for resourceful materials*

The findings from OFGDs also revealed the participants' common understanding of an ELE, which they associated with: patterns or structures that appear in the context. Two respondents out of all ten participants indicated that an ELE is rich and resourceful. One of the participating teachers had this to say:

“..Emmh! According to my understanding, this is an environment that is full of teaching and learning materials” (FL).

Another participant, **AC** added and further elaborated with examples:

“..Yah! Is the environment that is well equipped to accommodate all learners' diverse needs, For example, the learners who use visual language (deaf learners) such as sign language are provided or allocated sign language interpreter, and those who rely on tactile language (Visually impaired), are allocated braille specialists and those who need audible, written and spoken language are provided with the required resources such as qualified teachers to assist them throughout their teaching and learning.”

Most of the participants show an understanding of an ELE and associate it with its significance in terms of available resources. Participants were asked to explain in detail what a school environment should be like to say that is enabling. **IN** from group B, indicated the following:

“The school environment should have appropriate resources (e.g. Qualified teachers and trained to teach LVIs)... ...These teachers will have the best knowledge of how to teach LVIs.”

CO within the same group concurred with **IN** by saying:

“Yes! There has to be a special classroom, well equipped for LVIs' special educational demands. I also think that, when an environment is enabling it becomes useful, for example, such an environment will be surrounded by the equipment or resources that make teaching and learning easy for LVIs.”

The findings within this category showed that the participants considered an ELE for LVIs to be resourceful. They associated it with facilities, teaching, and learning materials that will assist in making the teaching and learning of them a success. In this theme, the

sub-theme which gives the description of ELE as patterns and structures that appear in the context emerged. In a focus of trying to have a look at how some secondary school teachers, who conducted their teaching in rural Lesotho schools, express their understanding of ELE, the researcher initiates the discussions by having a look at how they position themselves within the context of creating such ELE in order to make it enabling for LVIs. The findings in this first theme are crucial for one to acknowledge that participants did not contest the idea that the rural schools' provision of learning environments, which are enabling, will assist in the development of their learners' academic abilities but, they were however with the belief that in order for these schools to be enabling, there should be a well-equipped infrastructure, which they needed to use in the facilitation of the teaching and learning of these learners. Driven by the perspective of Mutlu and Yildirim (2019), a closer look at these findings indicates an element in the development of the school structures to qualify facilitation of teaching, which will then challenge one to be capable enough to employ. What is crucial to determine in the findings of this theme is that, the participants were able to link their understanding of ELE with positive attributes, which clearly explain its significance in terms of available resources and agents with potential and ability to construct a school learning environment to make it conducive in the context of all learners' learning, including those with visual impairments. With respect to this, this study therefore aims to explore how the ELE for LVIs' can be enhanced. The emerging findings in this study are with the focus of identifying and understanding an ELE as resourceful, conducive, and which acknowledges adaptive behavioural change of all learners.

5.2.1.4 An enabling learning environment as creating and empowering behavioral change

Most of the participating teachers in Lesotho rural secondary school, view their understanding of an ELE for LVIs as creating and enabling behavioural change. Their responses showed that such an environment is free and safe, and has the potential to enable support and interactive learning. This is supported by the following sentiments from some of the participants:

COL indicated that:

“An ELE is a safe barrier-free learning space that allows every learner to learn freely, safely, and feel at home.”

IN pointed out that an ELE stimulates learners’ behavioural change as he stated his understanding of such an environment:

“It is an environment that makes it easy for LVIs to learn freely.”

LO also affirmed:

“Yes, they feel relaxed and accepted.”

Some of the participants argued that creating a learning environment to become enabling, made all learners feel supported and enjoyed their learning.

COL pointed out:

“A learning environment that is enabling is enriching and supportive.”

SU went further and confirmed that:

“Yes! When such an environment is created to be enabling and supportive, it permits learners to enjoy their learning.”

One of the participants noted how the enabling learning environment allows interactive teaching and learning.

“According to my understanding, enabling learning environment is a learning space that makes LVIs' learning possible. For example, when the learning environment is enabling, the teaching and learning for these learners become interactive and more learner-centered than involving more writing which may sometimes become a barrier to them” (PR).

Additionally, one of the participants expressed his vivid concern about the interactive and more learner-centered practices, which happen during the teaching and learning of LVIs, and according to him, the learning environment that their school provided, is currently not enabling for LVIs due to the prevailing traditional teacher-centered practices, which involves too much writing during the teaching and learning processes. This view was concisely shown below:

“An ELE permits interactive and more learner-centered learning than involving more writing. That is true, because currently, the traditional teacher-centered practices which involve too much writing are a barrier to LVIs, as some teachers’ handwriting may not be visible enough for learners who experience eye problems” (AB).

Thus, participants indicated an ELE as a kind of value for general wellbeing and holistic development of LVIs. The above quotes are indicative that ELE continued to be regarded as important in enabling the teaching and learning of all learners, including LVIs. The findings of this study resonate with ALSadoon’s (2017) views that an ELE provides learners with opportunities to learn safely to actively achieve their academic goals. As a researcher, it was worth noticing that creating a learning environment that is enabling was not just for learners experiencing barriers to learning only, but also for the benefit of understanding rural schools as having resources, facilities, and human agents, who are capable of contributing solutions for community development. This is in alignment with Rasheed, Ahmad, and Azam's (2020) report, which indicates that all schools hold all the designs, facilities, and services that produce a supportive environment for all learners, ensuring their smooth academic journey.

This sub-theme presents the secondary rural school teachers’ interpretations of ELE in the context of LVIs’ easy access of learning. Free learning, safety, and feeling of belonging all communicate crucial information about how the secondary school teachers as participants in the current study express their understanding of ELE in the context of enabling learning for LVIs. The findings in this sub-theme instinctively revealed participants’ view concerning ELE as creating and enabling behavioural change. These findings suggest that when the learning environment is enabling, it stimulates learners’ behavioural change. It is therefore evident from these findings for one to note that LVIs experience change of behaviour when their learning environment is enabled. This is supported by Themane and Osher (2014) that an ELE ensures that LVIs feel safe, supported, cared for, respected and secured when their learning is conducted in an environment that is enabling.

Driven by the agentic capability framework of the current study, participants’ understanding of an ELE qualifies their appreciation that they could consider

themselves as agents (Code, 2020) in the learning environment of LVIs, and who can contribute to change in their learning. It is, therefore, clear in the context of this study to realize that, understanding of a rural school environment as an ELE by the participants, became a source of enhancing their teaching and learning. Hence, evidence from the above excerpts revealed that the participants have a clear understanding of what is meant by an ELE. The findings indicate their understanding that ELE means seeing learners' differences positively for their success in learning, rather than from a deficit perspective. A further aspect these findings signify is the notion of collaboration in the construction of LVIs' learning environment. In the next theme, the discussion is focused on how the participants consciously frame their support to contribute in the enhancement of LVIs' ELE.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Current support used to enhance an enabling learning environment for LVIs

This theme responds to secondary research question two: *What kind of support do teachers render to create an ELE for LVIs in a rural secondary school in Lesotho?* The Online Focus Group Discussions (OFGDs) was used to generate data for this research question. In this section, the sub-theme: A school-based collaborative support to enabling the learning environment emerged from the participants' responses. Drawing from the nature of the kind of support participating teachers regarded as being provided within their rural school in making LVIs' learning environment enabling, the researcher has categorized them into tangible and intangible support. The inclusion and exclusion indicators for a sub-theme and categories that emerged from the participant's responses to this theme are presented in *Table 5.4* below.

Table 5.3: Theme 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

THEME 2: Current support used to enhance an ELE for LVIs		
Sub-theme 2.1: A school-based collaborative support to enhancing the ELE of LVIs		
Categories	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Category 2.1.1: Tangible support	Any reference made to tangible support offered to make LVIs’ learning environment enabling	Anything that excludes tangible support offered to make LVIs’ learning environment enabling
Category 2.1.2: Intangible support	Any reference made to intangible support	Anything that excludes intangible support

5.2.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: A school-based collaborative support to enhancing the ELE of LVIs

Most of the participants' responses pointed out collaboration as the most significant factor, which they employ in trying to create an environment that is enabling to their learners, including those with visual impairments. According to these participants, constructing an environment that is enabling is not only important to address LVIs' special educational needs, but also encourages them as teachers to work collaboratively with each other, and as a team to develop their knowledge and teaching skills. The findings derived in this sub-theme revealed several tangible and intangible support currently offered by teachers in Lesotho rural schools when making LVIs' learning environment enabling. These are discussed in the next section.

5.2.2.1.1 Category 2.1.1: Tangible support

Within this category, the participants mentioned academic support, which involves classroom settings, teaching, and learning materials as the prevailing support that they currently providing to LVIs in their host environment. All of the participating teachers

during their OFGDs indicated that for them to ensure that LVIs' provision of education is conducted within an ELE; they collaboratively offered them support to help and enable them equally and successfully achieve their academic goals, the same way as their peers.

LO, a qualified special education teacher indicated that school-based collaborative support to enhance an ELE is currently considered the best approach to academically supporting all learners, including LVIs. She specified:

“To make sure that our school is an enabling learning space for LVIs, we work together. For instance, a LVI's teachers from the previous class use a continuous record to notify a teacher in the next class on how to academically accommodate such a learner.”

Another participant, **FL** supported **LO**'s view by saying:

“This works for us and makes us more conscientious in making preparations for these learners, in knowing well in advance how their educational needs were previously addressed.”

Additionally, some participants indicated that in ensuring that LVIs' learning is effectively done, they used different and appropriate teaching and learning materials, and human and physical resources. To these participants, human resources are very resourceful within their school as they collaboratively draw on one another's experiences, knowledge, and skills to assist LVIs to learn and holistically develop. The following verbatim quotes from the participants' responses in expressing how human resources were used to influence a kind of support to LVIs were outlined:

“Our school has three qualified special education teachers who are knowledgeable in how to assist learners with SEND. This enables us to draw on their special skills when a need arises” (AB).

SU added:

“Yes! Having this kind of people on our team is a relief because teaching LVIs is very demanding and these teachers always come to our rescue.”

Other participants, when drawing from their experiences or roles that they have played in supporting and making a learning environment for LVIs enabling, considered physical

resources, like classroom settings, facilities like teaching and learning materials such as chalkboards as available and accessible to use and to support the learning of LVIs.

IN pointed out:

“From my experience, the kind of support that I normally offered to LVIs during the teaching and learning process in my class is that I always check their sitting position after I have made identification and have found that they have vision problems. For example, for those who are short-sighted, I ensured that they sit in front away from direct sunlight where they will be to see clearly what has been written on the chalkboard.”

WE also indicated:

“I agree with my colleague here, I had one who had albinism in my class. I arranged for her sitting position by making sure that she sat on the dark side of the classroom where there was no direct light reaching her and made sure that she wore her hat even in class.”

The above responses gave clarity that enhancing an ELE for LVIs was considered to have created space for aiding support to them. It was also evident that LVIs are collaboratively supported, because their special educational needs are everybody's concern. The responses indicated the most important stakeholders in the provision of education to these learners as qualified special education teachers and thus have to be considered as such and as having capabilities to provide academic support by guaranteeing that physical and human resources are effectively used in making LVIs' learning a success. The findings from the participants' responses in this study are in opposition to many research studies, which title rural schools as limited or lack of adequate training of teachers (Asamoah, Ofori-Dul, Cudjoe, Abdullah & Nyarko, 2018; du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Mosia, 2017;), which proclaim inadequate resources (Ferreira, 2020). However, they signify that their rural schools are in the richness of resources that only need the best management. The findings of the current study, therefore, not only revealed tangible support through the use of physical materials as the only support provided by teachers within Lesotho rural secondary schools, but also confirmed the use of various intangible support that teachers' inveterate tapping into when creating an ELE for LVIs. The next section indicates this.

5.2.2.1.2 Category 2.1.2: Intangible support

In reviewing the participants' responses from their focus group discussions, which was conducted online, it was apparent that the kind of support that dominate at rural schools had been concomitant with the Basotho cultural system, which originates from their culture, highlighted in their Sesotho proverb, '*kopano ke matla*' (meaning working together to achieve one goal) (Sefotho, 2018). In this respect, most of the participants were able to reveal comprehensible explanations of the kind of support they provided to LVIs. In the current category, most of the dominating key findings of school-based collaborative support were that of encouraging LVIs' active learning, appreciation, and respect. The kind of support provided by teachers seems to flow originally from their traditional custom, as was expressed by the following participants:

CO:

"Most learners with eye problems tend to isolate themselves from participating in class, as I have noticed that and have to make sure that they feel part of a family, at least in a week I arranged for the class competition where every learner in a class is allocated a piece of work to share to the whole class."

AC also stated:

"...I also have seen that individual participation works very well for them than group participation. This enables these learners to actively engage in learning and even learn from one another."

Another participant indicated:

*"From my last years' experience, I remembered very well that I had a very interesting class where a VIL even volunteered herself to become a timekeeper. She was dedicated to her duty, always very punctual, and even arrives very early at school. That class was very interesting and we even created a class logo '**to give everyone his/her turn to shine**'"*
(PR).

What is interesting to note in the excerpts above, is that LVIs are regarded as active beings, and, while most of the participants mentioned school-based collaborative

support as an enabling learning environment for them, their responses dug much deeper into the application of school-based support and linked to a cultural phenomenon, 'kopano ke matla'. This indicated that working together enables defeat and could continuously be placed into practice, and yet it might be highly effective when LVIs are involved, feel appreciated and respected. One of the participants **LO** had this to say:

“LVIs are a fragile vulnerable group of learners whose feelings if not handled with care may be damaged. Talking from my experience while teaching grade 10s last year in 2021, I remembered one day when I had to step up and worked out a case of one learner who was visually impaired and was taking notes for his group only to find that everything that he copied from the chalkboard was full of grammatical errors, and sadly his group was shouting at him. Sad as he was, he came to me with his eye full of tears. Immediately and carefully I handled the case, In a form of a game, I wrote on a chalkboard using different fonts and selected 3-5 learners to read what I have written, out of 5 learners chosen, only 2 managed to read to the end. By the time they discovered that the very small font size written on the chalkboard was not conducive for reading the whole class was laughing including a sad and embarrassed learner. At last, I encouraged the class to respect, appreciate one another and be aware that everyone is unique.”

