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**ENHANCING TEACHERS' SKILLS TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
AMONG LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT: A CASE OF SELECTED
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MASERU, LESOTHO**

By

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DECLARATION

I, Mathabo Joalane Catherine Lebona, the undersigned, sincerely declare that the thesis titled, **“Enhancing teachers’ skills to improve academic performance among learners with visual impairment: A case of selected primary schools in Maseru, Lesotho”**, submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, is originally and entirely my work, except where other sources have been acknowledged. I also certify that this thesis has not previously been submitted to this or any other faculty or institution.

I hereby cede the copyright of this thesis in favour of the University of the Free State.

M. J. C. Lebona

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Bloemfontein

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis in loving memory of my late parents, Semakale and 'Mateboho Ntšeli. You have been there for me since my early stages to guide and nurture me. You taught me the values of integrity, humanity, human respect and that for me to be successful, I should pray and put God first. May your souls continue to rest in peace. I further dedicate this study to my family – My spouse, Lelecha, my two children, Tebello and Thabo, who have been supportive during my emotional and thorny study journey. Thank you so much. May God Almighty bless you, all.

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ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that learners with visual impairment often face significant challenges in accessing educational material, participating in classroom activities, and receiving the necessary accommodations, which can impede them from attaining high academic performance. The Lesotho Education and The Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy, in line with the Salamanca Statement, acknowledged that the education system should be more inclusive and supportive and benefit learners in the primary mainstream setting, irrespective of their disabilities. However, teachers find it challenging to successfully handle the teaching and learning environment to improve the LVI academic environment. The study aims to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced in improving academic performance among Learners with Visual Impairment (LVI) in primary schools in the Maseru district, regardless of the efforts utilized by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to make education free and Compulsory for primary learners irrespective of their disabilities. Many teachers had not yet benefited from being trained to teach learners with diverse needs, which reduced teachers' self-efficacy in teaching Learners with Visual Impairment. Despite the various steps the Ministry of Education and Training had taken to make provisions for introducing Free and Compulsory Primary Education to all other levels of learning, LVI still faced challenges in learning and needed attention and support from their teachers in mainstream teaching and learning. In this regard, lacking teachers' relevant skills contributes to insufficient delivery to provide LVI with the appropriate support they need. This proved that teachers were psychologically and academically unprepared to teach LVI in their classrooms, affecting their socio-economic and learning performance. It is highlighted that teachers with high self-efficacy improve learners' self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievements. Therefore, teachers play a vital role in improving learners' academic performance because they apply appropriate skills and resources to teach LVI.

This study used Bandura's Perceived Self-efficacy theory to enhance teachers' skills and improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools. It adopted a qualitative research approach through the case study design. It employed the interpretive paradigm. Twelve participants were purposively selected in this study from two schools (School A and

School B) were equally constituted of six participants. This study employed Focus Group Discussions, telephonic interviews, and non-participatory observation methods for data collection. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The findings showed that underperforming of LVI is some of the factors affecting their academic performance, including lack of teachers' skills, lack of content knowledge to teach LVI, lack of parental support, remuneration of teachers, Inexpert teachers, rigid curriculum, assessment tools, constraining learning environment the rigid curriculum that does not cater for LVI, lack of relevant resources for LVI such as Braille reading and writing, lack of parental involvement, remunerating teachers' salaries to show appreciation on the workload in the mainstream. The study recommended that the government of Lesotho, through MoET, should improve on the Special Education Unit to be ready to implement continuous training and equip teachers with relevant skills to improve academic performance of learners with visual impairment programs.

Operational Key terms: *Academic Performance, Inclusive Education, Teachers' skills, Visual Impairment,*

ACRONYMS

AAU	Addis Ababa University
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AT	Assistive Technology
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
COVID-19	Corona Virus disease of 2019
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DBST	District-based Support Teams
ECC	Expanded Core Curriculum
ECD	Economic Commission for Africa
EFA	Education for All
FCPE	Free Compulsory Primary Education
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GOL	Government of Lesotho
HE	Higher Education
HELs	Higher Education Institutions
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IEP	Individual Education Plan
ILEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
LCE	Lesotho College of Education
LD	Learners with Disabilities
LIET	Lesotho Inclusive Education and Training
LSEN	Learners with Special Education Needs

LST	Learning Support Teacher
LVI	Learners with Visual Impairments
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOEVT	Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NUL	National University Lesotho
ONH	Optic Nerve Hypoplasia
ROP	Retinopathy of Prematurity
SA	South Africa
SSA	Social Security Administration
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
URT	United Republic of Tanzania
UV	Ultra-violet
VI	Visual impairment
WHO	World Health Organization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational settings, the issue of teachers struggling with insufficient skills and knowledge in relevant content areas has become increasingly prominent. The issue is indicative in Maraisane (2020) perspective that some teachers face several challenges, including a restrictive learning environment, a lack of supportive teaching and learning resources, and a lack of skills and knowledge. Worldwide, such teachers face problems teaching learners with visual impairment (LVI) in the mainstream education system (Suhlane, 2017). Most LVI receive limited support from their teachers, resulting in them dropping out of school (Suhlane, 2017). This challenge of underperforming learners emanates from teachers who lack the skills and training needed to teach LVI, which hinders the development and performance of such learners. Therefore, this handicaps the creativity and achievements of LVI in the classroom setting (Matlosa and Matobo, 2007; Mosola, 2020). Makatse (2021) found that poor performance lowers the learners' interest in schooling. This requires dedicated teachers who display the humanity and empathy needed to support Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) (Lebona, 2020). Therefore, Lesotho is not exceptional regarding the case of unskilled teachers teaching LVI in mainstream teaching and learning settings.

Developing countries such as Lesotho ought to develop professional assessment systems meant to identify learners' needs because if such needs are unidentified, they will be worsened by poor teaching resources in schools, thus negatively affecting learners' development (Urwick and Elliot, 2010; Mosia, 2014). The Government of Lesotho aligned itself with the Salamanca Statement (1994) whereby many countries, including Lesotho, became signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which unnerve to include people with disabilities in the mainstream society (Mosia, 2014). The Salamanca Statement was vital in making quality inclusive education accessible to all learners irrespective of their disabilities (LIEP, 2018). Therefore, the present study is bent on exploring how

teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance among LVI in primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho.

Quality education is defined as meeting learners' basic learning needs (Musili, 2015). Therefore, quality education aims to improve the academic performance of LVI, thus helping them to reach their potential and enable them to manage the different challenges they encounter in life (De Leo, 2012). In this regard, every individual has a right to quality education (Lesotho Education Act, 2010; Ministry of Education and Training, 2018; UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2015), and Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights released in 1948 serves as the 'Magna Carter' for the right to education. Subsequently, another important landmark such as the Education for All (EFA) Goals in 1990 and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in 1994 have reaffirmed the need to ensure every learner has access to education (Mosia and Phasha, 2020). To realise this ideal goal, there has been a need for countries worldwide to make education free, basic, and compulsory for their citizens, without discrimination. This, perhaps, was done to enable learners with disabilities, including LVI, to be provided with equal educational opportunities, which would enhance their experiences with their counterparts living without disabilities in mainstream schools (Bryant, 2018; Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled [LNFOD], 2016; Mosia, 2017). Consequently, an increased number in the LVI cohort is gaining access to educational curricula that are being studied in regular schools (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). So, Lesotho is not an exception to this reality (Kremte, 2019). The inclusion of LVI presents teachers in primary schools' additional responsibilities that relate to meeting the diverse needs of this cohort of learners. Since 2000, Lesotho, through the Ministry of Education and Training MoET) introduced the Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE). This has been a major strategy towards achieving the goal of education for all (Education Act, 2010). Lesotho is among the signatories of education for all in alignment with the Salamanca Statement of 1994. It has been highlighted that the Education Act (2010) led to a rapid increase in the enrolment rate in primary education, which became legally free and compulsory in Lesotho (Education Act, 2010). LIEP stipulates that every child in Lesotho from six to thirteen years old should access education without being discriminated against based

on disabilities (Lesotho Education Act, 2010). This was seen as an effective way of redressing the inequalities characterising access to education (Lesotho Education Act, 2010; Government of Botswana, 2011). MoET introduced the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy [LIEP] in 2018 (MoET, (2018) and built a special education personnel position in the unit of special education to help ill-equipped teachers handle children with disabilities (Mosia and Phasha, 2020). However, all the above policies and programmes were deemed ineffective long-term strategies for meeting the needs of LVI in primary schools.

The FCPE policy has not made education responsive to learners' needs, especially LVI (Mosia, 2014; Mosola, 2020). For example, the introduction of FCPE has resulted in a huge influx of learners in schools, including LVI. The FCPE policy implementation is essential because it provides, articulates and gives comprehensive guidelines for providing education to LSEN and LVI. This policy aligns with other MoET policies that consider issues of access, quality, relevance, and equality as a priority. It should be regarded as the basic document which underlines MoET's intention to provide inclusive education at all levels. It is vital that individual stakeholders should make every effort in the education sector to implement this policy (LIEP, 2018). As a matter of urgency, teacher education institutions are urged to review their training programmes to ensure they align with the FCPE policy.

MoET should provide support that includes appropriate resources for the successful implementation of the FCPE policy. The Ministry should make every possible effort to monitor the proper implementation of this policy by all the stakeholders. The policy further provides a framework for upholding the educational rights of children with disabilities, as the policy aims to change the general education system into an inclusive one focusing on fulfilling the LIEP. Therefore, MoET builds a special education personnel position in the special education unit to help teachers in schools since teachers are ill-equipped to handle and teach learners with different disabilities in the mainstream (Mosia and Phasha 2020). Then, the FCPE overstretched the education system, and resources were inadequate in schools. Additionally, teachers perceive learners with disabilities as a threat and burden to their work; hence, they feel discouraged and not ready to teach them in mainstream classes (Mosia and Phasha, 2020; Ralejoe, 2016). These LVI exhibit a high rate of unsatisfactory academic work, which can

compel them to drop out of school at a tender age due to many factors include their disabilities and the rate of their family poverty (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2015).

Further, learners with disabilities are found at the confluence of a myriad of negative factors pitted against them, such as a lack of skills and approaches to implement effective inclusive education, uncondusive environments, shortage of special education teachers and other experts such as doctors, nurses, psychologists and counsellors (Mosia, 2011, 2014). Harmer and Murphy (2015) view poor school management, inadequate resources and a lack of teacher devotion as the factors contributing to high failure rate among learners. Similarly, Mokoqo (2013) posits that poor academic performance might sign the urgent need to deal with factors impacting learners' performance within the school environment. Some schools in Lesotho, mostly in urban areas, are well-resourced and perform well, while some schools, mostly in rural areas, do not perform well in primary schools in Lesotho because of a lack of resources to be used in daily teaching and learning activities. According to Lebata and Mudau (2014), schools equipped with resources perform better than those under-resourced ones. Consequently, the researcher has observed a relationship between the resources, teachers' skills and knowledge of content, and academic performance among LVIs, which play a vital role in reflecting on the learners' performance. As such, the researcher would like to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools.

There is a shortage of empirical studies that explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Lesotho. Therefore, it is this shortage in literature that necessitated this study. This study did not focus only on teachers' skills but also on the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching LVI as well as the possible solutions to these challenges. Such a study could be important in providing more essential services to LVI in Lesotho. Given this gap in research, lack of skilled teachers was found to be a possible reason for poor academic performance among LVI in Lesotho. As such, the study can contribute valuable information to MoET in which some sighted learners are advantaged. At the same time, those with disabilities are disadvantaged because of a lack of skilled teachers, knowledge of content, and lack of adequate resources. The study revolved

around the question: How can teachers' skills be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho?

The researcher argues that teachers' support is not always guaranteed to ensure that the needs of LVI are met (Al-Adwin and Khatib, 2017; Gezer and Aksoy, 2019). Therefore, for LVI to acquire quality education and attain their full potential, they should be taught in the mainstream education sector, together with their counterparts without disabilities in primary schools.

1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

As a senior teacher teaching foundation phase learners and being the Head of the Foundation Phase (HFP), the researcher observed and experienced developments since the inclusion of LSEN in the mainstream education sector in 2010 when MoET introduced the Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE) policy to all learners in Lesotho. On this note, most primary school teachers who teach LVI in the mainstream do not specialise in teaching learners with diverse needs, hence, they experience some challenges teaching such learners in their classrooms. In this case, LVIs are included in regular classrooms, but their performances are unsatisfactory. The researcher realised that LSEN need to be remediated to improve their academic performance, particularly in the foundation phase, where formal learning starts in primary school. Grades 1, 2, and 3 are sensitive classes where a firm foundation should be constructed to bring long-lasting and quality education to all learners.

At the researcher's workplace, general teachers teach all learners, including those with special educational needs, LVI in included these teachers who received little training when inclusive education was introduced in primary schools in 2010, with teachers in the primary school sector not being offered continuous training that equips them with the necessary skills that enable them to teach LVI confidently. So, teachers must be equipped to teach learners with diverse needs in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, this study aims to identify ways of enhancing teachers' skills to improve the academic performances of LVI in mainstream educational

settings. Thus, teachers are regarded as the key elements in education as they support all learners in attaining their educational goals.

The study intended to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho. The FGD, telephonic interviews, and non-participatory observation methods were conducted with teachers of LVI as the main participants in the study. Therefore, the existing literature was reviewed to identify ways of enhancing teachers' skills to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru District in Lesotho. The research seeks to create a user-friendly learning environment by enhancing teaching skills that improve academic performance among LVI and developing awareness by all educational stakeholders about the challenges facing both learners and teachers at school and how the government can address the gaps to improve teachers' pre-service and in-service training as well as on-going workshops to enhance teachers' skills and to allocate relevant and enough resources, then supply the resources such as Braille machines for LVI in advance, and also modify the curriculum to suit all learners in the entire education system.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Government of Lesotho (GoL), through MoET, made all efforts to incorporate learners with disabilities in the mainstream school system, including LVI, who had to be taught alongside their counterparts without disabilities (Lesotho Education Act, 2010; Lesotho Ministry of Social Welfare, 2011; LNFOD, 2016). GoL reformed its inclusive education policy to support learners experiencing barriers to learning (MoET, 2018). In 2018, MoET launched the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy to integrate all learners into the mainstream school system despite their disabilities. LVI are classified as learners with disabilities (MoET, 2018). In January 2009, Lesotho College of Education (hereafter: LCE) started a higher diploma programme on special education. In the same year, the National University of Lesotho (NUL) introduced a degree programme on special education.

Both programmes have focused on implementing inclusive education to equip teachers with the appropriate skills needed to teach and support learners with special educational needs in the classroom setting. In Lesotho, the training of teachers in special needs education to enable them to teach children who experience barriers to learning is an achieved milestone, given that teachers were not psychologically and academically prepared to deal with learners with disabilities. The teachers reportedly lacked skills in identifying and assessing children with special needs, which meant that children were susceptible to getting inappropriate treatment because of the teachers' incapacity to deal with them (Matobo and Matlosa, 2007; Mosia, 2014).

In 1991, GoL established the special education unit to support teachers with some skills despite being understaffed and grappling with a huge amount of work (Matobo and Matlosa, 2007). The authors further stated that MoET, with the office of the special education unit in ten districts of Lesotho, has been holding workshops designed to develop teachers' skills, enhance their teaching strategies, and support learners who face learning difficulties in mainstream school settings. MoET strongly supports the notion that learners with disabilities must be taught with their peers without disabilities and recognises the need to support all learners by equipping them with appropriate educational skills despite their disabilities (MoET, 2018). Khoaeane (2014) concurs with the notion that teachers are the key to the successful implementation of the inclusive education system, and in that manner, they need continuous support and some training to gain the knowledge to teach LVI. Thus, scholars like Mahlo (2011), Matlosa and Matobo (2007) and Mosia (2014) posit that many teachers have not been trained to teach learners who experience barriers to learning; hence, most of them find it difficult to support LVI.

In Lesotho, some learners experience barriers to learning, such as a lack of material needed in reading and writing in Braille, manipulating objects, exploring the environment, lack of teaching skills and approaches among primary school teachers (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2015; Mosia and Phasha, 2020). Some teachers find it challenging to address the learners' individual needs because teachers are inadequately trained to teach LVI (Mosia, 2014). As a result, the implementation of inclusive education in Lesotho has presented many difficulties,

especially for teachers in Lesotho's mainstream primary school system. Despite the efforts the Government of Lesotho made to promote educational inclusion by incorporating all learners into the mainstream school system, the number of learners with learning barriers increased in these inclusive schools (LNFOD, 2016). As a result, most learners with disabilities, including LVI, tend to drop out of school because they receive limited support from teachers (Suhlane, 2017). These could be explained by the limited number of teachers trained in special needs education and the insufficiency of teachers' skills and support needed to respond to the learners' special needs to enable them to achieve their full potential and thus overcome their learning barriers. It is envisaged that doing so will contribute to the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools in Lesotho. However, the current education system in Lesotho does not fully cater to the needs of learners with disabilities (Mosia, 2014). The school's communication system may exclude LVI due to a lack of teachers specialised in Braille (Shale, Lesotho Country Report, 2015). However, learners with disabilities face discrimination within their local communities and the education sector, which results in them, including LVI, dropping out of school and missing out on their opportunity to acquire formal education (LNFOD, 2016).

In Lesotho, the number of children with disabilities is growing, and most of these learners are aged between six and ten years old. Most learners in this age group drop out of school before completing Grade Seven, which is the milestone of primary education; this shows a significant decrease in attendance by LVI in Lesotho (World Bank Group, 2016). This relates to South African experience, where most primary schools have to cater to the needs of learners with multiple disabilities (Salie, Moletsane and Mukuna, 2020), meaning that learners from different backgrounds are in the same classrooms in selected primary schools in Lesotho's Maseru District; for example, there are learners from diverse economic backgrounds; there are those who underachieve and those who perform very well (Seotsanyane and Matheolane, 2010; Salie et al., 2020). However, teachers in Lesotho experience many challenges, such as teaching learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. Thus, many teachers are qualified to teach learners in mainstream schools but lack the necessary skills to teach learners experiencing learning barriers.

Furthermore, educational support services are resource-constrained and are unable to support learners with disabilities. Learning challenges are not appropriately met (Mangope, 2013). Therefore, this study explores how teachers' skills can be enhanced in supporting learners with LVI at the selected primary school in Maseru District, Lesotho. The crux of the matter is keeping LVI in the mainstream school system without understanding how their teachers navigate the terrain in terms of improving the learners' performance. This is unsustainable and morally objectionable because inclusivity goes beyond merely mixing learners and striving to ensure they get the best out of the arrangement. This proposed study serves to fill this gap.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1 Main research question

How can teachers' skills be enhanced to improve academic performance among learners with visual impairment in primary schools in Maseru District?

1.4.2 Secondary research questions

1. What challenges are encountered by teachers in teaching learners with visual impairment in selected primary schools in the Maseru District?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers in administering assessments to learners with visual impairment in selected primary schools in the Maseru District?
3. What strategies could be used to enhance teachers' skills in the selected mainstream primary schools in Maseru District?

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Aim

This study explores how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho.

1.5.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. To explore the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching learners with visual impairments in selected mainstream primary schools in the Maseru District
2. To explore the challenges teachers faced in administering assessments to learners with visual impairment in selected primary schools in the Maseru District.
3. To identify strategies to enhance teachers' skills to improve academic performance among learners with visual impairment in selected mainstream primary schools in Maseru District.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY THEORY

The study had its theoretical underpinnings in Albert Bandura's Perceived Self-Efficacy (PSE) Theory. This theory was developed in 1977 as a component of the Social Cognitive Theory. Bandura (1994) defined PSE as people's beliefs regarding their capabilities to produce designated performance levels that influence events affecting their lives. PSE was also used as the analytical framework to explore the relationship between teachers and learners, where teachers believe their learners can excel academically against all odds. Therefore, academic success is not solely the child's responsibility but the teacher's and both strive to fulfill their beliefs. Bandura (1997) emphasises that the self-efficacy belief is essential because it is centred on human functioning. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, behave, and motivate themselves (Bandura, 1994).

According to Bandura (1994), an individual's beliefs produce diverse effects through four major processes, which include: (i) mastery experience, whereby successes build a robust belief in one's efficacy and failures undermine it, especially if the failure occurs before a sense of efficacy is firmly established (ii) vicarious experience, which involves individuals seeing people like themselves succeeding through sustained effort, thus raising observers' belief that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities required for them to succeed; (iii) social persuasion, which involves strengthening people's beliefs that they (teachers) have what it takes to succeed; and (iv) modifying self-beliefs of efficacy, which involves reducing people's stress reactions and altering their negative emotional weaknesses and misinterpretations of their physical states (teachers' affective states such as stress, anxiety, and excitement when performing tasks).

Bandura (1994) introduced the concept of self-efficacy as one's belief in one's capabilities to reach the desired performance level. Research has shown that teachers with high self-efficacy improve learners' self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievements (Bandura, 1994; 1995). So, the PSE Theory highlights the importance of 'self-efficacy' in educational settings in different ways, demonstrating that those LVI characterised by positive self-efficacy aim to execute self-moving activities and look for a helping hand from their peers and teachers (Attwood, 2020). Hence, through this theory, the role teachers play in providing an environment for excelling among LVI at the selected primary school in Maseru District, Lesotho, will be explored. Therefore, this theory is considered suitable for this study as it helped the researcher understand that LVI's performance highly reflects their teachers' capabilities. It further helped the researcher to understand how teachers made teaching and learning easier by supporting LVI in their classroom settings through applying different teaching skills, as the theory emphasised the importance of self-efficacy in the school setting. Therefore, self-efficacy is a concept that can be associated with successful teaching skills. So, in the current study, teachers' self-efficacy refers to teachers' views of their ability to support LVI in primary schools.

1.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework underpinning this study is academic performance among LVI. Various scholars have attached different meanings to the concept 'learners' academic performance, which is closely related to LVI learning and development (Makweja, 2013; Morelle, 2016; Zelelew, 2016). Consequently, improvement in every learner's learning becomes apparent in the learner's holistic life and considered important in this study, for it enables LVI to develop self-efficacy skills as well as the emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual well-being needed for them to successfully achieve their desired goals.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The current study focuses on enhancing teachers' skills needed to support LVI in selected primary schools in Lesotho. The findings are expected to be significant to all stakeholders in

the education sector in Lesotho and similar settings in the global context. The study identified various challenges impeding efforts to improve teachers' support of LVI in resource-constrained settings such as primary schools in the Maseru District, Lesotho. The findings of this study will also add value to the existing body of knowledge on how to enhance inclusive education in resource-constrained settings such as primary schools in Lesotho. Further, it is hoped that the results of the study was beneficial to the parents of disadvantaged learners, as they will positively contribute to improving their children's academic performance. The results will create opportunities for all educational stakeholders to enhance teachers' skills to improve the academic performance of LVI by being grateful for what they have done well and thus encourage them to use and develop their strengths. So, the involvement of these stakeholders will improve learners' educational programmes too, and policymakers, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), and primary school teachers teaching LVI will display their competence in terms of improving their standard of teaching to accommodate all researchers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), school administrators, learners with and without disabilities, the community at large, and other stakeholders in fulfilling the needs of children with disabilities, particularly at primary school level. The study will also serve as a need-assessment tool for all those involved in integrating learners with special needs into mainstream schools.

1.9 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Research methodology concerns the research's theoretical and methodological underpinnings and the conceptualisation and justification of the procedures used to execute the research study (Creswell, 2018). The methodology section includes the research approach, design, and methods to gather data to achieve the set research objectives. The features of the methodology will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.9.1 Research approach

A qualitative research approach was employed in this study. This approach is usually in words and not numbers (Sharp, 2012; Maree, 2017). The researcher considered this approach

appropriate to this study because it is located within the domain of Educational Psychology. Mouton (2017) emphasised the importance of using qualitative approaches in education-related research because they allow participants to verbally contribute to topics of interest. Therefore, this proposed study explores how teachers' skills in supporting LVI can be enhanced in primary schools in Maseru District in Lesotho.

Research methods are activities or tools designed to gather and generate information in a research undertaking (Chiumento, Rahman, Machin, and Fifth, 2020). Creswell (2014) concurs with the view that research methods involve data collection, analysis, and interpretation, useful processes. This research aims to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools in Maseru District in Lesotho. In this study, the researcher chose research methods that would best enhance the achievement of the set objectives. The data collection methods were focus-group discussion, telephonic interviews, and the non-participatory observation method.

1.9.2 Research paradigm

This proposed study adopted an interpretive paradigm because it is concerned with understanding the world from individuals' subjective experiences (Khaldi, 2017). One of the advantages of using an interpretive paradigm in conducting this study was that it enabled the researcher to use meaning-oriented methodologies, such as interviewing or participant observation. These methods relied on a subjective relationship between the researcher and their subjects. This paradigm was, therefore, appropriate for this study as it assisted the researcher in exploring how teachers' skills can be enhanced in supporting LVI at selected primary schools in the Maseru District, Lesotho.

1.9.3 Research design

This study adopted an exploratory case-study design that encouraged the investigation of ways of enhancing teachers' skills in supporting LVI in selected primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho. Maree (2017) described a research design as a set of methods and procedures that enable the researcher to collect and analyse data. Maree (2017) further stated

that a design is a strategy that ensures that the components of a research problem are organised coherently and logically. This study adopted the case study design. Case studies are usually qualitative and aimed at providing an in-depth description of a small number of cases, usually less than 50 (Yin, 2017). So, this study's purpose of inquiry is exploratory. Therefore, it explores how teachers' skills in supporting LVI can be enhanced in selected primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho.

1.9.4 Research context and sampling

This study was conducted in two mainstream primary schools in Maseru District of Lesotho and this constituted the context of this research. The researcher purposively chose this location because purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify information-rich cases related to the phenomenon being studied (Polkinghorne, 2005; Denzi and Lincoln, 2018; Maree, 2017). In qualitative studies, participants are purposively sampled by the characteristics that make them relevant owners of data needed to address the research questions guiding the study (Maree, 2017). The schools were chosen based on their accessibility and proximity to the researcher's workplace; therefore, the schools were purposively selected to get in-depth and rich data, as they also integrated all learners, including LVI. Through purposive sampling, these mainstream primary schools in Maseru District and the participants (teachers) were selected for this study because they possessed in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2017; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Cohen et al. (2017) concur that purposive sampling involves choosing knowledgeable people with in-depth knowledge and understanding of the problem being investigated. Thus, the purposive sampling strategy is based on the researcher's judgement regarding who will provide the best information to achieve the goals of the study (Babbie, 2020).

Twelve teachers were purposively selected because they had in-depth knowledge of working with LVI daily (De Vos et al., 2018). The participants were also chosen as the sample size to ensure that only teachers teaching from Grade 1 to Grade 7 learners and working within selected primary schools that practised inclusion of all learners, including LVI, participated in this study. The participants were selected from both sexes (males and females), and teachers with three years or more of teaching experience were purposively selected to provide the

rich information needed for this inquiry (Neuman, 2014). Involving teachers as participants in this group helped the researcher to collect many aspects, as the researcher believed that due to their daily involvement with learners, teachers were exposed to many challenges that affect learners' academic performance. The teachers' views helped the researcher propose strategies to enhance teachers' skills. This research, therefore, used the purposive sampling technique (Cohen et al., 2017) to obtain a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation, as well as rich information concerning the participants' understanding of how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in the two selected primary schools in Lesotho.

1.9.5 Data collection

This qualitative research used in-depth interviews to elicit the relevant data from the participants. Maree (2017) stated that in-depth interviewing is a qualitative research method involving intensive individual interviews conducted with a few participants to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, programme, or situation. Interviews constitute the gold standard in qualitative research (Barbour, 2007). Depending on the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) regulations and guidelines prevailing during the data collection process, telephonic interviews are used to collect data as an alternative to traditional face-to-face interviews. This data collection method is appropriate for this study as it is a loosely structured interview. For example, questions about enhancing teachers' skills in supporting LVI in selected primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho, were asked. It allowed the interviewer and interviewee to freely explore additional points and change direction, if necessary, which helped the researcher collect rich and thick data. In this study, a FGD, semi-structured telephonic interviews, and classroom observations were chosen data collection methods.

1.9.6 Focus group discussion

A focus group discussion (FGD) was used to gather data as it facilitated an open discussion between the researcher and the research participants. The group comprised 12 participants to ensure full participation by each participant. According to Shumba (2018:78), "the use of focus group discussion as a data collection tool in social research is a firmly established

tradition within the ambit of the qualitative paradigm; hence, it resonates with the current study design.” This study adopted the FGD methods because participants in a group can debate about a specific issue and provide rich information in a short period (Mhlongo, 2017; Mosola, 2020). Therefore, the researcher interviewed a selected group of teachers separately to explore how their skills can be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools in Maseru District within a short period of time.

1.9.7 Semi-structured telephonic interviews

Depending on COVID-19 regulations and guidelines during data collection, telephonic interviews were used to collect data as an alternative to traditional face-to-face interviews. This data collection method (telephonic interviews) is appropriate for this study as it is a loosely structured interview (Halepota, 2014). For example, questions were asked about enhancing teachers’ skills in supporting LVI in selected primary schools in Maseru district, Lesotho. It allowed freedom for the interviewer and interviewee to explore additional points and change direction, if necessary, which helped the researcher to collect rich and thick data. Maree (2017) states that in-depth interviewing such as telephonic interviews is a qualitative research method involving intensive individual interviews with a few participants to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, programme, or situation. Interviews constitute the gold standard in qualitative research (Barbour, 2007).

1.9.8 Observation

In this study, non-participant observation was conducted in classrooms during teaching and learning processes to allow for the collection of more objective and reliable data. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), observation methods are used as an important tool for data collection that entailed well-planned watching, recording, and analysis of observed behaviours in a natural setting. In this study, the researcher observed one lesson per class, using a checklist reflecting aspects such as seating arrangements, resources used, teaching and learning strategies and, class participation for LVI, etc. These helped the researcher to understand how teachers of LVI explain and make sense of important events in their lives and schools’ environments (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010).

1.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an initial approach that the researcher should learn to provide the necessary skills to assist to conduct and differentiate qualitative research approaches. Thematic analysis entails a six-phase method, as Braun and Clarke (2017) recommended. The phases are familiarising with data, identifying codes, formulating meanings, generating themes, developing meanings of segments, and generating a report to provide a rich, detailed, yet complex account of data. This was considered ideal for this study. Thematic analysis is an initial approach that the researcher should learn to provide the necessary skills to help conduct different qualitative research approaches or data analyses. The researcher endeavoured to use Braun and Clarke's (2017) suggestion to generate the richest data. Overall, Braun and Clarke's (2017) approach helped to enrich the quality of data collected. The researcher first organised data to make meaning out of it and then identified codes from the FGD, semi-structured telephonic interview and non-participatory observation method to have a better understanding of the participants' perceptions on enhancing their skills in supporting LVI in a selected primary school in the Maseru District, Lesotho. So, in this study, FGD, semi-structured telephonic interview and non-participatory observation method are chosen as the research instruments.

1.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

The researcher considered the integrity of the study by ensuring that it gave authentic and worthwhile findings. The four pillars of trustworthiness are dependability, credibility, conformability, and transferability (Creswell, 2012). These pillars ensured that if the study is repeated with the same tools, it will yield almost similar findings; the instrument measures what it was supposed to measure, and all the steps undertaken in the research process are clear (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014).

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics are norms of conduct, presenting the difference between acceptable and unacceptable human behaviours (Resnik and Shampoo, 2015). All ethical processes and

protocols laid down by the University of the Free State (UFS) to regulate the conducting of social research are keenly observed and followed. Letters were written to the selected schools and the Department of Education seeking permission to conduct the study since this study involved their learners and teachers. Thereafter, the researcher sought consent from teachers who were part of the research. All research participants were given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. Participants were informed that they were at liberty to withdraw from the study should they anticipate inconveniences, and they were assured that no unfavourable consequences would emanate from such a decision. They were requested to sign informed consent forms, indicating that they understood participation was voluntary and the implications of participating in the study (NESH, 2016).

1.13 KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

This study defines the various keywords: visual impairment, inclusive education, academic performance, LVI; and teachers' skills.

- (i) Visual impairment or low vision is a severe reduction in vision and a condition that cannot be corrected with standard glasses or contact lenses. It also reduces a person's ability to perform certain tasks. Mboshi (2018) summarises visual impairment as being a four-way condition. These are:
- (ii) Totally blind: This means the individual receives no useful information through the sense of vision and must use tactile and auditory senses to enhance learning. This is severe impairment.
- (iii) Functionally blind: This means learners learn mostly through other senses but may be able to use vision to supplement information received from other senses. Learners would still need to use Braille to learn to read. Functional vision cannot be measured using visual field and visual activity tests.
- (iv) Low-vision learners: Such learners primarily use vision as a means of learning and with magnifying devices. They may learn to use print (this is mild to moderate impairment).

- (v) Visual efficiency: It refers to how well a person uses whatever vision is present. This includes controlling eye movement to discriminate objects from their background and paying attention to impairment details (Yao and Prosper, 2011).
- (vi) Academic performance: Scholars agree that learners' academic achievement is a net result of their cognitive and non-academic attributes (Lee and Shute, 2010; Lee and Stankov, 2016), and the socio-cultural context in which the learning process takes place (Liem and McInerney, 2018; Liem and Tan, 2019). According to Kell, Lubinski, and Benbow (2013), academic achievement is considered the most important outcome of a formal educational system, which plays a critical role in a learner's life and later (Kell et al., 2013). Masud et al. (2019) explain academic performance as embedded in the several components of academic success. Many factors influence academic performance, including socioeconomic status, learner attitude, motivation, peer mentality, teacher relevance, and parental support.
- (vii) Inclusive education system: This involves transforming the whole education system, which involves legislation and policy systems for financing, administering, designing, delivering, and monitoring education and how schools are organised (UNICEF, 2017). According to MoET (2018), inclusive education refers to addressing and responding to the various needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It ensures that all children, including those experiencing barriers to learning, receive quality education in general education classroom settings (MoET, 2018).
- (viii) Teachers' skills: The term teachers' skills that enable a teacher to (a) increase learner learning, achievement, and the ability to apply knowledge; (b) effectively convey and explain academic subject matter; (c) effectively teach higher-order, analytical valuation, problem-solving and communication. Teaching skills are the abilities a teacher must develop to succeed in education. These abilities include disposition, emotional intelligence, classroom management, communication of knowledge of content, and curriculum knowledge (Rocha and Cardoso, 2021).

1.14 THE DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was situated in Educational Psychology, which focuses on a child's holistic development. For this purpose, the researcher explored how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District of Lesotho. It is hoped that the study will improve the academic performance of LVI. All stakeholders in the education sector will benefit from the findings of the study; in particular, LVI in primary schools and their teachers will be able to identify the challenges LVI faced in the mainstream classroom. Further, teachers should be able to remediate LVI to overcome their problems and reach their potential like their peers without disabilities. This enables them to complete their primary school education enrol in the high school sector and further their studies up to the tertiary level until they become employable professionals. Therefore, they are hoped to become cooperative and full community members.

1.15 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Firstly, the limitation of this study is that it is based on the sample selection, which covers one district, Maseru District. However, the reason for choosing the two schools in the district was their uniqueness of being the only schools admitting learners with low and total blindness (LVI). School A is a boarding school, which accommodates LVI from the ten districts of Lesotho because this school is the only one in the country which accommodates LVI in boarding school. It is the only school of its nature among the primary schools in Lesotho. Therefore, School A is feeding to School B. Secondly, the time taken to interview the participants and to observe the lessons was also a limitation. It would be helpful if the researcher had an assistant teacher to lend a helping hand in those schools where the research took place. However, the nature of the research being a qualitative research study is that the researcher had to be there in the natural setting, which is the classroom situation in the context of this study, where the participants would share their views under investigation, to

be there when the whole teaching and learning process took place from the beginning of the lesson to its end.

1.16 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

The study consists of six chapters, which are:

Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study

This chapter provides the introduction and background to the research problem, as well as the significance of the study. It presents the research questions that guide this study, the aim and objectives of the study, an overview of the theoretical framework, research design, and methodology underpinning the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on the literature reviewed in previous studies conducted on the topic of interest, highlighting the same problem and proposing solutions to the problem.

Chapter 3: Review of a theoretical framework

The chapter outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Bandura's (1977) Perceived Self-Efficacy Theory was used to understand how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools in Maseru's District of Lesotho.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

This chapter focuses on the methodology used to collect data. The chapter details the data collection process, describing the research design and paradigm, among other nuances of the study's research methodology.

Chapter 5: Presentation of research findings

This chapter analyses data generated through the three data collection methods: focus group discussions, telephonic interviews, and non-participatory observation. Thematic analysis was done through data coding to present and discuss the research findings, highlighting themes related to the research questions.

Chapter 6: Summary of the findings, recommendations, and implications for future research

This last chapter concludes the study by presenting a summary and conclusions based on the research findings. It further proffers recommendations for future research.

1.17 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This introductory chapter has presented a brief background to the study, including the rationale for the study, the problem statement relating to the study, the key research questions guiding the investigation of the phenomenon being studied, and the study's objectives. The theoretical and conceptual framework and the significance of the study were also presented. The chapter further gave an overview of the research design and methodology underpinning the study. It also presented the prominent aspects included in the research paradigm and approach, research style, sampling technique, data generation, analysis methods, and ethical considerations. The next chapter reviews the literature that contextualises and frames this study. The literature review helps the researcher explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District in Lesotho.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature review seeks to discover what prior research has established regarding the issues around the topic, and by doing so, the researcher can discover the gaps in the reviewed research work (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The chapter articulates the different scholarly points of view to give the reader an in-depth understanding of visual impairment (VI) and its impact on the child's learning process. It also provides a global and regional picture of the challenges currently being encountered by teachers in teaching learners with visual impairment (LVI). The challenges and strategies were discussed to enhance teachers' skills to improve academic performance among LVI. The study sought to investigate how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI. The next section reviews the literature on 'visual impairment' definition.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF 'LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT'

2.2.1 Defining Visual Impairment

One of the factors that cause the individual difficulties with normal daily tasks, including walking and reading, is a loss of vision, known as visual impairment (VI). It should be noted from the onset that the terms low vision and blindness are often used. Although many people have a general idea of what VI means, several definitions have appeared in extant literature over the years. For example, VI is a term used to describe any kind of vision loss (Rein, et al., (2022). It refers to a condition when someone cannot see or has partial vision loss. In other words, some people are completely blind, while others may have legal blindness (Rein et al., 2022). Legal blindness is a term defined by the United States Social Security Administration (SSA) to determine those who are eligible to receive disability benefits and rehabilitation training (Lee and Mesfin, 2020). One is considered legally blind if one has a central visual acuity of 20/200 or worse in the better-seeing eye with the best correction (using glasses or contact lenses) at a distance or if one has a visual field restriction where the widest diameter is 20

degrees or less in the better-seeing eye (Lee and Mesfin, 2020). The nature and degree of VI may vary significantly among learners, and each learner may require individual adaptations to instructional practices and teaching-learning materials to learn effectively (Morris, 2014).

Moreover, VI is primarily measured based on an individual's better eye visual acuity without treatment such as correctable eyewear (Josua and Ford, 2022). The American Academy of Ophthalmology (2022) defines VI as the best-corrected visual perception of less than 20/40 in the better eye, while the World Health Organization [WHO] (2006) also considers it as presenting acuity of less than 6/12 in the better eye. Additionally, Odame et al. (2021) contend that VI is the complete or parallel loss of one's ability to see. It refers to losing part or all of one's ability to see. The impairment must persist even with eyeglasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery (Odame et al., 2021). The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] (2013) asserts that a visually impaired person's eyesight cannot be corrected to the normal level. However, for this study, the researcher adopts the definitions of VI given above, since they seem to have the same theme which falls under Mosola's (2020) definition of VI; that it is viewed as a partial or total inability of visual perception.

Therefore, from the explanations above, it can be said that VI is one of the most common problems in the local communities we live in (Mosola, 2020). It tends to be a very complex, challenging and multi-dimensional concept to define. Besides that, in the absence of treatment such as assistive devices, corrective eyewear and medical treatment, VI may make it difficult for individual LVI to either learn effectively in the mainstream classroom or perform well in examinations. Mosola (2020:13) further indicated that "LVI are the ones who have problems carrying out visual tasks or activities". LVI could have missed out on many visual experiences compared to other learners with normal vision (Mosola, 2020). Therefore, teachers must adapt inclusive processes of lesson delivery to accommodate all learners.

2.2.2 Causes of visual impairment

Globally, there are various causes of VI and blindness in children. The most common causes have shifted over the years, creating an increasingly complex image of the population (Ulla et al., 2009). Macheli (2007) and Mosola (2020) The main causes of VI in children include disease and poor nutrition (Macheli, 2007; Mosola, 2020). Similarly, Spec-Saver (2022) postulates that

people with high-stress levels, poor diet, family history, high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease, and heavy computer users are some of the causes of VI. In addition, “visual problems are caused by gonorrhoea, dry eyes, trachoma, measles, eye injuries, and brain damage” (Mosola, 2020: 14).

Overall, VI and blindness caused by infectious diseases have decreased during the last 30 years through factors such as overall socio-economic development, concerted public health actions such as vaccinations, increased availability of eye care services, and increased awareness about solutions to problems related to VI such as surgery or refraction devices (WHO, 2017). Globally, fewer children have become totally blind today; instead, low vision, combined with additional neurological impairments, has become far more common (de Verdier, 2018). One reason behind this is the increased survival of extremely preterm-born children, with brain lesions as the underlying cause (de Verdier, 2018).

Bornman and Rose (2017) assert that the causes of VI can be divided into three major categories, namely uncorrected refractive errors (43%), cataracts (33%), and glaucoma (2%). Others show that refractive errors include far-sightedness, near-sightedness, astigmatism, and presbyopia (Fact Sheet, 2014). Furthermore, Specsavers Optics (2022/2023) clarifies that cataracts are the most common cause of blindness. Cataracts entail any cloudiness or opacity in the eye’s lens. A healthy lens is clear and allows light entering the eye to focus an image clearly on the retina (Specsavers Optics, 2022/2023).

If a person has a cataract, the light rays scatter or are blocked as they pass through the cloudy lens, distorting and blurring the image (Specsavers Optics, 2022/2023). However, no direct link has been established regarding the development of cataracts. The problem can be a culmination of age, heredity, disease, or damage to the eye, which triggers the chemical change inside the eye that turns the lens cloudy, resulting in cataracts (Specsavers Optics, 2022/2023). Research shows that both eyes are usually affected, but not at the same rate. For this reason, no one currently knows how to prevent the formation of cataracts. However, protecting the eyes from ultraviolet (UV) exposure is recommended (Specsavers Optics, 2022/2023).

According to Specsavers Optics (2022/2023), in glaucoma, blindness is caused when pressure builds up inside the eyeball, damaging the retina and optic nerve. It is difficult to identify

glaucoma until a significant amount accumulates. It is often referred to as the “silent thief”, because most individuals with undiagnosed glaucoma do not suffer from any early symptoms (Lee and Mackey, 2022). Specsavers Optics (2022/2023) further indicates that it takes testing by an optometrist to identify glaucoma. Therefore, one should have their eyes checked regularly. Glaucoma is most common in people over the age of 40 years, and regular full eye examinations are vital. Thus, short-sighted people and diabetics are more prone to develop glaucoma. There are two kinds of glaucoma: (i) Primary open-angle glaucoma: which produces no pain and little noticeable disturbance in vision; without warning, you may have lost some vision before any symptoms appear. (ii) Acute angle-closure glaucoma: This is caused by a sudden blockage of the eye’s drainage passages. Pressure builds up quickly, vision becomes blurred, lights appear to have coloured rings around them, and eyes are painful and red. If the glaucoma can be controlled, it results in little or no more vision loss. If not treated, peripheral and central vision will be destroyed, and blindness may result (Specsavers Optics, 2022/2023), as well as hinder learning. Other disorders that may cause visual problems include heredity, premature birth, trauma, and problems in the brain due to stroke, among others. Therefore, learners’ visual problems may differ according to their causes and severity (Mosola, 2020).

From what the authors say about VI, heredity, environmental factors, and other unknown factors contribute to VI. Schools struggle to provide an optimal learning environment, and thus, LVI perform poorly. Hence, this research concentrates on exploring how teachers’ skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District. The identification, screening, and assessment of LVI are discussed in the next sections.

2.2.3 Identifying, screening, and assessing learners with visual impairment

According to Mosola (2020), learners who have visual problems may display certain behaviours or may complain about what they can or cannot see, and this should be considered by classroom teachers working with such learners because having identified a learner’s problem will assist in employing appropriate teaching strategies in the classroom. According to Bornman and Rose (2017), the following behaviours may alert a teacher to the existence of possible visual impairments in a learner: failure to make good eye-contact with others,

under-reaching or over-reaching objects, holding reading materials too close or too far from the face, squinting the eyes, relying on sound indications to help locate objects, as well as clumsy movements.

Some scholars suggest that regular screening and eye examinations are important because having a vision corrected can improve the quality of day-to-day life (Matobako, 2021; Mosola, 2020). In this study, the researcher suggests that a timely referral for formal clinical diagnostic evaluation may improve a child's future vision, function and educational achievement. According to the World Health Organization [WHO] (2006), screening and assessing for impaired visual acuity in primary care settings can identify whether the learners with vision problems are in one of the categories, namely blindness and low vision. Commonly, the VI test may incorporate Snellen's chart and log MAR chart as tools to measure the clarity of eyesight. Based on the tools used to assess VI, blindness ranges from being totally without sight to unreliable vision and primary reliance on other senses (WHO, 2006). A person with blindness usually uses Braille as a reading and writing medium (WHO, 2017).

2.3 GLOBAL PREVALENCE OF VISION IMPAIRMENT AND BLINDNESS

2.3.1 Vision impairment among learners worldwide

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2023), at least 2.2 billion people have near or distant vision impairment worldwide. At least 82% of blind individuals are over the age of 50 years, translating to most people living with visual impairment or blindness being adults or older (Pascolini and Mariotti, 2012). Approximately 19 million children under the age of 15 years live with VI or blindness worldwide (Altaf, Kawish and Anwar, 2017). Out of these, 12 million have VI due to uncorrected refractive errors, and 1.4 million are incurably blind for the rest of their lives and need rehabilitation mediation for full psychological and personal development (Altaf et al., 2017). Approximately 6.8 of learners younger than 18 years have a diagnosed eye and vision condition, defined as having trouble seeing even wearing glasses or contact lenses in the United States of America (WHO, 2023).

Research shows that four more school children are diagnosed with sight loss daily in England and Wales (WHO, 2023). Many of these visual problems are due to refractive errors that could be easily diagnosed and corrected with available resources (WHO, 2017). Young children with an early onset of severe vision impairment can experience delayed motor, language, emotional, social, and cognitive development, with lifelong consequences. School-age children with vision impairment can also experience lower levels of educational achievement (WHO, 2019). In most cases, assistive resources are often unavailable since most children live in developing countries (WHO, 2017). A small proportion of children with VI, around 1.4 million, are irreversibly blind (WHO, 2017).

Notably, most children with blindness worldwide live in the poorest countries of Africa and Asia (Babu, 2020). In very low-income countries with high under-5-year-old mortality rates, the prevalence was estimated to be 1.5% of children with VI per 1000 children without visual impairment, while in high-income countries with low under-5-year-old mortality rates, the prevalence was much lower, around 0.3 of children with visual impairment per 1000 children (Gilbert, 2007). In Sweden, children with VI and blindness have since the 1990s been reported to a national register (Blohme and Torngvist, 1997). According to the register, in 1997, literal Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH) surpassed Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) as the leading cause of infant blindness in Sweden (Blohme and Torngvist, 1997). In a status report from the year 2000, around ten children per year were reported to have complete blindness or such limited vision that they became Braille readers (Blohme-Stigmar and Tornqvist, 2000). Approximately the percentage of LVI in Sweden was 0.15% compared to the percentage of non-disabled children and young people (United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, 2017). In Lesotho, the total enrolment of learners, including LVI in registered primary schools, was 18,282 in 2016 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016; Monyane, 2020). As a result, it is certain that nearly all teachers, including regular primary school teachers, will find LVI in their regular classes.

Given this background, there seems to be no doubt that the rate of VI in all regions of the world is high. Looking at how high VI among young school children is in countries such as Asia, Sweden, the United States of America, and most poor countries in Africa, it is very clear

that more needs to be done to make their visually impaired lives easier. Therefore, greater focus is needed on increasing care and support for people with VI.

2.4 A GLOBAL VIEW ON EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

2.4.1 International perspective on education for LVI

Research shows that although the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) calls for countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Sternberg et al., 2018), LVI are faced with varying challenges that impede them from gaining the opportunity for a full social life, including education (Wilson, 2016). Inclusive quality education has been recognised as an ideology for achieving equality, justice, and quality education for all children, especially those excluded from mainstream schools because of disability and other characteristics (Mbosh, 2018). Various policies and strategies have been applied worldwide to improve the quality of education that learners, including LVI, receive. However, in this section, references will be made to the international context, focusing on developed countries as such as the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, regionally (Africa), and Lesotho.

2.4.1.1 *United Kingdom*

Previous research conducted by Castro and Palikara (2016) asserts that in the United Kingdom – a country in Europe, the Children and Families Act of 2014 changed how support for children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), including LVI should be assessed and provided for, emphasising their function needs as well as their medical diagnoses. Despite implementing various policies and practical capacities that support inclusive education in the UK, LVI faces challenges in accessing education in mainstream schools (Bishop and Third, 2011).

In addition, it is indicated that LVI have difficulties acquiring a range of social skills that allow the development of autonomy and independence (Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Hess, 2015).

This means that teachers who wish to effectively include LVI are responsible for promoting their social skills and fostering their autonomy at primary schools (Hess, 2015). According to McLinden et. al. (2017), in the United Kingdom (UK), the Braille format used in one university seemed to be unfamiliar to the students. In addition, it is indicated that LVI faced challenges in accessing information when teachers used gestures. The conclusion drawn from the study by Matobako (2021:36) is that “LVI also battled to follow long equations, even when they were read aloud, which is a challenge posed by memory”, and that appeared to have perpetuated their exclusion.

However, educational support for LVI has been identified by different researchers as a positive strategy to enhance the inclusion of these learners in regular schools as it promotes participation and improves the academic performance of learners (Habulezi, Batsalelwang and Malatsi, 2017). Furthermore, research shows that while there is a great need to enhance teachers’ skills to improve academic performance among LVI, research (Maraisane, (2020) explains how teachers lack the knowledge, competence, and skills required to improve LVI performance (Whitburn, 2014; Ralejoe, 2019; Maine, 2022). Furthermore, to achieve the aim of enhancing teachers’ skills to improve academic performance among LVI, a conducive classroom environment, teacher support, and training, as well as the required teaching aids, are very important (Ramatea and Khanare, 2021). Individualised learning and developing strategies to improve academic performance with other learners are vital to promoting learning for visually impaired learners (Mosola, 2020). It means that LVI categorised as educationally blind need constant support from special education teachers.

Bishop and Rhind (2011) state that LVI generally have negative attitudes towards their impairment and to challenges from the inappropriate institutional provision, external support, and others’ attitudes. Similarly, Knound (2010) study asserts that attitudes from the community in general and those of teachers, peers, and parents influence the overall development of LVI. Thus, including LVI in mainstream schools encourages learners without disabilities to accept their peers without labeling them (Lebona, 2020). McLinden et al. (2017) argue that LVI in tertiary institutions are no exception. They argue that in developing an inclusive learning environment for LVI in higher education (HE), higher education institutions

(HEIs) should make some adaptations to enable LVI to access education. However, there was a lack of hopeful adjustments, which created barriers.

2.4.1.2 Australia

Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, intending to eliminate the barriers that exclude or marginalise learners with disabilities from accessing education by embracing an inclusive education approach that promotes equal and active participation of all people with disability (Forlin, Chambers, Loreman, Deppeler and Sharman, 2023). However, Opice's (2018) study revealed that teachers' lack of understanding of LVI, limits Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) delivery and restricts access to Specialist Visiting Teachers (SVTs), which is a bottleneck. Building on the same idea, Whitburn (2014) indicates that LVIs experience unfriendly treatment in mainstream schools in Australia. This treatment seems to have contributed to LVI's exclusion in teaching and learning.

Other problems experienced by teachers in the Australian school environments stem from learners' lack of belief in their abilities, effort, and capabilities, highlighting that some learners lose confidence in their abilities due to bad test results and test scores that do not improve (Hardman, 2008). In these cases, it becomes difficult for learners to understand their learning content. They also develop anxiety about making mistakes. According to Simon (2010), most Australian schools do not have appropriate teaching and learning resources to help LVI learn better in an inclusive classroom setting. Furthermore, parents' lack of involvement in their children's education brings negative attitudes. The findings revealed that teachers' limited knowledge of teaching in an inclusive classroom comprising LVI is a major challenge (Simon, 2010). Support for LVIs requires adjustment, modification, and adaptation of curriculum and appropriate teaching methods, as well as good relationships between teachers and learners to work collaboratively (Habulezi and Phasha, 2012). The teacher needs to understand learners' beliefs in their abilities and efforts to motivate them, which may enable them to get better academic results (Hardman, 2008).

2.4.2 A regional perspective

Inclusive education has been defined in different ways by different African scholars. Opertti and Zhang (2014) propose that four core ideas globally relate to the continually evolving journey towards inclusion: a human rights-based perspective, a response to children with special needs, a response to marginalised groups, and a transformation of education systems. Inclusive education is a “learning environment that promotes the full personal, academic, and professional development of all learners irrespective of race, class, gender, disability, religion, culture, sexual orientation, learning styles, and language,” (Du Plessis 2013: 78). Inclusive education has also focused on ensuring that all children in schools are not only present (educated), but that they adequately participate and achieve in schools (MoET, 2018). Inclusive education provides real learning opportunities for traditionally excluded groups, including children with VI.

In Zimbabwe, inclusive education is not specifically defined as a stipulated service or policy. Still, it is implied in the country’s constitution, which enshrines education as a basic and universal right for all children, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). The Government of Botswana developed an Inclusive Education Policy in 2011 to enhance access, participation, and quality of education for all learners in the country (Government of Botswana, 2011). One study conducted in selected primary schools located in the South-Central Region, Botswana, among school heads, learners with disabilities, and their peers found that teachers were inadequately trained in special education and that most of the teachers preferred to include learners with mild disabling conditions compared with learners with severe disabling conditions (Mukhopadhyay et al.2012). Further,as cited by Mukhopadhyay, et al., (2012) the lack of resources and high teacher-learner ratio, has rendered implementation of inclusive learning cumbersome.

South Africa adopted the inclusive education policy in 2001, which outlines procedures for providing education support for learners who experience barriers to learning and development (Mpu and Adu, 2021). However, challenges have also been reported in implementing inclusive education in South Africa, including a lack of clarity in the policy and

poor implementation (Donohue and Bornman, 2014). Mpu and Adu (2021) found that learners faced various challenges in the transition to inclusive learning, including poor physical infrastructure, feelings of neglect by teachers, and stigma. The main barriers to learning are a lack of knowledge about diversity, rigid and poor teaching methods, and inconvenient learning environments with a lack of identification processes and inadequate assessment procedures (Mosia, 2014). In this regard, teachers find it difficult to accommodate LSEN and VI in inclusion and drive them to change schools instead of modifying the school to the needs of learners (Kabeto, 2015).

The education of learners with impairment has a relatively recent history in Ethiopia (Zezelew 2016). In the early 1920s, formal special education started with missionaries taking a guide, with the first special school for LVIs established by missionaries in 1925 (Johnsen and Alemayehu, 2007). Until the 1990s, the only higher education institution that provided integrated education for learners with and without impairment at the degree level was the Addis Ababa University (AAU) and higher institutions contributed to an increase in the number of students enrolled in undergraduate programmes (Zezelew, 2016). Putting aside the increase in enrolment in Ethiopia, the education of LVI was challenging because the Ethiopian education policy lacked clarity about the practical delivery of support to students (MoE, 2006). Many gaps have been identified in providing appropriate systems for LVI as put down in the principles of the Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and the Salamanca Framework for Action that the Ethiopian Government ratified (MoE, 2006).

In many cases, teachers are not equipped to work with LVI, use of assistive devices, curriculum differentiation, and difficulty adapting teaching methods (Negash and Gasa, 2022). However, to teach learners with diverse backgrounds, teachers need to have the relevant knowledge, skills, and the best attitude toward diversity (Salie, Moletsane and Mukuna, 2020; Negash and Gasa, 2022). Teachers may rely on such strategies as implementing hands-on learning, keeping rules similar for everyone, teaching from the concrete to abstract level, and talking out loud when writing on the writing board (Beni, Stears and James, 2017). Negash (2017) asserts that it is highly dependent on the attitudes and skills of the teacher, but

teachers may not have enough previous experience in teaching LVI. In this regard, it is important to be well prepared for any transition, from grade to grade or from high school to the tertiary level.

2.4.3 Inclusive learning in Lesotho

Disabled people in Lesotho are among the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the country. They are often forced to depend on relatives or other caretakers (LNFOD, 2016). According to the Lesotho Demographic Survey (2001), 4.2% of the population has some form of disability, and about one-third is children under 15 years old. However, due to unreliable data, these statistics do not objectively present the situation, magnitude, and prevalence of disability in Lesotho.

Teaching LVI in the mainstream sometimes gives fewer natural learning experiences. This aligns with the fact that LVI cannot see objects and interactions. This affects some learning areas, such as developing concepts, interpersonal communication skills, life skills, orientation and mobility, and academic development (Albert, 2010). Lombardi et al. (2017) emphasises that much learning typically depends on and occurs visually. He then highlights that development is delayed when visual impairment occurs in early life. Lombardi et al. (2017) say that one's ability to see gives one tremendous ability to access and learn about the world. An emotionally secure school atmosphere is essential for learners' growth and creative expression (Mosola, 2020).

LNFOD (2016) states that regardless of the efforts the government of Lesotho has made to ensure that people with disabilities are included in their communities, some learners with disabilities continue to drop out of school because of the learning environment, which fails to cater to their needs. The scarcity of resources contributes immensely to hindering the smooth learning among LVI in Lesotho rural schools (Ramatea and Khanare, 2021). One of the major contributory factors is the challenge of inaccessible buildings. The physical environment among LSEN in Lesotho schools is challenging (Lebona, 2020; Matlosa and

Matobo, 2007; Monyane, 2020). Many buildings in tertiary institutions in Lesotho are not accessible for students with disabilities (Mosia and Phasha, 2017). So, this challenge is not limited to primary schools; it is also prevalent in higher education institutions. Mosia and Phasha (2017) indicated that without an independent budget, services to students with disabilities are negatively affected. In this case, within educational institutions, the learning environment should be pleasant and user-friendly to LVI. Classrooms should be well equipped with proper furniture, seating arrangements, tables, heating and cooling equipment, and teaching and learning materials. As a result, the availability of proper materials, infrastructure, and facilities would help teachers in enhancing their skills and learning among LVI.

2.5 POLICY LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN LESOTHO

2.5.1 Inclusive policies as the practices to provide academic support

Policy documents are very important because they reflect the government's decision-making process, they demonstrate government accountability for the services delivered; they shape societal viewpoints and actions and record a society's progress and change over time (Udoba, 2014). Therefore, having the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy in Lesotho is a milestone towards achieving many global initiatives to ensure equal and quality learning opportunities to people with special needs. Maringa and Phachaka (2011) state that a brief policy statement on special education was published by Lesotho's Ministry of Education in 1989. The policy statement was then followed by establishing the Special Education Unit within the Ministry of Education in 1991. A feasibility study was conducted in 1993, and it was involved in the beginning of a pilot inclusive programme in 10 schools in the 10 districts of Lesotho. The pilot programme evaluation was done in 1996. After evaluation, the programme was then extended to all the schools in ten (10) districts, and the process was done in stages. The Education Act of 2010 was a key milestone in developing education for all children. The Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy was launched in (2018) by the Minister in the Ministry of Education and Training, Professor Ntoi Rapapa. The Government of Lesotho tried to provide equal education to all learners in primary schools, irrespective of their disabilities, by introducing free and compulsory education in Lesotho (Lesotho Education Act, 2010).

Various international declarations influenced the growth of inclusive education in Lesotho. The major convention policies and declarations include The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975); The International Year of the Disabled (1981); The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA, Jomtien, Thailand, 1990); The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation for Persons with Disabilities (1993); The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (Salamanca, Spain, 1994); The World Education Forum; The Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, Dakar, Senegal, 2000), and the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The main aim of these policies and declarations was the agreement to ensure that people with disabilities and without disabilities are treated equally, go to school together and learn in an inclusive teaching and learning environment, have fun together, and live happily in their communities (Maringa and Pachaka, 2011). Further, MoET committed to ensuring that every learner with special needs is given the special treatment required by their different conditions (Lesotho Education Act, 2010). Therefore, the Government of Lesotho tried to provide equal education to all.

Inclusive schools in Lesotho should train teachers to promote the inclusion of LVI. Furthermore, IE policy should include provision of the needs of learners without disabilities to provide support to promote inclusive education. Further, considering the importance of teachers' knowledge and skills in promoting inclusive education, research should focus on how such training could be provided to teachers (Asamoah et al., 2018; Ralejoe, 2019).

2.5.2 Inclusive education: A Philosophy

According to MoET (2018), inclusive education (IE) refers to addressing and responding to the different needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning cultures and communities, and mitigating exclusion within and from education. It ensures that all children, including those who experience barriers to learning, receive quality education in general education classroom settings (Education Act, 2010; MoET, 2018). IE is critical in the education sector, and currently, it is the pillar of the learning and teaching system that accommodates all learners (Albert, 2010; Mosia, 2014). The integration of LSEN and LVI ensures that all the

learners' success is equal and of the same quality (MoET, 2018), regardless of their disabilities. This means that every child has a right to education, and the responsibility of perceiving and handling themselves and others with dignity to improve their academic performance.

The purpose of including LVI in the mainstream is to ensure that all the learners are provided with an enabling environment that is suitable for teaching and learning while at the same time providing all learners in the same classroom with opportunities that are relevant for all to realise their potentials (LNFOD, 2016). The inclusion of LVI in the mainstream setting is a lifesaver to the parents and LSEN, too, by acknowledging that every child and their families have the right to access equal and high-quality education (MoET, 2018). Therefore, it is designed to eliminate any obstacle hindering every child's full acceptance and learning. It is regarded that most of the problems are associated with social and cultural attitudes and practices.

IE comes from policy imperatives for courses in inclusive education in countries where IE has been adopted (Forlin, 2012). The 'training model to prepare teachers for many regions is underpinned by international and or local legislation and policy' (MoET, 2018: 64). While the policy may play an important role in securing the place of IE in teacher education programmes, there may also be good reasons to assist policy as the primary determinant of knowledge selection for IE in pre-service teacher education (Forlin, 2012). Liasidou (2012:33) argues that policies are transitory and usually represent 'contradictory discourses' that can be interpreted in various ways. Forlin (2012) further cautions against policy being too directive in a curriculum because universities must be able to modify courses in response to the different needs of their learners. Though legislation and policies play a vital role in promoting IE, there is still a gap in teachers' knowledge acquisition (Kuyini et al., 2016), appropriate to address the special educational needs of learners with visual impairment.

2.6 LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND BLINDNESS IN THE MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM SETTING

Regarding academic support, formal and informal support structures should be provided to include LVI most effectively (Zeleeuw, 2016). Zeleeuw (2016) further states that informal and formal academic support includes personal tutor support and support from teaching and non-

teaching staff. Salisbury (2008) suggests that support staff can be a valuable resource for LVI. The reason is that for most learners with disabilities, the key to academic performance in class lies in having suitable adaptations, accommodations, and adjustments to the instructional methods and other classroom activities. A visually impaired learner who studies in mainstream public primary schools experiences several obstacles, such as the absence of accessible content, lack of sensitive and trained personnel, and lack of concern regarding advancements in support technologies, which render primary education difficult to access for LVI (Annie et al., 2015). The researcher argues that appropriate learning support strategies must be implemented in schools for LVI to facilitate access, participation, and success in learning. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by focusing on how enhancing teachers' skills can improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools in Lesotho.

According to Tugli et al. (2013), when teaching LVI or blind learners, the curriculum and the teaching approach must be modified to meet the needs of these learners. For example, when the teacher is delivering education in art teaching, the teacher may depend more on tactile experiences, such as modeling using clay, rather than drawing or colouring (Tugli et al., 2013). The teacher should be very reliable when selecting and using effective and adequate educational methods, which largely depend on the teaching objectives and the needs of learners (Ntšeli, 2021). Makhate (2020) argues that some methods or approaches may require more time and could greatly impact the performance of the LVI in the end. Yet, other pedagogical methods are quick and easy to apply and give just an adequate amount of balance in the classroom setting (Demirologen et al., 2018). Tugli et al. (2013) describe the individualised education programme (IEP) as the basic and important component of special education programmes, including that of LVI and different disabilities. The programme comprises individual elements that act as the roadmap, determining the present state of the learner, where the learner needs to get, and how the learner is expected to get there (Mitchell, 2008). IEP must cover important information concerning the child's goals, which should be upgraded at least once yearly (Tugli et al., 2013). Setting goals lays out what the learner is expected to learn in the following year, including academic and other important functional skills (Zeleeuw, 2016).

The researcher argues that the tactile learning system is one of the important skills that can improve learners' academic performance, including that of LVI. A tactile learning system is a teaching approach that employs learning through the senses, especially through the sense of touch (Zezelew, 2016). When teaching LVI, teachers should be aware of integrating tactile learning experiences as much as possible since it positively impacts the learning outcome (Mak, 2008). For example, rather than discussing a watch when teaching time and providing images of time, the teacher should have a physical watch accessible in the classrooms for the learners to touch and feel. According to Butler et al. (2016), this type of learning method is vital in assisting LVI to overcome classroom challenges and finally, challenges in real life.

Giving out projected sound during instruction seems one of the simplest and most cost-effective ways of improving LVI's learning environment and academic performance (Agesa, 2014). The researcher argues that this approach helps learners listen to the instructions or lessons often to ensure that they understand what the teacher expects them to do. Agesa (2014) argues that the teacher may encourage LVI to record instructions using their phones, and a free download can be processed later. Thus, collectively, a projected sound during instructions can improve the learning outcome among LVI (Agesa, 2014).

The researcher argues that sometimes LVI may require additional time to complete their assignments and tasks or during assessments. Generally, this is because reading through Braille or applying certain technologies may take longer than learning in a regular classroom. However, teachers can allocate more time to LVI to complete their work. Tugli (2013) argues that it is not appropriate for LVI to use their vision as an excuse to delay doing their work and handing it in on time. Therefore, teachers should set deadlines and ensure that the learners adhere to them. Generally, adapting the teaching and learning environment is at the core of successful inclusive education (Mosia, 2014). If the environment in which learning occurs is not supportive among LSEN, their learning will automatically be interrupted (Kabeto, 2015).

Research shows that the context in which learning occurs may sometimes lead to ineffective learning among LVI if teachers are not careful, citing issues such as an inflexible curriculum and inappropriate assessment procedures (Fraser and Maguvhe, 2008). An inclusive learning

environment should be different from the ordinary learning environment because an inclusive classroom contains learners with different learning needs and abilities (Simon and Hereeweghe, 2010). Some features and conditions should be adhered to for quality learning and LVI. These include special services from specialised teachers, teaching, and learning resources. Devices such as Braille and magnifying glasses contribute to a flexible learning environment that allows and supports the potential learning of all learners, regardless of the differences and diversities these LVI should possess. In the classroom setting, the element of humanity (Botho/Ubuntu), among teachers' humanity plays a vital role in enhancing learners' participation in learning (Lebona, 2020).

2.6.1 Availability of resources and efficiency of teaching LVI in the mainstream classroom setting

Access to resources is critical to ensuring equal opportunities and quality education for learners with disabilities, LVI included (Ramatea and Khanare, 2020; Matobako, 2020). Therefore, providing resources will contribute to ensuring equality of opportunities (Ralejoe, 2016; Zelelew, 2016; Lebona, 2020; Monyane, 2020). It is necessary to allocate human, physical, and financial resources to implement IE successfully. Daily practice and research have revealed the necessity for building and providing access to an enabling physical environment to accommodate LVI, which cannot be over-emphasised (Mosia, 2014; Mateusi et al., 2014; Ralejoe, 2016; Maine, 2022). Unless the physical environment is accessible to LVI, ensuring their successful inclusion in primary school education is impossible. If LVI can access the physical environment easily, many barriers to learning that they experience can be mitigated (Salisbury, 2008). Mosia (2014) also argues that public buildings and sanitation facilities should be accessible to all learners and that including steps and other design features should not make movement difficult for LVI. Above all, LVI could access physical facilities such as cafes, other social spaces, and toilets (Mwakyēja, 2013). Thus, the accessibility of physical environments, the provision of adaptive material, and specialised technology are vital for LVI in mainstream teaching and learning (Zelelew, 2016).

Additionally, LVI can benefit from technology (Zeleeuw, 2016). In this significance, specialised technology is any device that helps LVI use an educational product. Many reports claim that using a wide variety of specialised technology has significantly and positively impacted LVI's learning and lives (D'Andrea, 2012; Zeleeuw, 2016). The goal of adaptive materials and technology should be to give LVI independence by enhancing their communication, mobility, reading, and writing skills, and allowing them some control of their environments (D'Andrea, 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect primary schools to supply specialised equipment and technology for LVI since they need them to access learning information. It has become important to provide LVI with as many special devices and technologies as possible to enable them to access specialised designed electronic resources such as textbooks and curricular materials (D'Andrea, 2012). Thus, special education teachers should follow this process.

A special education teacher/resource teacher is a teacher designated to coordinate a learners' programme (A Guide to Support Team, 2003). In addition, the resource teacher:

- (i) provides diagnostic assessment to determine the learners' strengths and areas of need.
- (ii) generates ideas and suggestions for programme modification and/or adaptations.
- (iii) provides advice about materials and resources.
- (iv) orders materials and acts as a liaison between the school and the Resource Centre.
- (v) plans and carries out instructional programmes.
- (vi) develops strategies for assessing and communicating learner progress.
- (vii) maintains ongoing communication with parents and other teachers; and
- (viii) initiates and organises support team meetings.

The teacher's role in an inclusive setting is to understand the diverse needs of learners and successfully accommodate them all (Mhlongo, 2017). For some teachers, it can be stressful how they can cater to the needs of LVI if they lack the requisite skills and training. As a result, Burton (2015) advocates for integrating special education teachers to collaboratively work with general education teachers where they can plan lessons together, teach, and take responsibility for the class. Williams (2010) highlights that teamwork improves teachers' self-efficacy by allowing them to exercise the competency of their professional lives. In the context

of general education teachers, it is therefore significant for them to draw support from special education teachers to support LVI. In the view of Burton (2015), when teachers collaborate, they share strategies, experiences, and skills to support learners with special needs.

Burton (2015) further indicates that special education teachers have roles and responsibilities that include:

- (i) supporting classroom teachers to ascertain learner needs and strengths.
- (ii) implementing curriculum in a manner that responds to the needs and abilities of all the learners.
- (iii) mediating between the developing and active learner, and changing the proximal environment.
- (iv) developing educational plans for learners with disabilities.
- (v) facilitating interactions between environments and extrinsic influences such as curriculum; and,
- (vi) promoting progressive as well as mutual accommodation between a learner and the evolving learning environment to promote independence.

Effective collaboration among teachers can disseminate knowledge and facilitate the sharing of experiences and skills, thereby improving instruction in supporting LVI (Mosola, 2020). Mosola (2020) further indicates that teachers who strongly commit to supporting LSEN and working with special education teachers have the advantage and strength to help LVI in mainstream schools. If teachers lack collective support or opportunities to observe other teachers instructing, some efficacy-building experiences, such as verbal persuasions and vicarious experiences, should be investigated (Suchodolz, 2018). Teamwork gives exposure to various experiences, perspectives, and common understanding of issues regarding learners with visual problems, and in so doing, teachers grow professionally towards self-efficacy (Mosola, 2020).

Teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy for teaching are less likely to refer LVI to special education services, possibly because these teachers are more likely to spend time with learners with disabilities instead of giving up (Bandura, 2012; Mahlo, 2015). Teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy also use better instructional and assessment strategies

organisational and planning skills (Mahlo, 2011). Teacher self-efficacy also affects classroom management, goal setting, motivation, and more experimentation with new teaching methods through having a sense of security or bravery in the classroom (Mosola, 2020; Mahlo, 2011).