LO's response indicated her passion through the support she provided to LVIs. According to her, practices related to supporting LVIs are becoming more crucial in the rural context as most learners without vision problems are unaware of vision-related problems hence, require careful consideration. Evidence from **LO's** response has proven that providing support to all learners including LVIs, involves a wide range of practices, which includes valuing all learners equally to make their learning enabling. However, during their discussion, most of the participants indicated that collaboration existed, as teachers (qualified and non-qualified) built positive relationships with all learners, and that contributed to enhancing the ELE of LVIs in their respective schools. In this regard, they were asked to indicate to what extent the kind of support they provided, if any, contributed to the improvement of LVIs' holistic wellbeing. The following elicited participants to indicate 'fragments' in the current support provided within their school.

“Even though we are aware that these learners are very fragile my colleague here has said, I may not say that the kind of support we employed here in our school to make LVIs’ learning environment a favourable place for learning is a hundred percent. Since we have limited knowledge of how to support them” (SU commended).

Another participant **COL** provided succinct details:

“Yes! What worries me is that some of these learners are difficult to identify, and I think we might somehow along the way fail to effectively meet their needs. I, therefore, see working together as teachers and drawing assistance from other colleagues with proper knowledge and skills as not enough, what is still needed to be done is to have proper training with clear guidelines on how to support these learners.”

The participants' responses above raise awareness that rural schools are significant in ensuring that LVIs are enabled to access learning. However, most individual responses by the participants reveal that the initiative in place to support LVIs at their host school is not enough. The concept of school-based collaborative support presents innovative views about ELE and confirms the perspective that enabling a school learning environment should contribute to and function as habitat for a supportive learning of all learners, including learners with vision problems (Haidari, Karakus & Kocoglu, 2019; LIEP, 2018; Oliveira & de Barba, 2021). Yet, the gap that remains in this situation is that teachers as the key facilitators in enabling the learning of LVIs, experience limitations in mastering support to LVIs.

However, the prominence of expanding and strengthening rural community capabilities remains (Bandura, 2012; 2018). On the other hand, school-based collaborative support realizes the importance of collective agency and that better outcomes are the results of collective efforts (Alfaiz, Hidayah, Hambali & Radjah, 2019). This belief matches the significance of the current study, which views teachers' ability to enhance an ELE of LVIs as the influence of their shared experiences, capabilities, knowledge, and skills that already exist. The emphasis on strengthening rural community capabilities as a foundation for enabling support to LVIs requires teachers in a rural secondary school in Lesotho to be active in instigating support through shared knowledge, working together, and building positive relationships with all learners. In the backdrop of the findings from

the participants' responses, while identifying the kind of support rendered to LVIs within their rural schools, little support was identified by the participants as existing but, various hindrances within their school towards supporting LVIs, were also indicated. This leads to theme three of the current study, which explains factors that enable and constrain the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs as the researcher discusses this in the next session.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Factors that enable and constrain the enhancement of ELE for LVIs.

Visual methodology of research was used as the focus of analysis in this theme, since this study is arts-based. The findings in the previous theme two indicated the kind of support offered to LVIs. This theme has revealed that the support offered to LVIs is inadequate. While indicating the kind of support provided that can be influenced by either enabling or constraining factors found in their host school, the participants' responses provided evidence of the existing support that teachers rendered while supporting LVIs within their rural school. This motivates the focus of the current theme, which gives a reflection of the third and fourth research questions, *what factors could enable the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho, and what factors could impede the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho?* The participants' identification of factors that could enable and cause constraints in the enhancement of LVIs' ELE through photovoice was represented by the illustrations, written captions, texts, and accompanying explanations of their photographs. During the presentation of this data, the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and autonomy were recognized (Wang, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2021). On the other hand, the findings that emerged in this theme were organized using inclusion and exclusion criteria in *Table 5.5* below:

Table 5.4: Theme 3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

THEME 3: Factors that enable and constrain the enhancement of enabling learning environment for LVIs		
Sub-theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sub-theme 3.1: Factors that enable the enhancement of ELE for LVIs.	Any reference made on factors that enable the enhancement of ELE for LVIs	Anything that excludes factors that enable the enhancement of ELE for LVIs
Sub-theme 3.2: Factors that constrain the enhancement of ELE for LVIs	Any reference made on factors that constrain the enhancement of ELE for LVIs	Anything that excludes factors that constrain the enhancement of ELE for LVIs

NOTE: *ELE stands for enabling learning environment*

LVI stands for learners with visual impairments

5.2.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Factors that enable the enhancement of ELE for LVIs

Schools should provide learning environments that are enabling to learners and "permit all learners equal access to quality education" (LIEP, 2018:13). This indicates that in alignment with this objective from the Lesotho inclusive education policy, the participants in their two groups (group A and group B) of five teachers during photographs reflections and discussions were able to identify various factors within their rural school that could help in the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs. This was guided by the following prompt: *Take three pictures that represent factors that could assist in the enhancement of ELE for LVIs in your school, and then explain why you consider such factors as enabling.* The various factors were found within a broad network of social structures within which an individual functions. These involved factors that were derived from an individual's *inherent capabilities*, which are found within an individual, among peers and teachers (*enhanced interpersonal relationships*), and physical environments, such as a classroom environment, school buildings, and teaching and learning

resources, which are *resourceful materials*. The illustration below in *figure 5.1* highlights an overview of enabling factors identified using the notion of socio-structural systems (Bandura, 2000; Elwell, 2013).

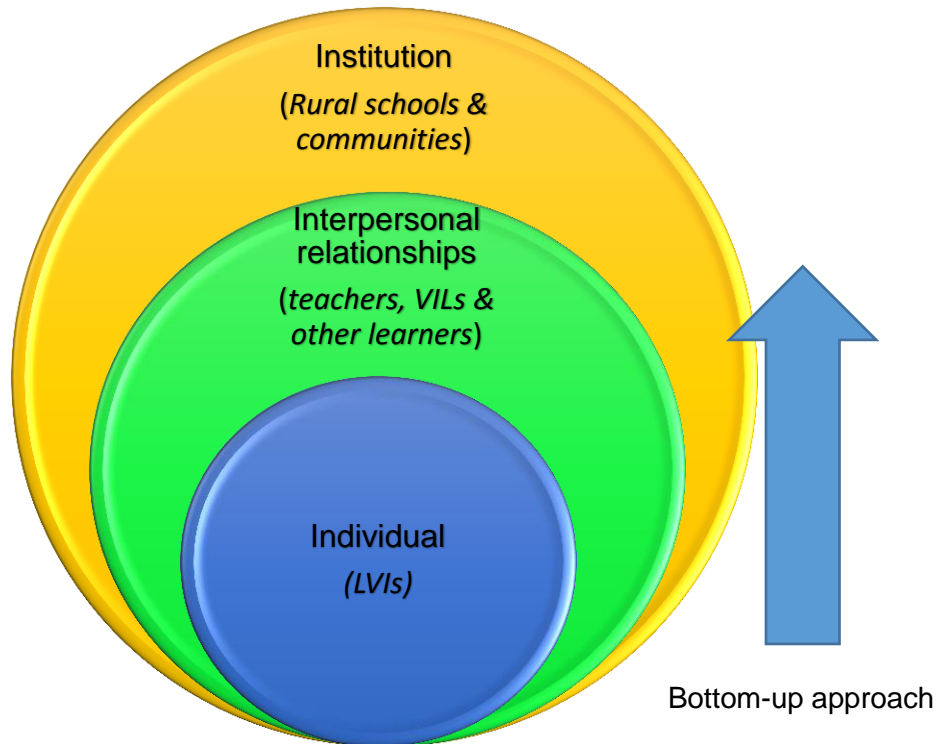


Figure 5.1: Socio-structural systems as host of enabling factors

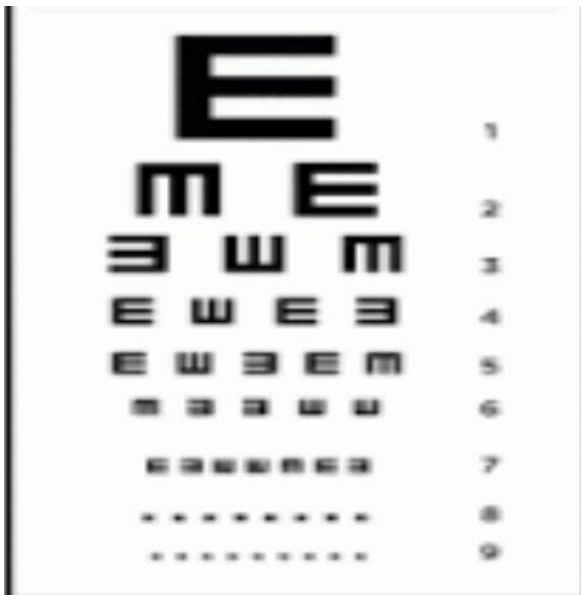
The illustration above shows that the diverse factors that permit the enhancement of ELE for LVIs originate from them as assets or agents with capabilities that can influence their learning. This means that they own unique skills or capabilities (Bandura, 2006), which can be drawn to enable the enhancement of their learning environment. The participants' identification of enabling factors denotes a bottom-up approach (Stewart, Manges, & Ward, 2015) where LVIs are considered to form part of the socio-structural system and own the ability to influence the decisions made concerning them. Additionally, some of the factors identified by the participants were also linked to interpersonal relationships among LVIs, their peers, and teachers. These factors were identified as available within their rural schools and communities, and as capable of

promoting and making improvements in the LVIs' learning environment. The next sections show how factors identified by the participants might contribute positively to the enhancement of ELE for LVIs.

5.2.3.1.1 Category 3.1.1: LVIs as agents with capabilities to influence their learning

Learners with visual impairment as agents with a unique ability to learn, was an interesting point raised during photographs' reflection by the participants. Within this category, most participants view LVIs as part of the system (inclusive education system in the case of the current study) and considerable success in the enhancement of their ELE to arise from their joint involvement. The participants identify pre-screening of vision problems and prioritizing LVIs' education the same way as all learners, as well as believing in their ability to learn as one form of enabling factor within their school. This is ascertained in one of the participants **IN's** from group B's explanation of their photographs in *figure 5.2* below:

Pre-screening of vision problems



This is a picture of the screening or Snellen chart (figure 5.2). We suggest that a vision test should be done as early as possible during the beginning of every learner's schooling in our school because this pre-screening will enable teachers to know their learners' visual state for proper arrangement and provision of their education.

Figure 5.2: Group B participants' screening chart

Another participant, **COL** within the same group pointed out:

“Pre-screening may be advantageous in making learning for LVIs a success. For instance, teachers will have an exact number of learners who have vision problems well in advance, and if ever referral may be required such learners shall be offered assistance as early as possible. This is exactly what is meant by enhancing enabling learning environment for these learners not what we are currently doing here in our school whereby, which only offers support to them when a case arises.”

FL agreed with her colleagues' opinions and stated:

“...This is exactly my point, LVIs are capable to learn and can thrive like their peers when their eye problems are initially detected and preparations for their educational needs are properly made.”

The above participants' responses are indicative of success in the enhancement of ELE and view the vision test as an enabling factor that prepares LVIs to become active in their learning. All the participants in group B share the same sentiments by indicating that knowing well in advance the learners who may require help concerning their eye problems, are significant and regarded as an enabling factor. Realizing initial screening of all learners is intended to provide proper arrangement, support, and assistance to learners whose vision may be impaired. The participants in this study, therefore, demonstrate an understanding of factors that could enable the enhancement of ELE for VILs. According to Munaw and Tegegn (2022), giving primacy to LVIs' education should be considered a key indicator of their success in the enhancement of their learning environment. From **COL's** response, it is apparent that teachers are aware of factors within their rural schools that could enable the enhancement of ELE for LVIs. Furthermore, after identifying some loopholes in the use of enabling factors to support these learners, as also indicated in the previous theme two, they shifted their actions into reality, creating room for practicality in what enhancement of ELE entails.

Some participants from group A revealed healthy living as another factor that could contribute to the enhancement of LVIs' learning. Most of the participants in this group during their photographs' explanation, showed the significance of eating healthy food as symbolic of healthy living. According to these participants, food is a basic human need

therefore, LVIs like every human being, need food for them to become fit and healthy in schools and their homes. This is evident in *figure 5.3* and apparent in the below extracts:

Healthy living



“We have decided to use this picture (figure 5.3) because all learners need to eat properly. Proper eating means having correct meals every day as well as, being healthy. Therefore, LVIs need to be offered whether in their homes or here in our school. This will enable them an opportunity to concentrate while in class during the teaching and learning process” (AB, in group A).

Figure 5.3: Group A participants’ indication of learners eating healthy food

*“As you can see our photo here, **SU** pointing at their photograph in figure 5.3, we decided to take this picture showing learners while eating food as a representation that they need food for survival”*

*“Yes! We intend to show that learners not just need to eat food as important but to eat healthy and fresh food every day” (**WE**).*

The participants' responses indicate food as an enabling factor that can be recognized for the enhancement of their learning environment. It is interesting to note that participants were able to view LVIs' healthy living as an enabling factor within their school. The above extracts speak volumes on the significance of eating healthy food. The findings further indicated that not just is eating important to LVIs, but also pointed beyond to the fact where it is considered important to manage their vision condition. One of the participants in group A, during their photograph interpretations and reflections stated:

LO suggested:

"We all know that vision problem is a condition that affects learners' eyesight thus, negatively impacting their learning. I therefore, see as a need for them to be given food consisting of carrots, legumes, fish, and leafy green vegetables as supplements to their eyesight"

More so, another participant **AC** stated:

"I also think, that giving the learners affected by visual impairment food as supplements will be very important because it will help to increase their concentration in class."

While demonstrating the understanding of what is required in the enhancement of LVIs' ELE, the participants' responses revealed not only LVIs' inherent ability to learn and their healthy living as enabling factors, but a point beyond and identified other factors within the socio-structural systems, like strong institutional structures which include, enhanced interpersonal relationships among teachers to support learners, both those with and without vision problems by using resourceful teaching and learning materials to help them adapt and effectively learn. These categories are discussed in the next section.

5.2.3.1.2 Category 3.1.2: Enhanced interpersonal relationships

Enhanced interpersonal relationships among teachers and learners with and without visual impairments were identified by the participants in this study as an enabling factor that promotes the social inclusion of LVIs. According to the participants' responses from both groups (A & B), their rural schools form part of the social system as shown in *figure 5.1* above, where learners and teachers interact inside and outside their classrooms. Respondents from three of the two groups indicated that improved relationships existed as teachers and learners built meaningful relationships by interacting with one another for the enhancement of ELE for learners in their respective schools. In this regard, **LO** from group A indicated:

"Strong connection, love, and positive relationships between teachers and learners yield positive results and contributed to a warm and healthy learning atmosphere. This prepares a learning environment that is enabling to LVIs."

Another participant within the same group confirmed, referring to her experience:

..“Ehm! I have seen that when learners believe in themselves that they are able (having improved self-efficacy) and regard others as human beings like themselves, it becomes easy for them to interact, support one another and work together without discrimination” (SU).

LO and **SU**'s responses show some similarity in realizing interpersonal relationships as existing enabling factors in their respective school. **SU** went further in providing insight into her experience, indicating her perspective related to the enhanced interpersonal relationships as a result of learners' improved self-efficacy. **SU**'s view of considering learners' improved self-efficacy as a foundation for interpersonal relationships, which have potential in the enhancement of enabling learning environment for LVIs, is in line with the philosophical position of agentic capability framework employed in the current study, which views human functioning as the product of intrapersonal influences Bandura's (2018), where learners including LVIs as agents can be able to succeed. Further to **SU**'s response, one participant from group B revealed that interpersonal relationships among learners yield not only their success in education, but also contribute to their physical fitness. **FL** referring to their photograph in *figure 5.4* below, argued that:

“When the relationship among learners in school is enhanced, they feel free while in class during the learning process, and also outside their classrooms, they enjoyed playing together. This is actually what our picture here represents.”

Physical fitness



“Physical fitness is a healthy way of living for learners gained through play and interactions. This picture (figure 5.4) depicts learners (those with and without vision problems) who are playing with one another. We have decided to use this picture as a token of appreciation that our rural school practices inclusive education and can promote the social inclusion of LVIs. This means that it provides enabling learning environment where all learners learn and even play together” (PR).

Figure 5.4: Group B photograph showing learners playing together

It is interesting to note that despite literature suggesting that social inclusion of LVIs in most schools has some limitations caused by vision-related problems. One of the participants from group B **PR** successfully managed to bring LVIs' social inclusion as a result of enhanced interpersonal relationships prevailing within their school, in a picture. This is contrary to Manitsa and Doikou's (2022) perspective, which indicates that it is difficult to maintain social inclusion of LVIs, due to vision-related problems. However, in the context of the findings from the participants' responses in the current study, enhanced relationships between teachers and learners with and without vision problems, are considered important in the enhancement of LVIs' ELE. The findings from the participants' responses further regarded teaching and learning resources and school infrastructure as resourceful enabling factors, required for the enhancement of an ELE of LVIs. The next section provides a discussion of resourceful materials identified by the participants as enabling factors within their rural schools.

5.2.3.1.3 Category 3.1.3: Resourceful materials

In this category, the participants suggest different materials that are resourceful to be used in the improvement of ELE for LVIs, and that would assist in enhancing and making learning accessible to them. They consider their rural school as an enabling space that is made up of different resources, most especially qualified special education teachers who possess different skills and abilities as a human agency (enablers), and who are also capable of identifying and using resourceful teaching and learning materials to promote their learners' education. This concurs with Ozerem and Akkoyunlu's (2015) observation, which testifies that an ELE is made up of resourceful enabling factors, such as: human agency, teachers, and physical learning spaces like school classrooms and teaching and learning materials. This was elaborated in the following sections:

WE's explanation of their photographs in group A indicated that qualified special education teachers as the human agency (enablers) in promoting their learners, including LVIs' learning skills, are responsible for making their learning environment enabling.

Qualified special education teachers



Qualified special education teachers as our picture here (pointing at figure 5.5) represents them as enablers and agents of change in ensuring the quality provision of education to all learners. They have very important roles to play in enhancing an enabling learning environment for their learners such as proving proper assistance by employing their special knowledge and skills to address the diverse needs of all learners in school. (WE, stated)

Figure 5.5: Group As' Photograph representing qualified special education teachers as enablers

WE; seems to believe that all educational initiatives within the school setting are the responsibilities of special education teachers. He also spoke of their role in the provision of education and that the success in quality provision of education to LVIs, depends on special education teachers' expertise. He further gave insight into how they contributed to achievement in making their learners' learning environment enabling. This is indicative that where the learning environment is made enabling, learners' success in education is manifested. The Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018) suggests that the effective provision of education and development of the learning environment in schools, depend on the teachers' efficiency. Meanwhile, enhancing an ELE becomes possible in special education teachers' handiness in schools. Another participant, **LO**, a special education teacher from group A also spoke of the significance of teachers as enablers, who are capable of making learning accessible to LVIs in their respective schools.

“There are indeed many qualified teachers in our country, in our school here we are all qualified but I have realized that to be qualified is not enough in terms of what is required in terms of the current inclusive education practices implemented in our country. In our school here, special education teachers like I play significant roles in making sure that from time to time we assist to identify, assessing, and where necessary recommend referrals for VILs as well as using assistive devices where there is a need to make learning accessible to learners with special educational needs including LVIs.”

According to **LO**, making learning enabling to all learners, especially to LVIs, seemed to be more of the work of special education teachers than of all teachers, whether qualified or not. This is ascertained in the participants' responses above in theme two, category 2.1.2, which reports limited knowledge of how to support LVIs by some of the participants in the current study. However, the inclusion of LVIs and making their learning environment enabling, will allow them to thrive, which remains every teacher's concern. It is therefore, important for all teachers in rural schools of Lesotho to be actively involved as the human agency to promote a learning environment that supportively promotes learners' learning (Cassum & Gul, 2017).

Another interesting point ‘*using assistive reading devices*’ was raised by the participants when they were further identifying enabling factors that are resourceful within their rural

learners' learning. I also think that, when resourceful materials are used, learners' smooth learning will be manifested” (CO from group B).

The above quotations revealed assistive reading devices as enabling factors that can be used to assist LVIs' learning. These responses confirm and align with ISET drawn from the argument made by Hornby (2021), who supports the idea of making use of resourceful materials to support the teaching and learning of all learners with special educational needs and disabilities, including LVIs. And thus, the findings from the participants' responses within the current category are in opposition with du Plessis and Mestry (2019), who associate rural schools with a lack of resources, however, they consider the assistive reading device as enabling factors available within their rural schools and suitably used to enable LVIs' learning.

The view of another group of participating teachers, of their rural school's physical learning environment (school classroom windows), being indicated as an enabling factor to improve LVIs' learning, was shared by **AC** from group A, who stated:

School classroom windows



This is a picture (figure 5.7) of school classrooms that we considered appropriate and resourceful for VILs' successful teaching and learning. As you can see, these classroom windows are blinded to reduce or to keep out too much light entering the classrooms. This kind of window produces a safe and enabling learning environment for these learners because we all know that excessive light

blocks an individual's vision.

Figure 5.7: Group A's photo showing a Blinded classroom window

Concerns related to strengthening resources that already exist to become enabling factors were also prevalent in the participants' responses. The participants were more concerned with making improvements in the resources that already exist within their

rural schools, rather than always viewing them from a deficit perspective. This was quoted verbatim from one of the participant's responses as follows:

"All our school classroom windows are as big as the ones in the picture (pointing at figure 5.7), but very unfortunately they are not covered or even blinded to keep out excessive light from entering the classrooms. This becomes a barrier and prevents learners, especially those with vision problems to see clearly. This is a concern to me that, because these kinds of windows are already there and only need improvement, we can at least use window blinds to control the situation, rather than complaining as if there is nothing we can do to solve this kind of a problem" (SU concluded).

The prominence of strengthening resources that already exist within rural schools and communities to become resourceful enabling factors has been strongly argued for (Lima, Nassif & Garcon, 2020; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012). Evidence to this claim, Bandura's (2018) agentic perspective emphasizes strengthening communities' capability for transforming what already exists for development. The idea of transforming what already exists is seen linking with extracts from the above participants' responses, which indicate school classroom windows as resources already available within their rural schools, which only need to be improved for LVIs' better learning and development.

The findings in this category revealed the dominating responses from the special education teachers. This proves limited knowledge by some of the participants related to issues raised, concerning enabling factors to enhance an ELE for LVIs, however, in contradiction with the major focus of the Inclusive Special Education Theory (ISET) of Hornby (2015; 2020), which is another theory used to frame this study that aims to eliminate all barriers within LVIs' learning context and therefore, value all teachers as having the potential in enhancing an enabling learning environment for their learners. There were some limitations identified by the participants in the current study, while accessing enabling factors within their rural school. The participants were also able to acknowledge that their rural schools have factors that according to them were regarded as having the potential in making improvements in LVIs' learning. But still, not all factors identified contributed to the improvement of LVIs' learning, however, there were some factors identified as constraining. The next session provides a discussion of findings

related to the second sub-theme titled, 'factors that constrain the enhancement of enabling learning environment for LVIs'.

5.2.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Factors that constrain the enhancement of ELE for LVIs

In response to the fourth secondary research question, *what factors could impede the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho?*, the participants identified several issues, which act as constraining factors that obstruct the improvement in the learning environment for LVIs in their host rural school. Most of these factors are related to physical resources found within and around LVIs' rural school learning environment and are classified into three categories: socio-economic factors (such as: government financial constraints and poor school infrastructure), which impact negatively on the quality provision of education to LVIs, socio-cultural factors (such as: ineffective inclusive education policy and ill perspectives about different impairments within rural communities), and geographical location (insufficient teaching and learning resources). The next sections provide participants' explanations, views, and understanding of how factors identified cause constraints in the enhancement of ELE for LVIs.

5.2.3.2.1 Category 3.2.1: Socio-economic factors

The findings in this category suggest that most participants perceived that LVIs' learning is mostly confronted with their country's economic factors that negatively impact their educational experiences in their host schools. Issues relating to economic factors were linked to lack of government financial support, due to LVIs' highly demanding educational needs and school infrastructure that restrict its learners' access to education. The following excerpts from some of the participants' perceptions during the interpretation of their photographs related to socio-economic factors, illustrate the following.

Government financial instability



“Since the quality provision of education to all learners is facilitated through the use of money in our country, this picture (figure 5.8) depicts money that our country fails to source for all schools and prepares them to be better placed for learning” (PR, indicated).

Figure 5.8: A photo of group B participants representing financial instability as a constraining factor

FL, a participant from group B stated that:

“As it appears in our picture here, that we have placed money, one of the critical issues in our country is money” (referring to photograph in Figure 5.8).

IN within the same group A, remarked:

“You know! Despite the introduction of free and compulsory education, that all learners must attend school, our country fails to profitably finance the education of almost all learners especially those with visual impairment at the secondary school level because their special educational needs are financially demanding and education is monetarily free only at primary level.”

Another participant, **COL** also asserted that lack of finances made most learners with visual impairments, especially those who come from poor families, more vulnerable.

“The problem of not being financially stable by LVIs’ families as well as the insufficient funds from the government created a lot of challenges for these learners to an extent that they may even drop out of school and go to search for jobs.”

The above excerpts are indicative that the provision of funds by the Lesotho Government to enable the facilitation of education to LVIs is insufficient. According to

the findings in this category, financial instability within their country and LVIs' families, created constraints in the enhancement of ELE for these learners. The findings are consistent with the findings in a study conducted by Temesgen (2018), who stated that one of the greatest challenges faced by LVIs in Ethiopia is for their country being unable to provide funding for their education. It is therefore, evident in the findings of the current study that without the financial stability of any country to support its learners' education, enabling learning for all learners in the case of this study LVIs, might not be possible. Participants from group A also pointed out that their country's financial instability results in poor school facilities and infrastructure.

LO, a special education teacher made an insightful comment by comparing the picture in *figure 5.9* with the one in *figure 5.7* above:

“I think LVIs should learn in an environment that is enabling. However, here in our school, all the school classrooms are having this kind of window, as you can see in this picture, (referring to a picture in figure 5.9) just by having a look at these windows, they are not accommodative to LVIs’ condition. What I am trying to say is that these windows allow too much to enter the classrooms and impede them from clearly seeing during the teaching and learning processes. It is therefore important for our school classrooms to use blinds like these in figure 5.7.”

Inaccessible school infrastructure



*In the context of enhancing enabling learning environment for LVIs, our rural schools are supposed to ensure that these learners’ teaching is conducted in classrooms where too much light is controlled. The picture here (figure 5.9) shows classroom windows that exposed learners to too much light which inhibits their vision and becomes a barrier to their learning. (**AB**, agreed with **LO**).*

Figure 5.9: Group A’s photographs showing classrooms with big window

Another participant **AC** added, referring to the same picture in *figure 5.9*:

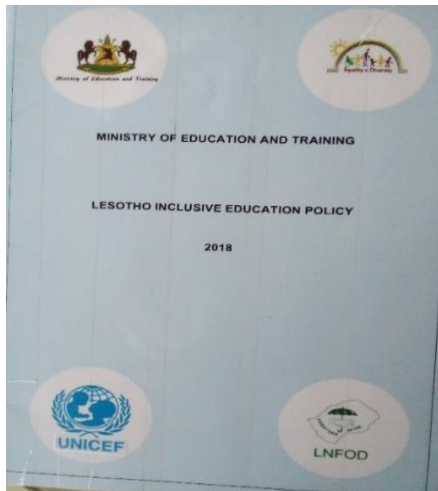
“Yes! It is very hard for LVIs to learn in this kind of environment. From my experience, I have noticed that from time to time these learners struggle not because of only the kind of writing used in their textbooks but also because of the excessive light from our classroom windows. I sometimes used a piece of broken chalkboard in my class to cover some of the windows in trying to proven too much light.”

From the above data, it is clear that an inaccessible school infrastructure poses a great challenge to learners as a result of financial instability within the country and consequently prevents schools from enabling learning for learners. The findings of the study resonate with the study of Assoumpta (2020), who perceived the inadequacy of school infrastructure as a barrier to all learners' learning. This is consistent with the idea of Rasheed et al. (2020) who see the adequacy of school infrastructure as a result of its resourceful materials and also in line with the findings of the current study, which perceived the educational success of LVIs as a result of a more resourceful school infrastructure. The findings of the study contrast with those of Furze and Phillips (2018), who assert that LVIs' condition, deprived them of an opportunity to access learning. Rather, in the findings of this study, the participants found a lack of financial support from both the government and LVIs' families as constraining factors towards the enhancement of their ELE not their eye condition.