2.6.2 Assistive technology for teachers and learners with visual impairment

Assistive technology (AT) is one innovative way of supporting learners with VI in learning (Phethoka, 2020). Education in the fourth industrial revolution has been pushed to ensure the quality of learning by enabling learners to get the latest knowledge and be innovative through technology (Kayembe and Nel, 2019). Information technology is particularly important since it allows learners with VI and their teachers to navigate the learning hurdles. It also offers learners access to information and communication to achieve independence and autonomy in the learning environment. By using AT, students with VI can access many school-related activities by drawing on other senses and abilities (Malloy, Acock, Vunchinich, Silverthorn, Ji and Flay, 2014). Research in non-academic settings has shown that the use of AT can be implemented in a multilingual format and provides a better aid for visually impaired persons by assisting them in recognising items and their environment (Abhishek, Sinha and Vohra, 2014). This form of innovation can be adapted to the learning environment with potentially positive results.

Teachers play a fundamental role in promoting the well-being of learners with VI and creating conducive conditions for learning (Khanare and De Lange, 2017; Ramatea and Khanare, 2021). While this is crucial, how teachers adapt and use assistive technology makes a difference. Teachers can potentially contribute to learners' academic success by guiding them in using resources that enhance their learning. A study by de Freitas et al. (2009) among 134 teachers concluded that access to AT provides independence to learners with VI. Teachers in the study were aware of the importance of using AT in education activities with LVI. However, the success of AT depends on the teachers' knowledge of how to use the technology. Some studies have been conducted mostly in the United States of America to identify teachers' self-reported mastery of AT devices and services. A study conducted in the United States of America, Palau, and the Virgin Islands among 840 teachers of LVI found that more than half

(57.5%) of the participants reported a lack of confidence in instructing LVI in the use of AT (Zhou et al.,2012)

Evidence indicates that an academic performance gap exists between LVI and their peers who do not have disabilities, possibly due to inadequate access to instruction in AT (Mosia and Phasha, 2017). While the number of LVI pursuing higher education has increased during the last few years, it is still low (Tuttle and Carter, 2022). The use of AT with LVI has the potential to give them greater access to educational materials and improve their academic outcomes. Providing access to the appropriate AT and supporting the education of LVI are fundamental factors in creating equal education opportunities for them to thrive and succeed academically. An experimental study among VI students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) programme at the University of Karachi, Pakistan, to compare the results of two semesters with and without using assistive technology showed an impressive improvement in the academic scores in the second semester (with the help of Artificial Intelligence) (Siddiqui et al., (2022). In another study among teachers of LVI who used AT, they agreed that AT positively affected learners' academic, functional, and social skills (Tuttle and Carter, 2022). As several studies reveal, adopting and appreciating the use of AT benefits LVI and their teachers is invaluable in enhancing academic performance.

2.6.3 Assessment of learners with visual impairment in the mainstream classroom

It is evident that assessment mechanisms are implemented in primary schools and that primary education should apply the instructional skills to facilitate their efforts to meet the challenges and unique learning needs of LVI (Morelle, 2019). In addition, assignments and other assessment mechanisms should be adapted to meet the needs of LVI (Zeleeuw, 2016). Some of the barriers LVIs encounter can be minimised by changing assessment procedures or implementing alternative assessment methods (Zeleeuw, 2016). This can be achieved by adapting assessment formats to suit the needs of LVI (Clayton et al., 2010). Specifically, LVI might require extra time for assessments, and an alternative format for assessments is oral or Braille (Mwakyaja, 2013). Therefore, LVI need a new curriculum, instructional

methodologies, and assessment mechanisms to reach the same levels of performance as the sighted learners, and the adaptations or adjustments described continue to remove the challenges of LVI (Salisbury, 2008).

Ramatea and Khanare (2021) argue that removing or minimising barriers to inclusive education involves mobilising resources within the schools and their communities. Therefore, it is essential to outline the range of resources that should be accessible to LVI and their communities (Kabeto, 2011; Odanga, Raburu and Aloka, 2018). While mobilising resources is essential, Zelelew (2016) argues that assessments are also of immense importance to ensure that real inclusion takes place. Zelelew (2016) highlights that high learner numbers in classrooms limit the number of assessments handed out to learners. Specific issues identified included an excessive marking load, providing timely informative feedback, maintaining high quality and consistency higher order thinking from the learners (Mohale, 2020). Makhate (2020) indicated that large classes limit the number of assessments teachers can give learners. This brings about relevant assessment, handling duplication, and maintaining marking quality.

2.7 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN TEACHING LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND BLINDNESS

According to the Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled [LNFOD] (2016), the current education system in Lesotho does not cater to the needs of disabled people. School infrastructure is often not accessible to people with physical and visual impairments. For instance, classrooms may still be accessed via stairs rather than ramps (Lebona, 2020; Monyane, 2020). The communication medium used in schools may exclude the deaf and LVI due to a lack of teachers with Braille and sign language skills (LNFOD, 2016). However, the most critical barrier for disabled learners is the discriminatory attitudes within their local communities and the education sector, which leads many disabled learners to drop out of school and miss out on formal education (LNFOD, 2016; Monyane, 2020).

The teachers responsible for teaching learners who experience barriers to learning and development must have the knowledge, skills, and attitude to teach and guide those learners

with VI to reach their potential (Mahlo, 2011). Therefore, there is a need for more learning to support teachers because they help classroom teachers in areas where they lack skill, attitude, and knowledge. In keeping up with the shift, since 2000, MoET introduced free and compulsory education to every learner in Lesotho primary schools irrespective of their disability (ies) in the mainstream teaching and setting (MoET, 2005; Education Act, 2010). The Act emphasises that everyone has a right to basic education and that all learners, at some stage, need support (MoET, 2018).

Maraisane (2020) argues that foundation phase teachers should be empowered with effective teaching strategies to lay a good foundation for these learners. In contrast to Maraisane's (2020) statement, the researcher argues that foundation phase teachers and all primary teachers should be empowered because they are the education cornerstones. The researcher further argues that there is a shortage of special teachers in Lesotho, and a few are still not familiar with teaching strategies that can be used to improve learning for those with visual impairment. Learning Support Teachers (LST) can be a useful resource; assisting classroom teachers in schools, especially in primary schools in a mainstream setting with special education teachers moving around from different classes, can help the LST find learners with a diverse range of extrinsic or intrinsic differences.

According to Mahlo (2011), extrinsic barriers are not within the learners but rather circumstances beyond or outside them, such as their environment, home, upbringing, teaching, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and socio-economic status. These factors influence the learners' development and learning and add to the barriers. For now, intrinsic barriers are located within the learner, including physical, sensory, physiological, learning, and developmental mental or intellectual impairments, single or multiple (Mahlo, 2011; Hlalele, 2013).

The researcher argues that such learners, if not identified and offered support at the grassroots level, may experience barriers to learning throughout their lives. Against this background, the researcher argues that little has been done to enhance teachers' skills to improve academic performance among LVI in the mainstream. The researcher believes this study's findings will contribute meaningfully to debates through recommendations for future research and policy formulation in Lesotho.

2.7.1 Attitudes of sighted learners/counterparts

Kabeto (2015) argues that many sighted learners are afraid of their blind and visually impaired peers and do not want to get acquainted with LVI. Lee and Lo (2007) maintain that among the various groups of mainstream learners, elementary school and female learners adopt a more positive attitude towards fellow learners with special educational needs than secondary school and male learners. Dunst (2012) indicates that sighted learners negatively treat children with disabilities, arguing that LVI are less likely to be selected as best friends or playmates. Yet, children in the other classes have high peer relationship satisfaction. In the view of Dunst (2012), misunderstanding and negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, LVI included, often interfere with their acceptance and full inclusion into school and society. Attitudes of people, in general, and learners, more specifically, towards individuals with disabilities, have been the focus of description and investigation for many years (Kabeto, 2015). UNESCO (1984) reveals that integrating LVI into the mainstream has advantages, such as providing quality education for all learners and creating an enabling teaching and learning environment. Further, integrating LVI into the mainstream educates learners and the community on good moral values (Morelle, 2019).

2.7.2 Attitudes of learners with low vision and blindness

Few studies have explored the attitudes and experiences of learners with low vision (Kabeto, 2015), Sefotho and Ferreira, (2020). One issue contributing to this challenge is ethical concerns around treating vulnerable populations and benefits versus undue hardship when using people with disabilities as research participants (Bryne, 2016). One case study conducted with a student with VI found that the student enjoyed high popularity in the classroom among his sighted peers and was perceived by teachers as a social equal to his classmates (George and Duquette, 2006; Duque et al., 2020).

Another study conducted in Ethiopia showed that learners with VI preferred to learn in an integrated school, although there was a risk of emotional teasing (Kabeto, 2015). In a study in Lesotho among 30 VI, a mixture of rewarding and detrimental daily lived experiences in the

school setting was reported (Matsie, 2021). Some rewarding experiences included social interaction, a positive relationship with teachers, a sense of belonging to the school, participation in extra-mural activities, and access to inclusive education and psychological resources support. Some detrimental experiences reported included unequal opportunities, inadequate assistive technology, inadequate academic support, and hostile learning environments (Matsie, 2021). A study in Botswana also found that learners with VI had positive social experiences but faced barriers in curriculum and classroom participation (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2012). In this study in Botswana, teachers were reported to lack the knowledge and skills required to teach learners with VI.

People without disabilities refuse to accept the individual differences that persons with disabilities possess, and the deep-rooted misunderstanding of “disability is inability” rejected learners with special needs to equal opportunity in education (UNESCO, 1994). Moreover, excluding LVI from any school involvement subsequently has a tiring impact on the group's physical, social, academic, and psychological well-being. Most of the barriers aligned with the education of LVI are negative attitudes (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2010). Further, Mastropieri and Scruggs (2010) argue that negative attitudes held by teachers and school administrators, overprotection by parents, and lack of motivation of LVI themselves are critical barriers that hinder their full school participation. Therefore, the attitudes and abilities of general education teachers can be considered major limitations in the LVI education process (Temesgen, 2018).

2.7.3 Teachers' content knowledge in the teaching of LVI and blindness

Teaching imparts knowledge and skills to learners (Annie, Ndhlovu and Kasonde–Nasonde–Ng'angu, 2015). There is a challenge in teaching LVI in integrated primary schools, and one of the major difficulties is the lack of correct instructional methods for LVI and resources (Ntšeli, 2020). For most learners with disabilities, the key to academic performance in the classroom lies in having suitable adaptations, accommodations, and adjustments to the instructional methods and other classroom activities (Joseph, Jang, Ozawa and Lee, 2012). According to Karuhawe and Possi (2022), clear articulation of words written on chalkboards, avoiding questions leading to choral responses in teaching, and curriculum modification are some of

the teachings and learning strategies as well as skills adopted to enable learners to acquire sufficient knowledge in subjects learned. There should be adaptations, too, in terms of teaching approaches and classroom physical modification, if necessary (Habulezi and Phasha, 2012). Moreover, an appropriate medium of communication should be the pillar of accessibility for all to facilitate independent interaction with relevant content (Mosia and Phasha, 2017).

More so, teachers' knowledge has been recognised as a strong aspect in prompting the improvement of classroom practice and learners' performance; hence, they are perceived as the main factors in changing the education system (Andreson, 2015; Deniz and Adibelli, 2015; Maraisane, 2020). The ability and competence to impart this knowledge, along with a teacher's attitudes, skills, values, and qualities to be a quality teacher, also helps improve learners' performance (Spaull, 2013). Teachers are expected to interact with learners and the intended content delivered during classroom practice (Maboya, 2014), so having appropriate knowledge is essential in the classroom (Mosia, 2014; Khoaeane, 2014). If they understand a topic's content, they will easily impart its sub-topic to the learners (Makhate, 2020; Zengin, 2017; Maraisane, 2020).

Lamichhane (2016) and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (2010) argue that when teachers do not design and apply special instructional skills and strategies, learners perform poorly in examinations and assessments. Several scholars indicate that very little has been done to design and apply special instructional teaching and learning strategies and skills to enable learners with visual impairment (LVI) to perform better in their classes as well as in subject examinations (Kabeto, 2015; Zelelew, 2016; Mohale, 2020; Ntseli, 2021; Kisanga, 2017; Ramatea and Khanare, 2021; UNESCO, 1994). Some scholars argue that when education is provided in the absence of special instructional teaching and learning skills as well as other necessary teaching and learning needs for learners with special needs, LVI included, there is a likelihood of ending up attaining minimal educational achievements; they may perform unsatisfactorily in final examinations at the same time making them lose hope of accessing better life in the future (Kasanga 2019; Lugome 2018; Possi and Malinga, 2017).

Further, teachers require external support and supervision, especially classroom teachers in mainstream schools who encounter LVI for the first time (Kisanga, 2017). However, support and supervision are often lacking (Global Monitoring Report, 2015; 2020; 2023). The ratio of teachers to learners in Ghana is still below the required standard (URT, 2011). To overcome the problems above, teachers in Ghana are provided with training to equip them with the relevant skills to teach learners with disabilities. The University of Education in Winneba and of Cape Coast are on the frontline in providing IE content to all teacher training colleges in Ghana. Since 1990, all the education colleges introduced course content to develop skills in special education teachers. The rationale is to ensure that teachers are equipped with skills, knowledge, and techniques to provide teaching in an inclusive school. This originates from the fact that the success of inclusion depends on teachers' knowledge and skills (Maraisane, 2020; Magoshoa, 2018). Unlike other countries, South Africa has established a system of District-based Support Teams (DBSTs) that support schools that include children with disabilities (Morelle, 2016). The researcher argues that this study seeks to fill in this gap in knowledge by exploring how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho.

2.7.4 The impact of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic on teaching learners' visual impairment and blindness

Globally, schools were under intense pressure to deliver high-quality instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown from 2020 to 2021 (UNESCO, 2020; UN, 2020). This period they marked a difference in how classes were being conducted, as there was a shift from traditional modes of teaching and learning to a change in the need to adapt and adopt new ways of teaching and learning in schools. Schools struggled to determine the best way to provide services for learners and meet their needs, from fully online learning to hybrid and in-contact lessons (Jones, Vaughn and Fuchs, 2020). Recent evidence points to the rise in educational exclusion, estimating that close to 40% of low to middle-income countries did not support disadvantaged learners during the school shutdown. In sub-Saharan Africa, almost all learners in schools and universities were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

(Clinton, 2020; Norman, 2020). During this period, various efforts were made across the continent to support learning by developing radio, television, and online materials (Mcclain-Nhlapo, 2020). The researcher argues that there is little evidence of how these learning mediums have addressed the specific learning needs of learners with disabilities.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, countries worked towards managing the continuity of learning while protecting the safety and well-being of learners. Some groups of learners stood the risk of being further marginalised and excluded from formal learning opportunities, particularly those living in resource-constrained settings (United Nations, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). According to Rosenblum et al. (2022), during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, globally, 13% of school-age learners with VI did not receive educational services, 61% received services remotely, and 43% of those learners' experienced challenges with access because of their vision loss.

The World Bank Group (2022) articulates that to recover learning losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, investing in evidence-backed programmes would help teachers improve their teaching skills. These must be part of any strategy that needs to be adopted. Therefore, investing in these programmes will help teachers' centres adopt more effective teaching practices that improve learners learning, which is essential for long-term and lifelong teaching and learning in mainstream schools (Bohn, Tessler, Merrick and Frank, 2022).

2.7.5 The Role Played by parents in the performance of Learners with Visual Impairment

All children have the right to basic needs, including quality education (UNESCO, 1994; Education Act, 2010; Lesotho Social Development, 2011; LNFOD, 2016; MoET, 2018). A child has the right to be educated and guided, given all the basic needs by her/his parents or guardian. The above section reveals that parents and guardians have a big role to play in educating children under their care, regardless of their abilities (MoET, 2018).

Furthermore, some scholars note that the home influences the behaviour, character, conduct, personality, and performance of its members in academics and all other areas of life

(Mukuna, 2010; Moula, 2010). It is, however, unlucky that children with various disabilities are given little attention even from their families, and this leaves a lot to be desired in their performance of daily activities (Matlosa and Matobo, 2007). Sadly, teachers and parents view LVI with pity and perceive them as hopeless and useless (Ralejoe, 2016; Mosia and Phasha, 2020). Thus, guardians need to be actively involved in activities useful for their children's learning as these activities help them acquire skills that would make them self-reliant at home and school.

Maluleke (2014) noted that parents have abandoned and left LSEN to teachers despite the crucial role they must play in the learning process of LVI. Some parents believe that teachers should put in more effort to deliver service to learners to improve the academic performance of all learners, including LVI. Parents have a very important role in the fruitful integration and academic performance of LVI, and there should be effective interactions between teachers and parents for effective and good academic performance for those learners who are visually impaired (Maluleke, 2014; Makhate, 2020; Zelelew, 2016). Therefore, the researcher argues that schools should design programmes that encourage contact between learners and parents including guiding and counselling sessions for both the children and parents and for parents to be reminded of their role in their children's learning process.

Being a parent is a complex yet demanding responsibility, full of challenges yet rewarding (Khan, 2017). To help improve the academic performance of LVI, all the stakeholders should contribute financially towards the necessary assistance needed by these children, guiding and counselling LVI to accept themselves and making everybody in the child's environment able and willing to help them. Khan (2018) added that the role of teachers is to see to it that all learners benefit from the available resources without isolation because most teachers in inclusive classes focus on sighted learners rather than those with learning challenges.

2.8 STRATEGIES ENHANCING TEACHERS' SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE IN TEACHING LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

2.8.1 Professional teacher development programmes

2.8.1.1 *Pre-service teachers training*

One way to improve the quality of education is to ensure that newly qualified teachers are adequately prepared, knowledgeable, and skilled to teach (Taylor, 2019). Pre-service teacher training is one of the most crucial teacher education curricula that ensures teachers are prepared to deliver quality education. IIEP-UNESCO (n.d) defines pre-service teacher training as initial teacher training, organised, private, and public educational programmes designed to formally train future teachers and prepare them to enter the teaching profession. Teachers are expected to acquire different knowledge and skills during pre-service teacher education.

Increasingly, general education teachers provide services for learners with disabilities in general education classrooms (Taylor, 2019), thereby pointing to better training pre-service teachers in the necessary strategies to serve learners with disabilities in general classrooms. There is some evidence to indicate that pre-service teachers do not feel adequately prepared to serve learners with disabilities in general education classrooms (Matlosa and Matobo, 2007). A study by Jung (2007) among 57 student teachers indicated that their attitudes toward integrating students with disabilities reflected a lack of confidence in their instructional skills and the quality of support currently provided to them. Therefore training should be extended to help raise the confidence level of pre-service teachers (Mosia, 2014). In Lesotho, there is evidence that some teachers have undergone some form of training in special education, with only one in three teachers surveyed by the Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (2021). The council is responsible for possessing such training. The lack of participation by principals in training affects their ability to enforce special education adherence in schools (Mosia, 2014). A policy brief by the Lesotho Council of NGOs recommended that Lesotho should adopt a “Special Needs Education Training Manual to ensure consistency and develop universal pre-service training for those entering the teaching fraternity and in-service training for teachers already in service based on these manuals” (Lesotho Council of NGOs, 2021).

As noted earlier, AT is an emerging and essential component for promoting the inclusion of children with VI so that they can fully participate and benefit from education (Tuttle and Carter, 2022). However, it is important to note that the effective use of AT by LVI depends largely on the knowledge and comfort of their teachers (Conner, Copeland, Grote and Rosen, 2010). Thus, pre-service teachers must be exposed to AT in their teaching practice. A study determining pre-service teachers' self-reported level of competency with AT found that participants viewed themselves as more competent post-test regarding the 20 SAT competencies (Jones, Alyward and Jones, 2019). It is vital to increase the amount of contact among teachers and LVI to enhance positive attitude towards IE (UNESCO (2010). Teachers are expected to teach LVI with dedication and empathy, they too should be provided with reading materials and workshops before teaching and learning takes place in the classroom. Therefore, all these preceding ideas can be incorporated during pre-service teacher training whereby candidate teachers are provided with specific training and experience in basic areas of blindness and low vision to enable them to develop needed strategies and skills.

2.8.2 In-service teachers' training

In-service education is designed for the workforce development of the school system and the educational enterprise (Osamwonyi, 2016). Teachers must be trained in new skills and modern methodology to perform their functions effectively and efficiently. To meet the growing need for education globally, it is imperative to provide sound in-service education so that teachers can update their skills, knowledge, and experience (Mosia, 2014). In-service education can simply be understood as the interface by one on relevant courses and activities in which a serving teacher may participate to upgrade teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and competence in the teaching profession (Topor and Rosenblum, 2013). Therefore, it encompasses all the forms of education and training given to a teacher already on the job of teaching and learning (Okolo, 2013). In-service education is also referred to as continuing education designed for the retraining, reskilling, and updating the knowledge of the current workforce (UNESCO, 1985).

In-service training is the systematic development of attitude, knowledge, skills, and behavioural patterns teachers require to perform adequately at their given task or job (Bramley, 1991; Mpya, 2007). Generally, teachers are regarded as the hub of educational development. Therefore, in-service education is concerned with the activities and courses in which a serving teacher may participate to upgrade his/her professional skills, knowledge, and interest after the initial training; in this case, in-service education is designed to fill the gap in the professional inadequacy of a serving teacher.

According to Osamwonyi (2016), the need for teachers to receive in-service education cannot be underestimated. It is necessary to note that enhancing teachers' work performance and motivation in the field of psychology is vital. The absence of in-service training for teachers will retard the professional growth of teachers and “missing gaps” between demands and actual achievement levels. In practice, in-service teacher training is recognised as an essential part of the overall process of teacher education, which can be achieved through attending events such as lectures, films, exhibitions, conferences, seminars, and workshops in which practical solutions to current difficulties are introduced and materials required for implementing these solutions produced (Alkus and Olgan, 2014; Osamwonyi, 2016).

In-service training is vital because it gives teachers adequate groundwork on the needs of learners and provides them with a well-integrated general education, professional training, and academic orientation (Kabadayi, 2016). At its core, in-service training assists teachers in grasping the curriculum well (Viirpalu and Mikser, 2014). In the study by Yadav and Bhardwaj (2013), self-efficacy is instilled by in-service teacher training programme facilities, planning, and preparation for effective teaching. These skills lead to building a human resource pool that is dedicated and committed to teaching and positively influencing the overall delivery of the education system.

Amadi (2013) notes that although in-service training has been embraced to counter the inadequacies of pre-service training, it still fails to adequately prepare teachers for the continued changes in teaching techniques and materials. There is the continued poor performance of schools' teacher training programmes, which are conducted using approaches that are not practical and, as a result, coerce teachers into just listening but not putting into

practice the novel teaching methods learned (Amadi, 2013; Nzarirwehi and Atuhumuze, 2019). Therefore, in-service teacher programmes in most developing countries, such as Lesotho, fall victim to such shortcomings whereby teachers are not equipped with transferrable and hands-on pedagogical skills (Amadi, 2013; Mosia and Phasha, 2020; Ralejoe, 2016).

2.8.3 Teaching methods

When teaching methods are not properly used, and teachers lack the skills and abilities to deal with LVI, the learners experience educational challenges (Mwakyeja, 2013). In some mainstream educational settings, the teaching methods are not appropriately implemented, and teachers are not educated enough to use Braille materials (Korir, 2015). In the preparation of hearing aids, tactile diagrams, and maps, LVI experiences the various challenges related to inclusive teaching. Then, the inadequacy of teacher education gives rise to challenges in acquiring education by LVI (Mwakweja, 2013). Therefore, there is a need for ongoing education for them. This can be through workshops, seminars, and training courses (Magoshoa, 2018). Further, Mogoshoa (2018) states that upgrading activities, education conferences, seminars, qualification developmental programmes, observations at other schools, and participating networks with other teachers with the purpose of capacitating teachers.

Teachers must be aware that LVI has a deficit of conceptual experiences and understanding due to the absence of visual ability. Therefore, the adaptation of teaching materials becomes paramount if LVI must learn all the concepts of learners without visual impairment in the classroom setting (Salisbury, 2008). Therefore, LVI must be taught physically about using concrete materials such as tactile diagrams (Mak, 2008). Tactile diagrams are important to understand images and concepts that are difficult to explain and describe in words. Tactile images or diagrams can be drawn on Braille papers using a special mat and stylus. This can produce a relief image or diagram that can be easily felt (UNESCO, 2001). Therefore, teachers of LVI in the mainstream should provide adequate, unique materials and equipment for

appropriate teaching and learning, such as Braille textbooks, Perkins Braille, and magnifying machines (Ralejoe, 2021).

LVI relies on verbal information for their learning, audio devices should be incorporated to assist the teaching process, including equipment such as audiocassettes and compact discs. In this note lesson, the contents of diagrams and tables cannot be explained well in audio format (Salisbury, 2008). Then, the lesson can be recorded and given to LVI, who can later playback. Therefore, user-friendly materials are good teaching materials that are provided to LVI, and this can enhance dialogue and social interaction when completing assignments.

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is vital to improving academic performance among LVI. It is a plan of study extracted from the general curriculum, designed specifically to meet the needs of a learner with additional needs (Mak, 2008). This study plan comprises a list of specific goals to be met and the strategies to be used to meet those goals (Salisbury, 2008). A team of specialists, including parents and teachers, works together to determine learners' specific goals and academic needs to enable a teacher to plan and implement teaching (Mattingly and Army, 2011). Team planning and implementation of IEP are essential for inclusion to be meaningful. However, IEP does not call for individualised teaching preferably; it intends to inform teachers to be aware of and meet the individual needs of every learner in the integrated classroom (Mitchell, 2008). Therefore, general teachers, special teachers, principals, and parents are important collaborators in preparing IEP.

2.8.4 Teachers' skills

A good teacher's qualities include communication skills, creativity, leadership, and learning (Sng Bee, 2012). Other characteristics of effective teaching include an engaging classroom presence, value in real-world learning, exchange of best practices, and a lifelong love and learning (Khan, 2017). Communication is the lifeblood of any organisation, and the survival and health of the organisation depend on effective communication (Thomas, 2019; Khan, 2018). Further, Thomas (2019) articulates that information flows to and from head teachers, teachers, and learners. Therefore, teachers' performance in inclusive classrooms depends on

their communication skills. If the teacher has good communication skills, it is easy to convey his/her teaching to LVI in an understandable manner.

Teachers must speak and communicate their subject matter effectively to learners. Further, they must facilitate classroom learning and participation (Makhate, 2020). Learners depend on their teachers to provide instruction, guidance, and feedback throughout the learning process (Mosia, 2014). When a teacher fails to communicate effectively with learners, their concentration level drops, and they eventually lose grasp of the subject matter, which leads to poor academic performance. This is worse for learners with LVI given that they rely more on listening than seeing.

The teachers' attitudes are very important in the teaching and learning environment (Ralejoe, 2016). Attitude is a manner, disposition, feeling, and position about a person, thing, tendency, or orientation, especially in the mind (Najafi and Ramhazade, 2013). Thus, for the teacher, the right attitude is a positive attitude, which is an important aspect of communication in the classroom. The teacher must maintain an attitude of confidence all the time, which includes the display of good mastery of content delivered to the learners to enable them to freely ask questions when in doubt, good command of the language of instruction, and unhindered teacher-learner interaction (Bandura, 2012). When the teachers' positive attitude is positive, learners learn better, enhancing their performance (Bandura, 1997). This revealed that teachers' attitudes contributed significantly to LVI attention in the classroom and influenced their academic performance. Several scholars have investigated the effects of teachers' attitudes on learners' personalities and performances and found that teachers' attitudes positively influence learners' personalities as well as their academic and life performances (Khoaeane, 2014; Mateusi and Naong, 2014; Ralejoe, 2016).

Teachers teaching LVI should be knowledgeable about reading and writing in Braille. Ralejoe (2021) states that Braille is essential for LVI to achieve satisfactory educational progress, reiterating that learning to read and write is necessary to becoming self-sufficient in adulthood. This implies that teachers should be well-skilled before they begin to teach LVI. However, school administrators face the challenges of finding competent teachers with the requisite expertise in Braille to teach LVI (Makhate, 2020; Mosola, 2020). Braille highly

depends on the training term's length and the training content's intensity (Frieman, 2004; Mwakweja, 2013).

Teachers' knowledge has been recognised as a strong aspect that prompts the improvement of classroom practice and learners' performance. Hence, they are perceived as the main factors in changing the education system (Anderson, 2015; Deniz and Adibelli, 2015; Diamond et al., 2013; Maraisane, 2020). Teachers are expected to interact with learners and the intended content delivered during classroom practice (Maboya, 2014). Therefore, having appropriate knowledge is an essential requirement in the classroom. If teachers understand the topic content, they will easily impart its subtopic to the learners (Maraisane, 2020). Hence, teachers should be equipped with skills in designing the curriculum in a way that accommodates learners with special educational needs and develops the ability to apply different classroom management styles, make use of learners' unique and latent skills, and assess and identify behavioural patterns (Mpya, 2007; Mosola, 2020).

Pertinent to note is that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are significantly influenced by their perceived efficiency level, particularly in teaching children with disabilities, and LVI are not an exception in their classroom (Kabeto, 2015). Positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by a myriad of factors, such as the overriding of policies on inclusion, school ethos, available resources, and level of support in catering to the needs of children with disabilities (Hsien, 2007; Mateusi et al., 2014; Maine, 2022). According to Beyene and Yinebebe (2010), most teachers reject the admission of Learners with Disabilities (LD) into their schools and refuse the placement of LD in their classes. Beyene and Yinebebe (2010) describe how attitude problems occur through human interaction in the school community. This includes relations between teachers and principals, between teachers and learners, teachers and parents, and between the psycho-social environment and among learners themselves (Dunst, 2012).

There is a need for teachers to be trained in a wide range of skills concerning disabilities; among others, teachers need skills in communication, basic knowledge of different forms of disabilities, multidisciplinary work skills, knowledge of the effects of social deprivation and poverty, identification and assessment processes of learners, multilingual approaches, and

behavioural management (Mpya, 2007). Al-Adwan and Khatib (2017) raised a concern that there is an acute shortage of trained human resources who work with LVI, and there is currently a need for well-qualified teachers in the field (Mateusi and Naong, 2014; Ralejoe, 2016). As a result, teachers who have gained imperative skills can make a remarkable and major offering in teaching LVI.

The skills required to teach LVI are regarded as a milestone for fruitful instruction (Al-Adwan and Khatib, 2017). However, teachers who acquire the skills in special and inclusive education still face challenges appropriately applying them due to the lack of support and resources. Teachers become inspired when given appropriate support; without the help, they will probably bring about no change (Coleman, 2017). In this regard, support in professional development and training at pre- and in-service levels can assist teachers in improving their skills in teaching learners with visual impairment. Teacher collaboration (co-teaching) is an important aspect of inclusive education because an inclusive classroom contains learners with diverse learning needs (Mwakweja, 2013). According to Stein (2018), some benefits of co-teaching include improved instructions and communication between a teacher and a learner and increased enthusiasm for teaching. No single teacher can have all the skills necessary to meet learners' diverse needs in an inclusive classroom (Mwakweja, 2013). Co-teaching involves two teachers teaching in the same class in mainstream schools with different learners with diverse disabilities (Stein, 2018). In this type of teaching, there will be a regular teacher who will be responsible for the main teaching, imparting such skills as reading and writing by using Braille, glasses, lenses, and so forth, while the special teacher deals with Learners with Special Educational Needs (Mwakweja, 2013).

2.8.5 Psychosocial support for learners with visual impairments in the mainstream classroom setting

The psychosocial support environment is the school environment that fosters learners' cognitive, personal, and social development (Mpya, 2007). The school environment should be welcoming, user-friendly and allow for mobility of LVI to use canes, guide dogs (assistance dogs trained to lead blind or visually impaired people around obstacles), assistive devices, and

learning apparatus. Although a study by Savasci and Tomul (2013) revealed that classroom size does not affect academic achievement, Mestry and Bodalina (2014) maintained that physical resources in a school impact the quality of teaching and learning. Learners with visual problems need to be taught in spacious and organised classrooms to easily access the learning materials and move around without much discomfort (Udoba, 2014).

According to Bornman and Rose (2017), teachers working with LVI must make many physical adaptations in and outside the classroom by ensuring clear and open walkways, restoring visual cues with physical cues, and teaching all learners in the mainstream about landmarks. Schools must aim to provide a school environment that is least restrictive and overall safe by using available resources to allow learners to learn effectively (Makatse, 2021). Maringa and Phachaka (2011) highlight that LVIs miss visual experiences, so the schools must be accommodative by increasing the use and intensity of other sensory mediums (touch and sound) to meet the needs of all the learners regardless of their background or disabilities of different learners to upgrade healthy development and enhance learning to improve their academic performance among LVI.

The social support that LVIs receive from their teachers and peers in schools may encourage their future independent living (Makatse, 2021). LVI's development of social relationships and friendships with their classmates may also positively impact their self-efficacy and self-confidence (Mosola, 2020). Furthermore, social support positively relates to social skills since the latter allows the individual to seek and maintain social support (Manitsa and Doikou, 2020). In addition, the development is a sense of belonging and acceptance in the school environment, and the provision of the instrument and emotional support from teachers and peers (key parameters of social support) positively impact on learners' well-being. These are considered fundamental components of inclusive education (Ramatea and Khanare, 2021).

Educational policies worldwide have endorsed the value of inclusive education, and particular emphasis has been placed on respecting the differences among all learners and addressing their needs in mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2006). Research shows that LVI who receive social support in an inclusive setting may have similar levels of social inclusion to their typically developing classmates (Manitsa and Doikou, 2020; Worth, 2013). From the risk and resilience

perspective, the social support provided in the context of the family, the school, and the community forms a protective factor for the psychosocial development of at-risk children (Masten, 2011). Regarding school, research has demonstrated the protective consequence of relationships with caring teachers and peers and the provision of social support and resources that enhance participation in the learners' academic performance and social-emotional development (Mahlo, 2011; Kabeto, 2015). It is therefore necessary for teachers to give social support to LVI; the social support will therefore assist in boosting their self-efficacy. The support can be provided in partnership with the special education teacher and the general teacher; thus, the teachers work to understand learners with diverse needs and successfully accommodate them all.

2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the researcher provided a broad overview of VI within the learning environment. Specifically, it provided a global and regional perspective of the current challenges that teachers encounter in teaching learners with VI. The researcher also presented a general overview of inclusive education in Africa, focusing on southern African countries and the policies introduced to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education. The challenges in successfully implementing inclusive learning and teaching learners with VI were presented, including teachers' skills and the availability of resources. Further, the teacher also reviewed the literature on the various forms of assessments for learners with VI in the learning environment as well as the challenges that teachers encounter in teaching LVI in mainstream primary schools. Lastly, a review of ways to enhance teachers' skills and knowledge in teaching learners with VI was presented. The next chapter is the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter constitutes the foundational structure upon which all research characteristics are interlinked. It illustrates how this research is structured. Consequently, this chapter associates the features of this study by emphasising the conceptual and theoretical framework. This research delves into the theoretical underpinnings of Bandura's Perceived Self-efficacy (PSE) Theory, initially formulated in 1997 and continues to be a fundamental component of the Social Cognitive Theory. This chapter delves into the historical origins of this theoretical framework and further discusses its relevance to the study. The theory aims to facilitate an understanding of school dynamics to enhance teachers' abilities to support learners with visual impairments for improved academic performance, drawing insights from Bandura's Perceived Self-Efficacy (PSE) Theory (1997). The chapter concludes with a summary.

3.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It is crucial to explore ways LVI can be aided to reach their full potential in mainstream teaching and learning spaces with their peers without impairments. This aligns with the principles outlined in the Learners with Impairments Educational Policy (MoET, 2018), which advocates for the inclusion of learners with impairments in mainstream educational settings at local schools to ensure the provision of equal and high-quality education for all, including LVI.

The enhancement of teachers' skills is of paramount importance as it positively impacts the academic performance of LVI, thus contributing to a more inclusive and well-rounded educational environment. The following section comprehensively elucidates the conceptual framework concerning improving teachers' skills, which serves as a foundational framework for the current study.

3.2.1 Conceptualising academic performance of LVI

A conceptual framework is a theoretical structure that provides a foundation for analysing and understanding a complex phenomenon or problem being studied. It serves as a fundamental component of any research project, guiding the research process from its inception to its completion (Hassen, 2023). According to Miles et al. (2014), a conceptual framework replicates a researcher's map of the territory being explored, as it provides clarity and direction in the research endeavour.

In this study, it is imperative to elucidate the key concepts underpinning the research. The chapter begins by presenting a clear explanation of the notion regarding enhancing teachers' skills to accommodate learners with visual impairments in mainstream educational settings. This is followed by a comprehensive exploration of the significance of improving learners' academic performance with visual impairments.

3.3 A NEED TO ENHANCE TEACHERS' SKILLS TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG LVI

This study must clarify the concept of "improvement" to foster a lucid comprehension of the reasons behind the need to pursue enhanced academic performance among Learners with Visual Impairments (LVI). Improvement can be likened to notions such as refinement, development, and upgrade, with various interpretations being offered by sources such as the Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary 4th Edition (2015). Kumar, Mehta, and Maheshwari (2013) define academic performance as a term that elucidates students' learning outcomes, signifying the knowledge acquired and skills developed in various academic subjects, as indicated by the obtained scores. Ramatea and Khanare (2021) posit that the amelioration of low academic performance in LVI is generally regarded as a means of enhancing the learners' overall well-being. Hence, from a scholarly standpoint, enhancing academic performance among LVI is considered pivotal to providing equitable and high-quality learning opportunities for the holistic development of all learners regardless of disability.

Exploring the factors contributing to the underperformance of high school learners in Lesotho, Jackson (2009) posits that it falls within the purview of the school management body to ensure the education of all students. The author further suggests that school administrators should receive training and guidance on effective school management to facilitate successful student outcomes. Arnaiz-Sanchez, Alcará, and Mirete-Ruiz (2019) underscore the view that it is imperative for LVI to enhance their academic performance to achieve inclusive and high-quality educational goals and redress educational inequalities. They further contend that this can be accomplished through the teachers' dedicated efforts to enhance the quality of teaching and learning processes, as grounded in the principle of equity for all learners.

Hence, trained teachers represent the most pivotal components of a school due to their capacity to engage equitable opportunities for all learners (Bornman and Rose, 2017). In this study, it emerged that teachers are the most invaluable human resource for fostering academic progress among students, considering the substantial time students and teachers spend together in the school environment (Babeli, 2013). Mahlo's (2017) study titled "Teaching Learners with Diverse Needs in the Foundation Phase in Gauteng Province, South Africa" aligns with the idea that effective inclusive education necessitates equitable access to education for all students, irrespective of race, gender, language, class, religion, disability, HIV and AIDS status, and culture. Such a framework acknowledges that all children can achieve academic progress with appropriate support. Odanga, Raburu, and Aloka (2018) assert that teachers' self-efficacy can be bolstered by improving their working conditions, including the provision of adequate teaching and learning facilities and timely welfare programmes that enhance their professional development, thereby amplifying their effectiveness in supporting LVI.

Mboshi (2018) underscores the need to address the unique requirements of LVI by adapting teaching and learning processes to accommodate them effectively. However, Phasha et al. (2013) observe that many in-service training programmes for teachers do not adequately equip teachers to teach LVI. Consequently, this study advocates for enhancing teachers' skills to elevate the academic performance of LVI in primary schools. This proposition is grounded

in Ramatea and Khanare's (2021) contention that the improvement of educational outcomes for LVI represents a viable solution to addressing the challenges faced by this demographic, as illustrated in the subsequent sections of this study.

3.3.1 Historical background to the Perceived Self-efficacy (PSE) Theory

This research study adopted the Perceived Self-efficacy Theory, which is characterised by its focus on human behaviours when engaging in specific tasks (Bandura, 1997). This theory emerged in 1997 and originated from the work of Albert Bandura, a Canadian American psychologist. It started as part of the broader Social Cognitive Theory. Bandura identified a mechanism that played a significant role in people's lives, which, until that point, had not been clearly defined or systematically observed. This mechanism revolved around the belief that individuals can influence events that constitute their lives. Bandura further posited that self-efficacy is a self-sustaining trait; when individuals take the initiative to address their problems on their terms, they gain positive experiences that further enhance their self-efficacy.

Research indicates that Bandura's theory of self-efficacy evolved from the Perceived Self-Efficacy (PSE) Theory (Bandura, 1997); its central tenet is that self-efficacy influences individuals' performances in various activities (Iroegu, 2015). Successful presentations bolster an individual's belief, while persistent sadness diminishes it. It is important to note that, in all experiments, the higher the perceived self-efficacy, the longer individuals persist with challenging and unsolvable problems before giving up. In the context of this study, this usually impairs the performance of learners whose perceived self-efficacy has been undermined (Mosola, 2020). This underscores the significance of teachers who possess essential skills and knowledge for success in teaching LVI, and the self-confidence to persevere even during challenging times and tasks. Additionally, when learners' belief in their coping efficacy is strengthened, they can approach trying situations more confidently, effectively utilising the skills they need to succeed. A strong self-efficacy belief includes affirmation of learners' capacity and the strength of that belief, contributing to improved academic performance among LVI in primary schools.

In an academic setting, PSE directly and indirectly motivates individuals' academic achievement by influencing their goals (Bandura, 2012). This implies that self-efficacy and goals are interrelated and contribute to academic accomplishments (Zimmerman, 1989). Furthermore, research by Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992) confirms that PSE has a direct and indirect impact on individuals' performance as it influences goal setting, the level of the established goals, the effort exerted by individuals, and their persistence in the face of difficulties (Bandura and Wood, 1989; Wood and Bandura, 1989). For example, learners with high levels of self-efficacy are more inclined towards tackling challenging tasks instead of avoiding them, attributing difficulties to insufficient effort and a lack of knowledge rather than insurmountable complexity (Bandura, 1993). Teachers who exhibit high self-efficacy in the classroom are more supportive of learners in inclusive classes than those with low aspirations and weak commitment to their goals (Bandura, 1993). The latter group of learners perceives themselves as initially less capable and tends to abandon their pursuits, leading to failure and a loss of faith in their abilities (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998).

This study highlights the significant role teachers' self-efficacy play in enhancing their skills to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools. It is crucial for teachers of LVI to instill a sense of self-efficacy in their students to bolster their academic achievements during evaluation activities. Perceived self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation (Bandura, 1977). In essence, PSE reflects one's confidence to excel in each context. Belief in one's abilities is crucial in determining an individual's cognitive strength (Bandura, 2008). As explained by Bandura (2012), self-efficacy entails both determination and perseverance, which enable individuals to overcome obstacles that impede the utilisation of their innate abilities to achieve their goals. The role of PSE is integral to human social development and general learning (Margolis, 2007).

Self-efficacy is also pivotal to motivation and learning, especially when comparing students with strong self-efficacy to those with weaker self-efficacy in academic contexts. Students with high self-efficacy exhibit higher motivation, invest more effort, persevere longer, and achieve more significant outcomes in academic pursuits. In contrast, struggling learners, who have low self-efficacy, often avoid tasks or prematurely abandon them, reducing their chances

of attaining academic success (Margolis, 2007). To address this issue, teachers must understand the importance of self-efficacy, its sources, and how to strengthen learners' weakened or wavering self-efficacy. This study explores how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools within the Maseru District. Iroegu (2015) and Bandura (1977) argued that successful performances boost an individual's confidence, while repeated disappointments diminish it. The rationale for enhancing teacher skills to improve the performance of visually impaired learners stems from this PSE Theory. Enhancing teachers' skills increases their belief in their ability to influence positive outcomes in their students. This is particularly important for visually impaired learners. PSE fosters an understanding of the need to enhance teachers' skills, as it is crucial for learners to develop confidence and succeed academically despite their disabilities. Therefore, in the context of this study, teachers' self-efficacy refers to their ability to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho. Khoaeane (2014) highlighted that teachers' classroom proficiency is closely intertwined with their self-efficacy.

3.4 PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY THEORY

3.4.1 Defining the concept of self-efficacy

This study is grounded in the Self-efficacy Theory, which is characterised by its focus on human behaviours when carrying out specific tasks (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviours required to achieve specific performance goals (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Self-efficacy encompasses confidence in one's ability to control motivation, behaviour, and social development. It can significantly influence individuals' choice of activities, effort, and achievement. Individuals bring varying levels of self-efficacy into their activities; these are shaped by past experiences, personal attributes, and social interactions. During an activity, individuals become aware of how effectively they manage it, which can, in turn, positively impact their self-efficacy for ongoing learning (Schunk, 1995). Bandura (1997) posits that self-efficacy is a tool for predicting outcomes and performance. However, high self-efficacy alone does not guarantee successful outcomes if the

individual lacks the necessary knowledge and skills (Schunk, 1995). Furthermore, self-efficacy interrelates with other self-beliefs, motivation, academic choices, changes, and achievements. The extent and nature of these relationships depend on the individual's self-efficacy and how the activities are initiated and evaluated (Pajares, 1996). Figure 3.1 below illustrates a simplified representation of the self-efficacy framework.

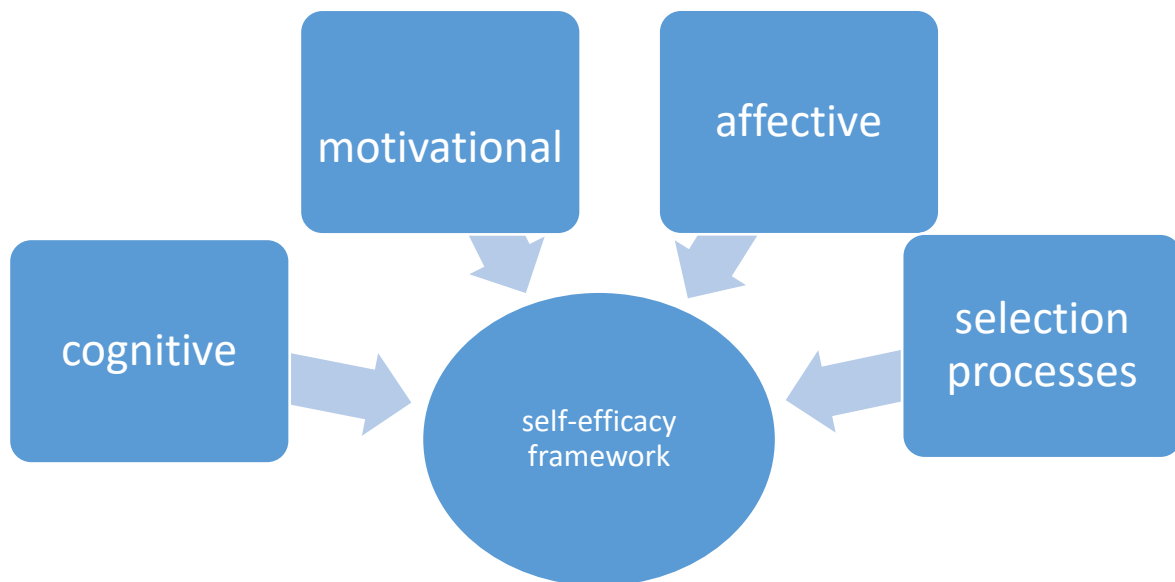


Figure 3.1: Self-efficacy framework (Source: Adapted from Bandura, 1997)

3.4.2 Efficacy-activated processes

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, self-efficacy beliefs have various effects through four primary processes: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes (Bandura, 1991; 1993, 2010). Arguably, the Perceived Self-Efficacy (PSE) Theory contributes to cognitive development and functioning in diverse ways (Bandura, 1988; 1998; 2010). As noted earlier, PSE is defined as individuals' beliefs about their capabilities in achieving specific performance levels that influence events affecting their lives. These self-efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave.

3.4.3 Cognitive processes

Self-efficacy beliefs exert various influences on cognitive processes. Human behaviours are generally purposeful and guided by forethought, which encompasses setting valued goals. These self-appraisals of capabilities impact personal goal setting (Bandura, 1994; 2006). Cognitive processes encompass thinking processes related to acquiring, organising, and utilising information. PSE directly influences learners' performance and significantly shapes their goal-setting and analytical thinking. For example, teachers with high self-efficacy can enhance their students' self-efficacy by providing more learning resources and using diverse teaching approaches and methods, thereby improving learners' performance.

Conversely, teachers with low self-efficacy may harm their students' performance due to a lack of adequate resources and the use of ineffective teaching methods (Ntseli, 2021). A study conducted by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1996) demonstrated that students who regulate their goals tend to perform academically better than those who do not. In the context of this study, self-driven teachers with high self-efficacy levels are likely to achieve better results than their counterparts with poor self-regulation skills.

In this study, self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in shaping self-belief and motivation among teachers and learners (Bandura, 1993; 2012). Consequently, self-beliefs play a crucial role in enhancing teachers' skills that are essential for improving academic performance among visually impaired primary school students. A teacher's success in meeting the pedagogical needs of visually impaired students using appropriate resources indicates their ability to interact with these students positively. In contrast, if a teacher fails to meet the diverse needs of visually impaired students in the inclusive classroom, there is a need to strengthen the teacher's capacity in this regard (Bandura, 1995). Teachers should recognise that visually impaired students exhibit varying learning paces, styles, and areas of strength and challenge (Tolbert, Killu and Lazarus, 2015).

3.4.4 Motivational processes

Motivational processes refer to an individual's internal cognitive and emotional processes that initiate and sustain his or her goal-directed actions and outcomes (DiBenedetto and Schunk,

2020). Self-efficacy's motivational outcomes encompass an individual's choice of activities, effort expended, persistence, and achievement. Individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to engage and invest more effort, persevere longer, especially in the face of challenges, and achieve higher outcomes. For instance, teachers can motivate visually impaired students through positive reinforcement, which can encourage these students to successfully complete academic assignments. Visually impaired students with a sense of self-efficacy regarding their learning are likely to engage in self-regulatory actions to enhance their learning (Usher and Schunk, 2018). A study by Cheung (2008) found a significant correlation between students' beliefs in their capabilities and their teachers' beliefs in their ability to teach effectively. This suggests that teacher self-efficacy positively influences visually impaired students' achievement. Positive reinforcement encourages students to actively participate in teaching and learning activities. Additionally, when teachers believe in themselves and see the importance of their teaching, they exhibit a substantial interest in their job (Cheung, 2008). Thus, motivation plays a vital role in improving the performance of visually impaired students in the inclusive classroom.

Motivation is closely aligned with teacher self-efficacy and leads to positive educational outcomes, including improved students' behaviours and academic achievement (Love et al., 2020). Academic self-efficacy significantly impacts motivation, learning, and academic success (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2021; Usher and Pajares, 2006; Yusuf, 2011). In this study, teacher self-efficacy is a crucial factor in evaluating the performance of teachers and students for the benefit of all stakeholders. This study explores how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of visually impaired students in primary schools in Maseru District.

3.4.5 Affective processes

Affective processes encompass behaviours that reflect an individual's level of professionalism. These processes include all emotional responses, both positive and negative, associated with an individual's behaviours, knowledge, or beliefs. Affective processes can alter an individual's perception of situations and outcomes, affect cognitive effort, and either enhance or hinder

cognitive and behavioural processes. Beliefs in personal efficacy can affect the levels of depression and stress individuals experience when faced with challenging situations and this can influence the individuals' motivation. In this study, affective processes are the emotional mediators of self-efficacy beliefs.

In the context of primary schools, visually impaired students who believe they can effectively manage the challenges they face are less likely to experience distressing thought patterns. Conversely, those who strongly believe they cannot handle challenges or difficulties are more likely to experience high levels of anxiety, which can negatively impact their academic performance (Bandura, 1993). These students may perceive many aspects of the school environment as fraught with danger. Additionally, visually impaired students exhibit a low sense of self-efficacy.

3.4.6 Selection processes: The influence of self-efficacy on career choices

As elucidated by Bandura (1994), efficacy-activated processes empower individuals to shape their environments and exercise a degree of control over their daily encounters. It is crucial to recognise that individuals are not merely passive recipients of occurrences in their surroundings; rather, they actively influence and are, in part, products of their environment (Bandura, 1992). Primary school teachers tasked with educating learners with visual impairments (LVI) make choices regarding their career paths and are emblematic of these efficacy-activated processes. Teachers who are influenced by their self-efficacy beliefs may opt to avoid certain activities and situations they perceive as surpassing their coping capabilities in classrooms, including LVI. Conversely, they may readily embrace challenging tasks or selectively engage with situations they deem capable of managing effectively while leaving behind those tasks that demand a greater depth of knowledge and capacity.

Under the purview of this study, the selection processes undertaken by primary school teachers in choosing to teach LVI students assume a profound significance. The career choices teachers make have far-reaching implications for the cultivation of distinct competencies, the development of personal interests, and the forging of crucial social networks. These choices,

in turn, wield considerable influence over the life courses of themselves the teachers, and the LVI they teach.

The strength of teachers' belief in their self-efficacy and the extent to which they contemplate various career options substantially determine the acquisition of skills and the cultivation of interest in enhancing the academic performance of LVI in primary schools. Researchers must appreciate the intricate interplay between self-efficacy and career choices. Teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy are less inclined towards shirking from challenging tasks; instead, they confront them head-on, driven by the confidence they draw from their abilities. Conversely, teachers with lower self-efficacy may display a propensity for avoiding activities that they perceive as challenging and, instead, gravitate towards choosing tasks that are familiar, suitable, and relatively easier to execute.

In essence, a teacher's high level of self-efficacy becomes a decisive factor in shaping their performance trajectory. A strong self-efficacy fosters an environment wherein challenges are embraced, competence is developed, and the academic performance of LVI is enriched. This underscores the integral relationship between selection processes, self-efficacy, and performance, serving as a pivotal point of interest in the ongoing exploration of effective educational strategies in inclusive educational settings.

3.5 APPLICABILITY OF THE PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY THEORY

According to Bandura (1997), PSE is defined as people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. For Bandura (1995), PSE concerns people's beliefs in their capabilities to control their functioning and events that affect their lives. Beliefs in personal efficacy affect individuals' life choices, level of motivation, quality of functioning, resilience to adversity, and vulnerability to stress and depression. For example, if a teacher can motivate LVI, those learners are likely to achieve their aims and will be able to perform well in class. As such, teachers with high self-efficacy promote learners' self-efficacy, while incompetent teachers influence learners to perform unsatisfactorily in class because the teacher lacks some relevant delivery skill.

Additionally, PSE is also used as the analytical framework that helps the researcher explore the relationship between teachers and learners, with teachers believing their learners can excel against all odds. In an academic setting, PSE motivates academic achievement directly and indirectly by influencing individual goals. In other words, self-efficacy and goals contribute to high academic attainments (Zimmerman, 1989). Self-efficacy predicts academic performance at different levels (Multon, Brown and Lent, 1991; Pajares, 1996). It is also helpful in assessing academic motivation and career choices (Lent, Brown and Larkin, 1989). Therefore, academic success or excellence is not solely the child's responsibility, but also the teacher's role to fulfill their beliefs. Bandura (1997) emphasises that self-efficacy belief is essential because it is centred on human functioning. Self-efficacy beliefs determine and align with how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1994). Thus, this theory is suitable for this study because it explores how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru District.

According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy beliefs produce diverse effects through four major processes, which include: (i) mastery experience, (ii) vicarious experience, (iii) social persuasion, and (iv) reduction of people's stress reactions, including altering their negative emotional weaknesses and misinterpretations of their physical states. The relevance of these four sources or processes to the study is discussed below.

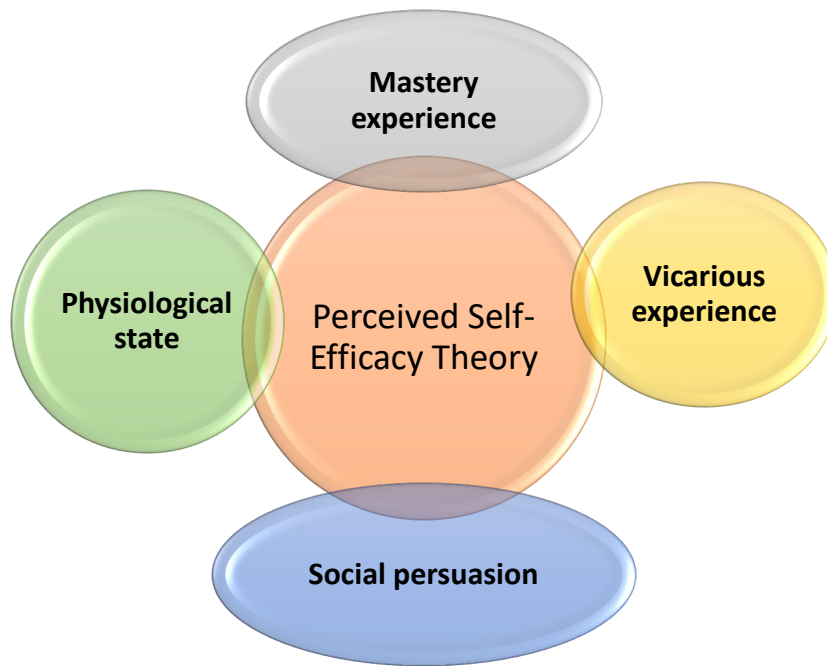


Figure 3.2: The four major sources of perceived self-efficacy (Source: Adopted from Bandura, 1997)

3.5.1 Mastery experience

Figure 3.2 depicts mastery experience as the most powerful source of self-efficacy. Mastery experience is when an individual experiences success in a previous performance of a challenging activity (Bandura, 1997). This source shows people like oneself successfully managing task demands, whereby successes build a strong belief in one's efficacy, and failures undermine success, especially if the failure occurs before a sense of efficacy is firmly established (Bandura, 1989, 1994). Margolis and McCabe (2006) add that learners' successful experiences boost self-efficacy, while failure erodes it. When a teacher reaches a milestone in meeting the needs of LVI and gives tasks that grab them in the directive procedure, it gives genuine proof that they can interact with learners. Yet, Bandura (1995) indicates that failure in executing the activities can hinder LVI capability to succeed (Bandura, 1995).

When a primary school teacher has a high level of self-efficacy in teaching LVI, learners will have confidence in themselves and their self-efficacy. However, the learners' self-esteem will be lower if the teacher has low self-esteem. This proves that teachers must enhance their skills to improve the academic performance of LVI (Yada and Savolainen, 2017; Mosola, 2020).

The success of the implementation of inclusion depends on the teachers' rational beliefs like being honest, committed, dedicated, passionate, faithful, devoted, loyal, confident and exhibiting Botho/Ubuntu/ humanity for them to teach learners with special educational needs, including the LVI (Ozokcu, 2018).

In the current study, the teachers' self-efficacy refers to the skills that are needed to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Lesotho. Ganzach (2016) affirms that capacity is established mainly on the teachers' self-efficacy in the classroom setting. Mojavezi and Tamiz (2012) found that teachers' self-efficacy belief influences how they use teaching skills to exercise control in their classrooms, support LVI, and motivate creative teaching and learning. Therefore, LVI need to develop a powerful sense of self-efficacy to boost performances through learner assessment activities and ensure quality educational provisions. Teacher self-efficacy is aligned with numerous positive educational results, including successfully managing the class, applying innovative teaching strategies, practicing innovative teaching, and demonstrating teacher commitment (Tseeke, 2021). Teachers and learners must, therefore, have a strong sense of self-efficacy to boost their purpose to succeed by exploring how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho.

3.5.2 Vicarious experience

Vicarious experience, within the context of teacher-efficacy, means an individual observing another individual teach. Seeing people like themselves succeed through sustained effort results in observers believing that they, too, possess the capabilities to master comparable activities required to succeed (Bandura,1997). In the context of this study, this second source of efficacy implies that learners learn by observing the behaviours of certain individuals and imitate the observed behaviours, as the results of these behaviours to the environment, and learners' awareness thereof, function as the primary factors that guide development in a reciprocal and triadic relationship (Bandura, 1986, 1977).

In this study, vicarious experience is named social models or observation. For teachers to master tasks and build their self-efficacy, they can observe knowledgeable people. Yet, observing other people failing, nevertheless, the persistent efforts made tend to lower one's judgment of one's ability (Bandura, 1995). On the other side, an encore of tasks regardless of failure can help teachers to consider what they can improve to enhance their teaching skills. LVI show that this social model was strengthened to change the behaviours of individuals; therefore, learners are inspired to emulate the behaviours of their teachers. For example, highly efficacious teachers display more advanced instructional skills by productively explaining content, questioning, and providing feedback to LVI (Mosola, 2020). Likewise, low-efficacious teachers have limited knowledge about IE practices and their roles, making them less confident to properly engage with LVI in the mainstream classroom setting. The teachers of LVI in the regular classroom may not be well equipped and confident enough to teach LVI in a manner that meets their educational needs.

If LVI observed their model being punished, they would be discouraged from copying the model's behaviours, and this is called vicarious punishment. Learning from models may take different forms, such as new behavioural patterns, cognitive competencies, judgmental standards, and generative rules for creating new forms of behaviours (Bandura, 1977, 1989). Therefore, observational learning is one of the fundamental ways of putting cognitive competencies in place and enlarging them, which further shows that positive approaches and beliefs towards LSEN are related to better learner academic progress; yet poor efficacy belief can result in teachers perceiving themselves as not being capacitated enough to make IE a success and they seem not to try to make this new educational model a success (Ozokcu, 2018). For example, teachers of LVI may feel that these learners are not easy to support or teach due to the teachers' lack of skills and training in teaching such learners. Therefore, teachers become too unconfident to extend their efforts to support these learners (LVI).

3.5.3 Social persuasion

Bandura (1977) explains that social persuasion indicates that most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling, from observing others, one forms an idea of how new

behaviours are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action. This is a third way of strengthening people's beliefs that they (teachers) have what it takes to succeed in teaching the LSEN in mainstream classroom settings and to make the learners not feel frustrated and that their work is at risk (Lebona, 2020). For example, teachers in general may find it difficult to teach LVI due to other teachers who are too ill-equipped to teach them. As a result, such teachers become less prepared and less capacitated to extend their efforts to support the learning of LVI (Matobo and Matlosa, 2007). Therefore, teachers must enhance their skills to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools. Mosola (2020) highlighted that teachers' preparedness and eagerness to modify the curriculum to accommodate LVI may increase their learners' learning opportunities. They judge their capabilities more in terms of personal improvement than by comparison against the achievement of others (Bandura and Cevone, 1986). For people who view ability as a fixed capacity, the performance level is a diagnostic method of determining inherent cognitive capacities. Errors and deficient performance carry a high evaluative threat. Therefore, they prefer tasks that minimise errors, simultaneously permitting a ready display of intellectual proficiency at the expense of expanding their knowledge and competencies. High efforts also influence others to belittle their perceived ability (Wood and Bandura, 1986).

In this study, social persuasion is identified as one's capacity to produce chosen levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. This is mentioned as a form of verbal feedback from others in making efforts to boost someone's confidence (Bandura, 1977). Teachers play an important part in remediating and modeling LVI behaviours in the mainstream classroom and observing behaviours they can display with their emotions. This shows that self-efficacy is a critical action in self-regulated learning, which means that strong efficacy guides learners to strive to master challenges, whereas low efficacy results in learners giving up learning. It is believed that when learners are praised or given positive feedback, they develop a high level of self-esteem, and there is a high chance that their performance will improve. Therefore, it is important to accept that teachers cannot make it to successfully teach LVI alone. Still, they need to work collaboratively with other people to improve and give quality education to LVI.

Mosola (2020) adds that a low sense of self-efficacy in teachers brings about an unclear and ill-tempered arrangement concerning learners who mistrust such teachers. Mphale and Mohlauri (2014) add that the lack of skills for most of the teachers teaching LVI could be one of the factors contributing to learners' poor academic performance in primary schools in Lesotho. However, according to Koh and Shin (2017), barriers and concerns of this nature are frequent, even in countries like the United States of America. Therefore, teachers must be capacitated with the skills needed for them to teach LVI for them to improve academically in primary schools in Lesotho.

3.5.4 Physiological state

The fourth way of modifying self-beliefs of efficacy is to reduce people's stress reactions and alter their negative emotional weaknesses and misinterpretations of their physical states (teachers' affective states such as stress, anxiety, and excitement when performing tasks). Matobo and Matlosa (2007) have found that LSEN were hidden by their parents at home, depriving them of their opportunity to attend formal schools like their peers without disabilities. In 2000, the Government of Lesotho introduced Free Compulsory Education (FCE), which obligated the inclusion of every learner in mainstream teaching and learning processes (Ministry of Education and Training, 2010). These developments made teachers ask for adjustments to the curriculum to accommodate LVI in their classes, which positively influenced learners to increase their learning positions. For example, when the class teacher performs positively in changing the teaching methods, approaches, strategies, and skills to accommodate and meet the needs of LVI, LVI can link with other learners without disabilities, which is called mastery experience (Bandura, 1976). Specifically, when teachers face situations like this, they depend on insights drawn from past mastery to build facts that can be used to bolster judgments about current abilities (Bandura, 1982). Yet, fruitful teaching and learning performance enhances the ability and confidence of teachers and learners to perform behavioural patterns that can assist in constructing and fostering a very positive efficacy belief (Wood and Bandura, 1989). For teachers to possess a strong sense of self-efficacy, they need to acknowledge that they cannot single-handedly support LVI. Therefore, teachers who

outlined a positive sense of efficacy belief will likely enhance teachers' skills to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools at the Maseru District in Lesotho.

3.6 THE BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF PSE THEORY

PSE is grounded on many basic assumptions. One of the major assumptions underlying PSE is that learning is a central procedure that may or may not guide behaviours (Bandura, 2007). This means that learning may not occur immediately; for example, LVI can process the new behaviour, and their learning may not be affected until later. PSE suggests that individuals can learn, set goals, select learning plans, and direct their behaviours accordingly (Attwood, 2020; Zimmerman, 2013). These are called self-starting behaviours.

Similarly, when LVI are motivated, they are determined to achieve and excel in the classroom setting. As a result, the teacher should observe behaviours that motivate learners and use them as positive pillars for the fruitful completion of academic tasks (Mateusi, 2011). In this regard, teachers need to use their cognitive skills and social experiences and self-efficacy belief to motivate LVI to work towards academic excellence.

Bandura (1986) presumed that human expectations, beliefs, and cognitive competency are developed and changed by social influences so that learners can learn by observing others in a social context. Bandura (1997) asserts that the emotional reactions exhibited by LVI are activated through modelling. Bandura (2012) argues that through learners' observable features, the learners can influence their social environment even before they say or perform an action. Therefore, teachers relate to LVI at this point, irrespective of their emotional state; this is often mirrored by how motivated the teachers are in teaching these learners.

One more assumption of PSE is that past experiences affect reinforcements, beliefs, and anticipations (Bandura, 2012). These past experiences determine whether and why a learner will engage in a specific behaviour (Adam, Young, Simpson and Keen, 2019). Bandura and Wood (1989) assert that in reinforcement, the internal or external responses to learners' behaviours affect the likelihood of continuing or discontinuing particular behaviours. Suppose social reinforcements, such as praises, smiles, and overt participation, are unproductive, it will

be essential to put in a more tangible prize chosen according to learners' liking, which means that self-efficacy is very important and can be influenced by many things, such as comparing peers' and teachers' performance with positive and negative performance.

3.7 RELEVANCE OF THE PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY THEORY TO THE CURRENT STUDY

This theory is relevant to this study because it fosters an understanding of how skills enhancement improves learner support in inclusive classes. Consequently, the theory helps foster an understanding of primary-level teachers' beliefs about their capabilities in teaching learners with diverse impairments and how these beliefs can improve educational experiences and outcomes for LVI. This theory helps the researcher explain how enhancing teachers' skills can be used to support creativity and interaction among LVI in an organised way.

The PSE Theory is important to this study because it can build and influence the performance of LVI academic areas. As learners generally must deal with academic problems, their academic self-efficacy may include such cognitive perceptions as a belief in LVI capabilities to achieve many academic goals, confidence in task performance, and visualisation of success. These perceptions help learners enhance their efforts to perform academic tasks successfully, and this positively influences the performance of LVI (Nasir and Iqbal, 2019). Honicke and Broadbent (2016) concluded that academic self-efficacy moderately correlates with academic achievement, and other factors mediate this relationship. Koseoglu (2015) also found that academic self-efficacy significantly predicts learners' academic performance. Monyane (2020) also reported similar findings. In this study, teachers' self-efficacy refers to their skills in improving the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Lesotho.

3.8 IMPORTANCE OF THE PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY THEORY

The Perceived Self-Efficacy Theory plays a major role in understanding LSEN and LVI because many studies have confirmed the importance of self-efficacy in different disciplines. Mosola (2020) explored how teachers' self-efficacy can be enhanced in Lesotho's mainstream schools by supporting LVI through school-based support networks. Li (2012) explored city students'

attitudes, self-efficacy, effort, and academic achievement toward research methods and statistics. The results showed that both attitude and self-efficacy could significantly predict effort. Mullen, McAuley, Satariano, Kealey, and Prohaska (2012) pointed out that physical activity and functional limitations in adults influence self-efficacy and functional performance. Johnson adds that teachers perceive their capabilities as critical to service delivery or instructional practice and influential to the teaching and learning process.

Bandura (1977) indicates an individual's belief is their ability to succeed. PSE plays a major role in how people think, act, and feel about their place in the world. Bandura (1977) further asserts that the goals people pursue, how they accomplish them, and how they reflect upon their motivation, behaviour, and social environment constitute their beliefs. It is also an important behavioural change technique (Bandura, 1977). In this study, for teachers to enhance their skills to improve academic performance among learners with visual impairment in primary schools, they ought to master experiences or someone's genuine performance of activities and strengthen their self-efficacy. They can observe other professionals as more knowledgeable and skilled people. When the teacher succeeds in meeting LVI's educational needs and carrying out tasks that capture their interests during instructional processes, it gives real proof that they can link with these learners. However, Bandura (1995) indicates that lack of success in carrying out activities or tasks can also affect one's perception of their capability to succeed.

Nevertheless, an individual's continuous attempts and observance of others failing in their attempts, are apt in lowering one's judgments of their ability (Bandura, 1986, 1995). On the other side, repeated presentations of activities, regardless of failure, can help teachers constructively reflect on what they can do better as they attempt to improve their teaching practices. This statement aligns with the findings of Yesilyurt, Ulas, and Akan (2016) who point out that self-efficacy gives feedback to questions asked by teachers regarding whether they can plan and play out the necessary thoughts and actions when performing their duties. In this case, successful efficacy-builders do more than convey positive appraisals.

Podell and Soodak (1993) indicated that teachers who experienced a high sense of self-efficacy reported that the general education setting was adequate for positioning learners facing

challenges in the teaching and learning process. High self-efficacy in this context could influence teachers to put in more effort and creatively plan the teaching and learning activities to help learners with many learning needs realise their potential, which in turn means increased learner fulfillment and effective implementation of inclusive education for learners with various learning needs (Tseeke, 2021). Therefore, teachers' self-efficacy is a conceptualisation that relates to rich and important teaching practices, which are also recognised as having an important role to play in encouraging the improvement of classroom practice and learners' performance. Yet, they are perceived as the main factors contributing to changes in the education system (Anderson, 2015).

3.9 WEAKNESSES OF THE PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY THEORY

Bandura's (1997) Perceived Self-Efficacy Theory was considered the dominant theory used by many scholars to frame their research. Low self-efficacy is systematically related to increased fear and avoidance behaviours characterising anxiety disorder (Raeder, 2019). According to Bandura (1995), failure to carry out an activity can also challenge one's perception of one's ability to succeed; as such, making one's observations when watching others fail can lower the person's judgment of one's abilities. This can negatively impact LVI's academic performance. As a result, LVI can develop a tendency to avoid going to school, sometimes dropping out of school at a tender age. Therefore, teachers should display effective and successful teaching practices. It is of paramount importance for teachers to enhance students' self-efficacy beliefs to foster positive attitudes regarding the students' capacities to attain academic excellence, as well as to cultivate their confidence in their ability to proficiently engage in academic tasks and effectively absorb instructional content (Hayat, 2020).

Table 3.1: The difference between people with high self-efficacy and those with Low self-efficacy

People with a high sense of self-efficacy	People with low sense of self-efficacy
Develop a deeper interest in the activities in which they participate	Avoid challenging tasks
Form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities	Believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities

Recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments.	Focus on personal failings and negative outcomes.
View challenging problems as tasks to be mastered.	Quickly lose confidence in personal abilities.

Table 3.1 above shows the characteristics of teachers with high and low self-efficacy. Teachers must be equipped with the skills required in implementing the curriculum in a way that accommodates LSEN, develop the potential to apply different classroom management styles to accommodate different learners, make use of learners' unique skills, identify and assess the different behavioural patterns they have and support them to raise their low self-efficacy to high self-efficacy (Mpya, 2007).