5.2.3.2.2 Category 3.2.2: Socio-cultural factors

Within this category, almost half of the participants point to the ineffectiveness of the inclusive education policy, which the Government of Lesotho, through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) implemented to introduce education for all learners. In responding to the abovementioned question in sub-theme 3.2 concerning constraining factors, the participants during, photographs' reflections, stated the that best form of enhancing ELE for LVIs is through clearly following well-stipulated objectives and guidelines of the policy, which their rural schools fail to effectively implement. The culture of documenting the policy without properly implementing it was frequently mentioned by the participants as shown in the following extracts.

Ineffective policy implementation



The inclusive education policy in Lesotho as this picture (figure 5.10) shows, is meant to ensure that all learners with and without any form of impairment, cultural background, religion, and or geographical locations are provided with the best education yet, our government through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) is incompetent to guide schools in how to effectively implement such policy. This continuously contributes to its ineffectiveness in enhancing ELE of all schools. (CO in group B stated).

Figure 5.10: Group B's photograph of the Inclusive Education Policy

IN, a special education teacher within the same group, added his comment by mentioning that:

"It is only out of our hard work and humanity but, our government only documented the policy in a piece of paper and does not even border to assist or even put efforts in ensuring that inclusion of these learners is effective. What I am trying to say is that it is out of our goodwill to see to it that all learners including LVIs are supported academically, socially, and even psychologically in our school."

Three participants, especially those who are qualified and trained as special education teachers supported one another and lamented the lack of support from the government in creating their school learning environment to be an enabling learning space for LVIs, particularly those schools situated in remote areas. In this regard, **FL** expressed his deep concern regarding the insufficient support they received from the government:

"..Though! We all know that in our school through our work as teachers, we are expected to work hard to ensure full inclusion of all learners; this is very unfortunate because here in our country, inclusion is just documented in policies but, it is very difficult to be placed into practice. Since all teachers including qualified special education teachers are expected to use their skills and knowledge without clearly giving what is required."

LO concurred with **FL** and further indicated:

“Yes! This is very true, more attention is only given to the special schools located in urban areas as if they are the only ones that enrol these learners yet, we too are expected to include them, and very, unfortunately, we only use our knowledge from our colleges and universities. No in-service training is provided to other teachers and no clear plan is given to us on how to work with each other in creating support for these learners. This means every teacher does what he/ she sees as appropriate and works best in her class. Unfortunately, those who are qualified for teaching these learners are not even being compensated.”

The first and foremost concern in the above quotations, was the incompetence of the MoET in Lesotho of being unable to guide all teachers on how to implement the policy after devising it, hence the reason why teachers in all schools struggle to implement it. This is supported by findings in a study conducted by Mosia (2022), who asserts that the greatest challenge facing schools to practice full inclusion of LVIs is due to some fragments identified within the Lesotho inclusive education policy, which fails to provide clear direction that defines the appropriate procedures needed to accommodate these learners' special educational needs. This is consistent with the ideas of Landsberg, Kruger, and Swart (2019), who realize the effective inclusion of LVIs as challenges surrounding teachers who are mostly illiterate and semi-illiterate and who are challenged to actively implement and put the policy procedures into practice. Further to that, the findings in the current study revealed that the inclusive education policy is designed to remain an ineffective tool without being properly implemented for better inclusive educational outcomes for all learners as what it was meant to be and thus, causes constraints in the enhancement of an ELE of LVIs in their respective rural schools.

Another feature denoting fragments identified in the implementation of the inclusive education policy, which leads to unsuccessful inclusion of LVIs, was the lack of parental involvement in the promotion of their children's education. Most of the participants spoke about the hesitancy of LVIs' parents in being part of their children's learning. Parental unwillingness to participating in the enhancement of their children's education was indicated in some participants' responses while interpreting their pictures. Three

out of five participants in group A's explanations of a photograph in *figure 5.11* below, stated:

"Although, the involvement of parents in their children's education is significant, unluckily, most of LVIs' parents in our community are very reluctant to respond and attend to any matters related to their children's education" (**AB** commented).

"Yes! Fear of being stigmatized and labelled as the ones who are cursed for having "Lihole" (being children who are born incapacitated) surrounded most of the parents who have children with disability in our community, which I consider a lack of knowledge among our community members who only need to be empowered to accept their children's conditions" (**AC**, added).

Lack of parental involvement



"Parents form a cycle in their children's education and holistic well-being. Their involvement in the process is crucial. This is indicated by this picture (referring to a photograph in figure 5.11). Surprisingly, most parents whose children have any form of impairment do not want to part and or even border to attend parents' meetings" (**WE** also asserted).

Figure 5.11: Group A's photograph represents a lack of parental involvement in their children's schooling

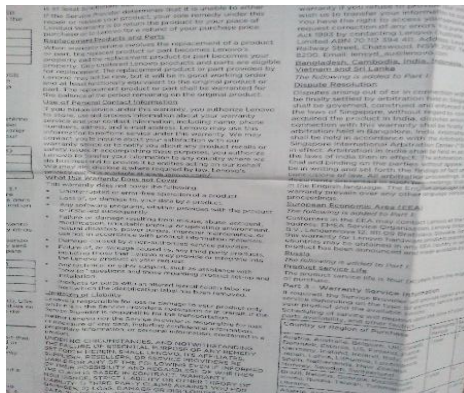
From the above data, it is clear that lack of parental involvement in their children's learning assembled a significant threat, which negatively affects the enhancement of LVIs' learning and consequently impacts their academic growth and development. According to the findings of the participants in the current study, the enhancement of ELE for LVIs is still constrained. This is in contradiction with the progression of the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018), which considers parents of all learners, including those with visual impairments as equal partners in the enhancement of their children's education. However, the findings within this category revealed a lack

of parental support for their children, which become a barrier to these learners' access to education.

5.2.3.2.3 Category 3.2.3: Geographical location

From the above participants' responses, it is clear that the availability of resourceful materials enabled the enhancement of ELE for all learners who experience barriers to learning, such as those with visual impairments. Most of the participants' responses indicated their rural school in the richness of resourceful materials, however, their poor management contributed as constraints in the enhancement of ELE for LVIs. Factors relating to the poor management of resourceful materials were classified into non-supportive learning materials and lack of appropriate teaching skills among general teachers, which in turn excludes some of LVIs' special needs. This was evident from participants' responses while interpreting their photographs in figures 5.12 and 5.13 below:

Non-supportive learning materials



“Most schools' written texts such as textbooks supplied to learners are not user-friendly for learning. This is an example of a page that we have captured from one of our learners' textbooks (referring to figure 5.12). These kinds of teaching and learning resources are not user-friendly, especially for LVIs” (COL reported).

Figure 5.12: A picture of invisible text captured by group B participants

A closer examination of the findings from COL's verbatim quotation above revealed that LVIs are not academically accommodated. Evidence of the above claim is indicative that learning materials provided to these learners are more constraining than enabling. The ineffectiveness of learning materials in enabling LVIs' learning appeared frequently in the responses of group B participants while explaining their photographs.

CO responded:

“By having a look at the font used in writing the textbooks supplied to all learners including LVIs at our school, in particular, one could find out that the font used is not meant for these learners. At present, these learning materials are not designed to suit the needs of these learners and thus, cause restrictions in their smooth learning.”

A further view of why learning materials used in the facilitation of teaching and learning of LVIs were regarded as non-supportive by **FL**, a special education teacher from group B mentioned that:

It became very difficult for LVIs in our school to read these books, what I can say is that they are non-supportive to them.

It is significant to notice from the participants' extracts above that enabling learning for LVIs is hindered by the learning material supplied to them. According to the participants in this study, LVIs are struggling with the use of these materials, thereby, limiting their ability to actively learn. The findings in this category are in line with the findings from the study conducted by Ralejoe (2021), who states that even though the Lesotho Education Acts (3 of 2010) provides well-established regulations that all learners have an equal right to access education, LVIs' special educational needs were often excluded. This, therefore, reflects a gap where inclusion is meant for all learners' educational needs, but some learners like LVIs' special needs are just not catered for. Hence, this can as well be linked to next theme four, which indicates the need for the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs.

Another sentiment shared by the participants, related to the constraining factors, which impede the ELE for LVIs within their rural schools, was the lack of appropriate teaching skills among general teachers. The following comments were made by some of the participants:

SU from group A stated:

Though we are all qualified teachers here in my school as our picture here (pointing at figure 5.13) reflects, some learners whose educational needs require special attention like

LVI, who at some point fail not only because they are incompetent but because of a lack of appropriate skills from some of us to assist them.

The above extract reveals that the participants regarded qualified teachers' agency as essential in the enhancement of all learners' learning, as discussed in category 3.1.3 during the identification of enabling factors. Although **SU**'s response indicated that it appeared to be prevalent to consider teachers as drivers of educational initiatives within their school setting, her perspectives on identifying how the lack of appropriate skills among teachers would serve as a barrier to LVIs' learning, was also indicated. Another participant within the same group spoke with intense feelings and exemplifies the extent to which LVIs' learning is affected:

*In as much as these learners are included in the mainstream teaching and learning with their peers without vision problems, they sometimes along the way encounter some problems from other teachers who have limited knowledge in how to create learning which is enabling for them. This is because these learners are not just supposed to be included in the system but because their needs are special, they necessitate special attention which many of us here lack. (**AC** suggested).*

The extract from the two participants above is indicative that the lack of appropriate skills among teachers contributed as barriers in the LVIs' learning. In addition to that, some participants' responses revealed the government's ignorance of special education teachers' expertise and efficiency in enabling LVIs' learning. This was indicated by some of the participants' responses, showing how their teaching proficiencies were affected.

Devaluing teachers' efficiency



Qualified special education teachers are considered as 'just mere teachers', their special skills and knowledge of being competent in how best to address the special educational needs of all learners including LVIs fall in vain here in our country. This is because of the laid government policy which was implemented in 2016 stating that teachers' salaries are longer going to be based on their qualifications but rather on promotion. This expression is what this picture here (figure 5.13) is implying (AB asserted).

Figure 5.13: Group A's photograph indicates the devaluing of teachers

LO's response indicated her experience by stating that:

"Although our school practices inclusion of all learners including LVIs (in this case only those with mild to moderated vision problems) not those with severe or profound vision problems, and since I have been teaching in this school, I did not attend or even one of my colleagues here is called to attend any training or workshops in how to assist these learners but the only education we get here in our school related to assisting these learners comes from our colleagues who are qualified and have special skills to teach these learners who sometimes get irritated and refuse to help us by indicating and complaining to us that they are even not get paid or considered by the government."

The above excerpts speak volumes about the ignorance and discouragement of the Lesotho Government to teachers (especially qualified special education teachers) of not realizing their potential and the contribution they have in enabling the learning of all learners in schools. It is interesting to note that despite literature suggesting that rural schools consist of lack of qualified teachers in the provision of quality education to all learners, due to the insufficiency of resources associated with rural areas (Sefotho, 2018), the findings from LO's response managed to successfully bring special education teachers' expertise in the picture that, if the special education teachers are valued, motivated and supported as being able to bring about change, all learners' special

educational needs will be successfully catered for them to prosper in their learning. The verbatim quotations of the participants revealed, considering LVIs as able in their learning. On the other hand, enhanced interpersonal relationships among teachers and learners within the school were regarded as essential in creating a school as an enabling space. Contrary to this claim, participants identified more constraining factors than enabling factors toward the enhancement of ELE for LVIs.

The findings denoting factors that constrain the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs, showed government's financial instability as a starting point of all constraining factors and which contributes to the inaccessibility of the school classrooms. According to the participants in this study, the inaccessibility of school classrooms posed a significant challenge to LVIs, which negatively affects their learning. These resonate with the study of Koehler and Wild (2019), who identify that attaining full inclusion for LVIs in US schools remains a challenge. Gambo, Adelokun, Gambo, and Afolayan (2021) similarly report that learners living in low-middle-income countries, like Nigeria experienced an inaccessible infrastructure and facilities that negatively affect the provision and attainment of quality education. This is also evident in the findings of Mosia's (2019) study, which reports that challenges facing LVIs in Lesotho are due to a lack of basic resources however, this contradicts the findings of the current study, which revealed that rural schools and rural communities possess enabling factors, which their effects can become constraints if not well managed. Evidence of the above claims is relevant to the agentic capability theory (Bandura, 2006), and is based on philosophical assumptions of this theory which values individual potential for development. In the context of this study, LVIs, their peers, and teachers, are therefore considered as having the ability to bring about change however, their competence might be doomed if not considered. In the next theme, the discussion focuses on the need to enable the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment.

5.2.4 Theme 4: The need to enhance the ELE for LVIs

The need for the enhancement of ELE to effectively address LVIs' academic necessities emerged, while participants attempted to respond to the fragments caused by the

constraining factors they identified in the previous theme. In this section, the participants' responses from two groups revealed that the enhancement of ELE for LVIs is not effective, due to the negative impacts caused by the constraining factors found in their respective schools and, also indicated that for their rural schools to enable their learners' learning, there is a need for its learning environment to be improved. The analysis of participants' photographs and focus group discussions suggests that more improvements need to be done to reduce their rural school insufficiency. This indicated a need *to strengthen all stakeholders' responsibilities, improvement of LVIs' academic materials, and, harnessing of rural agencies*. In *table 5.6* below, the inclusion and exclusion indicators for each category that emerged from the findings in the current theme, are outlined.