Research has consistently demonstrated a strong correspondence between an individual's belief in their ability to apply control over potential threats and reduced levels of anxiety (Bandura, 1977; Iroegbu, 2015). Specifically, individuals with low levels of perceived self-efficacy tend to exhibit higher levels of anxiety and neuroticism and are more likely to experience symptoms associated with anxiety disorders (Raeder et al., 2019).

3.10 THE ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY OF BANDURA'S PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY

A theory that supports an ontology and epistemology of any kind has a key impact on the research category being guided and the kind of knowledge being constructed. Therefore, the theory is of prime value to this research (Maree, 2017). This section discusses the theory's ontological and epistemological assumptions, as outlined below.

3.10.1 Ontological assumptions

According to Maree (2017), ontological assumptions concern the nature of reality, which is preconceived as objective; for example, the researcher can assume that social reality can be understood from an external point of view. The Perceived Self-Efficacy Theory is simply the study of humans, done merely through words and names created by the mind and within

levels of individual consciousness. This study has adopted a research approach rooted in ontology, focusing on the nature of reality, where the reality ascertained through the interview process is inherently socially constructed. Within this framework, the study seeks to elucidate participants' perspectives regarding how teaching skills can be effectively augmented to enhance the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District, Lesotho. As the participants engage in comprehensive discussions, their collective viewpoints will hopefully shape and transform the existing understanding of reality regarding how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District in Lesotho.

Moreover, this research employs the Perceived Self-efficacy (PSE) theory, which positions the researcher as a facilitator for guiding research participants in exploring their individually constructed realities. This exploration primarily involves questioning the challenges faced by teachers in Lesotho in fulfilling their role of enhancing teaching skills to elevate academic performance among LVI. As a theoretical framework, the PSE Theory underscores the importance of examining the intricate interplay between the individual (teacher), their environment (the educational setting), and the occupation (teaching), thus providing a holistic lens through which to understand and address the prevailing challenges.

3.10.2 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemology is a branch of Philosophy that addresses questions involving individuals' ideal cognitive aims and achievements, which include knowledge, justification, explanation, understanding, and wisdom (Gunstone, 2015). Epistemology determines what researchers accept as the truth or as real, guiding how individuals attain that knowledge (Whaley and Krane, 2011). (Graaig, 1990) further states that Epistemology is the study of how we know, what we know, what initiates a valid understanding of knowledge, and the standards with which genuine knowledge should comply.

Maree (2017) highlights the pivotal role Epistemology plays in investigating the nature of knowledge and the diverse methodologies used to acquire it. Consequently, this study places

significant emphasis on acquiring knowledge as it pertains to optimising the teaching of learners with visual impairments. The research aims to uncover and comprehend the reality associated with effective pedagogical approaches suitable for LVI. These approaches encompass appropriate lesson planning, the requisite educational resources, and the essential teaching skills required to cater to the unique needs of these students. Moreover, the study endeavours to explore how teachers can enhance their instructional techniques and teaching skills to bolster the academic performance of LVI. Nolan, Macfarlane, and Carmel (2013) have further endorsed that researchers focusing on children and their educational needs must grapple with the interplay between their perspective on reality and that of the study participants. This examination extends to constructing meaning around knowledge and the formation thereof. Thus, the study seeks to elucidate the reasons underpinning the necessity of enhancing teachers' skills to elevate the academic achievements of LVI in primary schools.

3.11 ROLE OF A RESEARCHER

Bandura's Perceived Self-Efficacy Theory is commonly defined as the belief in one's capabilities to achieve a goal or an outcome. Therefore, the theory is considered appropriate for the current study because it is important in highlighting the researcher's understanding that teachers' self-efficacy can significantly influence the teaching and learning process (Bandura, 2012). The researcher aligns this understanding with how teachers' skills can be improved to raise the academic performance of LVI enrolled in primary schools in Lesotho, yet teachers understand how strongly they believe they can use their abilities to work towards goals. Thus, teachers' powerful beliefs play the most important role in ascertaining their capabilities to teach LVI to other learners without disabilities (Mosola, 2020).

Teachers teaching learners with diverse needs can benefit from collaboration with teachers skilled and knowledgeable in special needs education to enable them to identify and help LVI, thus cultivating a positive attitude and willingness to accept LVI in inclusive classes and assist all learners, irrespective of their special educational needs (MoET, 2018). This theory elucidates the researcher's vital role in enhancing teachers' skills to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District, Lesotho. This shows that

teaching skills play a pivotal role in the teaching and learning of LVI in general education settings, and this shows that PSE is relevant to this study as it bolsters the researcher's understanding of how teaching skills relate to how much a teacher can teach in a learner-centered approach and activity-based method as this approach recognises the learner as the primary reason for curriculum planning and implementation (Mosola, 2020).

In this study, the researcher recognises the complications experienced by LVI and their needs, teachers, and the school environment, all these are discovered through the interviews with the participants. The PSE Theory plays a pivotal role in assisting the researcher to be more sensitive about the background and involvement of the teachers to obtain the desired outcomes from LVI by using multiple and different teaching skills. According to LNFO (2016), most learners with disabilities, LVI included, tend to drop out of school because of limited support. Suhlane (2017) shows that this lack of support could be described by the limited number of teachers trained in special needs education. Bandura's (1997) theory is relevant to the present study as it reveals that schools are crucial agencies in the cultivation of self-efficacy, and many LVI demonstrate a sense of low self-efficacy for learning and high performance. This negatively affects their motivation when learning along with their counterparts in general educational settings in their primary schools. As a result, teachers need to adopt different teaching skills and strategies that are suitable for teaching LSEN and LVI (Mosia, 2014).

3.12 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE RESEARCHER AND PARTICIPANTS

Bandura's (1997) Perceived Self-Efficacy (PSE) Theory is centred on the belief in one's ability to organise and execute actions necessary for achieving specific goals. Self-efficacy beliefs pertain to the confidence individuals have in performing specific tasks, and they can vary based on the generality of the task being performed (Bandura, 1977). The primary objective of this study is to investigate how teachers can enhance their skills to improve the academic performance of learners with visual impairments in primary schools in the Maseru District of Lesotho. This endeavour requires collaboration between the researcher and the co-

researcher, emphasising the necessity of a close working relationship between the two parties.

To foster successful cooperation, the researcher and participants should establish mutual respect, acknowledge each other's perspectives, adhere to the norms of conduct, and differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours (Resnik and Shamoo, 2015). Open communication and trust are vital in this collaborative relationship, as both parties work together to address the challenges teachers encountered when instructing LVI in mainstream primary schools in Maseru District in Lesotho. These discussions, facilitated through telephonic conversations, focus-group discussions, and non-participatory methods, draw on participants' past experiences to enhance their research knowledge and research self-efficacy regarding improving teaching skills to benefit LVI. Co-researchers who possess invaluable insights and expertise are integral to the quest for an understanding of how best to elevate teachers' skills to enhance academic performance among LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District, Lesotho.

3.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced Bandura's Perceived Self-Efficacy Theory (PSE, 1997) as the theoretical framework for this study. It provided an overview of the historical background of the theory, the theory's objectives, and the applications thereof. The chapter also emphasised the significance of efficacy beliefs in socially and mentally enhancing the skills and self-efficacy of the teachers working with LVI in primary schools. It discussed the theory's relevance, assumptions, and importance to the study. In addition, it presented the implications for ontology and epistemology. Additionally, the chapter explained the researcher's role in the research study and the collaboration between the researcher and co-researchers, who, in this case, are the study participants. The subsequent chapter, Chapter 4, delves into research design and Methodology.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Kothari (2004), research methodology is a systematic way of solving a research problem. It is critical to acknowledge that when we refer to research methodology, we are not only referring to the design whereby the researcher selects data collection but also an analysis of the procedures to investigate a specific research problem (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) postulate that the terms method and methodology are often used in specifying how the researchers may go about practically studying whatever they believe can be known, which are mostly used in conflicting and often confusing ways in the research literature (Carter and Little, 2007). However, explaining the research methodology is beyond the scope and mandate of the current chapter. Suffice it to say that the methodology and techniques adopted in executing the current research study are described systematically as the plans to investigate the phenomenon for this study “to paint a clear picture of how the data was collected and analysed” (Shumba, 2018:71). Effort is made to rigorously, lucidly and concisely describe the research setting as well as to motivate for the research design considered ideal for this research study.

The researcher selected the methodology to investigate the phenomenon for this study, which encompasses the research paradigm, research approach, and research design in identifying participants, the data collection, presentation, and analysis (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Mouton, 2001). The logical descriptions of the various steps taken, and the justifications provided for each of the steps and decisions, resonate with Maine (2022) and Padayachee’s (2021) conceptualisation of methodology as a systematic approach or a procedure to be followed and how data will be collected and analysed, “within the framework of specific epistemological and ontological assumptions” (Mouton and Muller, 1998:2). Importantly, an ontology defines the research framework while epistemology determines the research questions that the researcher answers in this study.

4.2 THE STUDY CONTEXT– LESOTHO



Figure 4.1: Map of Lesotho illustrating the ten districts

Figure 4.1 shows the map of Lesotho with its 10 districts namely Qacha's Nek, Quthing, Mohale's Hoek, Mafeteng, Maseru, Berea, Leribe, Botha-Bothe, Thaba Tseka, and Mokhotlong. Lesotho is a small landlocked country surrounded by its much larger neighbour, South Africa. This mountainous country has a population of about 2 million. Previously a British protectorate, the country gained independence on the 4th of October 1966. Lesotho is a constitutional monarch, ruled by a King as the Head of State and governed by a 33-member Senate and 120-member national assembly. The researcher purposively selected two mainstream primary schools as the case for the current study for they practice the inclusion of LVI. The two schools are located near the Lesotho College of Education in Maseru District, Lesotho. About 300 meters from the royal palace. According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), a research site selects a site to locate individuals involved in the research or event. This chapter section provides a detailed description of the study's geographic location and school profile. This helps the reader better understand the factors that might have shaped the experiences of the LVI.

Maseru is the capital city, and it has good infrastructure (Monne, 2021). For this reason, many services are found only in Maseru, implying that people who live in other districts must travel to Maseru to access services. For example, most parents of LVI from rural areas move to Maseru to find better job opportunities. According to Monyane (2020), this region is large, with an area of 4 279 square kilometres. The researcher selected schools from the same district to ensure commonality regarding input and for logistics reasons. Feasibility and suitability of the sites were essential to the researcher; permission and access to these sites were granted (McMillian and Schumacher, 2010; Maree, 2012). The research participants for this study comprised six participants from each school; six participants were engaged in focus group discussion (FGD), the same participants, because of a limited number of teaching staff participated in telephonic interviews, and the total number for both schools added up to 12 participants.

The first research site was a government-owned primary school. The school admits learners with visual conditions ranging from low vision to total blindness. It accepts learners from the ten districts of Lesotho. The school has a boarding school that admits LVI. In School B, learners learn braille in this school before they go to Grade 3. In School A, learners (LVI) are offered only Grade 1 and Grade 2. Mostly, the type of learners in this school did not attend pre-school. This is their first formal education, making it difficult to teach the learners in primary school. School A teachers are transcribers to LVI from Grade 3 to Grade 7 in this school. This is the type of school where teachers and learners use resources such as Stylus and Braille machines to process their daily teaching and learning. The school is independent of feeding LVI in the boarding school. These LVI go home during long school vacations.

The second research site was a church-owned school, gave access to LVI for those with low vision conditions. It is worth noting that learners admitted to this mainstream primary school might require little or no support from some assistive devices, as they can read printed materials and write using pen and paper (Matobako, 2021). The admission requirement in this primary school was the same for all learners, and there were no restrictions for a certain group of learners. Unfortunately, there are no professional teachers whose main roles and responsibilities are to identify LVI and to assist them in undergoing a screening process. This

means there is a need for teachers who are mandated to take care of their welfare within the school premises.

4.3 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTER

Generally, this methodology chapter is introduced under the main headings summarised below.

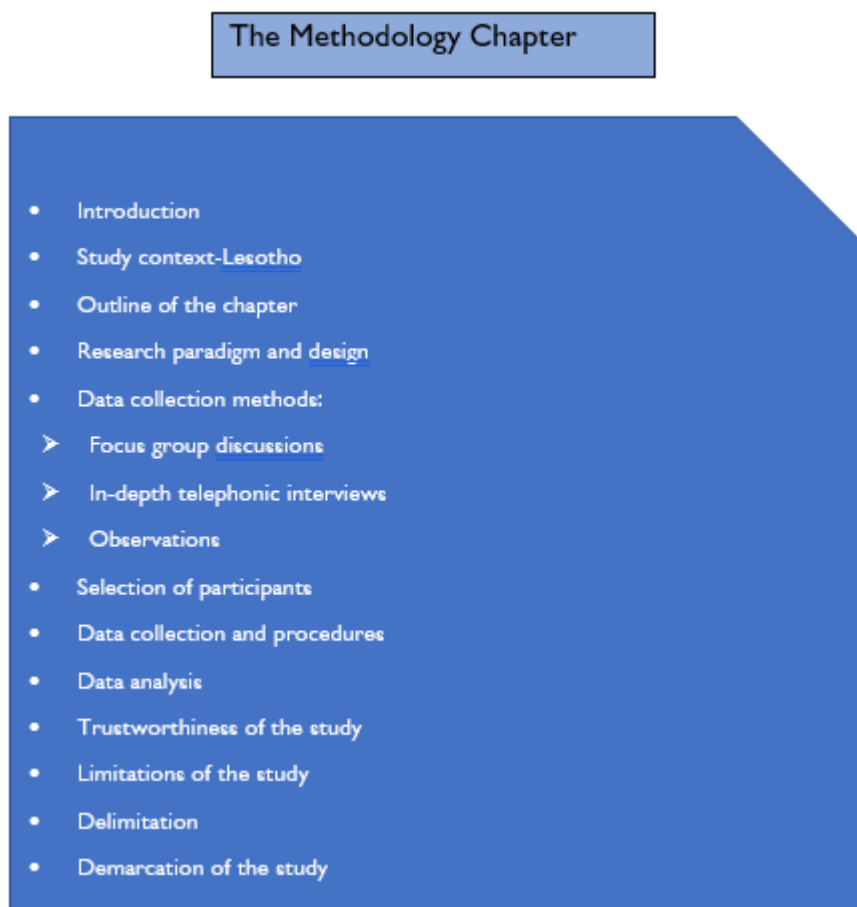


Figure 4.2: Outline of the methodology chapter

4.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM AND DESIGN

4.4.1 Defining research paradigm

This section focuses on the research paradigm used in the study, why it was chosen, and how it relates to the research study. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019), a research paradigm

can be defined as a model that social scientists use to view the objects of the research. de Vos et al. (2018) stated that a common characteristic of paramount significance is that all scientific research is conducted within the confines of a given paradigm. According to Cooper and White (2012), a paradigm is a set of logically related assumptions, concepts, or principles that tend to guide our thinking and our important assumptions about how the world functions. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) define a research paradigm as a global view, which is how a researcher brings a general philosophical orientation to the study.

According to Braun and Clarke (2017), a paradigm is a set of logical ideas that guide a research study and inform the choice of the research questions, methodology, method, and intentions of the researcher. This research paradigm is suitable for the current study because the study aims to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District. The research paradigm plays a significant role in influencing the research methodology employed in a study. The methodology describes the guiding principles and procedures employed in a study. It also determines how data collection and analysis processes were conducted. In the interpretive paradigm, both the researcher and the participants are important in the social construction and recreate knowledge (Scotland, 2010).

Furthermore, the research paradigm is vital in influencing a study's research methodology. The methodology describes the guiding principles and procedures employed in conducting the study. It also determines how data collection and analysis processes will be undertaken in the worldview chosen by the researcher, whereby relevance to the study at hand was the interpretive paradigm. In this case, the researcher worked with the participants to gain an understanding of their roles and responsibilities in working with LVI by exploring how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance among LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District.

In formulating a definition of research paradigm, based on an understating from the various works of renowned scholars, the researcher concluded that it is the foundation of any research study, together with the beliefs, values, and assumptions of knowledge, these being the aspects the researcher uses as a point of departure for their study (Mouton, 2017). This

involves being familiar with the suitable paradigm under which the study operates. Therefore, this paradigm is appropriate for this study as it assists the researcher in exploring teachers' skills to improve academic performance among LVI in selected primary schools in the Maseru District, Lesotho.

4.4.2 Interpretive paradigm

The current study adopted an interpretive paradigm because it is concerned with understanding the world from the subjective experiences of individuals (Mouton, 2017). As Blaikie and Priest (2017) point out, an interpretive approach ensures that the research embeds the researcher and the research process into the social meaning of the group's experiences. Khabanyane (2020) states that an interpretive approach provides an in-depth understanding of phenomena through a detailed orientated analysis. This study allowed for exploring areas that previously had not been thought of.

The researcher chose to employ interpretivism in this study because it utilises observations and interviews to obtain data (Babbie, 2019; Denzin and Lincoln, 2013). This research study utilised interviews to obtain data. Research shows that interpretivism believes in multiple realities and subjective meanings, which are ontological and epistemological orientations, respectively (Padayachee, 2021; Wahyuni, 2012). As aforementioned, based on the assertions of other researchers, the researcher considered a research paradigm as the foundation of this research study in accordance with the beliefs, values, and assumptions of knowledge that the researcher uses in conducting the current study.

4.4.2.1 Paradigm assumptions

Paradigms and their assumptions guide the structure and nature of questions and are so ingrained that they are not usually examined in detail (Jason and Glenwick, 2016, cited in Padayachee, 2021). Given this, the researcher viewed the following assumptions: Ontology as the nature of reality and how we come to gain the knowledge of what we know, epistemology, which Ritchie and Lewis (2003:13) explain as being concerned with ways of knowing and

learning about the social world and focusing on questions such as: how can we know about reality and the basis of our knowledge? This is regarded as the value of the truth and facts we know. Lastly, a methodological consideration is the language of instrumentation and data collection.

4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

4.5.1 Defining research design

Research design is the inquiry within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches that provide specific direction for procedures in a research study” (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This means that the researchers plan how they will embark on procedures to help establish how variables relate to a study. For example, “By its nature, a research design is more of a road map that describes the path linking the research questions to the actual implementation of the study” (Shumba, 2018:76). As Durrheim (2006) conceptualises it, it is an architectural blueprint. In this study, the epistemological and ontological assumptions to which the researcher subscribes played a significant role in the choice of the research design.

4.5.2 Exploratory case study design

This study adopted an exploratory case study design. This qualitative approach encourages investigating ways to enhance teachers’ skills in supporting LVI in selected primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho. This study's exploratory case study explores how teachers’ skills can be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools. Hamilton (2011) defines a case study as research involving an in-depth exploration of a particular entity or idea. Mouton (2017) indicates that case study designs are appropriate for qualitative studies, and usually involve multiple data collection methods. Hamilton (2011) clarifies that a wide range of data sources are often used but goes further to say that this is done to build up strong evidence from targeted individuals about their views, perceptions, and experiences regarding the issue under investigation.

An exploratory case study design focuses mainly on a representative group, an organisation, or a phenomenon in its natural context within a specified time. Researchers indicate that different forms of data sources, which are usually used in case studies, include codes from participants, anecdotes, narratives of participants, observations, notes, video and audio records, which should help the researcher develop an understanding of the complexity of many variables in the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014; Hancock and Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2017). The nature of the study necessitates that the researcher directly uses information from participants about their experiences. This would require the use of the teachers' narratives. The key function of narratives is to foster reflection and re-studying by the participants (Clandinin and Connelly, 1989).

However, Moen (2006) indicates that the genuineness of narratives can sometimes be questionable as they can differ depending on the level of trust between the participants and the researcher. Considering this, cordial relations should be built between the researcher and the participants to ensure trust (Resnik and Shamoo, 2015). To achieve this, the researcher should engage with the participants regularly (Moen, 2006). This can also help gather detailed and in-depth data from the participants (Yin, 2017). Researchers use case studies to inform decisions about a phenomenon in the real world. The case study used this study to generate rich, in-depth data and understand how to enhance teachers' skills to improve academic performances among LVI in primary schools.

Concurring with the authors mentioned above, the researcher posits that by its nature, a research design is more of a roadmap that describes the path linking the research questions to the actual implementation of the study. Other researchers see it as an architectural blueprint (Durrheim, 2006; Matobako, 2021; Padayachee, 2021; Shumba, 2018). Yanow (2014) also asserts that such studies often focus on one case at a time. The reason cited for this research is that the researcher should be directly involved in the research setting to develop an understanding of local meaning-making. This enables the researcher to account contextually for a particular setting when analysing large amounts of data.

Moreover, Maree (2017) highlights that this approach is useful for understanding the context within which the participants act and its influence on their actions. Qualitative research

studies often use a relatively small sample (Maree, 2017). As a result, it enables the investigator to understand how events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which they occur.

4.6 RESEARCH APPROACH

Using a qualitative research approach allowed the participants to share their views concerning their teaching skills supporting LVI within their natural setting. Maree (2017) identified the qualitative approach as the best approach to address the research problem that needs exploration due to unknown factors. Qualitative research is described in words, not numbers (de Vos, et al., 2018). Qualitative research relies on linguistic (words) rather than numerical data and employs meaning-based rather than statistical data analysis. Additionally, qualitative research is naturalistic. It focuses on natural settings where interaction occurs, and in other words, it views social life in terms of processes that occur rather than in static terms. Therefore, this study is qualitative, it views actions in a natural setting.

The qualitative approach allows the researcher to probe the questions about participants' experiences within their relevant context and collect nuanced data from their different points of view. People have their feelings, ideas, motives, and dissimilar experiences. In this case, qualitative researchers study peoples' lives, lived experiences, behaviours, and emotions and, very importantly, reflect on the conditions in which events happen (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, this study is worth using qualitative research because it is ideal to get the primary information about phenomena in their natural setting (Maree, 2017; Leedy and Ormorod, 2013). A qualitative researcher concentrates on the meanings allocated to events by the research participants. One of the objectives of qualitative research is to understand the importance of selecting a paradigm that develops a qualitative study, defines and explains people's happenings and experiences, but never predicts (de Vos et al., 2018). This qualitative research is useful because it is oriented towards analysing concrete cases in their temporal and local, particularly starting from people's expressions and activities in their local context (Maree, 2017).

Furthermore, qualitative research is suitable for exploring issues in the psychology of education as it makes splitting issues from their personal experiences that are unknown to the community easier. This can make a healthy space for a researcher to obtain knowledge from the research participants (Cresswell, 2012) to explore how teachers' skills can improve the academic performance among LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District. Maree (2017) maintains that qualitative research is naturalistic because of its characteristics; different teachers could simply show their feelings and share their views regarding ideas that can help teachers enhance their skills to improve the academic performance of learners with visual impairment in primary schools.

Qualitative researchers often purposively select few participants for their investigations. The selection is based on the participants' knowledge of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2017). Qualitative researchers become the main data-collecting instruments and they collect data through multiple instruments they developed to explore the lived experiences and views of the participants (Creswell, 2012). The final research report includes the voices of participants as well as the researcher's personal and literate interpretation of what they have heard or seen and understood (Creswell, 2012).

Additionally, the qualitative research approach can help the researcher better understand the different characteristics of the participants, as well as their experiences (Maree, 2017). One of the characteristics of this research approach includes information gathered directly by engaging with the participants and observing how they behave and act within their context. A researcher should not rely only on the information collected by the third person but rather collect data through direct observation or interviews (Creswell, 2014; de Vos et al., 2018). Moreover, the qualitative research approach can also help the researcher better understand the different characteristics of the participants and their experiences (Maree, 2017). Separately from studying phenomena in their natural setting, this should help the researcher extend the ability of the placement under this study and the component in which it appears.

Creswell (2012) indicates that the literature may not give enough information about a phenomenon being studied; in this regard, a researcher must relate with the participants to properly clarify some incidents. The approach was used by many researchers in different

disciplines (Mhlongo, 2017). Therefore, the rationale behind using qualitative research is to bring forward the participants' voices and give views on enhancing teachers' skills to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools.

4.7 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The researcher tried to understand LVI teaching and learning experiences in the mainstream setting. Therefore, the researcher identified and purposively selected appropriate participants for the study. The selection was meant to gather detailed and in-depth information to understand the participants' experiences and how such knowledge is established without making any predictions.

4.7.1 Selection of participants

The study explores how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District, Lesotho. Purposive sampling was used in this study (Maine, 2022), meaning that participants were selected because of some defining characteristics that distinguished them from the data needed for this current study. Purposeful sampling is when a researcher selects participants, sites, or documents to help understand the problem statement and the research questions (Creswell, 2014; Leedy and Ormrod, 2019). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explain purposive sampling (sometimes called purposive judgment sampling) when the researcher selects elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest based on the researcher's knowledge of the population. An adjustment is made about which subject should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research. Dawson (2006) elaborates that purposive sampling is used if the research is a description rather than generalisation based on the goal. Then, the primary consideration is the researcher's judgment on whom the research can provide the best information to achieve the study's objectives.

The researcher approached people whose opinions were likely to provide the required information, and the participants were supposed to be willing to share the information. It was

important to select a group of teachers teaching LVI purposively; in this manner, purposive sampling is relevant to this study because purposive sampling is where the researcher selects a sample based on their knowledge about the study and population. The participants are selected based on the purpose of the sample, hence the name purposive sampling (Neuman, 2014). Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify rich information cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Polkinghorne, 2005; Maree, 2017). In the view of Johnson and Christensen (2012), purposive sampling helps the researcher to choose the participants based on specific features.

Maree (2017) emphasises the vital role of using purposeful sampling in selecting participants and sites that helps understand the phenomenon and provide rich information by bringing out the voices of the voiceless. Therefore, the researcher applies purposeful sampling to obtain rich and detailed data. The main research question states that the participants' target was teachers teaching LVI in the mainstream. Therefore, the criterion of choosing informants was that only teachers teaching LVI in their classrooms as special education teachers, those who went for the workshops to teach LSEN, LVI, participants who attended pre-service and in-service training, including participants who teach LVI but were not trained to teach LVI but have three (3) or more than three years teaching such learners. The teachers selected for this research were those who were teaching LVI daily. They were expected to offer more information regarding learners' behaviour, communication, academic performance, social interaction with other learners without disabilities, and teachers, in the school. This study concluded that these participants were a good choice to answer the research questions.

A total of 12 teachers from two different primary schools were interviewed. The two schools are represented by the letter A and the second school is labelled B. Teachers P1-P6 represented the teachers, then in School B, teachers were labelled, P1 – P6. Therefore, the reason for these pseudonyms instead of real names is due to ethical considerations, which correspond to the rules of research (Holloway, 1997; Resnik and Shamoo, 2015).

4.7.2 Sampling process

Sampling is selecting a small group of people as specimens from a large group called the population (Maree, 2017). In this study, purposive sampling was used, and the participants were selected for a good reason tied to the purpose of the title. According to Maree (2017), purposive sampling is a procedure in qualitative study by which the participants are selected because of some features. As a result, only teachers who specialise in teaching learners with LVI, teachers who went for training and workshops, and those who taught LVI for more than three years and all those teachers were key participants in this study.

4.7.3 Inclusion

The selected schools for this study are as follows: (i) located in Maseru (ii) are primary schools (iii) admit learners with visual impairment. Those who constituted the sample met the following: (i) more than years of teaching experience (ii) at least three (3) years' experience teaching LVI (iii) aged between 30-60 years.

4.7.4 Biography of participants

4.7.4.1 School A

Table 4.1: Participants who participated in the research FGD discussion and telephonic interviews

Participants	Gender	Age 35-60	Highest qualification	Teaching experience	Years of teaching LVI
Participant 1	Female	✓	Diploma	15	15
Participant 2	Female	✓	Diploma	15	15
Participant 3	Female	✓	Diploma	37	37
Participant 4	Female	✓	Diploma	20	20
Participant 5	Female	✓	Diploma	18	10
Participant 6	Male	✓	B.Ed.	37	30

The researcher purposively selected a research site as a primary school under the proprietorship of the Government of Lesotho. The school operates within Grades 1 and Grade 2. It accommodates only learners with low and total blindness, and it also has a boarding school. These LVI come from 10 districts of the country, which admits LVI-meaning learners with low vision and total blindness. The school is named School A. This school is a feeding school to School B. The teachers teaching in this school were trained to teach LVIs. This is whereby the teachers introduce LVI to Braille reading and writing so that when they go to full mainstream teaching, they can read and write in Braille.

Although the LVI teachers mentioned that most LVI struggle to grasp in classroom situations because LVI start to learn Braille in Grade 1, there are no pre-schools for LVI that can assist LVI to learn and or introduce Braille reading and writing. When LVIs come to Grade 1, it would be easy and fast to learn, if LVIs started learning Braille in pre-school, it would also be simple for LVI to grasp the basics and avoid struggling to learn and reduce the frustration of their teachers . When they finish their lower primary, Grade 1 and 2, after finishing their introduction to Braille teaching and learning, LVI then proceeded to their feeder school. The school is Roman Catholic Church-run. The school and participants were purposively selected because of their suitability to provide rich data for the study (Creswell, 2014).

All the participants (teachers) worked at the school that enrolled LVI, those with low and total blindness. This study focused on six teachers, all teaching learners with visual impairment in their classrooms. These teachers volunteered to participate in the study after the invitation was extended to all teachers at the school. The participants had a minimum of three years of teaching experience teaching LVI. The participants had three years or more teaching LVI, whereby they provided support services and transcribed classwork and homework to LVI, thus they were better positioned to generate rich information about their self-efficacy about responding to the needs of learners with visual impairment in the mainstream setting (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007).

Ever since the integrated curriculum was introduced in 2000, the Lesotho government through MoET provided free and compulsory primary education to all learners from the age of six to thirteen years old. The education system provided by MoET is available within a reasonable distance from every habitation. The primary school was chosen as the research site to gain access to LVI, regardless of their gender, religion, and disability, including boys and girls who experience the problem of vision. The school was chosen because of its uniqueness and long history, whereby it enrolled LVI.

The school is a unique type of school in the country that admits and supports LVI in primary school. The school is situated in Maseru District. It has some limited resources for teaching and learning materials, such as Braille and Stylus. These resource ratios do not match with the learners' ratio. These learners with low or total blindness stay in a boarding school; the school also admits learners from the ten districts of the country. Lesotho comprises 10 districts, and this study was based in Maseru District, which is the capital city of Lesotho.

4.7.5 Biography of teachers

4.7.5.1 School B

Table 4.2: Biography of teachers

Participant	Gender	Age 35-6	Highest qualification	Teaching experience	Years of teaching LVI
Participant 1	Male	✓	B.Ed.	20 years	10
Participant 2	Female	✓	B.Ed.	16 years	12
Participant 3	Female	✓	Diploma	15 years	5
Participant 4	Female	✓	B.Ed. Hon	10 years	8
Participant 5	Female	✓	Diploma	17 years	13
Participant 6	Female	✓	B.Ed.	12 years	12

The researcher purposively selected school B as the learning site for the current study. The school is Roman Catholic Church-run. According to Mhlongo (2017), the school location should not be far from the use of all the participants and the researcher to avoid financial and logistical constraints. The school consists of learners in grades 1 to 7. It is an inclusive school with an integrated curriculum in its mainstream teaching and learning. The school comprises learners with diverse needs, low vision, and learners with total blindness. The researcher considered this school relevant because they assumed the participants would give in-depth information. Therefore, this study explores how teachers' skills can be enhanced in improving academic performance among LVI in primary schools.

The participants in this research study were teachers who taught LVI for three or more years. The teachers trained as special education teachers trained to teach specifically LVI, who went for workshops and training to teach LVI, will be able to use the relevant resources, strategies, language, and skills.

4.8 DATA COLLECTION

In this qualitative research with an exploratory approach, the researcher used the data collecting instruments to find adequate information for different methods. She used focus group discussion, telephonic interviews, and non-participatory observation, to gather data. The data from the interviews consists of direct quotations from participants regarding their experiences, knowledge, attitudes, and opinions. According to Coleman (2017), to produce results that are worthy for readers to be eye-catching and pay attention to, the researcher needs to modify the methods of gathering data to generate rich and thick data. Below is a detailed description of each method.

4.8.1 Semi-structured telephonic interviews

The telephonic interviews were useful tools for collecting data from the participants. There are several advantages of using interviews when collecting data. Essentially, interviewing is often seen as the predominant research method in qualitative research (Leedy and Ormrod, 2019). Interviews enable participants to provide detailed information, including some historical background of the issues under investigation. Moreover, interviews also allow a researcher to control the line of questioning. Interviews are widely used in most qualitative studies to gather data about the participants' experiences on the specific issues under investigation.

A telephonic interview is a data collection method, the interviewer communicates with the respondent on the telephone by the prepared questionnaire. Usually, standardised questionnaires with closed-ended questions are recommended for this kind of questioning. The researcher conducted telephonic interviews when it was convenient for participants so that the researcher could get as much information as they had to give (Azad, 2021). The use of telephones as a medium for conducting interviews is becoming an increasingly popular data collection method. Despite the frequency of use of this data collection method and the many advantages conferred to researchers, this method is often considered suspect within the academic community (Block, Emily and Erskine, 2012). Telephonic interviews provide

flexibility to the interviewers and this method of interview can be beneficial to people who cannot read and write. They can also answer questions.

4.8.1.1 *Preparing for interview sessions and access to the schools*

The researcher designed the interview research questions in English for the participants in the study project. The researcher ensured that questions were semi-structured, simple, and concise. Questions on the interview guide were generated after thoroughly reviewing relevant literature and scrutiny of the research problem, research questions, and study objectives. The FGD, telephonic interviews were conducted with the teachers between September and November 2022. Follow-up interviews were conducted with the teachers to confirm their responses and clarify answers. The interview questions for teachers also included questions aimed at obtaining demographic information from the participants.

The researcher arranged most of the interviews after school hours to avoid any interference with the teachers' school programmes. Each telephonic interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was recorded and transcribed verbatim (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). As DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) see it, by recording the interview, the researcher could listen to the interviews again when needed. The procedure provided more evidence for the researcher to focus on the interview and build rapport without worrying about the information that may be lost during notetaking. The interview schedule included open-ended questions that permitted the researcher to obtain information on the phenomenon under study (Appendix F).

4.8.2 Focus group discussion

The researcher chose focus group discussion as one of the methods of generating data for the study to allow for an open discussion of the issues as per the research objectives. FGD is the process of generating data through an interview with a group of people (Creswell, 2014). Few people are asked to come together in a group to discuss a certain issue. These interviews are conducted to generate data from the shared understanding of different people, as well as to get views from specific people on the topic under study. FGD explores the perceptions,

experiences, and understandings of a group of people with some common experience regarding a specific situation or event (Kumur, 2011; Kueger, and Casey, 2015). For example, in my research study, my argument is that the participants would be able to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced in improving academic performance among LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District, Lesotho. The understanding is therefore, that FGD, broad discussion topics are developed beforehand by the research to allow for the gathering of rich data. FGD provides a more natural environment than telephonic interviews because participants build on one another's information as though they are in a real-life situation (Krueger and Casey, 2015). The researcher believes that there is a high possibility that different and rich data may be generated from participants in a social context.

The discussion is led by a researcher who introduces the discussion topic, asks specific questions, controls deviations, and stops break-away conversations. The researcher ensures that no participant dominates the discussion while trying to ensure that each participant contributes. During focus group discussions, the researcher can receive a wide range of responses during one meeting. Participants can sometimes ask questions from each other, lessening the impact of the researcher's bias. According to Maree (2017), in FGD interviews, participants can build on each other's ideas and comments to provide an in-depth view not attainable from individual interviews. Unexpected comments and new perspectives can be explored easily within the FGD and add value to the study. It helps people to remember issues they might otherwise have forgotten. It also helps the participants to overcome inhibitions, especially if they know other people in the group. The effect is a useful resource in data collection. For example, this could be a discussion based on social research to discuss the LVI experiences in the school environment (Krueger and Casey, 2015).

The researcher regards the FGD as complementary to the data generated through telephonic interviews to enhance teachers' skills and improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools. FGD enables the research to consider not only what the participants say in the discussion but also their gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal communication. The FGD would be more profitable when individuals are willing to give information in a group (Creswell, 2015; Barbour and Morgan, 2017). When interviewing the

participants using FGD, the researcher must encourage them to participate. Hence, the researcher encouraged the participants to be free to give their views and participate by taking turns to avoid those who can dominate the group by talking without the chance to others. The researcher understood that the interaction among interviewees is likely to yield the best information when there is cooperation.

The FGD in this study involved six participants (five females and one male). The main reason for arranging this FGD was to encourage participants to learn from one another as they exchange views and build on one another's views. The FGD in this study was audio recorded and notes were taken during the discussion for referral when transcribing.

4.8.3 Observation

The non-participatory observation method was used as a support method for the interviews to gain clarity or understand the problems in detail. The act of observation may sound easy, but it involves many work activities during data collection. Observation is a research method that enables researchers to systematically observe and record people's behaviours, actions, and interactions. This observation method allows the researcher to gain a comprehensive explanation of social settings or moments to locate people's behaviours within their socio-cultural context (Bailey, Hennink and Hutter, 2011).

Observation is a research tool that can be a supplement when careful preparation has been done, and the data are thoroughly and carefully described. The description should be factual, accurate, and thorough. Like interviews, the observation method can be distinguished from interviews in two ways. Firstly, observation occurs in the natural field setting instead of a location designated for interviewing. Secondly, observational data represents a first-hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a second-hand account of the world obtained in an interview. The data are collected in the field, where the action is taking place, as it happens (Human 2010). The observation was used as a support method to the interview method to gain clarity or understand the problems in detail. Thus, observation is a research method that allows researchers to fully observe and record people's behaviours, actions, and

interactions (Udoba, 2014). Brink (1996) defines Observation as a technique for collecting expressive data on behaviours, events, and situations. It is important in psychology of education because the researcher can observe behaviours as it occurred.

The observation method is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants (Stangor, 2017) objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them. It is an everyday activity where we use our senses (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) and our feelings to gather bits and pieces of data. As a qualitative data-gathering technique, observation allows the researcher to gain a deeper insight into and knowledge of observed experiences (Maree, 2017). The data collected from observations consisted of detailed descriptions of participants' comfort, discomfort, and opinions.

In the observation method, the researcher views people in their natural settings (Udoba, 2014). The researcher identifies observation as a first experience and the researcher, as the observer, records information as it is revealed. It also provides vital additional sources of data for verifying, clarifying, and expanding the information gained by other methods such as interviews (Bailey, Hennink and Hunter, 2011). One of the limitations of the observation method is that the participants might act differently knowing they are being observed. Therefore, it would show a shortage of major information required as participants and might respond differently with the observer around them (Cresswell, 2014; Maree, 2017).

In this study, the researcher used a non-participatory observation method approach, which referred to conducting an observation without participating in the activities that the researcher is observing (Leavy and Biber, 2011) the researcher studies the activities and teacher-learner interaction. In this research study, many observations were made. Observations in School B were done in the mainstream classes and School A, where learners from Grade 1 and Grade 2 were introduced to Braille, and then in Grade 3, LVI joined the mainstream teaching. In school A, the observation was made in classrooms where there were learners with low vision, and the observation in two schools was as follows: teacher-learner interactions: The focus here was to see how teachers interacted with each other learners as well as with the other LVI during teaching. For example, Learner-learner interaction: here, the focal point was the interaction between the learners involving those LVI. Secondly,

Teacher's presentation of teaching materials: The central point was how the teacher could control the teaching materials in relation to the LVI. Lastly the focus was on the possible challenges teachers encountered when teaching learners with LVI.

4.9 DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURES

Data collection is the technique or process used to gather and analyse data related to some research questions or hypotheses. One way to emphasise the strength and minimise the weakness is to use more than one method in a study (Kabeto, 2015). Data are the raw materials of research that need to use the most effective and appropriate data collection methods (Mouton, 2017). The researcher employed three methods to generate data: focus group discussion, telephonic interviews, and non-participatory observation. The data from interviews consists of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. The data from interviews consists of detailed explorations of people's activities, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organisational processes that are part of observable human experiences.

After ethical clearance for the study was obtained, data collection proceeded as follows.

4.9.1 Entry into the research site (School A)

The researcher went to school A on the 12th of September, 2022 at 10:00. The researcher first went to the principal's office, introduced herself to the principal and explained the purpose of her visit to the school. The principal told the researcher that she had to meet with the teachers first and let them know about her visit to their school and the purpose of the visit. She then told the researcher that they usually hold their staff meetings on Mondays and identified days the researcher would like to pay for the visits so that they could schedule her appropriately. The principal asked the researcher to call her on the 14th of September 2022 so that the principal could let the teacher know how the teachers and participants would work. The researcher was told to come on the 15th of September 2022 for the confirmation of the next visit.

The researcher's visit to the school on the 18th of September 2022 aimed at meeting the six research participants. During this second visit to this school, the researcher reported to the

principal's office, and the principal sent a child to call the teacher's representative to accompany the researcher in the boardroom so that the researcher could prepare herself before the teachers could join the researcher. Then, five minutes later, the teachers joined the researcher, and the researcher was allowed to explain to the teachers the purpose of the visit. Some teachers claimed they were preparing for the third term assessments, which the learners were going to write in two weeks to come. They should be given extra time for the time they spend discussing with their learners to pay back the time spent in the interviews. After the agreement with the principal and teachers about payback time after school, the teachers agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent forms.

4.9.2 Entry into the research site (School B)

The researcher visited the principal's office on the 12th of September 2022, at 13h30 for the first meeting. She found that she had staff meetings with her teachers on the researcher's arrival at school. The researcher was told to wait a few minutes before the meeting adjourned. Eventually, the meeting was dispersed no later than 10 minutes before the researcher was called in. The researcher introduced herself to the principal and told her the purpose of the visit to the school, and the principal gave her a positive, welcoming face. This welcoming face gave the researcher much trust and freedom to talk to the principal. The researcher was told to come on the 18th of September 2022; to give the principal time to meet with her staff on the 15th of September 2022 and agree on the relevant date for the teachers' schedules.

When the researcher came to school on the 18th of September 2022, she first went to the principal's office, where she was told that the principal was not on duty on the day in question. The principal had to attend to administrative issues with the Ministry of Education and Training. The office assistant requested the researcher to see the teachers' representative. He gave the researcher directions to meet the teachers' representative in his classroom. The researcher met the teacher's representative and introduced herself to him. He told the researcher they had a meeting on 14th September about the researcher's visit. On this note, the researcher was expected to return on the 18th of September. The teacher's representative called one teacher and requested that a particular teacher prepare her class for the meeting. At the same time, he sent some learners to call the teachers chosen to

participate in the discussion in the lower primary classroom block. He then called other teachers in the upper primary classroom block who were chosen to participate in the research study, and the six teachers were from Grades 3 to 7. All the teachers responded to the call, and the researcher and the participants met in the classroom to prepare for the interview. The researcher was allowed to talk about the purpose of the visit. The teachers seemed not free to participate on the first day of the visit. During the second visit on the 25th of September, they made many contributions and became more participating than before, as the first meeting on the 18th of September 2022.

The interview sessions were conducted from 09h00 to 10h00. The interviews during classroom sessions aimed to allow teaching and learning to continue as usual according to the school's timetable without disturbing the teachers and the learners. The allocation of the interview time was about an hour. This time was suggested and agreed upon by the teachers and the principal. They agreed that this time would be enough for the day to discuss the challenges teachers face when teaching LVI. They liked this interview and said they hope the government will bring change for LVI and their teachers because the challenges they face when teaching these vulnerable groups in the mainstream are frustrating to parties, learners, and teachers.

Some participants opted not to be audio-recorded, whereas others agreed to be audio-recorded for a quick interview process and referral purposes of the researcher. Those who gave the researcher permission to be audio-recorded were audio-recorded. Other participants' views were written in the form of notes, and those were the participants who asked not to be audio-recorded. The researcher took notes, and an audio recorder was used to ensure the original data provided a complete and thorough verbal record (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Notes and audio recordings taken during data collection were kept as a record that would be used in the future, and it is locked in the safe cupboard and will be shuttered later in 5 years to come.

4.9.3 Researcher as key instrument

In this qualitative research study, the researcher's role is to organise a team of co-researchers comprising teachers who were brought on board as co-researchers from two primary

schools. Again, the researcher is the key instrument (Patton, 1990), who collects and analyses data. This characterisation makes the researcher inseparable from the research (Jackson, 1990), which has broader implications (Fusch and Ness, 2015; Shumba, 2019).

4.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is the initial approach that the researchers should learn as it provides the necessary skills that can help to conduct different approaches of data analysis in qualitative research because it is a very flexible approach (Clarke and Braun, 2017). The thematic analysis process was used to analyse the collected data. Data analysis is organising the collected data into categories (Mouton, 2017). It is vital to transcribing these raw data to gain meaning and patterns from the data (Mouton, 2017). Data analysis in qualitative studies should start immediately on the first day of the data collection process to locate if production or missing information collected on a particular day. Then in this study, the introductory data analysis was done after every interview to scan for any information gaps.

When the data collection process was over, the raw data were transcribed. Transcription transforms interview notes and audio recordings into texts (Johnson and Christiansen, 2012). Afterward, the data collected were transcribed from Sesotho to English. Then, thematic analysis was used to organise the transcribed data. Thematic organisation and analysis are the processes that identify, analyse, and report the occurrences of themes in the data collected from the research areas. A thematic analysis follows six basic steps (Braun and Clarke, 2017). These steps are summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Six basic steps of thematic data analysis

Step	Description
1. Familiarising with data thoroughly in reading the transcriptions.	This helps the researcher to have in mind what exactly is in the data.
2. Generation of initial codes.	The researcher organised the data in a meaningful and organised manner by coding to reduce it into small blocks.

3. Searching for themes/patterns	Related codes are organised under different themes.
4. Reviewing themes	The researcher reviewed, modified, and developed the initial themes.
5. Defining and naming themes developed	Defining the overall content of the themes and the message it carries it before producing a report.
6. Write-up-producing a report	The researcher is satisfied with the themes developed; finally, the researcher writes the report based on the findings.

(Source: Braun and Clarke, 2017)

Table 4.3 shows the data analysis process adopted by the researcher. For the researcher to make sense of the data, the procedure involved decreasing data into separate units, consolidating and conceptualising what people said regarding a specific research question (Clarke and Braun, 2017). The researcher used recording devices and research notes to analyse the information during the interviews and observation. Likewise, observations were considered individually and by grouping similar types of occurrences while also looking for differences among individual settings or times. According to Human (2010), once the data has been organised, the researcher defines many relevant views of the study, including setting both for the time being and permanently: the individuals being studied, the purpose of any tasks examined and the perspectives of participants. It uses all the data collected to answer the questions the research set out to answer. Research questions were unpacked in the FGD and during telephonic interviews. Explanations were made per the participants' request, whereby they did not understand the question. Afterward, the researcher went home and sat down and listened to the audio recordings many times to understand and ensure accuracy when transcribing. The data analysis was conducted so that the researcher could detect consistent patterns within the data.

Following the cutting up of data, the researcher discovered the ideas and patterns by coding. First, the researcher utilised instructions for coding. Thus, in this study, the interview

transcripts were organised chronologically. The analysis of each interview was re-read many times to trace up and identify the major categories and themes contained in the transcript. Relevant notes, comments, and observations were made. After this process, the data was interpreted, analysed, and set out to be understood by others. Information obtained from the telephonic interview, observation, and focus group discussions were analysed according to different individual responses. The consistent patterns were labelled with codes, the same codes were grouped to lower the intersecting and redundancy of codes. Then, the codes were subsided into themes, which are also categories. Thematic analysis using a six-phase method was used while grouping the same types of phenomena (Brain and Clarke, 2017). The whole process allowed the researcher to interpret data, which included the writing of a final report about the research study findings. The telephonic interview, FGD, and non-participatory observation method, of each participant were looked at and introduced concerning the research questions.

In describing the data collected, some direct quotations were used. Reporting of direct statements from research participants were collected and some direct quotations were used. Reporting these direct statements from research participants is very important because it assists in maintaining the originality of the data collected (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Finally, the researcher's views, based on the participants' answers, were stated and supported by extant literature.

4.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit and Beck, 2014). This study determined trustworthiness by ascertaining four pillars of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Leedy and Ormrod, 2019). As Babbie and Mouton (2003) see it, these four critical aspects are interdependent such as validity and reliability in qualitative research. For instance, a researcher cannot talk about transferability without credibility or credibility where there is no dependability (Shumba, 2019). In support of this view, Maine (2022) notes that trustworthiness is a common form used to describe validity in qualitative research.

4.11.1 Credibility

The researcher used the various strategies to ensure credibility (Kumar, 2011). In addition, credibility was used because it involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the participants' perspectives in the research. In the work of Maraisane (2020), credibility concerns the extent to which the research findings and conclusions can be observed to be convincing (Nassaji, 2020). For the researcher to find out if there is any inconsistency in the findings, they built credibility by asking the participants to examine the transcribed data as to whether it gave out what they deliberated to voice out. In addition, credibility was considered by triangulation of multiple data collection methods, which in this case were FGD, telephonic interviews, and observation (Maraisane, 2020). Convincing findings along with inconsistency findings were presented to show the trustworthiness of this research study.

4.11.2 Transferability

Transferability is an additional outlook of the current study to secure the truthfulness of the findings. Transferability points out the researcher's capability to collect true and comprehensive information that requires an explanation of the conditions so that an understanding can be carried to other studies or a larger population (Coleman, 2017). The researcher tried to attain this with effortlessness by including many data generation process methods namely FGD, telephonic interviews, and observation, to add more confidence in the research findings. Additionally, the most important central point was to collect rich information to allow the scholars to determine the adequacy of the research findings so that they can be relevant to other factors.

4.11.3 Dependability

Dependability establishes whether this study was dependable. The researcher employed proper procedures to ensure that the dependability of this research study is carried out.

Dependability is concerned with the researchers' capacity to warranty if the study was redone with the same subject, context, and tools used in the current research study and if similar results will be achieved (Mhlongo, 2017). The researcher achieved all these by revisiting the research site to verify from the participants that the information recorded and written down in the notebook during the data collection process was a true reflection of what they said, a process called member checking. Furthermore, the fieldwork notebook was used to check that the information and activities during data generation were correct. This is called an audit trail.

4.11.4 Confirmability

The last criterion is confirmability. Confirmability concerns how long others verify the researchers' interpretations and conclusions (Nassaji, 2020). In this regard, the researcher guaranteed that objectivity was kept going during the data analysis and interpretation process by not demanding personal matters to influence the research project's findings. The researcher studies the initial transcripts by reading and re-reading them several times for awareness and referral appropriately. Finally, the researcher ensured that there was always consultation between the researcher and the supervisor of this research study to confirm the findings and lessen bias through consonant thoughtfulness.

4.11.5 A Pilot Study

A pilot study was commenced before beginning the data collection. This is helpful to the researcher, enabling them to evaluate and reconstruct the instruments for data collection to attain information that focuses on the research questions and to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation to be studied. Researchers should test the instruments for data collection that they will use in their studies before running the research (Drew, Hardman and Hosp, 2008; Udoba, 2014). A pilot study was conducted to see if the questions were reasonable and easily understood by the interviewees and the use of Sesotho language in generating data because Sesotho is our mother tongue in Lesotho, the participants used

Sesotho and English, the languages they felt comfortable using. Thus, in Lesotho, there are two official languages: Sesotho and English. Then, the translation of Sesotho to English was checked by a language professional (qualified translator).

A pilot study was done by interviewing one special educational needs teacher at Thota-e-namme Primary School (a pseudonym). The interview guide questions (Appendix 3) were in English. Corrections were made to the interview guide questions after the pilot study. According to Neuman (2014), the researcher should develop one or more drafts or preliminary versions of a measure and try them before applying the final version in a hypothesis-testing situation. To ensure credibility, the researcher piloted the questions and refined the content, considering the phrasing of questions, ambiguous words, and appropriateness of questions, making the questions more appropriate and soliciting a detailed range of possible responses.

4.12 PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

4.12.1 Ethical considerations

According to Resnik and Shamoo (2015), research ethics are norms for conduct that present the differences between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Similarly, Wiles (2013) defines ethics as the branch of philosophy that addresses questions about morality and research ethics and concerns moral behaviours in research contexts. Thus, ethical consideration is part of the research work and cannot be avoided (Bryman, 2004). Participants were ensured their protection from harm, exposure, and anonymity. Research should consider ethical guidelines and legal rules (Holloway, 1997).

Carrying out a research study indicates that a researcher is entering participants' surroundings (Silverman, 2011). Silverman reminds researchers that they should be conscious of the suitable and unsuitable applications that are normally believed. It is, therefore, crucial for the researcher to follow and abide by ethical guidelines and the necessity to apply for ethical clearance from the University of the Free State (UFS). This was approved, and no attempt

was made to proceed with the research process before the Research Ethics Committee at UFS authorised the request.

The University of the Free State Research Ethics Committee first granted permission to conduct the research study. The purpose was to provide evidence to the Ethics Committee Board that the research study abided by their rules and guidelines for conducting ethical research (Cresswell and Poth, 2018). The researcher then sought gatekeeper permission from the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to conduct research in schools in Maseru District. Once gatekeeper permission from MoET was granted, the researcher requested permission from the school principals to conduct her research study at their schools. Then, permission was granted by the principals before data collection.

4.12.2 Informed Consent Form

The researcher made sure that the informed consent forms were distributed to all participants to allow them to give voluntary consent to participate in the study. Pseudonyms were allocated to all the participants to allow them to give voluntary consent to participate in the research study. Pseudonyms were used when reporting the findings to maintain confidentiality and avoid potential participants' harm (Johnson and Christenson, 2014). Participants were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time should they wish to do so. They were then enlightened about the final milestone of the research study that will be kept at UFS library archives for future use.

4.12.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

The principle of anonymity refers to unknown names. It is a form of ethics that keeps participants from identifying secrets (Sauders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 2015). The participants' names and the schools where the study was conducted were kept anonymous to protect their identity, and certain codes were used to refer to the participants. I ensured that the participants and the school remained concealed in such a manner that it would be difficult to track the responses of any participant, and there would not be any link between the data and the participants' confidentiality that has an element of privacy. It refers to all information kept

hidden from anyone except the researcher conducting the research (Saunders et al., 2015). Participants were confidential and would not be used for any purpose other than this study. Furthermore, the participants were assured that the data collected would be kept in a safe place locked in the locker. The researcher would be the only one with access to the data collected. Electronic information would be kept on a computer with a password. Participants were informed that the interview data and audio transcripts would be locked in a locker and would be destroyed after five years when the study's academic procedures were completed. According to Bailey, Hennink and Hutter (2011), ethical issues have the following considerations:

1. **Informed Consent:** The participant must be provided with sufficient information about the research in a comprehensive format, and make a voluntary decision to participate in the research study.
2. **Self-determination:** Individuals have the right to determine their participation in research, including the right to refuse participation and pull out at any time.
3. **Minimisation of harm:** Research should not harm participants or put them at risk.
4. **Anonymity:** Researchers should always protect the identification of research participants.
5. **Confidentiality:** Researchers should ensure that all data records are always kept confidential.

From the considerations above, the study was granted permission from the Ministry of Education and Training by giving the researcher an allowance to collect data in the two primary schools located in the Maseru District. The participants were informed before the data collection using permission letters, which contained important and relevant information about this research study and the importance of their participation in this research. The aim was to ask for their consent, to ensure voluntary participation and provision of information, and to give them free space to withdraw from the research participation any time they wished. Furthermore, the schools and participants in this study were kept anonymous, and the data collected from the participants were kept confidential.

4.12.4 Protecting participants from harm

The participants should be given a clear understanding of the issues the study will address before being asked to take part. Researchers, too, need to be able to make clear judgments about what is relevant to the study and what is not relevant to the study and they must avoid prurient or irrelevant details (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The researcher did not violate the participants' rights. Only an audio recorder was used with the participants' permission. Participants were not pressured into disclosing information with which they were uncomfortable, but the research questions directed the researcher. However, the researcher observed participants' body language and any discomfort during the interview to check whether they wished to discuss the matter.

4.13 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study's limitations are barriers encountered by the researcher that cannot be easily controlled (Mhlongo, 2017). One of the encountered setbacks in this study is that in telephonic interviews, the researcher cannot assess the non-verbal behaviours of the participants, such as their gestures, facial expressions, and postures to mitigate the problem. So, as opposed to face-to-face interviews, there are gaps between how the researcher communicated with the researcher participants and how their actions were displayed during the interview process. Secondly, the School B principal highlighted to the researcher that many researchers use the same school as their research site, which hinders the learners' academic teaching and learning. The teachers asked not to be audio-recorded in school B and this made the researcher consume a lot of time in writing, and the researcher had to refer to them time and time again. In School B, the principal in this school was not on duty, for the researcher's first visit, I had to work with the teachers' representative because the principal was busy with other administrative issues. Thirdly, the researcher realised the need to have an assistant to help the researcher when taking notes during the interview process. To interview and take notes and record teachers at the same time is a challenging task for the researcher. The researcher could miss some of the good points but if the researcher had an assistant, they should work hand in hand to note some information, which can be missed by

the other partner, then, the type of research is qualitative which the researcher must be there at the natural setting.

4.14 DELIMITATION

This study was limited to one education district, Maseru Urban. Maseru is the capital city of Lesotho. Lesotho is on the left bank of the Caledon River near the border of Free State Province, South Africa. It is a democratic sovereign and independent country with the unique characteristic of being surrounded by its neighbour, the Republic of South Africa. The country was formerly known as Basutoland. It was renamed the Kingdom of Lesotho upon independence from Britain in 1966; hence, the findings may not be entirely representative of all ten (10) districts in Lesotho.

4.15 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

The present study is found within the area of Psychology of Education. According to Duque (2020), Educational Psychology is the study of how people learn, including teaching methods, instructional processes, and individual differences in learning. The goal is to understand how people learn and retain information. This department involves the learning process of early childhood and adolescence, and the social, emotional, and cognitive processes that are involved in learning throughout the life span.

Educational Psychology incorporates many other disciplines, including Developmental Psychology, Behavioural Psychology, and Cognitive Psychology (Duque, 2020). Therefore, the Psychology of Education focuses on holistic well-being and support of learners regardless of their socio-economic background. It also deals with addressing many barriers teachers face in schools regarding learners. Hence, the current study aims to explore teachers' skills to be enhanced in improving the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District.

Duque (2020) further points out that in Psychology, the centrality of knowledge of the psychology of teachers' learning can reflect on the following services: It would lead to more

effective practice in the classroom. The long-term results will be presented in various professional forums and will hopefully change the look of educational psychology courses and textbooks. Moreover, adding this element to teacher preparation will raise both the competence and profile of teachers as professionals. Zwiers and Johnson (2012) add that in the field of Psychology of education, teachers can make provision for the following services: school-based, counselling; designing and implementing crisis response plans; designing and delivering prevention programmes for at-risk learners; educating parents and other teachers about skills and strategies to address risky behaviours; help to create safe, healthy and supportive environment; and help parents and other school staff members understand how children develop. Thus, the study aims to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District. The study is limited to two mainstream schools in Maseru, Lesotho, due to the number of schools with LVI in their mainstream.

4.16 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter addressed issues relating to the methodological approaches that the researcher adopted. The purpose of the study was also discussed to introduce the research objectives. In this chapter, the researcher presented the research questions guiding the study. Further, the chapter deliberated on the research paradigm supporting the study. Moreover, it debated the research design and provided an explanation of the researcher's position. It further describes the research sites and marks ethical issues binding the study. Thereafter, the researcher described how research instruments were employed when collecting and analysing data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the possible limitations then, the delimitation of the study, the demarcation of the study, and finally, the summary of the chapter.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter detailed an overview of the research approach and methodology employed during the data generation and analysis. This chapter presents analyses and discusses the findings. This was done in line with the research questions, where data were generated using focus-group discussions, telephonic interviews, and the non-participatory observation method in response to the three objectives linked to the study's aims. The generated data resulted in three major themes, presented by the sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis process. This study presented and analysed the generated data using verbatim quotations to preserve participants' original voices. The existing literature with a theoretical framework is also immersed in discussing the findings.

5.2 PRESENTATION OF THE MAJOR THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Figure 5.1 outlines the themes suggested by the research questions and the sub-themes the researcher identified from the collected data. The major themes, as well as their sub-themes, are discussed. (In Table 5.1) and used as headings to present data in this chapter. These sub-themes assisted the researcher in addressing the research questions. The major themes are, in this case, utilised as headings to present data in the chapter. The themes were categorised based on the research questions. Moreover, verbatim quotations were used in data presentations. Then, the themes are discussed in depth in this chapter.

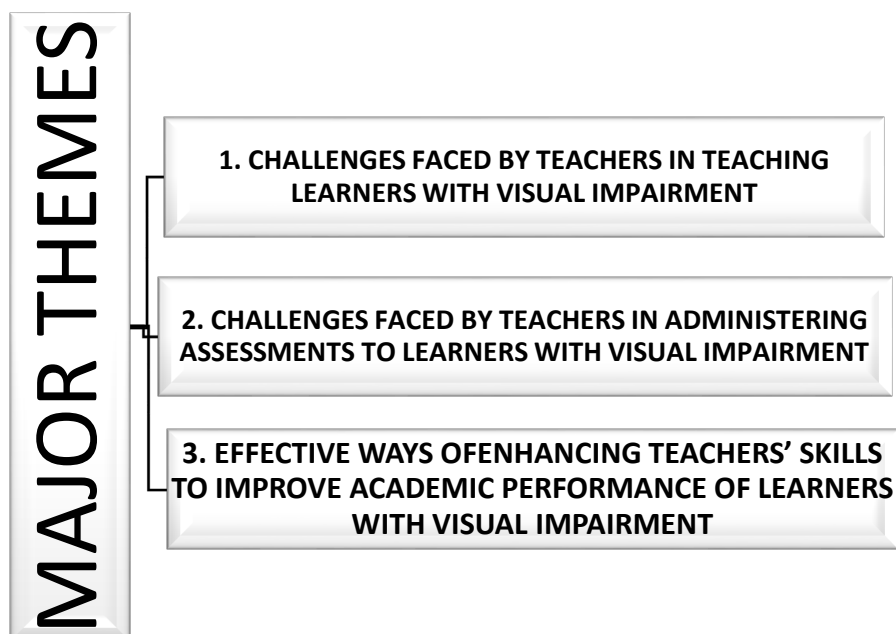


Figure 5.1: Major themes emerging from participants responses

Table 5.1: Major themes and sub-themes

THEMES CORRESPONDING TO SUB-THEMES		
THEMES	SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES
Theme 1: Teachers' challenges in teaching learners with visual impairment	Academic challenges	1.1.1. Lack of teaching skills for LVI 1.1.2. Lack of training and content knowledge 1.1.3. Inflexible curriculum 1.1.4. Heavy workload 1.1.5. Non-implementation of pre-schools for LVI
	1.2 Lack of appropriate teaching and learning resources	1.2.1. Limited human resources 1.2.2. Limited non-human resources 1.2.3. Inadequate infrastructures 1.2.4. Overcrowded classrooms
	1.3 Lack of parental support	1.3.1. Lack of School Attendance Activities 1.3.2. Failure to attend school meetings

		<p>1.3.3. Non-collaboration between teachers and parents</p> <p>1.3.4. Parents' lack of awareness about dealing with LVI</p>
	1.4 Teachers' salaries	
Theme 2: Teachers' challenges in administering assessments among LVI	<p>2.1 Inexpert teachers</p> <p>2.2 Rigid curriculum and assessment tools</p> <p>2.3 Constraining Learning Environment</p>	
Theme 3: Effective strategies for enhancing teachers' skills to improve the academic performance of LVI	3.1 Enhancing teachers' skills in teaching LVI	<p>3.1.1. Pre-service and in-service teachers' training on LVI</p> <p>3.1.2. A need for continuous workshops</p> <p>3.1.3. Using technology devices</p> <p>3.1.4. Enhancing teamwork (collegial support)</p> <p>3.1.5. Provision of diverse teaching and learning resources</p> <p>3.1.6. Teacher professional development training</p> <p>3.1.7. Involvement of specialists</p>
	3.2 Improving academic performance among LVI	<p>3.2.1 Varying teaching strategies, methods, and styles</p> <p>3.2.2 Involving parents in their children's education</p> <p>3.2.3 Maximising Teaching Resources for LVI</p> <p>3.2.4 Teachers' Attitude towards LVI</p> <p>3.2.5 A need for teacher assistants to boost teacher development</p> <p>3.2.6 Accessing Adaptive Technology</p>

		3.2.7 Adapting assessment procedures 3.2.8 Financial resources 3.2.9 Accessing the physical environment 3.2.10 Curriculum adjustment 3.2.11 Using portfolio 3.2.12 Government engagement 3.2.13 Individual Educational Plan 3.2.14 Peer tutoring 3.2.15 Collaborative learning
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5.3 THEME 1: TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN TEACHING LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

This theme provides the participants' understanding of teachers' challenges in teaching LVI in mainstream schools. In response to the focus-group discussion questions, which focused mainly on participants' understanding of teaching LVI, the participants' responses revealed that they understood what teaching LVI entails. However, most of their responses were dominant to challenges encountered by teachers while facilitating the teaching of these learners in mainstream schools. The participants showed a common understanding of the challenges experienced by teachers while teaching LVI, which the researcher categorised into academic and environmental challenges as presented in the following sections.

5.3.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Academic challenges

This study found that teachers experienced academic challenges such as a lack of teaching skills, inadequate content knowledge, teachers' training, an inflexible curriculum, and a heavy workload when teaching LVI at schools in Lesotho. The participants' responses, while addressing focus-group discussion questions, lack of content knowledge, and teachers' skills, were some of the challenges experienced by teachers in facilitating learning outcomes for LVI.

5.3.2 Lack of teaching skills

In the current study, most of the participants indicated that teachers' lack of skills to effectively teach LVI is not only a challenge to teachers as it also negatively impacts the interest of LVI in schooling. The following participants indicated these:

P4, a teacher from School A, stated:

“The most common challenge we are experiencing here in our school while teaching these learners is academic-related. Most LVI lag their counterparts without visual impairment because when they reach Grade 3 here in our school, they are taught by untrained teachers”.

P3 from the same school added:

“Yes, I think this is a huge challenge that creates many problems for these learners who sometimes fail not because they are incompetent but because unskilled teachers teach them”.

It was evident from the participants' responses that teaching LVI is a challenge for teachers and LVI. One of the participating teachers, P1 from School B, candidly commented that:

“These learners even have no trust in some teachers; this makes them shy away, and in most cases, they avoid fully participating in class.”

Similarly, another teacher, P2 from School B, articulated:

“We have noticed that in many cases in the classroom situation, LVI demands repetitive work to grasp the concept fully. However, it is unfortunate that most teachers are not patient enough when facilitating the teaching of these learners. This contributes to their lack of interest in schooling”.

P4 within the same school confirmed:

“Teachers' lack of patience towards LVI affects their academic performance and, thus, results in poor performance.”

Some teachers also pointed out that the lack of appropriate skills and knowledge among many teachers within the mainstream school settings results in an increased workload for those who know how to teach LVI. The following excerpts from some of the participants illustrate this point.

P6 from School A had this to say:

“Teaching LVI creates a huge challenge, especially for teachers who lack skills. Teachers who can teach LVI have to carry a larger responsibility as the only ones answerable for dealing with learners with special educational needs.”

Similarly, another teacher (P5 from school B) echoed that:

“That is true! You may find out that here in our country, all learners with special educational needs, including LVI, form part of mainstream education; however, their special educational needs demand special attention, which turns out to be the responsibility of only teachers suitably trained for them and thus, they become over-loaded with work.”

P1, a qualified special education teacher from School A, referring to her teaching experience, said:

“Talking from my experience, special education teachers have a higher workload, especially in school settings like ours where there are few teachers who are qualified to teach LVI compared to those who lack skills and knowledge of how to teach them. This demands a lot of work from us, yet there are no incentives to motivate us.”

The findings of this study revealed that the alleged lack of teachers' skills was related to their incompetency, which contributes negatively to the learning of LVI. The results of this study agree with those of previous studies, which reported that teaching LVI is challenging for many teachers (Matobako, 2021; Mosola, 2020). Furthermore, the scenario put forth by P2 from School B that “most teachers are not patient enough when coming to facilitate learning for these learners” suggests that some teachers do not have experience teaching LVI in regular classes; hence, they are more impatient and skeptical about teaching such classes. This also contradicts Objective 3.2 of the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (MoET, 2018:13), which outlines that “successful implementation of the policy demands availability of competent and dedicated teachers who are equipped with requisite skills”. It also shows the need to develop an inclusive education form facilitated by skilled, well-trained, and knowledgeable special teachers (Masola, 2020). Similarly, some scholars share the same sentiment that LVIs have diverse special educational needs, which requires the deployment of teachers with the necessary skills to enable them to successfully perform their work in the best interest of LVI (Matobo and Matlosa, 2007; Mosia, 2014; Ramatea and Khanare, 2020). Therefore, the findings

of this study have revealed that the participants understand teachers' lack of skills and knowledge of content as a challenge that affects the academic performance of LVI in mainstream schools.

5.3.3 Lack of teachers' training and knowledge of content

Teachers' responses indicated that teachers had limited knowledge of content and training to teach LVI, which is a challenge to most teachers in mainstream settings. The findings further revealed that this limited knowledge is due to untrained teachers teaching LVI using Braille reading and writing to enable smooth teaching and learning. The transcripts detailing some of the experiences of teachers' lack of training and knowledge of content that the participant reported are captured below.

P1 (School A) said:

"In my experience, I like teaching as my profession, but lately, I am no longer confident in teaching because of many changes that have taken place in the teaching system. It is challenging for me. I don't know the content or any information on how to help LVI for reading and writing Braille because we lack training on that issue."

Similarly, P5 (School B) indicated:

"This is not a challenge to teachers only but also to LVI as it negatively impacts their interest in school. When we do not have skills, we will not be confident in conveying relevant skills to LVI. The teachers' biography displays that they have good qualifications, but these qualifications are not relevant to teaching LVI. Even when I trained as a teacher at Lesotho College of Education, there was no professional qualification specialty in teaching LVI and inclusive education".

P3 (School B) added:

"Inclusive education was introduced to primary schools, and LVI are among the learners that we must teach daily. We realised that we need relevant skills to teach LVI".

P4 (School B) expressed a similar response:

“The LVI must be taught together with the peers irrespective of their disabilities but we do not have relevant training to assist them. Our knowledge is only relevant to teaching regular classes. We do our best to teach them and help them write the work in their exercise books; after that, they go to be helped by the transcribers.”

Similarly, P5 (School A) said:

“Even though it is a walking distance, by the time they go to transcribe, I teach. I do not wait for them. The walking distance is not far from each other. The LVI moved from one school to another, known as the Resource Centre. The environment in School B and between it and School A is not user-friendly. This is a continuous workload if the work must be done in the absence of other learners.”

Regarding teachers’ training, the responses revealed that the teachers had not received training in primary schools to be relevant in teaching LVI. Even at Lesotho College of Education, the teacher training course did not include professional teachers’ qualification specialty in teaching LVI and inclusive education. Hence, P1 from School A stated that it is challenging to assist LVI in writing and reading in Braille. This finding resonates with those of another study conducted by Sefotho and Ferreira, (2020), which found that the lack of training severely affects teachers’ abilities to effectively and efficiently teach LVI. The reference made by P5 (School B) to the notion that, “This is not a challenge to teachers only but also a challenge that negatively impacts the interest of LVI in schooling,” is understood to mean that at this school, a lack of content knowledge and training regarding Braille does not only disempower teachers but also has adverse effects on the education of their LVI. This indicates that most of the LVI dislike school because their teachers lack the knowledge needed for them to cater to their needs. It was also interesting to note that the findings further showed that if teachers have appropriate skills, strategies, approaches, and methodologies and trained transcribers, they will develop LVI in quality and long-term learning.

5.3.4 Inflexible curriculum as a challenge to teachers

Another fact unearthed was the inflexible curriculum, which contributed to teachers' challenges in teaching LVI in mainstream schools. The participants stated that although the current integrated curriculum was introduced in 2000 and was meant to be inclusive, and serve a good purpose in the teaching and learning environment, the disadvantage is that it does not emphasise the inclusion of LVI in mainstream teaching and learning activities because there are no resources and facilities such as Braille as reading and writing material for LVI. The following assertions were made during some of the meetings about curriculums at the schools.

P4 (School B) denoted:

"The purpose of the curriculum is to be inclusive, which is a good idea, but the MoET did not prepare relevant resources to educate all learners in one classroom irrespective of their different disabilities."