Table 5.5: Theme 4: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

THEME 4: The need to enhance the ELE for LVIs		
Sub-theme 4.1: The need for the enhancement of ELE to effectively address LVIs' academic necessities		
Categories	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Category 4.1.1: A need to strengthen all stakeholders' responsibilities	Any reference made to strengthening all stakeholders' responsibilities	Anything that excludes strengthening all stakeholders' responsibilities
Category 4.1.2: A need for the improvement of LVIs' academic materials	Any reference made to improving LVIs' academic materials	Anything that excludes the improvement of LVIs' academic materials
Category 4.1.3: Harnessing of rural agencies	Any reference made to the harnessing of rural agencies	Anything that excludes Harnessing of rural agencies

5.2.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: The need for the enhancement of ELE to effectively address LVIs' academic necessities

The findings in the current sub-theme revealed that all of the participants in this study believed that to enable effective learning for LVIs, their learning environment needs to be enhanced through the strengthening of all stakeholders' responsibilities for their better educational standards, as well as providing development in the use of suitable academic materials that will help in enabling easy access of education to them. The participants also showed an understanding that harnessing rural agencies is significant in the quality attainment of education by all learners to successfully achieve their academic goals, learn and develop holistically. These are now presented and discussed in the following sections.

5.2.4.1.1 Category 4.1.1: A need to strengthen all stakeholders' responsibilities

Participants' discussion here points to their sensible view of strengthened relationships among all stakeholders as a significant aspect of the enhancement of ELE for LVIs within rural schools. Their responses indicated that stakeholders' responsibilities are ineffective if they are not called to take account and thus, reflect a need for strengthened accountabilities with the existing stakeholders (teachers, parents, learners including LVIs and the members of their school boards (SGBs, hereafter) at their school level. The following verbatim quote was highlighted by one participant during the photographs interpretation in how they view a need for strengthened stakeholders' responsibilities.

“Based on the fact that the inclusion of LVIs is currently considered the responsibility of special education teachers alone and, not for all teachers, enhancement of ELE for these learners cannot be effective. And now that it is performed by only special education teachers, many attempts done in enabling learning for these learners fail because enabling all learners' learning should be done collectively as it demands every bodies' attention” (CO from group B).

This section further responded to a question asked to the participants during OFGDs in searching for further clarity on *what they think needs to be done to enable the enhancement of ELE for LVIs which was different from the current situation prevailing in their rural school.* LO, a qualified special education teacher from group A reported collective responsibility to have had success in the enhancement of ELE for LVIs, as indicated:

“In every school such as public, private, and community schools there is a need for collective efforts among all parties (teachers, parents, school governing bodies, and learners) to enforce LVIs' education in their respective schools. This clearly shows that working collectively will enable school facilitation and management from the school governing bodies in working together with teachers to enable parental involvement in their children's education. For these reasons, all learners including LVIs' success in education need to be enabled collectively. Therefore, every school needs to employ a collective approach in the facilitation and management of every learner's education.”

On matters related to what needs to be done to enable the enhancement of the learning environment for LVIs, **LO** indicated that collective efforts from all stakeholders were necessary to build a watertight seal around enabling the learning of all learners in schools. The collective efforts approach is supported by Code (2020), who states that one of the best forms of approach that schools can use to empower the education of all learners, is to realize the power dynamics from collective relations within their societies (Sefotho, 2018) and this can be done through the distribution of responsibilities among all groups and individuals. The extracts from the participants in this category revealed that most stakeholders within their rural schools need to be empowered and encouraged to work together to overcome ineffective efforts among them in enabling the learning of all learners. This is supported by Nnama-Okechukwu, Chikwuka, and Okoye (2020) in proclaiming collective engagements of all stakeholders as a solution to improve LVIs' wellbeing and to offer support services for the enhancement of their learning.

5.2.4.1.2 Category 4.1.2: A need for the improvement of LVIs' academic materials

In this category, the majority of the participants' discussions and photographs' explanations featured apparent academic materials. The participants' responses in this category are indicative that LVIs need to learn in an ELE that will provide them with academic materials, which are resourceful to use. However, they also indicated that as much as academic materials are in place to help in enabling all learners' easy access to education in their rural schools, their effective use in education facilitation is still a challenge. Therefore, it revealed a need for their improvement to promote all learners' learning environment, because when all learners, including LVIs' learning environment are improved, their academic performance will be enabled to successfully achieve their academic goals. These views were openly expressed by four participants respectively:

IN from group B reported:

“In alignment with the integrated curriculum employed in our country that all learners' inclusion is meant to provide appropriate instructional materials and learning resources in

an accessible manner and answerable to an individual's needs, but currently, teaching and learning resources are still not conducive for LVIs' learning in our school. As a result, their learning is still negatively affected hence why we consider a need for the improvement of these learners' teaching and learning materials" (OFGD).

Another participant **COL** within the same group added:

"I would like to add my comment that because LVIs' needs are special, the academic materials provided to aid their learning should be in an accessible format. For example, the Use of readable text during the teaching and learning of these learners should be encouraged in all schools" (PV).

The above excerpts revealed the participants' view that LVIs need an ELE with resourceful materials for them to successfully and effectively learn. This values some of the established theories of psychology, such as the one of Hornby (2014; 2015), employed in the current study, which gives reflection that LVIs' effective learning is enabled through the proper use of academic resources. The participants also believed that the improvement of academic materials will help LVIs to successfully learn, develop, and grow holistically. In support of these views, another two participants, **SU** and **AB** shared the same sentiments during their photographs analysis by stating:

SU from group A stated:

"Use of enabling academic materials to respond to the special educational needs of LVIs in our school is minimal; this makes it difficult for them to attain the expected level of education. It therefore important for our rural schools and education authorities in our country to make sure that academic resources such as textbooks to be used by these learners are remedied"

AB concurred with **SU**'s point of view and indicated:

"Yes, we anticipate that the educational materials for these learners are made accessible, or maybe there should be proper (in-service) training to all teachers in how they can make modifications while using already existing materials."

The study revealed that the participants were aware that LVIs have special needs, which may require special attention in the use of academic materials to meet their

educational demands. The participants' responses were indicative that use of academic materials is scarce to cater for LVIs' special needs. These resonate with the research findings from Alali's (2017) study, who reports that the eye condition experienced by LVIs, calls for change in the use of their academic resources to successfully attend to their special educational needs. The verbatim quotations from the above participants show the significance of realizing and making amendments to the already existing materials to actively meet the educational needs of LVIs within the rural school context. This aligns with Bandura's (2018) agentic capability framework, which affirms that communities' agencies are challenged to transform what already exists for their development. In the context of these quotations, the researcher in this study needs to realize that LVIs' learning can be a success and develop when appropriate teaching and learning materials are adjusted to accommodate their needs.

5.2.4.1.3 Category 4.1.3: Harnessing of rural agencies

A key finding towards a need to enhance enabling learning environments for LVIs was that of harnessing rural agencies. Based on the above participants' perspectives regarding constraining factors in theme three, these cause hindrance in the enhancement ELE for LVIs. The participants' responses in this category were grounded within the same premise that agency within rural schools and communities can be drawn and utilized to eliminate barriers from constraining factors and enable LVIs' learning. Three participants during focus group discussions and while interpreting their photographs, stated that when agencies within their rural school are activated, enhancement of ELE for LVIs becomes manifested.

PR, a participant from group B stated:

“Enabling learning for LVIs in our school is indeed problematic to teachers, especially those who are not trained or lack the skills of assisting them like myself. I, therefore, think that to successfully enable learning for these learners, it is better to be empowered through workshops where special education teachers like the ones we are having here in our school are given chance to facilitate” (PV).

Another participant **CO** within the same agreed:

“I agree with what my colleague here has said, these teachers are very skilful and have the potential to manage LVIs' learning challenges. It will be very important if their skills and knowledge are profitably used to benefit us so that we are all given the opportunity through training. This is a need to all our school that all teachers had to become true agents meaning, they have to be all empowered” (PV)

What is interesting to note in the above responses in this category is that, while participants mentioned teachers becoming true agents as an indication of active participation of rural agencies in the enhancement of ELE for LVIs, the responses contribute to realizing the importance of rural agencies, such that harnessing of rural agency can be considered, yet it might become highly effective when there is an understanding that enhancement of ELE for LVIs within their rural schools and communities is about enabling rural people or agents to take control of their destiny. To attest to this claim, Bandura (2006) considers the improvement in the learning environment of all learners, including LVIs, as a result of interaction between human agencies with one another to meet their desired goals.

Another issue that was raised in the findings of this theme in this category was that of campaigning about vision problems within the rural communities, which were seen as a solution to overcome rural communities' vision-related problems. Moreover, the results in the current theme showed a lack of knowledge concerning the impairment and its effects on the learning of LVIs. Hence, the participants called for awareness of visual impairments in rural people, and for them to contribute to the enhancement of ELE for LVIs in their community. **WE**, a participating teacher from group A provided his summative comments during online focus group discussions by saying:

“Educating all people, parents including the whole community will assist in new knowledge development concerning visual impairments and their impacts on learners learning. Most people in our community have limited knowledge about this condition hence; they fail to contribute to the development of these learners' life. What I think needs to be done is that wherever education gatherings are made in the country as well as, during every year disability awareness day, there has to be clear teaching made to educate all people to gain

insightful information about all different kinds of impairments and how they affect the teaching and learning of all learners affected” (OFGD).

WE's response above indicated the importance of a connected understanding of all community members about visual impairment and its impacts on the learners' learning. According to him, campaigning about the impairment of people might enable the development of new knowledge within their rural school contexts. This is apparent in Lima, Nassif, and Garcon's (2020) study, who indicate that imparting new knowledge to people is needed in the learners' learning development and can only be possible through strengthening the agentic capabilities of their community members. What was interesting to note was that, **WE** valued community agencies, and realized the importance of the potential they possess in contributing solutions to their community problems. His perspective of harnessing rural agencies and campaigning about visual impairments is significant in ensuring that all people are informed and stay tuned into the LVIs' learning development.

5.3 TRIANGULATION OF ONLINE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND PHOTOVOICE RESULTS

Triangulation in the current study was reflected in the first and second phases of qualitative data analysis. In this respect, questions asked during OFGDs were triangulated with the ones in the interpretation and discussion of photographs to promote the validity of the research findings. Furthermore, triangulation was also done by using field notes to compare the data generated from the two methods used; OFGDs (textual and verbal) and photovoice (visual and textual). Qualitative literature has proven triangulation as the best form of research method used to test validity through the combination and comparison of multiple data sources (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011). Hence, in the context of this study, the researcher thereby, employed both qualitative data sources, and used field notes to compare and integrate findings from two phases of data. This also aligns with Kelle, Kuhberger and Bernhard's (2019) indication that triangulation is used to determine the comparison of multiple data sources, data collection and analysis procedures, research methods, investigators, and interpretations

that occur at the end of a study. In the context of this study, methodological triangulation was therefore used with the aim that triangulation reflected at several points in the study.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The current chapter provided descriptions of data that was generated from two tools; OFGDs and photovoice. This chapter was deeply rooted in the presentation of data; with the first part providing details of data generated from OFGDs with participants and the second part presenting photographs' reflections used to gain in-depth information and data were analysed through inductive thematic analysis. OFGDs were used to address the first and the second research objectives and to further complement the second set of data, generated through photovoice. The results from this tool showed that most participants had a clear understanding of ELE for LVIs. However, some indicated inadequacy in the kind of support provided within rural schools in making the learning environment enabling for these learners. Further clarity on this was sought in the photographs' interpretation. The photovoice method helped to develop the second set of data from the third and fourth research objectives. The results from this tool indicated the existence of enabling factors in rural schools that can be tapped into for the enhancement of ELE for LVIs. Since the inconsistency in the kind of support rendered to these learners, enhancement of ELE for them was constrained, showing a need for the enhancement of such ELE. The presentation of data that emerged in this study was done according to themes, sub-themes, and categories. The triangulation and validation of the research findings concerning data generated from the two qualitative research tools used were made regarding the research problem, research objectives, theoretical framework, and literature review. An important finding from the participants was of the view that a school-based collaboration was considered the best form of support to making LVIs' learning enabling, whilst the support currently offered to LVIs, was seen as lacking. The elaboration on this finding is made further in the next chapter, which provides a summary of major findings, as well as providing details of recommendations and conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1, the researcher discussed the introductory background to this study. Furthermore, the researcher's interest in this study emerged from her personal and professional experience as a teacher in a rural primary school in Lesotho. Having worked for more than 15 years, she has come across and taught learners with visual impairments. Additionally, through her experience, she observed how her fellow teachers struggle to teach these learners, due to a lack of resources and policies that they could use to guide them. Also, it was through her observation, especially in the school where she teaches that teachers will do everything to support LVIs and refer those with severe impairments to specialists in the urban area. The researcher also observed that LVIs passed their primary education and transit to a secondary school within the same rural area. This sparked her interest in this study as she was eager to know how they cope in their post primary school. The aim of this study was to explore how the learning environment of these learners can be enhanced in their rural school.

Various studies do confirm and align with the aim of this study that, creating an enabling learning environment for LVIs in rural schools is significant and values the inclusion of these learners in the mainstream education as important for them to successfully achieve their academic goals. This challenges the notion from many scholars about rurality that is subjected to lack of resources and in opposition with the idea that these rural schools and communities are lacking. Driven by the inclusive special education framework and the agentic capability framework used to frame this study, the enhancement of an ELE for LVIs in rural school is therefore considered significant, due to an assumption that ELE for LVIs needs a more nuanced understanding and agency within the rural context, as well as reflecting on broader opportunities for a collective

agency (including local agents) to bring inclusive education and high-quality inclusive education for LVIs in the country and beyond.

The findings in the current study therefore indicate that, enabling the learning of LVIs in rural schools is not a new issue of controversy, and that teachers had to put all efforts to work within the realm of the Lesotho education policies and legislations to ensure the successful inclusion of these learners. However, due to the complex nature of the inclusive education practices in Lesotho rural schools, the inclusion of these learners present many challenges to teachers, which negatively inhibit them from becoming active participants in the construction of learning, which is enabling to these learners. This chapter, which is the last chapter of this study, offers a summary of the key research findings yielded, while addressing the following key research questions that guided the study:

- How do teachers understand/interpret an ELE for LVIs in a rural secondary school in Lesotho?
- What kind of support do teachers render to create an ELE for the LVIs within a rural secondary school in Lesotho?
- What factors could enable the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho?
- What factors could impede the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho?