P5 (School B) indicated that:

"The Government introduced the current curriculum with no resources and facilities to suit every learner. The curriculum was meant to be inclusive, but it does not display the inclusion of LVI in mainstream teaching and learning because it does not have Braille as reading and writing material suitable for LVI. As a result, we face the problem of LVI who do not know how to read and write."

"Before the implementation of the new curriculum, we were expected to receive training, to be prepared and equipped with what the curriculum entails, and to prepare us to teach such learners psychologically. Still, LVI depend on their ears when teachers are teaching."

P6 (School A) stated:

"We are always involved in utilising the curriculum at the implementation stage as teachers. We could understand it better if teachers were involved in the designing stage. The MoET found it imperative for LVI to learn with their sighted peers. Their inability to process visual information efficiently results in their need for a specific curriculum."

P3 (School A) added:

“Oh yes, I agree that primary teachers should be among the team designing the primary curriculum because they know the content suitable for the learner’s age.”

P4 (School B) said:

“I think, LVI, need to be educated in their special schools, where their educational needs are the same and I think for them not to work satisfactorily, one of the reasons they do not feel free to learn in the same classroom with the sighted learners. The curriculum also does not allow their full participation because it lacks relevant resources to meet their needs.”

P6 stated that:

“We understand that the current curriculum in primary schools is about inclusion. We also understand that the Government tried to incorporate all children in the education sector irrespective of gender, background, religion, and learner disabilities; this means that long-term training should have been implemented.”

P5 indicated that:

“Yes, this curriculum is said to be inclusive, but it does not demonstrate inclusiveness because it does not cater to the needs of LSEN, for example, for LVI and Learners with hearing impairment, there are no interpreters of Sign Language in classrooms, and even the knowledgeable people knowledge about interpreting is rare in the country.”

P5, (School B) said:

“Oh, yes, the new integrated curriculum in primary schools in Lesotho has a broader content than the old one. I think this curriculum should include Braille reading and writing and in schools we should have books in Braille print, and these should be available and accessible to the LVI Much in the same way that we have books used by sighted learners in regular classrooms.”

P1 (School B) indicated that:

“Yes, LVI, need to have the curriculum that is tailor-made for them, this will be proper for them to learn better and the relevant resources should also be allocated to schools before the schools reopen.”

As evident in the above excerpts, most participants mentioned the inflexible curriculum as does not demonstrate inclusiveness as one factor that they believed to contribute to teachers' challenges in teaching LVI in mainstream schools. Hence, they suggested that teachers should be included when designing the curriculum with the hope that their involvement will greatly help in applying the relevant materials such as Braille reading and writing to teach LVI. The implication here is that the participants in this study see the importance of primary school teachers when designing the curriculum, as teachers are the ones who will disseminate the curriculum practically.

Another issue emerging from the data, as P4 in School B narrated, is that teachers are faced with LVI who do not know how to read and write. What also emerges from the assertions by P5 (School B) is that teachers feel overwhelmed and ill-equipped to implement the curriculum and are not psychologically prepared to teach LVI. This suggests that due to the inflexible curriculum, some teachers of LVI are traumatised and may neither be serious nor committed to teaching LVI in mainstream classes. This kind of teacher's behaviours affects LVI's learning, and they have little or no control over it. Another concern raised by the participants was that the new integrated curriculum in primary schools in Lesotho has broader content than the old curriculum. As a result, Maine (2022) concurs that teachers hardly complete the syllabus.

Consequently, findings from the current study agree with those of a study conducted by Matobako (2021) in a public mainstream school in Lesotho. The study found that teachers lacked interest in addressing barriers to learning due to an inflexible curriculum. Therefore, it is likely that LVI would not perform well. In conclusion, most of the participants in this study felt that to respond to the inflexible curriculum, teachers needed books in Braille prints for them to be able to teach LVI.

5.3.5 Heavy workload

The participants' responses were related to the heavy workload experienced by teachers teaching LVI. The teachers viewed teaching LVI as a heavy workload because they had limited

knowledge of the content to be taught to LVI, which means they were not adequately prepared to teach such learners. The findings further indicate that they are also not qualified to teach them because of their limited skills and teaching resources. The responses revealed that the participants were also irrelevant to LVI, with some participants making the following comments.

P4 from (School A) stated:

“We have a big load to carry. LVI are in the classroom and we are happy about their inclusion. However, the most challenging thing is that we were not trained on how to adequately teach them even though we like to assist. We are also a challenge to LVI. We are not relevant to them; we have limited knowledge needed for them to achieve their goals.”

P3 (School A) and P6 said:

“We work very hard and work overtime because we have to transcribe the work for LVI in the primary school in School B, so that the next day LVI can hand in their homework like their sighted counterparts. We make sacrifices because we want to see their success. Our principal is very supportive, and we are all prepared to help LVI.”

P5 (School A) explained:

“When it is time to go home for the other teachers, it is not yet time to go for teachers teaching LVI because we must wait and help these learners by transcribing. We love these learners; we want to see them succeed in life. We are humans, we are Christians. We empathise with them.”

P1 (School A) added:

“Yes, we go home late, and the next morning, we must be around the school premises to teach as usual, but there are no incentives. Even though there are no incentives, we teach these learners full-heartedly so they can succeed soon, just like other learners without disabilities.”

P4 and P3 (School B) stated:

“We are given too much workload despite having limited training and books. There is no Braille, an essential teaching and learning material. There are no electronic appliances like audio tapes or tape-recording machines, which can be helpful for learners. To teach learning areas like Mathematics, a teacher teaching a concept like Time, needs a watch for LVI to touch. Improvising daily is not easy. This is another workload.”

P1 (School A) said:

“It is necessary to be assisted with electronic devices, like audiotapes, cell phones, or tape-recorders, so that learners can tape-record teachers’ lessons, so that later at their spare time, the learners can listen to the audio. This can help a lot in lessening the workload on teachers.”

P2 (School B) said:

“The teacher-learner ratio does not correspond. The learners are many in the class. Therefore, there are heavy loads on the teacher. So, marking and giving remedial classes is difficult for one teacher.”

The participants' responses in the above transcripts show that LVI are facing unbearable workloads because of their limited skills, which put teachers together with LVI in the dark place in mainstream teaching. Still, the other group of transcribing teams work till they have completed helping those LVI with their work. For example, they indicated they had to mark and have remedial classes. Closely linked to the findings was the response of participants in Mosola's (2020) study, which found that some teachers were specifically deployed to support LVI and teachers working with these learners. However, they are still given other extra classes to teach, thus increasing their workload. This suggests that the workload of those teachers working with LVI is too much. LVI cannot be given a maximum of 83 days per session or 30 periods per week as it is in their mainstream classrooms. The findings also reveal that the work is done out of the teachers' goodwill and love for improving the child's future. The participants suggested that technological devices should be of great importance in helping LVI, as they would assist them in gaining in-depth knowledge.

5.3.6 Absence of pre-schools for LVI

The participants' issues indicated that the lack of preschool for LVI is a big challenge to teachers who teach LVI in primary schools. Teaching LVI who have never attended pre-school is a big challenge for both LVI and their teachers. The study's findings indicate that teachers are frustrated by the situation of learners who enroll in Grade 1 before mastering the basic concepts while in preschool.

P4 and P5 (School A) pointed out that:

“Pre-schools should be implemented in primary schools. It is frustrating to start from scratch and introduce learners to the basics that they should have been introduced to before they come to Grade 1. We urge the Government to implement pre-schools at the primary school level.”

P3 (same schools) said:

“Yes, we introduce them to getting used to the environment so that they should be aware of their environment before the other learners can join them. Those learners in the boarding school sector, especially those who are new, come a week before others so that they can be introduced to the environment.”

P4 (same school) added:

“For those who use canes, getting used to the environment before their sighted learners can join them is good. Some learners use canes, which may have been introduced to them for the first time. All these things should have been done in pre-school.”

From the above data, it is apparent that the lack of pre-schools for LVI is a big challenge to teachers who teach LVI in primary schools. This seems consistent with the Roger Federer Foundation (2023) findings, which alluded to the recent scarcity of quality preschool education for every child in schools in Lesotho. The study's findings further revealed that teachers who teach LVI are frustrated when teaching LVI in grade 1, as it is these learners' first entrance into the formal teaching and learning environment. The Global Partnership Education [GPE] (2023) revealed that at the time, only 46% of learners, including LVI, had access to pre-schools in Lesotho. This means the road ahead is still long for MOET to fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 in ensuring that, “all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. The assertions made by P4 and P5 (School A) that “we urge the government to implement pre-schools in the primary schools” are understood in this context to mean that more needs to be done in Lesotho towards resource mobilisation and allocation of budget to ensure that all the needs of young LVI are met during their pre-school years. It even becomes more interesting when some teachers say they introduced LVI to get used to the environment so that they should be aware of it before the other learners can join them.

5.3.7 Lack of appropriate teaching and learning resources

The participants' responses were related to resource challenges. According to these participants, limited human and non-human resources affect the teaching and learning of LVI. Most of the challenges in developing countries like Lesotho about the inclusion of LVI, are linked to the scarcity of resources.

5.3.8 Limited Human Resources

This study showed that teachers experienced limited human resources in teaching LVI at schools in Lesotho. The participants indicated that human resources play a vital role in the teaching and learning process. They further emphasised that the lack of appropriate human resources and commitment influences teachers not to adequately accommodate LVI. Their status of being unqualified to teach LVI means they are not relevant, and these learners will fail to reap quality results. The findings indicate that teachers should have high self-efficacy, which enables them to assist learners in improving their academic performance.

P2 (School A) states:

“Lack of resourceful teaching and learning materials like ‘human resources’ who are teachers knowledgeable about the teaching of LVI here in our school is a major challenge.”

P2, a teacher from School A, shared the same sentiments. Another teacher, P4, within the same school, passionately mentioned that:

“Limited human resources such as teachers trained to teach LVI is a major problem within our country. This problem is created by our Government through the Ministry of Education and Training, which wrongly places teachers or ignores the need to take the availability and potential of these teachers into consideration.”

“It is the Government’s oversight role because many teachers from the Lesotho College of Education are well trained and competent enough specifically to teach LVI even though the programme from LCE was then terminated. Some students from The National University of Lesotho (hereafter NUL) are not recognised or even found worthy by our government, making their placement in this kind of

school difficult. However, most teachers here are just general education teachers who are not even offered in-service training to facilitate the teaching of LVI.”

Similarly, two participants from School B supported the above, pointing to their school setting.

P3 stated:

“We all know that even though our school is meant to implement inclusive education, where all learners are to be taught together with those with visual impairment, these settings create many challenges for us, especially because here in our school, teachers are not trained to teach LVI. Yet, we are supposed to include LVI in the mainstream system.”

Similarly, another participant, P5, commented that:

“This is a major challenge to us because the only teachers who are trained and skilled in Braille are placed at School A, a feeder school to School B, which is also within the same premises as School B. Surprisingly, most of the time, attention is given to only teachers at School A by the Ministry, as if they are the only ones who teach these learners.”

P6 added that:

“Yes, meeting the needs of all learners in the colleges and universities is a good idea because it would prevent LVI from dropping out of school.”

The above data indicates that lack of resources, such as teachers who are well-trained and able to teach LVI, presents a significant problem that negatively affects the academic performance of LVI. The study's findings merge with those of another study conducted by Mateusi, Khoaeane, and Naong (2014), Mosia (2014), and Mosola, (2020) who identified a lack of trained teachers as the source of barriers to learning for LVI. Other scholars confirm that most LVI are left behind because their teachers are not adequately trained (Sallie, Moletsane, and Mukuna, 2018; Mosia and Pasha, 2017). In alignment with P5's comment from School B above, the lack of training for teachers is not the only challenge they face.

5.3.9 Limited non-human resources

Non-human resources were limited, posing another challenge the participants identified as stifling teachers' self-efficacy in teaching LVI at schools. The findings of this study indicate that most participants perceived a shortage of teaching and learning support materials for LVI. This included limited Braille, which hindered the smooth facilitation of the teaching and learning process. The following quotations from some of the participants illustrate this finding.

P3 from School B pointed out that:

“A major challenge we experience here in our school relates to adapting materials to meet the needs of LVI.”

P1, indicating how limited Braille hinders their smooth teaching and learning, stated that:

“Having a shortage of teachers of Braille is a great challenge because all learners, especially those with visual impairment who are enrolled here in our school, are blind and rely mostly on learning using Perkins Braille, large print books and assistive devices. This, therefore, badly affects our teaching and slows down these learners’ academic performance.”

“That is true! LVI must walk from this school B to School A where they will have access to Braille and be assisted by a teacher who is a specialist in Braille. This confuses most of us as it negatively affects these learners as they must go for Braille assistance; they miss out on some of the work done here.”

From the above excerpts, the participants showed a common understanding of their views on how the teaching of LVI can be enabled. For these participants, limited resources contributed immensely as a barrier to teaching and learning for LVI. It shows that in the absence of materials such as Perkins Braille, large print books, and assistive devices, teachers of LVI can experience challenges as they attempt to facilitate teaching and learning for these learners, which could negatively affect their academic performance. This corroborates one of the findings from Makhate (2020), which demonstrates that teachers are frustrated by the lack of resources, which is also connected with the learners’ poor performance. Some studies acknowledged that teaching LVI requires skilled teachers and other teaching and learning resources (Ralejoe, 2016; Ramatea and Khanare, 2020).

It is also worth noting that LVI must travel from this school to another school where they can access Braille and be assisted by a Braille specialist. This finding gives the impression that other schools are generally more under-resourced than others. Hence, the participants lament that discrepancies in resource allocation in schools, which force them to travel from one school to another, are confusing and negatively affect LVI. As a result, the current curriculum has not been fully adapted to ensure its accessibility for LVI. Besides, the reality of the lack of physical resources faced by teachers and LVI at the primary school level is far detached from LIEP and legal commitments.

5.3.10 Inappropriate infrastructure

The provision of inappropriate infrastructure becomes a nightmare and a barrier to learning and development when the needs of LVI are not met in the mainstream setting. The participants made the following comments:

P2 from School A said:

“It is very appropriate for a school to have conducive infrastructure suitable for all. Where there is a need for renovations, the principal should help to benefit all learners, despite their diverse needs.”

P1 from School A added:

“LVI depend on their ears. If they struggle to move freely because the school environment is not enabling, it is very touchy. The government should have the school infrastructure prepared before the integration of LVI.”

P4 (School B) stated that:

“The situation of infrastructure is not good, even though LVI are used to it and are familiar with the school environment. There are no ramps, the school environment has some steps, and the ground is bumpy. Gradually, we will be paving the ground to make the environment user-friendly. We need to complete improving the school buildings.”

The participants reported that infrastructure remains an obstacle to implementing the existing policies and ensuring accessibility. This statement implies that in Lesotho’s mainstream schools, infrastructure is often inadequate, dilapidated, and unsafe. The view

expressed by P4 (School B) that “there are no ramps, the environment has some steps, and the ground is bumpy” means that MoET should supply schools that accommodate LVI with relevant infrastructure for the best implementation of IE. The adequate infrastructure can help enhance teachers' skills, and in this way, the academic performance of LVI will improve too. The finding aligns with the findings of Lebona (2020), Monyane (2020), and Ntseli (2021), who argued that having the relevant infrastructure in primary schools would contribute to an improvement in the academic performance of LVI and implementation of inclusion in mainstream schools because the environment will be enabling to everyone, irrespective of their disabilities. In her study, Mahlo (2011) showed that in most South African schools, the physical environment is not yet accommodative to learners with learning barriers. Therefore, the Government must prepare the infrastructure to suit all learners.

5.3.11 Overcrowded classrooms

It was evident that teaching LVI in an overcrowded classroom is very frustrating and destructive in many areas, especially class and classroom management. Again, ensuring every learner is attentive and paying attention to what is being taught in the classroom is challenging. Learning cannot be effective if it is done in an overcrowded classroom. Some participants, particularly P5 (School B), stated that:

“We are teaching too many learners in the same classroom. It is not easy for us to teach and mark at the same time. After school, we will be very exhausted.”

P3 (School B) concurred:

“It is not easy to organise remedial classes when dealing with overcrowded mainstream classrooms. Sometimes, we become physically and mentally sick because of the huge burden we are experiencing in overcrowded classrooms.”

P1 from School A had this to say:

“There is a lot to be done. After school, some teachers go home, while we remain here to assist LVI in transcribing their work. This involves a lot of work. When the teacher demands their homework in the morning, LVI should hand in theirs too.”

Based on the above statements, it is obvious that when classrooms are overcrowded, teaching LVI under those conditions is challenging. Teaching in overcrowded classrooms is frustrating, as teachers find it difficult to attend to all learners who need attention and to organise and manage remedial classes. The results of this study agree with the findings of a study conducted by Jia and Santi (2020), which reported that having large numbers of learners in the same class results in teachers experiencing various barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education in their classrooms, which included managing learners with and without barriers to learning. Seotsanyane and Matheolane (2010) also highlighted that since the introduction of free and compulsory education, there has been overcrowding of classrooms, which has made it difficult for teachers to cater to the needs of LSEN. This study also revealed that teaching and marking simultaneously, which is not easy. Data further show that teachers become physically and mentally sick because of the insurmountable burden they experience in overcrowded classrooms. This can result in teachers developing low interest and negative attitudes towards poor assessment practices being implemented in overcrowded classrooms.

5.3.12 Lack of parental or caregiver support

Parents are one of the major stakeholders in the teaching and learning of their children with disabilities. Parents or caregivers are the main players in supporting teachers and their children. The participants' comments revealed that teachers are expected to work together

with parents to improve the academic work of LVI. However, the discussions with the participants revealed issues such as lack of parental or caregiver support as challenges in teaching LVI in mainstream classes. P4 (School A) made the following comments:

“Parents do not come to schools to discuss the academic work of LVI. They do not take any initiative to apologise for failing to come for a meeting.”

P4 (School A) indicated:

“Parents do not even bother to help their children with their homework. So, as teachers, we think it is good to call parents and work together to build the well-being of children. Teachers cannot be stuck alone with the children in the classroom without discussing the academic work of LVI with their parents.”

P5 (School A) indicated:

“It is important to take care of LVI as their parents. Parents are important people who should guide learners and take them to counselling.”

P4 (School A) said:

“Is it lack of knowledge that results in parents not taking any responsibility for their children? For example, they do not ensure that their children have birth certificates, which are necessary for sponsorship when attending high school.”

P5 (School A):

“Parents and teachers should work together in the academic journey involving their LVI. Discussing the work of learners and how to help and guide them motivates us as teachers and children. Learners who are helped at home and school perform better than those who are helped by teachers alone.”

P6 (School A) added:

“I agree that learners who are helped at home perform better than learners who do not get any help at home.”

P6 (School A) said:

“As the school has limited funds, we cannot make home visits for learners who completed their primary school. As teachers check their lifestyles. The Government should see a need for schools to

incorporate LVI into high schools through the principals. There should be relevant materials both in primary and high school for the well-being of LVI to be enhanced.”

The findings, as indicated by the participants' responses cited above, revealed that the effectiveness of parents' participation in LVI can help motivate both teachers and learners. The findings further revealed that learners whose parents or caregivers are hands-on concerning helping their children with schoolwork to perform better in class than those whose parents or caregivers do not take any responsibility for their children's schoolwork. At the textual level, an analysis of the response of P5 (School A) that “when we call parents to come to schools to discuss the academic work of LVI, they do not come to school,” is understood to mean that parents are not involved in their children's education. The findings revealed that a lack of support and encouragement from the family can lead to academic failure (Cleyle and Phipostt, 2011). The findings further indicate that LVI should be incorporated into high school through the principal's office, even though the teachers suggested that funding should be automatic to LVI.

5.3.13 Failure of parents or guardians to attend school meetings

A closer look at the findings showed that parents' failure to attend school meetings is a big challenge to the school. This further shows that parents or caregivers need to be sensitised about the importance of attending school meetings. Parents need to support their children's educational needs, though some come from afar. Sometimes, it is not easy to reach the school premises due to lack of transport. The participant P5 from School A stated that:

“At the beginning of the year, we call parents to meetings. However, some parents delay their children's arrival at school, which means they miss the opening day, and the school activities are lined up for that day. For some parents, it is due to a lack of literacy for others it is due to poverty that makes it difficult for them to provide the child with the basic needs to go to school.”

P1 (School A) mentioned:

“We are aware that some learners come from afar, and when it is time to report for school, they delay, and the reason is that they do not have money for transport and other school needs.”

P5 (School B) said:

“As a teacher, I used to ask myself why some parents, just from the onset, when the child arrives from school, do not start budgeting or finding other means of raising money so that by the time the schools reopen, the child should go to school on the opening day. We know that some children are orphans and struggle when it comes to school needs, which are provided by their relatives who sometimes struggle too in terms of providing for their immediate families.”

As demonstrated by the above-cited quotations, the participants selected from the groups indicated that some of the parents do not have clear knowledge that giving support to the LVI boosts their engagement and improvement in their academic performance. The findings revealed that some children are orphans and have nowhere to get their basic needs. Their main shoulder to cry on are the relatives who sometimes like to help but because of their vulnerability and struggle to provide for their families, this makes it difficult for them to provide for their immediate families, let alone the extended family. The responses from the participants indicated that parents or caregivers struggle to find money to cover the children's expenses, and the children fail to go to school on the opening day accompanied by their parents. Despite the parents' failure to attend school meetings, teachers are the most valuable resource in fostering a learning culture, regardless of the prevailing challenges (Babeli, 2013).

5.3.14 Lack of communication between teachers and parents or caregivers

The participants' statements show that communication between teachers and parents is a challenge that needs to be addressed for the academic performance of LVI to be improved. The findings further revealed that communication, either by face-to-face conversation, telephone, or letter, plays a major role in school activities. The findings indicate the need to communicate with teachers, parents, and principals about school activities concerning LVI to enhance their academic progress. The quotations from P6 (School B) illustrate this finding:

“We usually write letters to the parents of learners with special needs, inviting them to school to discuss the academic work of the LVI. Some parents neither attend nor respond to these appointments.”

P5 (School B) added:

“Some learners do not stay with their parents, their parents go to the neighbouring country in the Republic of South Africa to look for a job, so, some children stay with their siblings, some stay with their grandparents who are sometimes illiterate and some stay at boarding school, in this situation it is not easy to communicate with parents.”

P4 (School B) that:

“As teachers, we do all that we can to help learners, but there is certain helpful information that we have to know from parents for the academic performance of LVI to improve significantly.”

P6 (School B) asserted that:

“It is very supportive to have parents involved in their children’s performance so that they know exactly where more help is needed. This encouraging to teachers too. It is important to realise that the support from parents also makes us realise our support. Parents need to be actively involved in the learning of their children with visual impairments and this can mostly help LVI to have barrier-free behavioural, emotional, and social development.”

Similarly, P1 (School A) said:

“It is good to see parents taking responsibility for their children’s education. This can improve their self-efficacy and academic performance. Even if they are illiterate, they should approach teachers for guidance and further discussions on how best to improve the academic performance of their children with visual impairments.”

P4 (School B) stated:

“I become very excited when I teach a class where parents come to school to ask about their children's performance and how to assist them.”

P5 (School A) highlighted:

“The way, I feel good when I work with learners whose parents take care of them, who will be asking about the progress of their learners. Such parents are not many. But I always feel frustrated when I realise that some parents do not come even during the school holidays when LVI are to be collected to go home.”

The findings have revealed that it is important for the parents or caregivers, teachers, and the principal to play their roles. The findings further reveal that effective communication between the principal, teachers, and parents can motivate and encourage LVI, which can then improve their self-efficacy and academic work; teachers’ self-efficacy may also improve upon their realisation they have support from a school team that also aims to improve the academic performance of LVI (Maluleke, 2014). The participants indicated that parents, as front-line role players, need to be actively involved in their children’s education, and this presents a united front-line picture of learners’ behavioural, emotional, and social development (Maluleke, 2014). The findings indicate that parental involvement can provide children with a sense of empowerment and confidence.

5.3.15 Non-collaboration between teachers and parents

The study's findings highlight that most parents do not collaborate with teachers by taking the initiative to help their learners with homework. Some learners come to school with undone homework. For instance, some learners delay returning to school after the holidays, which adversely affects their performance. Mosia (2022) indicates that parents of LVI must fully support their children because they are in the best position to guide teachers by giving them information about the strengths and weaknesses of their children. Parents need to support class teachers in solving the challenges facing LSEN (Mahlo, 2011).

P1 from School A and P4 observed that:

“Sometimes, LVI delay coming to school at the expected time when schools have reopened. Some learners stay with relatives who are also facing various challenges, including their inability to provide

the children with transport fare to school. This is the information that teachers usually get from the children themselves.”

P3 from School A said:

“For parents to understand the inclusion of their learners in the mainstream classes, the Government should hold workshops for parents, so that they are made aware of the need to take responsibility in terms of helping their children to upgrade their class work in general.”

P4 in School A added:

“Yes, even though some parents are illiterate, they should still support their children in various ways. When they are called to attend parent meetings, they should cooperate and not shy away. Communicating with class teachers is one of the best ways of improving their children’s performance.”

P1 from School A reported that:

“Some children stay in the boarding school when schools have been closed. For example, some orphans are not excited to go home for the holidays. These learners tell sad stories about how they are ill-treated at home based on their disabilities.”

P2 from School A said:

“When LVI reach the teenage stage, they should be educated about life skills such as unplanned pregnancy and the resource person should be an outsourced person.”

P6 from School B added that:

“LVI trust us teachers so much that they feel more comfortable with us here at school than when they are at home.”

P5 emphasised that:

“The government should follow up by supporting teachers to make home visits and visit the homes of LVI in these 10 districts as schools lack the resources to finance these visits. Even those individuals who have left school still need teachers to check on them to ascertain how they cope.”

P3 (School A) explained:

“LVI leave the school motivated to go home among their communities to start a small business but because of no funds, LVI begin to be frustrated and they stop their dreams. I agree that a follow-up is needed to see how they progress and face the world.”

P4 School A:

“I think counselling should be done to themselves and their parents so that they can know how to face the challenges in the world outside school. That is why, I think, the government should make a plan for those who leave school without continuing their studies to be given funding to begin a small business and the government through the Ministry of Social Development they should monitor the LVI projects.”

P4 (School A) stated that:

“I buy the idea, and the MoET should introduce preschools for LVI because we struggle to teach them. This would improve performance. As the case is, we start trying to close the pre-school gap from scratch, yet these learners are obliged to complete two years at School A”

P5 (School A) added:

“It is not an easy job assisting the type of learners we have. I hope our government is aware of that challenge. We need to have Botho (humanity).”

The teachers showed a common understanding of how difficult it is to teach learners who lack support from caregivers. They felt that there is a need for parents or caregivers to work together with teachers, as teachers sometimes identify the child's needs; this then becomes a stumbling block in the learner's performance (Mahlo, 2015). Mahlo further says that if the parents can take responsibility, the teachers would also feel encouraged to help and support the LVI. In addition, Khanare's (2012) study pointed out that it is important to include LSEN in consultations and decision-making processes to make their voices heard. In this regard, their needs can be adequately met. Manitsa and Doikou (2022) showed the importance and impact of providing special support services in educational settings, as this enhances the socio-emotional development of LVI. Therefore, there is a need for LVI to have support from their families and the Government because vulnerable learners must be assisted in their well-being through counselling and other strategies. In this case, LVI can realise that they are cared for

in terms of Ubuntu/Botho, in humanity. In this way, their self-efficacy will be raised, and their academic performance will improve as well (Rugoho and Maphosa, 2017; Lebona, 2020; Maine, 2022).

5.3.16 Parents' lack of awareness about dealing with LVI

Parents' lack of awareness about their children's visual impairment is one restraining challenge hindering teachers from teaching LVI. Data showed that the government is not organising enough workshops to orient parents on how to take care of and deal with their children with special needs. Furthermore, the chiefs in the village do not hold public gatherings and make the community aware of the needs of vulnerable people they have in their villages so that LVI cease to be the responsibility of their parents only, as in Sesotho, 'ngoana ke oa motse kaofela', which means 'it takes a village to raise a child'. This was highlighted in one of the participants' responses, for example, P2 from School A said:

"We have these visually impaired people in our families, schools and the community at large. Parents and caregivers are not made to attend enough workshops to know about the disabilities different people live with, and how to take care of such people."

Similarly, P4 from School A said:

"Yes, I agree that people are not educated enough to know that people with disabilities are like other people. We have to respect the fundamental rights of LVI. It is not within the community only where, they are not taken care of, even here in schools, teachers should be made to attend workshops that are meant to change our mindsets."

P4 (School A) added:

"I hope the awareness should not be only through workshops, but they should be done through media, village gatherings, clinic and hospital visits, and churches. Through all these methods, information can reach out to people living in remote areas."

P2 (School B) indicated that:

"People are not knowledgeable about disability; they think it is a curse to have such children. I think we are supposed to help each other as teachers to pass the voice to support these learners and they

should not be bullied in schools and humiliated by their neighbours and their agetates in the community. So that they can feel loved everywhere.”

The findings stated above revealed that the number of people who are visually impaired in families, schools, and communities at large has significantly risen. The implication is that the intake of LVI has also increased due to the Free Primary Education policy (Mosola, 2020). However, the school used to admit learners fresh from pre-school whose parents and caregivers had not attended enough workshops to know about their disabilities, and how to take care of LVI. This means that parents are not aware that their children are visually impaired; it is safe to say such parents are in denial and cannot work harmoniously with teachers. This challenge hinders teachers from fulfilling their role in teaching LVI.

The report indicated that it is not only within the community where LVI are not taken care of, as even in schools, teachers are not exposed to workshops that teach them how to work together with the parents of LVI. The response by the P4 from School A that “the awareness should not be done by workshops only, but through media and in churches; yes, through all the methods so that it could reach other people who live in remote areas,” is a clear indication that teachers are aware of lack of parental awareness about LVI and their education in rural areas. The participants suggested that arrangements should include workshops, media advertisements, and other methods that could be used to raise awareness about the need to take care of people with disabilities and abolish behaviours that humiliate people with disabilities. Thus, the communities, schools, and homes should be educated to support LVI.

5.3.17 Poor teachers’ salaries

The poor teachers’ salaries reportedly posed challenges in restraining the teachers’ self-efficacy and commitment to fulfilling their role of teaching LVI in mainstream classrooms. Findings from FGDs show that teachers' incentives are immensely important as they ensure that the teaching and learning process occurs smoothly. The government has entrusted teachers with important jobs. However, it has placed a greater workload on the teachers. In this regard, the Government of Lesotho should try to adequately remunerate teachers. Compared to other countries globally, Lesotho offers low salaries to teachers. Teachers

teaching LVI should be provided with support and guidance, as they understand very well that they should foster cooperation among learners, provide immediate feedback, allocate more time to tasks, create attainable goals, and show respect for the diverse talents and learning styles of all learners. Teachers noticed that LVI learn in different ways and this perception on their part requires that it should be recognised that they form an important part of the workforce. This task of teaching learners with diverse needs is not an easy task and the Government, as the main stakeholder, should provide support from different angles. It should consider increasing teachers' salaries.

P1 from School A had this to say on this issue:

“Though we teach all learners with diverse needs in one class, it is very stressful and cumbersome to prepare lessons for such a class, although we have received training in this area. Our poor salaries compound the situation.”

Another teacher, P4 from School A, explained:

“When free and compulsory education was introduced, we received a short training, and we do not have enough salaries and resources to help all learners with different needs.”

P3 (School B) added:

“When the Government allocates resources, they exclude us as the mainstream school; they only give the resources and incentives to our neighbouring school. They forget that we work together, sharing this heavy load, and they do not motivate us through incentives. This demotivates us.”

Similarly, P1 (School B) said:

“Yes, it is very upsetting to realise that our school and we as teachers are excluded; when the other school is given some resources to be used in classrooms to enhance their teaching, we are left out, yet we carry the same workload.”

P5 (School B) mentioned:

“Our salaries are very low, in comparison with our workload, and the teacher-learner ratio in our classrooms is overwhelming.”

P6 (School B) further emphasised that:

“The MoET should give the relevant books and machines to help LVI access the educational material offered in the classroom. They should learn in the same way as, and simultaneously with, learners without vision problems. This can help learners with visual impairment perform better.”

The above statements revealed that teachers of LVI are not paid good salaries. The citation by P5 that “our salaries are very low compared to our workload, and the teacher-learner ratio in our classrooms is overwhelming,” connotes that some teachers feel that there is a lack of balance between their salaries and the huge responsibilities of teaching LVI. The implication here is that the issue of poor salaries seriously demotivates the teachers in their bid to efficiently support LVI. Mahlo (2011) stated that it is vital that teachers who are responsible for teaching LVI, who experience barriers to learning and development, should have good monthly incentives, knowledge, skills, and the right attitudes to teach and guide those learners for them to reach their highest potential. Mosola (2020) says special education teachers should put in more effort as they face many daily challenges in supporting LSEN. In this case, the Government must seriously consider adequately remunerating teachers (Odanga, 2018; Coleman, 2017). It would be important if the government could consider increasing salaries of teachers. This way, the teachers will feel appreciated and confident and have more self-efficacy. Undoubtedly, the appreciation will motivate them to offer hands-on assistance to LVI.

5.4 THEME 2: TEACHERS’ CHALLENGES IN ADMINISTERING ASSESSMENTS TO LVI

In addressing the second research question, which sought to explore challenges faced by teachers in administering assessments to LVI, the participants, during the observation method, they often identified several different challenges they experienced. These challenges were broadly within the context of inexperienced teachers assigned to properly implement assessments, rigid curriculum and assessment tools, and a constraining learning environment. Figure 5.2 shows a three-table representation of barriers or challenges experienced by teachers in administering assessments for LVI.

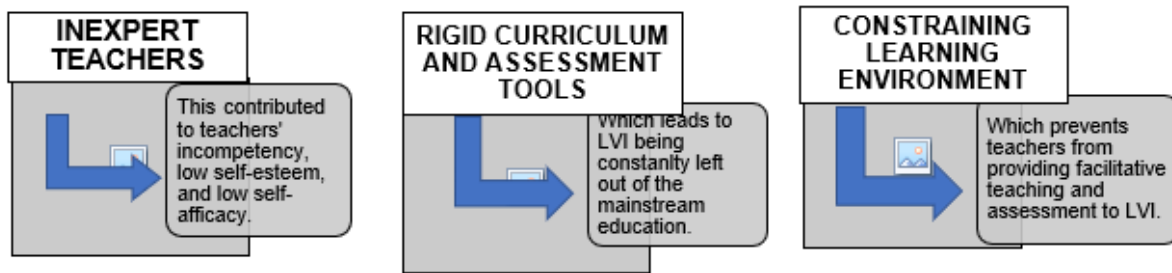


Figure 5.2: Representation of the challenges facing teachers in administering assessments of LVI

5.4.1 Inexpert teachers to administer assessment for LVI

The findings in this study suggest that most participants perceived unskilled teachers in administering assessments to LVI could be a challenge in their schools. The challenges relating to incompetent teachers are assumed to be due to the teachers' low self-esteem and low self-efficacy, thus resulting in their inability to successfully manage the assessment of LVI. The following extracts from some of the participants illustrate this situation. P4 from School B had the following to say:

“The common problem we experience here in our school is not being able to effectively manage the assessment of LVI in terms of giving them extra time based on their visual impairment and the relevant assessment based on their visual problem.”

P6 from School A said:

“The problem of having, the most inexperienced teachers here in our school contributes negatively to the failure of LVI.”

According to some participants, most inexpert teachers also have low self-efficacy and face challenges trying to effectively administer assessments to LVI in mainstream schools. During discussions P2, candidly commented:

“In our mainstream school, LVI need special care and support for them to prosper. However, few succeed academically, but most of those who fail, it is not because they are incompetent, but because inexpert teachers administer their assessments.”

Similarly, three other participants added the following comments:

“From my experience, we work in isolation as teachers trained to teach LVI, and most teachers are not trained to teach LVI, resulting in most of them failing to administer assessments for LVI because of the process is complex, time-consuming, and demanding. For example, during classroom tests or assessments, teachers who are not trained to teach LVI do not know how to transcribe Braille as a form of writing used by LVI. Therefore, it will take time for our work to be taken to the transcriber for assistance, LVI are left behind, while their sighted peers proceed”.

P3 from School A concurs:

“This also has lowered our self-esteem and even made us hate teaching within this kind of setting where all learners with and without visual impairments are taught together.”