To explore these questions, the researcher used a qualitative research approach and situated the study within an interpretive paradigm to allow participants' engagement and interpretation of their lived experiences and understanding of an ELE. The researcher used Online Focus Group Discussions (OFGDs) and Participatory Visual arts-based method (PVA) to enable active participation of ten (10) purposively selected secondary school teachers in a rural school. Through the use of these methods, participants were able to provide insights of how an ELE for LVIs in rural schools can be enhanced. They managed to acknowledge, but also identified gaps, in the creation of an ELE of LVIs in schools and therefore realised a need to imagine possible solutions in overcoming

inhibiting factors that prevents improvement in their own rural school context. These participants perceived a need in the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment, and attest to harnessing of rural schools' and communities' agency.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, the researcher provides the summary of the research findings that responded to each secondary research questions used as headings, indicated below. The summary of findings is presented in line with the literature and the data, to ensure that the contributions these findings made, are clear and can be evaluated.

6.2.1 Secondary-research question1: How do teachers understand/interpret an ELE for LVIs in a rural secondary school in Lesotho?

The work of literature around understanding of ELE has been seen linking to all aspects, which influence improvement in the learning of all learners. From the work of Haidari and Karakus (2019); Olveira and de Barba (2021); Isomottonen, Daniels, Cjander, Pears and McDermott (2019), an ELE was found to be a significant aspect of learners' educational development and success. The enhancement of learners' learning corresponds with Bandura's (2006) theoretical framework used in framing this study, which deals with human development, adaptation and change. The process of human development (in the case of LVIs) as articulated in *figure 3.3* of Chapter 3 in this study, involves recognition of their ability and of other human agencies (local community members, parents, teachers and other learners) in their rural schools. The aim of this process is to realize the significant roles of local agencies and discover their contributions, as well as to establish how each may be resourceful in assisting them to adapt and develop holistically. Another important aspect in the improvement of learners' education, as found in Hornby's (2015; 2020) theory, is of acknowledging SEND, including LVIs, as active human beings, who have an inherent ability to effectively learn. From Hornby's perspective, it was argued in this study that the effective inclusion of all

learners is that, in realizing their potential, skills, and unique talents, can enable the enhancement of their learning.

The findings from focus group discussions, which were conducted online with the participants in this study, clearly align with the above perspectives by revealing the understanding of an ELE in rural schools as a **very multifarious and influenced by various aspects**. According to the participants, in order for the learning environment of LVIs to be enabling, it has to be understood as a kind of a value that provides all learners with the same opportunity to learn, has to be viewed as patterns or structures within the rural context where all learners' quality provision of education is successfully maintained, as well as, regarding it as having potential in creating and enabling of an individual's behavioural change. In this respect, due to the participants' diverse understanding of an ELE for LVIs, it was clear that these learners' educational success is influenced by learning in an environment that is enabling. However, some literature on the inclusion of LVIs in schools that could provide learning environments that are enabling to them indicated numerous challenges. A study of de Verdier (2016) indicated that European schools fail to provide an ELE to their learners. According to Giese, Greisbach, Meier, Neusser and Wetekam's (2022) report, it became clear that the inclusion of LVIs in German schools exposed them to vision-related challenges. This is in contradiction with the findings of what was found in this study to be seeing learners' differences positively for their success in learning, rather than from a deficit perspective, which consequently lead to the continuity of a poor level of academic attainment in schools. The findings in the current study therefore, demonstrate that although literature reported problems facing most schools in the creation of an ELE for their learners, it was significant to have an in-depth understanding of ELE in the rural context, and consider the importance of agency.

6.2.2 Secondary-research question 2: What kind of support do teachers render to create an ELE for LVIs within a rural secondary school in Lesotho?

Adding to recognition of human agency as being proposed in the findings of this study and driven by Bandura's (2006) and Hornby's (2015) theoretical framework, a school-

based collaborative support emerged as a crucial approach for the enhancement of LVIs' ELE. While the ELE, as proposed in the literature, is valued to have potential in the enablement of education, it may not spread beyond all the educational dimensions, which involves collective support. However, in this study, when participants were asked about the kind of support which was currently employed in their school for the creation of ELE for LVIs, a school-based collaborative support was indicated as existing in all educational premises. They conserved that when they work together as a team in sharing knowledge and skills, their learners' learning environment becomes improved.

Based on the context of findings in this study, participants had thoughtful views on collaborative work, which they indicated as prevailing and rendered in supporting LVIs in their rural school. These participants argued in their discussions that a school-based collaborative support prevails within their school community, for example, where all school learners (those with and without visual impairments), and teachers, collaboratively work in the creation of ELE for LVIs. These findings however, did not succeed in mentioning or including in detail the roles of the school principals and did not indicate how the school principals, as members of the school community, engaged with these learners for the enhancement of their ELE. The findings of this study therefore, contradict with a school-based collaborative support for being effective, due to other school-community members' involvement of being missed in the picture.

The researcher draws a conclusion from these findings through the indications that these rural school teachers seemed to have a clear understanding of the prevailing support provided to LVIs in a rural school context. Though the findings revealed that little support was identified by the participants, they were able to demonstrate the understanding of strengthening rural community capabilities and agencies. They were also able to provide substantial ideas of strengthening and empowering rural community agency. In particular, these school teachers emphasized that they realized team work as the most appropriate approach. It is therefore in the context of this study for one to develop an understanding that strengthening rural community capabilities as a foundation for enabling support to LVIs, is significant and it encourages LVIs' active

participation in learning, appreciation, and recognition of all agencies and the contribution they may have within their learning environment.

6.2.3 Secondary-research question 3: What factors could enable the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho?

Evidence can be drawn from the findings in the study that each secondary school teacher brought his or her interpretive thoughts and ideas to the study. Their photographs revealed the illustration in *figure 5.1*, which indicates what they perceived to be enabling factors to be situated within a broad network of social structures within which individuals operate, while interrelating and interacting with other agents, who do not separate them from the external influences outside their rural context. Their photographs with written captions and accompanying explanations revealed enabling factors (see *figures; 5.2-5.7*) towards the enhancement of LVIs' ELE to be found within an individual as *inherent capabilities, skills and potential*, among peers and teachers as *enhanced interpersonal relationships*, and in physical environments, such as a classroom environment, school buildings, and teaching and learning resources, which are *resourceful materials*.

It is indicative in the context of these findings that an ELE for LVIs encompasses a wide range of factors that allow its improvement, starting from realizing these learners as visible in terms of agency or the assets they possess. The participants' responses mentioned and described LVIs as having an interpersonal ability (for example, believing in their self-efficacy) to learn, and with strengths and the capacities to take control of themselves by living a healthy life. One participant even mentioned the significance of food in LVIs' school life that LVIs as human beings also have a human basic need "of eating healthy food" **AB**, while referring to their photograph in *figure 5.3* for them to be empowered and allowed concentration opportunity while in school during teaching and learning processes.

The enhanced interpersonal relationship within the rural context was recommended by the participants, therefore, suggesting its effective impact in enhancing ELE. The key

point to note in their responses concerning the enhanced interpersonal relationships among all education stakeholders, is that when LVIs are actively involved and interconnected with their teachers and other learners within the rural schools and community, positive academic outcomes are achieved, as well as positive relationships, beneficial to all, become apparent. Although, the findings revealed that enhanced interpersonal relationships encompass positive relationships among all education stakeholders, the participants suggested that, in as much that it is the responsibility of all teachers to ensure educational initiatives towards the enhancement of the schools' ELE, other teachers are inactive, due to the fact that they experience limited knowledge. These ideas about some being inactive, appeared to be matching a negative nature about rurality that rural schools are subjected to lack of resources (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Hlalele & Myende, 2018), which limits their capability to act as far as LVIs' learning environment is concerned.

In enhancing ELE for LVIs, participants also identified resourceful teaching and learning materials as enabling factors within their rural school. Participants identified factors like human agents like qualified teachers, physical materials like assistive reading devices and school classrooms as resourceful that could be used to assist in the enhancement of LVIs' ELE. Evidence can be drawn from the findings of this study that in rural schools, the secondary school teachers position themselves, especially qualified special education teachers, at the forefront of the creation of an ELE of LVIs, acting as enablers and agents of change for the benefit of all learners and their colleagues. According to these participants, enhancement of ELE for LVIs cannot be easily understood due to the influence from factors identified as enabling within the rural schools, but by engaging with them and making them resourceful and accessible to meet LVIs' special needs, which is crucial.

6.2.4 Secondary-research question 4: What factors could impede the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho?

A close examination from the findings of this study indicates the participants' interpretations and discussions of their photographs that, their rural school as a multifaceted and vigorous space is not only a habitat of enabling factors, but

constraining factors as well (see *figures 5.2-5.13*). As it is evident from most participants' responses that, socio-economic factors, like government's financial instability, which results in poor constructions of schools, socio-cultural factors, which involves inflexible ways of implementing inclusive education policy, and lack of parental involvement in their children's education, revealed in the discussions as constraining and disabling factors. The geographic location of their school, too, with the poor management of its resources by some teachers, who lack suitable skills and others whose abilities are devaluated by the government, was reported as constraints in the enhancement of LVIs' ELE.

Although literature suggests that the only practicable way to confront the challenging factors within the ELE is to ensure effective use of the existing resources, which becomes a barrier in the actual implementation of education policies enacted by MoET (Temesgen, 2018), there seemed to be recognizable challenges in the ways in which Lesotho schools implemented the policies in an effective manner (Mosia, 2022). As a result, it contributed to inconsistencies in the policy implementation, which impedes the enhancement of learners' ELE. Hence, the need in the improvement of such schools' learning environments, which is through strengthening responsibilities of all stakeholders involved, and to contribute to development in the academic resources that worked in the best interest of LVIs' special educational needs.

As it is evident from the generated data during photographs' interpretations and discussions, the participants value the enhancement of the constrained learning environment for LVIs as a need. The participating school teachers had several suggestions on how to reduce their rural school insufficiency in the enhancement of its learners' learning environment. They acknowledged that there are resources in their rural context, which are resourceful, but only need to be improved, mobilised or harnessed. The findings revealed the resources like, people's agency and responsibilities from all stakeholders, such as themselves, all other school learners with and without visual impairments, the principal, parents, and members of the school board. However, more emphasis was placed on the need to strengthen collective agency. The participants indicated involvement of everyone, including LVIs' active

engagement in all matters that can lead to their success in school, as what is all needed. These participants wanted the development in LVIs' ELE to be everybody's business.

These participants called for a need in the realisation and recognition of special education teachers' agency concerning their ideas, skills and knowledge that relate to many issues that constrain the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment. The participants wanted these teachers to be recognised and actively engaged in meaningful ways for the benefit of the whole school. Their findings emphasised significance of realising and appreciating the contribution of the current agencies in rural schools and community.

Drawing from these discussions, a conclusion can be made that while there are structures and inclusive education initiatives in place, which are meant for the enablement of the learning environment for LVIs, the rural schools, through the Lesotho Government does not function in a predictable manner in relation to the creation of ELE for their learners, and does not acknowledge or draw on the contribution of the secondary school teachers themselves and LVIs as well. The way in which the enhancement of ELE is enacted in these schools, proves a lack of clear understanding of what ELE is on the part of both schools and the government through the Ministry of Education and Training. Most importantly, the participants within this constrained space however, value their ability as assets or agents of change to individually and collectively construct ELE for LVIs. These participants also argued for the need for effective use of limited, however, available assets or resources in the rural context.

6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The following serves as the limitations of the current study:

1. Two methods (online focus group discussions and photovoice) were used to engage participants in this study. Both the researcher and the participants experienced the following limitations while employing these methods:
 - ✚ Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, strict regulations regarding social distancing and wearing of masks were compulsory. Data generation was therefore, challenging to the researcher and the participants, for they had to conduct the discussion under strict regulations, hence, some participants feared to participate face-to-face. Therefore, the researcher conducted some focus group sessions via social media platforms, such as WhatsApp.
 - ✚ Due to some discussions being conducted online over WhatsApp, the researcher could not observe crucial elements of the face-face focus group discussion processes, such as body language, which involves facial expression and eye contact. Further to that, engaging participants in the photovoice process, which was strictly to be conducted face-to-face, during a global pandemic, continued to be a challenge and very time consuming, but, the Covid-19 protocols were strictly followed. Consequently, the prolonged process during the generation of data, due to the prevailing global pandemic, delayed the processes; however, knowing about the flexibility of qualitative research the researcher used the participants' convenient time and was patient and flexible enough to wait for their time amenity.
 - ✚ The use of participatory visual art-based methodology (photovoice) had ethical limitations relating to anonymity and confidentiality (Wang, 2022), which according to the researcher's experience and involvement in various arts-based research workshops and conferences, she was unable to overcome. In addition, due to the specific ethical limitations related to the use of photovoice and despite in-depth training of visual ethics with participants, the limitation found here is that some participants, out of excitement in revealing their understanding of what constitutes enabling factors within their

environment, took photographs that might reveal objects' identities however, such limitation was solved through use of blurring, as suggested by Mitchell (2011) to keep photographs taken, unrecognizable.

2. The focus of this study was on the issue of promoting an ELE for LVIs in rural schools. What determines as limitation is the issue of the participants' sample size, which comprised ten secondary school teachers who were purposively selected and therefore, required to be knowledgeable of the phenomenon being researched, in this case an ELE. However, the study did not engage with all the secondary school teachers teaching in this particular school, because the researcher did not wish to generalize the findings of the study, but rather to engage in-depth with a small group of knowledgeable participants.

6.4 THE RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

Given the limitations and rurality as the context of the current study, the researcher recommends further research on appreciating the importance of local agencies. It must be admitted that this research study may not be the only evocative to all education sectors in Lesotho; however, its significance is in enabling all schools with similar contexts and environments, of acquiring in-depth information that can contribute to all learners' equal attainment of education through their learning environments that have been enhanced. This research therefore, contributed insightful knowledge to a body of literature conceptually, theoretically and methodologically, about LVIs' provision of education, social inclusion, learning experiences, and holistic development.

6.4.1 The research conceptual contribution

In answering secondary research questions 1 & 2: *How do teachers understand/interpret an ELE for LVIs and what kind of support do these teachers render to create an ELE for the LVIs within a rural secondary school in Lesotho?* The findings of the study vividly indicate that secondary school teachers have clear knowledge of

what an ELE means. There are multiple understandings of an ELE by these participants, which due to their diverse understanding, firstly position themselves as key role players and agents in the provision of LVIs' education since, they considered themselves as capable of contributing improvement in the learning of these learners. Secondly, they also offered clarity on their perspective on what is currently prevailing within their rural schools, related to the creation LVIs' ELE, highlighting that the school is enabling, only if it successfully offers support whether academically, physically, emotionally and psychologically to its learners.

Despite numerous understandings of an ELE from some literature in Lesotho education context, which was only been directed to what the policy say concerning the inclusion of all learners, including LVIs in schools, the findings of the current study point even beyond the principle of inclusion by raising awareness for the involvement of teachers' voices who have been silenced and argued for them to be heard in the construction of inclusive guidelines, which are clear enough to direct them in how to create learning environments that are enabling to all learners in schools. As a result, policy makers via MoET may be encouraged to revisit inclusive education policies, which are meant for the enhancement of ELE and provide greater assistance to teachers in enabling learning of all learners in schools.

6.4.2 The research theoretical contribution

The secondary research questions 3 & 4: *What factors could enable and impede the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in Lesotho*, allows a discussion of a theoretical contribution to the study. The agentic capability and inclusive special education frameworks were used as the lens to frame the study. Using the agentic capability theory, enabled the participants' discussion and identification of enabling factors in drawing from a broad network of social structure, beginning from LVIs' individual inherent abilities or agents and including interpersonal relationships drawn from themselves, parents, community members and other learners, being the education stakeholders, and institutions, to clearly think of what needs to be done and how the ELE could be enhanced to overcome its impediments in the learning of LVIs.

The findings in the current study represent 'collective agency' as a contributory enabling factors that recognized LVIs as not passive beings; rather as active participants with potential and who, through their interactions with other agencies like their teachers and other learners and structures within their learning environment, develop a unique ability to learn (Bandura, 2018). The study revealed that participants demonstrated their agency personally and collectively during the process of articulating how ELE for LVIs in a rural secondary school of Lesotho can be enhanced, using their capabilities, skills and knowledge to discuss and suggest the kind of support that their rural school could use in constructing of such enabling learning environment. Their opinions indicate a lot of fragments in the improvement of ELE for these learners. The very practice of demonstrating agency disrupts the existing fragments in the enhancement of LVIs' ELE. This study therefore, gives substance to the value of assisting all education stakeholders in reflecting on broader opportunities about collective agency, to bring inclusive education and high quality inclusive education for LVIs in the country and beyond hence, all education stakeholders may benefit from the findings of this study, revealing a better understanding of ELE and how such ELE can be improved.

A key finding on harnessing of local agencies to influence all education stakeholders to become productive agents in an act of contributing to the enhancement of ELE for LVIs was pivotal in this study. Hence, harnessing of agentic capabilities may pave the way for more strengthened relationships among education stakeholders in schools, which on the other hand may positively contribute in making all learners, including LVIs' learning, possible.

6.4.3 The research methodological contribution

This study used a participatory visual art-based methodology (PVA); hence, it was participative in nature and contributed to the existing knowledge of visual art-based research in various fields to enable a space for rural and local communities to exercise their agencies in the issues concerning them. Although, the researcher cannot guarantee a full success in the use of participatory methodologies, but by employing PVA (photovoice), and locating this study within an interpretive paradigm, allowed the

participation of secondary school teachers in expressing their ideas through sharing knowledge and interpreting of ELE, thus contributing to creating changes in the lives of LVIs and the whole school. Although the study provides visual representation of how ELE of LVIs can be understood, one of the methodological contributions drawn in this study through use photovoice is to give a true picture of ELE for these learners, rather than basing ourselves from the assumptions of what constitutes this or what this environment should be like. Additionally, the photographs or artefacts produced by the secondary school teachers in the current study, methodologically contributed in making some difference both in their lives and the school community.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident in the view of the findings in the current study that the following recommendations with regard to the enhancement of the ELE in rural schools to enable LVIs' learning are proffered.

1. This study has highlighted the lack of financial contribution of the government in assisting schools to provide learning environments that are enabling to all learners. It has also disclosed that most LVIs' learning is mostly affected by their countries' economic barriers, such as poor construction of school infrastructure. It is therefore recommended that the Lesotho Government through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to financially strengthen school facilities for better educational standards of all learners, including LVIs.
2. The present study brought to the picture gaps identified in the creation of an ELE for LVIs by teachers. Teachers as education collaborators are expected to put in place inclusive education practices and to create a learning environment that is enabling to their learners yet, remain unprepared as per their discretion in many cases of inclusive education, thereby compromising the inclusion of all learners. Hereafter, this study recommended the MoET to revisit and improve the policy, which might lead to pre-service and in-service teachers adequate understanding how an ELE for LVIs can be enhanced.

3. Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), via all education stakeholders (teachers, learners with and without visual impairments, parents, and rural community members), should encourage more support from all stakeholders so that, as key stakeholders in education, they should collaboratively work together to contribute in enabling LVIs' learning, rather than being a burden to only teachers, especially special education teachers with their special skills and knowledge.
4. In the education facilitation, this study recommended for more academic activities to engage LVIs as agents, who are able to interact with other learners to support each other socially, physically, emotionally and academically. It is therefore important for the rural schools and rural communities to become places that encourage the spirit of oneness, where every individual develops a sense of belonging.
5. Another recommendation, regarding education facilitation for the purpose of enabling learning for LVIs, is that all teachers should be capacitated with the appropriate knowledge and skills to become enablers in the teaching and learning of LVIs; the reason being that inclusion of these learners is currently diverse and requires knowledgeable teachers, who are able to embrace change.
6. Further to that, it is also recommended by this study that rural schools should be places filled with innovative appropriate teaching and learning resources for all learners, and it is therefore urged for the improvement of the academic resources that will enhance and shape LVIs' learning.
7. In the context of methodological contribution, the study recommends continuous use of photovoice as a participatory visual art-based method in rural school backgrounds to permit easy communication access and visual expression, and creativity in learning among learners and teachers.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Evidence has proven that constructing and enhancing of an ELE has more constraining factors with regard to supporting LVIs' learning in rural context. The findings of the study brought to the fore the enhancement of ELE for LVIs in a rural secondary school of Lesotho. Therefore, recommended for future research is indicated below:

1. Since this research study was confined to one rural secondary school from one district, It would be worth conducting similar studies that focus on the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment in a different context, such as in urban secondary schools or other districts.
2. The findings of this study revealed much argument around the issue of inclusive education's policy implementation. The discrepancies in the policy application remained apparent in the data. It is therefore recommended for a need to consider how the policy implementation has influenced the enhancement of the ELE of LVIs in schools.
3. Collective agency or support as an approach for the promotion of an ELE for LVIs in rural schools, surfaced as a key finding of this study. Therefore, there is a need for more studies to be conducted to promote a deep understanding of ELE and agency within the rural context, as well as reflecting on broader opportunities about collective agency (including local agents) in the facilitation of high quality inclusive education for LVIs in the country and beyond.
4. This study specifically aimed at how the ELE for LVIs can be enhanced. Therefore, future research, which specifically explores how the enhancement of LVIs' learning environment can be conducted with more use of different participatory visual arts-based methodologies, for example, the use of drawings, collages, painting, etc., is recommended.
5. As a result, this study is contributing to the existing body of literature by employing the PVA (photovoice) in generating data with LVIs' teachers to enable them to become active communicators and critical thinkers. Further studies are therefore recommended to verify its practicality as a research method, as well as an informative tool in the facilitation of education in the global context.

6.7 CONCLUSION

Visual impairment is still affecting learners and their whole community in various ways. The current study was only conducted with the aim to explore the enhancement of LVIs' ELE and challenged the prevailing belief that see LVIs as vulnerable, but view them as active beings with potential and who are knowledgeable of their own life. The enhancement of an ELE as a focus of the study was based on the belief that LVIs are a heterogeneous group of learners who possess unique skills and potentials that can only be harnessed through interacting with local agents, such as other learners, the local community, parents, siblings, and teachers for their development. The study indicated that in spite of inclusive practices meant for the quality provision of education to all learners, their learning environments are not enabled to meet their special educational needs. This study, therefore, through the use of the PVA, located within an interpretive paradigm, motivated the participants in how to enhance ELE for LVIs, and concurrently realized the significance of local people as agents and co-contributors of change within the rural schools. The agentic capability theory of Bandura (2006) and inclusive special education theory of Hornby (2015) were used to frame the study and to provide in-depth understanding of ELE, which its improvement may come from harnessing of agentic capabilities. In this thesis, the researcher therefore, argued that harnessing agency in rural schools is significant for it allows all stakeholders to come together with one vision for community development. This proves that, LVIs' learning environment becomes enabled and enhanced by tapping into agency found in their rural context.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Title Registration



28 August 2021

APPLICATION FOR TITLE REGISTRATION

Applicant: Ramatea, MA
Student Number: 2008037455
Discipline: Psychology of Education
Study Code: Doctoral (EDPY9100)


Dear Ms Ramatea

Your registered title is: "Enhancing an enabling learning environment for visually impaired learners in a rural Lesotho school"

All of the best with your studies.

Yours sincerely,


Prof Patrick Mafora
Chair: CTR committee


Ms CS Duvenhage
Secretary: CTR committee

Appendix B: Ethical Clearance



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

30-Nov-2021

Dear Mrs Mamochana Ramatea

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

Enhancing an enabling learning environment for visually-impaired learners in a rural Lesotho school

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2021/1375/21

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

205 Nelson Mandela
Drive
Park West
Bloemfontein 9301
South Africa

P.O. Box 339
Bloemfontein 9300
Tel: +27 (0)51 401
9337
aduplessis4@ufs.ac.za
www.ufs.ac.za



Appendix C: Permission to conduct research



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Po. Box 561

Berea

08/11/2021

Research Ethics Department
University of The Free State
Bloemfontein

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY IN THE BERE A SCHOOLS

Please be informed that Mrs. Mamochana Anacletta Ramatea's request to carry out research titled "ENHANCING AN ENABLING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR VISUALLY-IMPAIRED LEARNERS IN A RURAL LESOTHO SCHOOL" has been approved on the following conditions:

- ✚ Teachers' participation should be voluntary
- ✚ Teaching and learning should not be interrupted
- ✚ Principals should be approached for logistical matters such as dates and mode of conduct

Kind regards

Mopei Selikane

District Education Manager—Berea

Mobile: 58855708



Appendix D: Letter from school principal

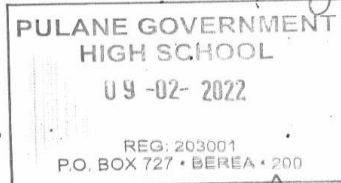
PULANE HIGH SCHOOL (203001)



P.O. BOX 727

TEYATEYANENG 200

11 February 2022



To Whom it may concern

Dear sir/madam

This is to certify that Ms. Masochina Anacleto Ramate requested for permission to carry out a research at the above-mentioned school and was allowed to interview the teachers who teach Grade 8-10.

Yours faithfully

Malefane Thofeng (Principal) Contact: 58947214 / 634451503

Appendix E: Research study information leaflet

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



Dear participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

I am Mamochana Anacletta Ramatea, a senior primary teacher at Mots'eare government primary and a student at the University of the Free State. I am doing PhD in psychology of education, and my research title is; **“Enhancing an enabling learning environment for learners with visual impairment in a rural Lesotho school”** and would like to request permission of your participation in my research, The reasons of being interested in your involvement is because you are a qualified teacher with experience of working within the rural mainstream school that practice teaching and learning of all learners including LVIs of which the aim of my research project is to explore how an enabling learning environment for these learners can be enhanced. Moreover, it will add the value in the following manner:

- Your participation will offer your school chance to gain insight into and reflect in the possible ways used to enhance an enabling learning of the LVIs.
- Policy-makers in the Ministry of Education will have access to the findings and recommendations of the study and could consider these to shape policies as the study presents diverse voices, including that of LVIs.
- Teacher training programmes, especially in fields such as educational psychology, could benefit from your teaching to improve teaching and learning strategies in enhancing an enabling learning environment of LVIs.

Please be assured that pseudonyms will be used as a security measure to avoid any potential harm and if at any point you feel discomfort during the cause of the study you are free to express your feelings during participation to the researcher because you will be under no influence of power as your participation is voluntary and if ever need a professional and trauma counselling in the process you will encouraged to seek help without disclosing your problems to anyone except the professional. Please also take into account that this study will be conducted using two methods; photovoice and online focus group discussions of which it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity especially when focus groups are used as a data collection method where some of the participants may reveal your privacy. However, be advised not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group however, adhere to the set rules.

The online focus group discussion session may last for about one and half hours and may be split depending on your preference. I pleasantly invite you to participate in a photovoice process. This will involve a session of a photovoice workshop in the use of cameras, ethics in

taking photographs will be adhered to and what photovoice is all about which will last for an hour. The second session will be on photo shooting which will last for an hour and the last session will take an hour on photo interpretation and discussion which will be followed by a 30 minutes photographs reflection process. Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research study only. Please also take note that your involvement is only for academic purposes and there are no financial benefits involved. If you are willing to participate in the photovoice process sessions and online focus group discussions, please indicate by signing the consent form below:

I, the undersigned,

_____ (*participant's full names to be included*), (the "**Participant**")

Confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the

_____ (the "**Study**") in
relation to

and which Study is being conducted by

(*insert the name of the researcher*), (the "**Researcher**").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that–

1. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet;
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing and processing my personal information in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto;
6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise

process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;

7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and de-identified at such stage;
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the *insert specific data collection method*.

Full Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s):

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date:

For any further enquiries concerning the information about my request, please contact me on my email; mamochanaramatea@gmail.com

Cell number; 58447716

Yours faithfully

Mamochana Annacletta Ramatea

REFERENCE:

Dr. Fumane Khanare (Supervisor)

Senior Lecture and Head of Department in the School of Education Studies

Email; KhanareFP@ufs.ac.za

Cell number; +27834321772

Thank you so much for contributing to this study!

Appendix F: Qualitative data tool1

1 HOUR 30 MINUTES ONLINE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH TEACHERS

You are welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study which explores how an enabling learning environment for LVIs can be enhanced within the Lesotho rural schools. Driven by the objectives of this study, the focus is to explore the teachers' understanding or interpretation of an enabling learning environment for LVIs within their rural school, to identify enabling and the impeding factors of an enabling learning environment for LVIs and examine the kind of support that teachers render to create an enabling environment for these learners. Therefore, your participation in this focus group discussion is voluntary and please be free to participate and not to answer any question you are uncomfortable with.

Title of the study is “Enhancing an enabling learning environment for LVIs in a rural Lesotho school”

Introduction by the researcher:

Hello! My name is Mamochana Anacletta Ramatea, PhD student in psychology of education department from the University of the Free State. I will be facilitating these focus group discussions in relation to the study as mentioned above.

Introductions by participants:

Let's start with a quick round of introductions. “Tell us about your name and the class you teach”

- I. How long have you been teaching in this rural school?

Discussion process:

During this focus group, questions will be asked to guide the discussion. This will be done to facilitate the discussion dialogue so as to allow a fair participation for all, so let us have a look on the ground rules;

- There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view, so feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

In order to adhere to and remain safe from the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic, please note that this session is going to be done on WhatsApp, video recorded and notes taken to adequately capture your ideas and that no miss of any comments is needed during your discussions. However, your names won't be used in reports, this ensure complete confidentiality and the reports will go to the University of Free State as part of my study.

Questions that guide the discussion:

Section A--- This section addresses objective 1: Explore the teachers' understanding or interpretation of an ELE for LVIs within a rural secondary school of Lesotho and 2: Examine the kind of support that teachers render to enhance an ELE for LVIs within a rural secondary school in the Berea District of Lesotho.

Firstly, I would like to hear from you, what you understand by the following terms:

a) An enabling learning environment?

Probing:

- What is an enabling learning environment?
 - please elaborate
 - give examples of what you mean by an enabling learning environment
 - b) Learners with visual impairment (LVIs)?
 - c) To enhance something?
1. From your explanation of an enabling learning environment, please explain in details what a school environment should be like to say that is enabling?
- a. As a rural school, what is the current kind of support provided to make sure that VILs' learning environment is enabling?

Probing

Remember you can draw from different level of support i.e.

- Psychological
- Emotional
- Social
- Physical or material support.

And many experiences or roles you have played in providing support to make learning environment for these learners enabling either within or outside their school.

2. In what ways can this kind of support (if any) provided can contribute in the improvement of these learners' psychological, emotional, social and physical wellbeing?
- a) What do you think is still lacking to make these learners' learning environment enabling?
3. At this point, I would like to hear about what you think need to be done which is different from the current situation to enhance an enabling learning environment for LVIs within their rural schools?

Probing

What need to be done, how and by who?

- I. What can these rural schools use to enhance an enabling learning environment of the LVIs? Remember these can be drawn from: (policies, plans, physical structures, psychosocial, emotional, support programs).
 - II. Who should take part in enhancing the enabling learning for the LVIs?
 - III. How and why should they be involved?
4. What are the other things we haven't discussed yet that you think are important in relation to enhancing an enabling learning environment for LVIs?

(Adapted from Ramatea & Khanare, 2021:3)

Thank you so much for your time and participation.

Appendix G: Qualitative data tool2

3 HOURS 30 MINUTES PHOTOVOICE PROCESS SCHEDULE WITH TEACHERS

You are welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study which explores how an enabling learning environment for LVIs can be enhanced within the Lesotho rural schools. Driven by the objectives of this study, the focus is to explore the teachers' understanding or interpretation of an enabling learning environment for these learners within their rural school, to examine the kind of support that teachers render to create an enabling environment for these learners and identify the enablers and impeding factors of an enabling learning environment for LVIs. Therefore, your participation in these photovoice activities are voluntary and be free to participate and not to answer any question you are uncomfortable with.

Title of the study is “Enhancing an enabling learning environment for LVIs in a rural Lesotho school”.

10 minutes Introduction session:

- **Introduction by the researcher:**

Hello! My name is Mamochana Anacletta Ramatea. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the photovoice process as another method used in generating data in this study.

- **Introductions by participants:**

Let's start with a quick round of introductions. “Tell us about your name and the class you are teaching”

Questions to follow in guiding photovoice process which are addressed in sessions:

Session 1:

Engaging in Photovoice workshop- This stage introduces the participants to an hour photovoice process that includes:

- Exploring and understanding what photovoice mean?
- Training in the use of camera (manual cameras)
- Following ethical code of conduct during photovoice process (Mitchell, 2008)

Session 2:

Photo shooting- This 1 hour session addresses objectives 1: **Explore factors that could impede the enhancement of the ELE for LVIs at a rural secondary school in the Berea District, Lesotho** and 2: **Explore factors that could enable the enhancement of the ELE for**

LVIs at a rural secondary school in the Berea District, Lesotho, participants will be given mobile phones with clear picture camera to take photographs that will depict the enabling and the impeding factors within the LVIs' learning environment. This will be done following the guiding prompts: In two groups of (5) teachers per each group;

- Use a camera to take (3) photographs showing your understanding of factors that could enable the enhancement of the learning environment for the LVIs within your school.
- Use a camera to take another (3) photographs showing factors that could impede the enhancement of the enabling learning environment of the LVIs within your school.

Session 3:

An hour Photo interpretation:

After photo shooting and the researcher uploaded participants' photographs in her laptop and be saved in a folder, each photograph will printed out on an A4 sized sheet and presented in power point slides, for the participants to provide interpretation of their photos using the following guiding prompts through use of SHOWeD Mnemonics and to give details of what their photographs are all about (Mitchell, 2008);

- Explain your photographs?
- Why did you choose to take these photographs?
- What and who is in your photographs?

Session 4: Photographs reflection (Written)

The purpose of this exercise is to allow you to reflect about the sessions you participated in such as photovoice. Therefore, you have 30 minutes to reflect on your participation through the following prompt: **“Write down what comes to mind about your participation in the photovoice activity”**

Use the following guidelines to guide your reflection.

- Write about today's session
- Write about how you felt
- Write about your experiences
- Use 'I'/'my' language, for example, in today's session I..."
- "Today I have experience...."
- Please write in language of your choice.

The end of the session:

(Adopted from Nwokedi, 2019: 329).

Thank you so much for your time and participation.

Appendix H: Photograph waiver

I _____ (insert name), solemnly give permission for my photograph to be taken and be used in the current research titled: **Enhancing an enabling learning environment for visually impaired learners in a rural Lesotho school.**

Through my permission, my photograph will be used for this research purposes and if ever it has to be used for any presentations and or dissemination purposes, I should be consulted first to offer further permission. This indicates that no further use of my photograph will be made without my permission.

Signature

Date

For any further inquiries concerning my research, please contact me at:

Email: mamochanaramatea@gmail.com

Cell phone number: +266 56140233

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Thank you so much for time and assistance!

Appendix I: Transcription of participants' online focus group discussions data

ORGANISING DATA: 1st SET OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH 10 PARTICIPANTS (TEACHERS)

Objective 1: Exploring teachers' understanding or interpretation of an ELE for LVIs within a rural secondary school of Lesotho.

In order to easily identify the participating speakers, the researcher used general identifiers whereby she first created a transcription key where each participant was assigned a different symbol. The participants were given opportunity to choose names they preferred appropriate and related to the phenomenon being investigated and which they would like to use to substitute their real names. They preferred to be called:

1. Ability
2. Inclusive
3. Enabling
4. Welcoming
5. Conducive
6. Supportive
7. Effective
8. Protection
9. Flexible
10. Change

- Transcribing verbatim

Researcher: Right, so first of all, **we are going to explore your understanding of an enabling learning environment.** So explain with examples, what do you understand by enabling learning environment? You may start by brainstorming your points or even jot down your ideas on the notepad provided.

Enabling:

An enabling learning environment is a supportive space that makes it easy for LVIs to learn freely.

Protection:

I think it is an environment that suits the needs of all learners including those with LVIs, this means that it responds to VILs' special educational needs

Inclusive:

...I agree with my colleague here, when VILs' learning environment is enabling and realising that LVIs' needs are well considered, they feel relaxed and accepted.

Ability:

According to my understanding enabling learning environment is a learning space that makes LVIs' learning possible. For example, when learning environment is enabling, the teaching and learning for these learners becomes interactive and more learner-centred than involving more writing which may sometimes become barrier to them.

Conducive:

That is true, because sometimes too much writing may become a barrier as some teachers' handwriting may not be visible enough for learners who experience eyes problems.

Inclusive:

An enabling learning environment is accommodative, supportive, inclusive, safe, and conducive for all learners regardless of any form of impairments.

Flexible:

It is an environment that accommodate every learner in order for he or she to learn smoothly

Supportive:

It is an environment that is enriching and supportive, for example; it is the barrier-free space that allows every learner to learn freely, safe and feeling at home.

Inclusive:

Yes! It is an environment that is accommodative and supportive which makes learners' learning enjoyable.

Welcoming:

I think when an environment is enabling, is when it is useful, for example, when it is surrounded by the equipment or resources that make teaching and learning easy for LVIs.

Change:

Yah! Is the environment that is well equipped to accommodate all learners' diverse needs, For example, for the learners who use visual language (deaf learners) such as sign language are

provided or allocated sign language interpreter, those who rely on tactile language LVIs, are allocated braille specialists and those who need audible, written and spoken language are provided with the required resources such as qualified teachers to assist them throughout their teaching and learning.

Inclusive:

Emmh! According to my understanding, this is an **environment that is resourceful**, which means is **full of supportive teaching and learning material**.

Flexible:

*An enabling learning **environment is conducive for learning**. For instance, **this environment enables engagement of all parties (parents, their peers and friends and teachers) in making learning for LVIs enjoyable.***

Welcoming:

*I too, also think that it is an environment that **enables collaboration** among all the concerned parties in the education of these learners.*

Protection:

...Yes, parental involvement is an important factor that contributes positively to enabling learning environment for these learners. Parents play very important role as some of them if fully involved may discuss with teachers about their children's eye problems in advance for them to offer effective education to their children in school.

2. From your explanation of an enabling learning environment, please explain in details what a school environment should be like to say that is enabling?

Conducive:

*The school environment should have **appropriate resources** (e.g. Qualified teachers and trained to teach LVIs)...These teachers will have best knowledge in how to support LVIs.*

Ability:

*Yes! There has to be a special **classroom, well equipped for** LVIs' special educational demands.*

Protection:

I think, regular workshops should be frequently done to educate other teachers on how to work with all learners including those with eye problems.

Inclusive:

Ehm! Awareness of visual impairments should be made during parents meetings for parental support, acceptance of LVIs.

1ST SET CODING FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH 10 PARTICIPANTS (TEACHERS)

<p>Supportive</p>	<p>Enabling: An enabling learning environment <i>is a supportive space</i> that makes it easy for LVIs to learn.</p> <p>Inclusive: Yes! It is an environment that is accommodative and <i>supportive</i> which makes learners' learning enjoyable.</p> <p>Supportive: <i>It is an environment that is enriching and supportive, for example; it is the barrier-free space that allows every learner to learn freely, safe and feeling at home.</i></p> <p>Change: <i>Emmh! According to my understanding, this is an environment that is resourceful, which means is full of supportive teaching and learning material.</i></p>
<p>Teaching and learning materials</p>	<p>Welcoming: <i>I think when an environment is enabling, is when it is useful, for example, when it is surrounded by the equipment or resources that make teaching and learning easy for LVIs.</i></p> <p>Change: <i>Yah! Is the environment that is well equipped to accommodate all learners' diverse needs, For example, for the learners who use visual language (deaf learners) such as sign language are provided or allocated sign language interpreter, those who rely on tactile language (learners with visual impairment), are allocated braille specialists and those who need audible, written and spoken language are provided with the required resources such as qualified teachers to assist them throughout their teaching and learning.</i></p> <p>Change: <i>Emmh! According to my understanding, this is an environment that is full of teaching and learning materials.</i></p> <p>Conducive: <i>The school environment should have appropriate resources (e.g. Qualified teachers and trained to teach LVIs)...These teachers will have best knowledge in how to support LVIs.</i></p> <p>Ability: <i>Yes! There has to be a special classroom, well equipped for LVIs' special educational demands.</i></p>

<p>Interactive teaching and learning</p>	<p>Ability: According to my understanding enabling learning environment is a learning space that makes LVIs' learning possible. For example, when learning environment is enabling, the teaching and learning for these learners becomes interactive and more learner-centred than involving</p> <p>Conducive: ...That is true, because sometimes too much writing may become a barrier as some teachers' handwriting may not be visible enough for learners who experience eyes problems.</p> <p>Flexible: An enabling learning environment is conducive for learning. For instance, this environment enables engagement of all parties (parents, their peers and friends and teachers) in making learning for LVIs enjoyable.</p> <p>Protection: ...Yes, parental involvement is an important factor that contributes positively to enabling learning environment for these learners. Parents play very important role as some of them if fully involved may discuss with teachers about their children's eye problems in advance for them to offer effective education to their children in school.</p> <p>Welcoming: I too, also think that it is an environment that enables collaboration among all the concerned parties in the education of these learners.</p> <p>Inclusive:</p> <p>Ehm! Awareness of visual impairments should be made during parents meetings for parental support, acceptance of LVIs.</p>
<p>Respond to LVIs' special needs</p>	<p>Inclusive: An enabling learning environment is accommodative, supportive, inclusive, safe, and conducive for all learners regardless of any form of impairments.</p> <p>Change: Yah! It accommodates all learners' diverse needs</p> <p>Flexible: It is an environment that accommodate every learner in order for he or she to learn smoothly</p>

Appendix J: Letter from Language Editor

Michelle Woolley

WRITER EDITOR PROOFREADER TRANSLATOR

Bachelor of Library and Information Science: B.Bibl.
Reference & Research Librarian

Associate Member of Professional EDITORS' Guild (PEG)

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

This letter certifies that I have edited the Dissertation detailed below.

Title:

ENHANCING AN ENABLING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR VISUALLY-
IMPAIRED LEARNERS IN A RURAL LESOTHO SCHOOL

Author:

MAMOCHANA ANACLETTA RAMATEA
Student number: 2008037455

Regards
Michelle Woolley



Date: 25/11/2022

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Professional
EDITORS
Guild

Appendix K: Plagiarism Report (Turn it in)

MAMOCHANA ANACLETTA RAMATEA			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
5%	3%	1%	2%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
1	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper		<1%
2	repository.up.ac.za Internet Source		<1%
3	archive.org Internet Source		<1%
4	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source		<1%
5	www.ijlhss.com Internet Source		<1%
6	studylib.net Internet Source		<1%
7	Submitted to University of the Western Cape Student Paper		<1%
8	vital.seals.ac.za:8080 Internet Source		<1%
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