P4 within the same school commented:

“This type of setting is not suitable for both teachers and learners. It consumes a lot of time. By the time the LVI take their work to be transcribed to the other teachers in the other school, whereby the two schools work together; the teachers in the neighbouring school who work together do not wait for the transcription of the work. In addition, when they go for transcription, they sometimes have to wait for the teacher to finish the class work they are working on and then attend to them afterward. While waiting for the teacher to complete their teaching to assist the learner in transcribing the work, the teacher’s self-esteem will be dented. Remember, these learners must be handled with greater care.”

P1 (School B) commented:

“This statement has just reminded me of one thing. Since we are unfamiliar with Braille, the learners will be given some work to be transcribed by interpreters. After that, when I get feedback, I will ask the learners if they have understood what the transcriber has said or written. Usually, the learners get wrong answers between themselves and the transcribers. The learners will tell us: ‘No teacher, it is the teacher who wrote that’ and we then discover discrepancies between what we teach and what the transcribers write”.

The above observations reveal that most teachers within the mainstream teaching environment are challenged in facilitating and administering the assessments of LVI. Based on the findings in this category, most teachers lack training thus creating constraints in the

assessment of these learners (Kabeto, 2015; Matobako, 2020). These findings align with a study conducted by Ralebese (2019), which specified that one of the major challenges teachers face in teaching LVI in mainstream education is insufficient training, which results in an inability to properly assess these learners. The current study's findings suggest that learners' academic acquisition might not be possible without teachers receiving proper training to successfully carry out assessments of LVI. Three out of six participants from School B also pointed out that the placement of inexperienced teachers within their school is not the only challenge the teachers face. There is also the issue of a rigid curriculum and assessment tools. In line with Mohale (2020), lack of training in implementing the Lesotho integrated curriculum has negatively affected the effectiveness of teachers in implementing the integrated curriculum in Lesotho, which negatively affects teachers' effectiveness in the classrooms (Khokanyana, 2015). Mohale (2020) reiterates sentiments like those of Singer-Freeman and Bustone (2016), stating that teachers should encourage effort. When giving feedback from the assessment, teachers should describe the efforts of learners for them to improve on their performance. The notion of "good performance" shows that a teacher knows the learners' progress. It shows more appreciation when teachers communicate openly with the class to know their weaknesses. It encourages learner participation, more dialogue, and better performance (Brooks, 2017).

5.4.2 Rigid curriculum and assessment tools

Most participants pointed to the rigid curriculum and assessment tools within this sub-theme, which normally becomes problematic for teachers in administering assessments to LVI. In response to the question mentioned above in Section 5.3 which concerns challenges faced by teachers in the administration of assessment for LVI, the participants, during observation methods, identified fragmented implementation of the inclusive curriculum assessment tools by teachers. The participants frequently mentioned the use of a 'one-size-fits-all' mode of assessment without consideration for diverse individual special education needs as shown in the following extracts.

P5 from School B mentioned that:

“The mode of assessment we are expected to employ here in our school where we teach all learners, those with and those without visual impairment, is very challenging”.

Two out of the five participating teachers, especially those trained to teach LVI, supported one another and confirmed the major problem of being expected to use a ‘one-size-fits-all’ assessment method that does not accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. In this regard, P2, from School A, expressed her deep concern regarding the challenge they were facing, which is caused by employing a uniform mode of assessment:

“Although we all know that LVI are unique individuals with special educational needs, which means that they need special care and support to prosper, we are still expected to be rigid and to assess them as if they have no special needs. On a serious note, the mode of assessment used, especially the national assessment tools, is challenging and not accommodative. It excludes many learners with special educational needs.”

Concurring with P2 above, P1 further indicated:

“Indeed, this is very challenging, especially to us teachers for we have to adapt to the assessment requirements yet some of us are inexperienced in properly facilitating these learners’ assessments.”

The primary concern in the above extracts concerns the loopholes identified in Lesotho’s national curriculum and assessment tools. They are seen to be exclusive of and not accommodative to all learners. This makes teachers appear incompetent. The situation identified here matches the findings of studies conducted by Ralebese (2019) and Matobako (2020), which both asserted that the greatest challenge facing teachers in assessing LVI in mainstream schools is due to some fragments identified within Lesotho’s curriculum and assessment tools which are inflexible and devoid of appropriate guidelines needed to direct teachers to meet the assessment requirements about learners with special educational needs. However, very little has been done to provide the necessary support services to children with disabilities in Lesotho’s regular schools (Ralejoe, 2016, 2021).

The new curriculum and assessment processes provide statements about the learners’ progress and abilities (Ralebese, 2018). This enables teachers, learners, and parents to know exactly what a learner has learned, what they can learn, and the areas where they need more

support (Ralebese, 2018; Raselimo, 2010). The findings of the current study are in alignment with other studies conducted in Lesotho, such as the studies of Ramatea and Khanare (2021), Lebona (2020) Phethako (2020), Monyane (2020), Ralejoe (2019), and Mosia (2014) where teachers experience barriers in teaching LVI because of lack of relevant resources and a rigid curriculum that does not adequately accommodate learners with disabilities. Another aspect signifying fragments identified in the administration of assessment for LVI was the constraining learning environment, which impedes the smooth facilitation of these learners' learning and assessment. Most participants indicated that the learning environment where the assessment of LVI is conducted is not conducive. In agreement with this finding, Mohale (2020:94) postulates that "teaching large classes can present real challenges in the management, the making, and the standardisation of assessment practices." The hindrance caused by the constraining learning environment was considered a challenge to both the learners and teachers concerned. This manifested in some of the participants' responses.

5.4.3 Constraining learning environment

Findings from the participants' extracts indicate that LVI are not educationally accommodated due to several challenges teachers face in administering assessments. Evidence reveals that the learning environments these learners are exposed to are more constraining than supportive. The constraining learning environment in which the learning and assessment of LVI are conducted was frequently mentioned in the responses of the participating teachers. P1, from School B, remarked:

"It is challenging to realise that despite the implementation of the inclusive education system here in our country, LVI are included in the mainstream schools without proper arrangements being put in place to create a learning environment that suitably accommodates them."

Similarly, P4, from School A, commented:

"It is very hard to conduct the assessment of LVI in this kind of setting where it is difficult to facilitate their learning. Although we practice inclusion, where all learners are accommodated in one learning space, the school environment is more accommodating to those without visual impairment than those with impairments."

P 5, a special education teacher, insightfully indicated how the school's constraining learning environment hindered teachers' assessment administration for LVI. She said:

"In the context of an enabling and effective assessment of LVI, an arrangement should be made to ensure that all teachers are equipped with the essential skills and resources; and that all the necessary equipment should be made available to them because honestly, all of these are limited and contribute to the poor learning environment at our school. Proper teaching and learning and assessment are inaccessible, causing constraints to us in successfully managing the assessment of LVI."

Another participating teacher, P3, in school B also asserted that their school's inaccessibility deprived most LVI of an opportunity to cope with their learning.

"It is very difficult for LVI in our school to access learning facilities like their peers because the learning space where their learning and assessment are conducted is inaccessible."

From the above data, an inaccessible learning environment in a school poses a great challenge not only to teachers but also to learners, preventing them from properly achieving their academic goals. The study's findings resonate with those of another study conducted by Mosia and Phasha (2018) and Monyane (2020), who perceived the inaccessibility of a school's learning environment as a barrier to all learners' learning. This is consistent with the assertions of Lebona (2013), Lebona (2020), Ramatea, and Khanare (2020), who see the learners' successful learning because of an enabling learning environment full of resourceful teaching and learning materials. This also corresponds with the findings of the present study, which perceive the academic acquirement of LVI because of a more resourceful school and learning environment. However, the findings of the study disagree with those of Matlosa and Matobo (2007), who claim that the inclusion of LVI in mainstream learning environments is a barrier, and they reported having a sense of incompetence, helplessness, or guilt and, expressed different reactions about having LSEN and LVI included in the mainstream class. Rather, the findings indicate that the participants considered the constraining learning environment as a challenge not only to teachers but also to LVI as it impedes their attainment of educational goals.

5.5 THEME 3: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING TEACHERS' SKILLS TO IMPROVE THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LVI

This third theme, which evolved from the data analysis, relates to the possible strategies for enhancing teachers' skills for the improvement of the academic performance of LVI. The participants showed that for LVI to succeed in their teaching and learning, teachers must engage different strategies to teach LVI as this will help teachers to have more skills, strategies, approaches, and methods that will help the teachers to teach LVI so that they understand the concepts taught in the classroom. These results are discussed in the following sections.

5.5.1 Enhancing teachers' skills in teaching LVI

5.5.1.1 Improving teachers' skills through pre-service and in-service teacher training

The participants reported that teachers' skills play a vital role in ensuring that the relevant teaching and learning process runs successfully. Evidence shows that some general teachers were trained before the Special Education programme was introduced at Lesotho College of Education and the National University of Lesotho. The findings have further revealed that teachers realised that their skills were limited to teaching LVI; therefore, they need suitable training to teach all learners in the classroom irrespective of their disabilities. The participants made various comments and P1 (School B) had this to say:

"During our training, the special education programme had not been introduced. In this regard, teaching learners with diverse needs was a challenge."

Another teacher, P4 (School A), explained:

"We were trained to teach in a general education classroom. After the new curriculum was introduced, it emerged that there was a need for retraining in special needs education."

P3, who hailed from the same school, added:

"Yes, special needs education is a major need for all. It is a need that should have been implemented for the benefit of all learners. It is not easy to teach LVI without being trained to teach them."

Similarly, P3 added:

“Oh, yes, there is a need for developing in-service programs tailor-made for pre-service training teachers for them to have in-depth training in different types of disabilities so that after training they can be relevant and have all the positive attitudes and self-efficacy needed for them to teach LVI.”

P4 (School A) emphasised:

“Special needs education is a good programme that all teachers should be trained in. Most of the teachers were happy that the programme was introduced in the pre-service training programme to equip teachers with the relevant skills. I discovered that a special education programme is available for a short time at Lesotho College of Education. We urge the LCE to bring back the programme as a stand-alone entity as before so that teachers and trainees can benefit from them to enhance mainstream teaching and learning for all learners.”

P6 (School A) highlighted:

“With limited knowledge, teaching LVI is a huge challenge. Even though we like to help them, we lack the adequate content to teach them. Therefore, we need supportive teachers to help us in those inclusive classrooms.”

The above findings reveal that teachers lacked the capacity to help LVI improve their academic performance. The evidence reflects that teaching in the mainstream classroom is difficult because participants are trained as general education teachers. The participants urged the Government to bring back the special education programme at the LCE to allow the teachers to undergo training in teaching LVI. Mosola (2020) supports this, who stated that teachers need to be trained to be self-efficacious in supporting learners' educational needs.

5.5.1.2 A need for continuous workshops

These findings revealed that continuous training workshops are important in the teaching profession. The findings further revealed that both novice and long-service teachers need training workshops that augment the knowledge they gained in the previous training, and this

should be based on the current knowledge structures of education in the teaching and learning situation. Some of the participants' responses indicated, as P3 (School A) stated:

“It is a bottleneck for teachers in the mainstream system to teach LVI in the classroom. As teachers lack the relevant skills to approach such learners, I suggest that there should be in-service training for us teachers at Lesotho’s higher education institutions. This programme is necessary because it equips teachers with skills in special educational needs.”

P4 (School B) mentioned:

“Teaching LVI is a struggle for most of us. I think we need in-service training that equips us to teach LVI. We need the Ministry of Education and Training to take action to help us. This can help us to attain higher self-efficacy and positive attitudes towards teaching in inclusive classrooms.”

P1 (School B) added:

“We need continuous workshops. We need to be relevant and MoET needs to bring back online training. We need to be equipped with some relevant training for us to regain our self-efficacy when teaching all learners with diverse needs.”

P4 (School A) stated:

“We are exhausted, having to struggle to teach LVI within the mainstream settings. Yes, LVI are there in the classrooms, but we do not use Braille. So, this stresses LVI as they must move from one place to another, which is also time-consuming for them and their teachers. I agree that we need continuous training workshops to benefit teachers who will gain relevant information to teach all learners regardless of their diverse needs.”

P5 from the same school said:

“The inclusion of LVI in mainstream classes has become as a huge load because we do not have the relevant teaching materials and skills to assist these learners. Even though some LVI can pass with better marks than learners without visual impairment, I agree that in-service training is needed for teachers who have joined teaching without going through special education programmes.”

The findings from the above statements suggest that continuous training workshops are needed by teachers who hold Primary Teacher Certificates and who have not trained in special education to acquire the relevant skills needed to teach LVI. The findings further reveal that teachers' skills are important for the teaching and learning process to be effective and

for teachers to have a high self-efficacy and positive attitude towards teaching LVI. They further revealed that once the teachers have the relevant skills, the academic performance of LVI may improve, too.

5.5.1.3 Using Technological Devices

The participants highlighted that providing a variety of teaching and learning resources is a major need because it plays a major role in enhancing high-quality teaching and learning. The participants, specifically P5 (School B), indicated that:

“We need relevant resources to teach these LVI so they can improve their academic work.”

P5 (School B) said:

“Also, we know that Braille machines are very expensive, but the Ministry of Education and Training should assist with at least one machine and one transcriber per stream to make the classroom environment more accommodating to all learners.”

P4 from School B stated:

“Educational technology is important. We need equipment like cell phones and tape recorders to expedite the teaching and learning progress to effectively educate LVI. Introducing technology to this primary teaching and learning can benefit both LVI and learners without disabilities.”

P3 from School B said:

“Yes, all the equipment is needed to help all learners to access quality education. Educational technology can be very beneficial to LVI because electronic machines can also be used even after classes during learners’ spare time, so they can have more clarity on the concepts taught in classrooms if the learners audio-record the lesson.”

P2 (School A) said:

“Technological devices can decrease the teachers’ workload because teachers and learners can discuss what they hear together, and teachers will transcribe properly.”

The findings in the previous theme suggest that the participants in this study identified challenges teachers face in administering assessments to LVI, and indicated the extent to

which these challenges adversely affect these learners' academic performance. A typical psychology theory, such as Bandura's (Bandura, 2012) plays a significant role in determining how successful one can become in managing a challenge. Drawing from the philosophical assumptions of the PSE theory of Bandura (1977). It is believed that teachers can overcome barriers to learning in the context of LVI and create learning environments that ensure that all learners have equal access to learning (Lebona, 2020). The analysis of telephonic interviews and focus-group discussions with participants suggests that more developments need to be adopted to enhance teachers' skills in promoting LVI's academic performance. The findings were then grouped into the following sub-themes: [1] Enhanced collaboration or teamwork, [2] improved teaching and learning resources, and [3] continuous training workshops.

5.5.1.4 Enhancing teamwork

The findings from the discussions held with the participants revealed that teamwork is a significant feature in enhancing teachers' skills needed for teaching LVI in two primary schools in Lesotho. During the telephonic interviews and focus-group discussions, which were quoted verbatim, the participants identified ways of enhancing teachers' skills to improve the academic performance of LVI. P1 from School A opined:

"I think teachers need to be empowered by being allowed to work collaboratively with one another and neighbouring schools knowledgeable in the teaching of LVI can learn a lot from each other."

P3 from School B pointed out that:

"Yes, collaboration is a good approach as it allows the development of partnerships and the sharing of ideas to help one another improve."

P6, from the same school, added:

"I agree with my colleagues here. Collaboration is what most of us as teachers need. This may lead to teamwork, which plays a major role in teaching LVI."

P5 from School A agreed, saying:

"Collaboration can help ensure that teachers support each other because we have different skills. Some of us went for Braille courses, and these can help us augment the skills that we already have."

They can also foster the positive attitudes we need and develop the best ways of accommodating all learners.”

P4, from School A, added:

“That is true. We all know that no one is a ‘jack of all trades’, meaning nobody knows everything. This indicates that teamwork is what we need to be able to learn from one another’s expertise and enhance our skills.”

The study shows that enhanced collaboration among teachers is a crucial tool for empowerment, which the participants can use to promote and enhance the academic performance of LVI within their mainstream settings. In their studies, Mahlo (2015) and Mohale (2020) concluded that LVI could succeed and thrive academically if they received collective support from their teachers. According to the participants who participated in this study, the learning needs of LVI ought to be enabled through collaboration so that they can effectively achieve their academic goals. Khoaeane (2012) claims that the adaptation of LVI towards success results from improved collaboration within their learning environment.

5.5.1.5 Provision of diverse teaching and learning resources

Concerning enhancing teachers’ skills to improve academic performance among LVI, the participants identified a need to improve teaching and learning resources for LVI. According to the participants, these teaching and learning materials must be enhanced to be resourceful enough to provide quality education. Therefore, providing adaptive materials and specialised technologies specifically tailored to the nature of LVI and their learning preferences and prior experiences would enhance their chances of succeeding (D’Andrea, 2012). This shows that the participants in this study considered the educational success of LVI as an outcome of improved teaching and learning materials. Some of the participants declared that effective facilitation of the teaching of LVI needs improved resources.

P3, from School A, stated that:

“In terms of improvement in the teaching and learning resources for LVI, I think there has to be enough learning equipment that these learners use. Each teacher should have a Braille machine in the classroom and be equipped with the skill of using it.”

P6, from School B, mentioned:

“As you know, teaching LVI requires enhanced teaching materials or equipment specifically catering to their special educational needs, such as a tape-recording machine. Access to a tape recorder would enable LVI to listen to the lessons offered during the day during their spare time.”

P2 from the same school added:

“The most significant issue about enhanced equipment, such as Braille machines, is that each learner with a visual impairment will have access to learning and will not miss classes while trying to have access to the use of Braille, which is currently happening here in our school.”

P4 further clarified:

“Stylus, Braille, knowledge of content and audios can be very useful in upgrading both teachers’ skills and the academic performance of LVI because they enhance learner-centered approaches and build up independence for LVI.”

Sounding aggrieved, P1 from School B added:

“I think an effective system can help improve our teaching. I wish our government could listen to and implement what teachers say! Giving us resources would benefit our future leaders and help fast-track the process of fostering effective learning. It would be a way of improving the learning environment and enhancing their academic performance. Each classroom could have video clips, phones, and a projected sound for each learner during teaching and learning.”

P6 from School A:

“Yes, LVI need resourceful teaching and learning materials that effectively address their special educational needs.”

In the context of enhancing teaching and learning materials, the participants’ responses were indicative of perceived improvement in the academic performance of LVI. A study conducted by Kabeto (2015) showed that a lack of teaching and learning facilities and materials brings poor academic results. In a similar case, Zelelew’s (2016) study reported that poor

performance registered by LVI results from limited learning materials in South African mainstream primary schools. Morelle (2016) stated that classroom practitioners require external support and supervision; this applies specifically to teachers in mainstream schools where they are encountering LVI for the first time. Yet, such support and supervision are lacking in other countries. South Africa has built a support system coined by District-based Support Teams (DBSTs), an initiative responsible for supporting schools with the inclusion of LSEN.

These scholars' arguments point to the need for the improvement of the teaching and learning equipment for the learning of LVI to be effectively facilitated. This is in line with these findings, which considers the need to develop teaching and learning materials for learners, especially LVI in Lesotho mainstream primary schools. Hence, the participants in this study advocated for an effective advancement of teaching and learning materials for LVI, which will help make their learning a success. By implication, there seems to be a strong relationship between the availability of resources and learners' performance (Makhate, 2020).

Regarding the promotion of the teaching and learning materials, the participants, through telephonic interviews and focus-group discussions, identified a need for developing professional development training workshops for teachers, which will create an enabling and conducive learning environment for LVI. They indicated that having competent teachers teaching LVI requires continuous training. This study's findings revealed that more teacher training initiatives are necessary because effective learning for LVI demands skilled, knowledgeable, and competent teachers to facilitate the teaching and learning.

5.5.1.6 Teacher Professional Development Training

Most participants consented to a need for professional development training, as they often experienced challenges in teaching LVI, which contributed to their low self-efficacy. The participants in this study regarded teacher training and professional development involving both pre-service and in-service as fundamental in helping them to successfully teach LVI. Some of the comments made by P2 from School B are as follows:

“I understand that there should be professional development training for teachers here in our school. This enhances the planning and delivery of lessons. This is the most effective and highest standard of teaching possible to these learners.”

Another participant, P5, within the same school, stated:

“Through training and professional development, teachers will be equipped and skilled enough to successfully work with these learners.”

P1 (School B) agreed:

“Yes, it is better that MoET equips us by holding different and continuous workshops so that we can be relevant and confident as far as teaching LVI is concerned.”

Similarly, P4, from School A, added:

“Although some teachers here in our school are trained and have skills on how to teach LVI, most of us still need continuous training to help improve our skills for the sake of enhancing quality teaching and learning in the context of LVI.”

To these participants, teachers’ continuous training was characterised as advantageous and contributory to enhancing their skills needed to ensure that LVI are effectively educated. However, one of the participating teachers (P3 from School A) went beyond teachers’ training and envisaged the need for workshops. This is what she had to say:

“In my opinion, in-service and pre-service training are insufficient for teachers. Most commonly, the focus of professional development for teachers can help equip us with the necessary skills which will enable us to employ new and appropriate teaching techniques and methodologies that facilitate teaching and learning for LVI as the world around us adapts to changes.”

The participants’ responses, as cited above, indicate the imperativeness of teachers’ continuous training and professional development. This also confirms the argument advanced by Morelle (2016) and Mosia and Pasha (2020), who support the idea of teacher training and professional development, affirming that through training, teachers will be well-equipped to address the diverse needs of all learners, including LVI. Morelle (2016) further highlights that classroom practitioners, especially those teaching LVI in mainstream schools, require external support and supervision because they will be encountering such learners for the first time.

Similarly, studies conducted by Salie et al., (2020) and Coleman (2017) found that effective teacher training allows LVI to acquire educational skills and knowledge to their fullest potential. However, some scholars present a conflicting discourse. For instance, a study conducted by (Hardman, 2017) found that teaching LVI is a challenging experience for many teachers in Kenya. Franck (2017) also reported that the academic performance of LVI in Ethiopia was mostly poor due to a lack of resources and skills among teachers, even though the teachers and school administrators support the inclusion of all learners in mainstream schools. Therefore, the participants' findings, in this case, align with these scholars' opinions. However, effective teacher training is recommended to ensure an improvement in LVI's academic performance.

The above findings positively reveal the participants' ability to demonstrate a need to improve the teaching and learning materials and the significant roles they can play in promoting the academic performance of LVI. The discussions held with the participants established that teachers need continuous training to effectively administer the learning and assessment of LVI. This is supported by Bandura's Perceived Self-Efficacy Theory (Iroegu, 2015), which points out that individuals need to have essential skills and knowledge to foster progress in learning LVI. According to a study conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2020), despite the challenges being faced, LVI across Sub-Saharan Africa should eventually have much greater access to various texts in diverse formats.

It is therefore important to take into consideration the need to improve the teaching and learning resources for LVI and enhance collaboration among teachers for the sake of properly facilitating teaching and learning for LVI, which in turn will assist the teachers in developing social interaction skills, learning from one another, and acquiring new knowledge and skills required to meet the special educational needs of LVI. The findings are consistent with those of Tseeke (2016), Ramatea and Khanare (2020) and Mohale (2021), who established that individuals possess inherent abilities in a way that self-efficacy theory helps them to overcome obstacles that would otherwise interfere with their utilisation of those innate abilities.

5.5.1.7 Involvement of Specialists

All the participants expressed the feeling that if there could be interconnection and cooperation between the different parties in the school, such as teachers and external specialists, teachers' skills would be enhanced, and the resources would be available for the attainment of quality education for LVI (Makhate, 2020). This was shown in the participants' responses. As such, P2 (School A) reported that:

“Our school should ask for assistance from psychologists, nurses, doctors, counsellors and therapists, academics, support staff, and specialist service providers to increase the detection and diagnosis of visual impairments in children. Non-governmental organisations can provide skills and other resources needed for the effective teaching of LVI in mainstream schools.”

In the same vein, P3 from School B said:

“I think the community's contribution towards providing skills, fundraising, and giving the LVI donations and money is important.”

The discussion above reveals that, as advocated in teaching and learning, psychologists, nurses, doctors, counsellors and therapists, academics, support staff, and specialist service providers play important roles in working and connecting with other staff members on issues that lead to higher performance by LVI through the acquisition of quality education. The participants saw the community as a key resource that encourages teachers to provide skills, organise, fundraising activities, and donate money and other donations to LVI. Makhate (2020) agrees with the above view and argues that various role-players can work together to provide skills and educational resources.

Precisely, accomplishing the academic performance of LVI calls for enhanced collaboration among teachers, improved academic resources, and continuous training for teachers. It is evident from the participants' points of view that enhanced collaboration between teachers and the rest of the stakeholders is a factor that enables the acquisition of new knowledge and skills (Salie, et al., 2020) Lebona, 2020; Matobako; 2021). The statement above speaks to inclusive education, which is meant to assist all learners to learn together regardless of their disabilities (Education Act, 2010; Social Welfare, 2011; LEIP, 2018; UNICEF, 2015; Mosia, 2014).

5.5.2 Improving Academic Performance among LVI

5.5.2.1 Varying teaching strategies, methods, and styles

The participants were all in agreement that varying teaching strategies and methods provided a positive learning environment where LVI seemed to feel safe participating in class activities, such as class discussion and group work. The participants indicated that teachers' differentiated teaching styles can influence their effectiveness in supporting LVI. They indicated that a lack of skills and knowledge of Braille reading and writing handicapped them, thus barring them from supporting LVI in varying their teaching styles, which could benefit every learner in an inclusive classroom. P1 (School B) shared the following views:

"I hope that our teaching strategies, methods, and styles can undergo positive changes after attending training workshops. LVI will not need to waste time moving from primary school to the resource center for transcribing."

P4 (School B) said:

"Various strategies, methods, and styles seemed helpful to LVIs as they could follow the lesson and engage in class activities at their own pace and abilities. We attend workshops, after a while and every teacher will be asked to do so. That strategy does not seem to have much impact on us."

From the above findings, the participants felt that their teaching strategies, methods, and styles would improve if they were made to attend workshops or training sessions on how to use Braille reading and writing so that they can help LVI. Based on the teaching methods, teachers had to show their passion for teaching LVI. This simply means that teachers are expected to be skilled and to vary their teaching styles when teaching in the mainstream classroom, which aligns with the findings of Mart (2013), who highlighted that teaching with passion enables learners to understand concepts effectively. Therefore, teachers' passion for teaching LVI means that teachers need to be trained and skillfully employ teaching styles, thus improving the academic performance of LVI.

5.5.2.2 *Involving parents in their children's education*

Regarding enhancing academic performance among LVI, the performance of LVI partially depends on parental support because parents are the major stakeholders in the learning and teaching of LVI. Parents are supposed to direct teachers towards identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their children. Regarding this issue, P2 (School A) said: "As we work with learners from different backgrounds, disabilities, and performances, I think parents should pay regular school visits. More importantly, the parent's information when the child first enters the school can help teachers know where to begin when planning to teach LVI."

P4 (School A) concurred:

"Yes, parents can help teachers because they know their children better than teachers. When parents work with teachers, it will be easy for teachers to refer to parents and work out issues together if there are any matters to be discussed."

P5 (School B) indicated:

"Parents play so many roles. They guide and counsel the children through their upbringing. They bring children to church, teach them about their cultures, and take them to see the doctors for proper healthcare. Parents are important."

The findings indicate that parental involvement plays a major role in supporting LVI. Being the primary caregivers of LVI, parents are very crucial in the education of their children. The findings further indicate that parents are the cornerstone and the pillar of the life of LVI because they educate them about the different angles of life. They educate and guide the learners based on where they come from or where they are heading, that is, about their culture, religion, and academic history, which can build up the child. The findings further revealed that LVI should know about their health status; they should know where to go for emotional and physical well-being. The education of LVI is a result of collaboration between parents and teachers. According to Maluleke (2014), parental support embraces a wide range of home-based and school-based activities.

The finding above aligns with those of Teba-Teba (2016), Mosia (2014), and Ralejoe (2016), who have highlighted that lack of parental involvement in the education of LVI is due to various

reasons, which include parents' low level of education, poverty, poor communication, and time-related constraints and all the factors have a significant influence on the learners' academic success. It is, therefore crucial that the parents of LVI are involved in their children's education (Ralejoe, 2021).

5.5.2.3 Maximising Teaching Resources for LVI

The participants reiterated the importance of having the relevant resources to teach LVI. This allows teachers to carry out their daily duties effectively. In many Sub-Saharan African countries, there is a lack of access to resources, which is associated with prevailing economic and developmental challenges that implement IE as a non-existent goal (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010). Access to teaching and learning resources is one of the major elements that ensure equal and quality educational opportunities for LVI in a country's education system. Participants' responses confirm this view. P5 (School A) indicated that:

“When I have sufficient resources, my teaching will be boosted. The relevant resources enhance the learners' listening skills and extend their attention span. In our case, we have a few Braille machines and when they are broken, it is not easy to buy or fix them because they are very expensive.”

P6 (School B) said:

“If the school, with the help of the MoET, can provide us with resources, at least one Braille machine and one transcriber per stream, I think that equipment can be very helpful in carrying out the teachers’ duties. It is difficult to teach without relevant resources.”

P3 (School B) stated:

“Yes, relevant resources are required for learners with low vision. I think there should be modifications, which include enlarging printed materials to a magnificent size for learners to see.”

These findings revealed that for teachers to be effective, they need the relevant resources for the daily teaching and learning activities to succeed. In line with this view, Mosia and Phasha (2017) pointed out that LVIs face lives with limited resources compared to their counterparts without impairments. This is a challenge in primary schools and tertiary institutions (Mosia and Phasha, 2017). The teachers indicated that teaching without the relevant resources is not easy. These findings further revealed that having proper materials makes teaching smooth, fruitful, and possible for both teachers and learners and this improves learners’ academic performance. The lack of access to education for LVI in developing countries depicts a negative picture of the education structure and, in this case, it is an output of a lack of resources (Ainscow, Sandil, 2010; Zelelew, 2016). Therefore, it is true that the greatest challenge to the implementation of inclusive education involving LVI in developing countries is the lack of human, material, and financial resources. In this case, without relevant knowledge and a positive attitude towards IE, primary school teachers cannot fully participate in developing an inclusive environment (Forlin, 2010). Primary schools need to allocate all the relevant resources as this enhances profitable and successful teaching and learning for LVI.

5.5.2.4 Teachers’ Attitude towards LVI

The teachers’ attitudes play a major role in motivating or demotivating the LVI. Negative attitudes exhibited by some teachers are identified as a factor contributing to low academic performance among learners. Conversely, the positive attitudes shown by some teachers raise the learners' self-efficacy. Therefore, positive teachers engage positively in supporting LVI. It

is also essential for teachers in mainstream classes to know that the successful inclusion of all learners depends on the teachers' training, the quality of support such teachers receive, and how confident teachers feel about teaching learners with special educational needs. In that regard, P2 (School A) highlighted that:

“Some teachers mention that they do not have LVI in their classrooms in the presence of LVI or transcribers. I think these hurts and does not have Botho. It is inhuman.”

P5 (School A) said:

“We should love these LVI as our children. I like seeing them progress and have a bright future like their sighted counterparts.”

P3 (School B):

“I like these LVI like the sighted ones. I like to see them progressing to higher education institutions. Nonetheless, the lack of resources makes it very difficult. It seems we neglect them when they do not cope like their sighted peers.”

The above statements revealed that while some teachers support LVI, others have negative attitudes toward teaching such learners. It was reported that some teachers categorically state that they cannot accommodate LVI in their classrooms, which displays an element of inhumanity. The findings revealed that teachers' positive attitudes can increase learners' self-efficacy and high performance. However, teachers' negative attitudes can sometimes lower the learners' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 2012) until they drop out of school. It is very important to raise the self-efficacy of LVI to improve their academic performance. In support of the study of UNESCO (2005), inclusion is a complex and dynamic process that responds to the diverse needs of all learners within a classroom environment. The success of positive inclusion relies on what happens in the classroom environment, and the commitment to inclusion begins with the teacher. Therefore, attitudes stem from values, defined as being able to endure beliefs about what is right (Baloglu, 2012). Then, to understand and manage the needs of LVI, the teacher should know what risks may lead to visual impairment and their influence on LVI's normal development (Ramatea and Khanare, 2020).

LVI who are being taught by well-trained and more enlightened teachers stand a better chance of being successfully included in mainstream classrooms, as their teachers will be sensitive to what is needed for them to participate optimally in their learning. Therefore, teachers' attitudes shape the learners' performance, and those of other teachers and the community at large (Savasci and Tomul, 2013). Positive attitudes towards LVI are linked to higher achievements, whereas a teacher's low self-efficacy is associated with unsatisfactory learners' performance, which arises from teachers' inability to teach LVI. Therefore, teachers should be dedicated to and supportive of the improvement of the academic performance of LVI (Yada and Savolainne, 2017).

5.5.2.5 A need for teacher assistants

The findings revealed that many teachers lack motivation, and one of the reasons is unsatisfactory salaries and lack of assistant teachers. Evidence places the blame on the Government. For example, in recent years, there have been teachers' strikes instigated by the failure of negotiations between the Government on one side, and teachers through the Lesotho Teachers Trade Union (LTTU) and Lesotho Association of Teachers (LAT) on the other. Therefore, lack of motivation can result from low morale and lack of commitment among teachers. Teachers' development is one of the key elements of quality education for LVI. The professional development of teachers through training contributes to quality teaching and learning in mainstream classrooms inclusive of LVI; it helps teachers be self-dependent and improve their teaching skills. Teacher development programmes must be provided to enable teachers to gain the appropriate capacity through a chain of continuing teacher development activities that will enable them to contribute towards improving the academic work of LVI. Regarding this aspect, P2, P3, P4 and P6 (School B) indicated:

"I think teacher assistants and long-term or continuous training will be beneficial to the development of teachers so that they can support LVI."

P6 (School B) said:

“I think teacher assistants need training too and this training should involve all teachers, not certain individuals. All teachers ought to be equipped because inclusion is a long-term goal. The Government should not forget that training goes together with good salaries because teaching LSEN is toxic.”

Similarly, P4 opined:

“It is not good for teachers to leave learners and go on strikes. In recent years, we went on strike instigated by low salaries or incomes and poor retirement benefits.”

P2 (School B) indicated:

“LVI are included in mainstream schools but there is no single teacher in the mainstream who knows how to transcribe. LVI must go to School A for transcribing. This process is time-consuming for both teachers and learners. Furthermore, the teachers never know when the transcribing is correct or wrong. The teachers in the mainstream sector rely on the learners. Teachers must be staff-developed to avoid the unnecessary movement of learners whose mobility is not that user-friendly.”

The findings revealed that co-opting teachers' assistants is important for teachers' development. This can improve learners' academic work. Teacher assistants and teachers need to be trained through training, which would equip them with transcribing skills for them to be able to teach LVI in inclusive teaching and learning environments. To support LVI, teachers' development activities should enable teachers to contribute to the full inclusion of LVI. In line with the findings of Al-Adwan and Khatib (2017), teachers require competencies in personalities, modifications, behavioural management skills, and knowledge, especially for LVI because these vulnerable learners need extra support compared to their sighted counterparts. Al-Adwan and Khatib further established that teachers' skills are viewed as a milestone in the provision of fruitful instruction; however, teachers who have teaching skills in special education continuously face challenges related to failure to appropriately apply skills due to the limited support and resources.

5.5.2.6 Accessing Adaptive Technology

There is a shortage of assistive devices in schools. The participants showed that assistive devices are vital and enable LVI to carry out daily classroom activities and participate actively and productively in classroom and community-based activities. The participants identified the following:

P1 (School A) stated that:

“We need more magnifiers and Braille displays. Large print materials, phones with large tactile buttons, and canes enable LVI to learn effectively.”

P2 from School B said:

“Assistive technology solves problems facing people with diverse needs, thus making life easier for them. Developed countries use assistive technology to improve the academic performance of LVI.”

P6 from School A indicated:

“Braille typewriters enable blind children to write and read quickly and easily as long as they have the strength and skills to use them.”

The findings from the current study indicated that it can be easy for LVI to learn if they have assistive devices. These can be helpful as they assist LVI to carry on with their daily teaching and learning activities. The findings further indicate that lately, many LVIs in many countries have used assistive technology to ease their teaching and learning barriers. Various reports claim that using a wide variety of specialised technology has had a significant impact on the learning and lives of LVI (D’ Andrea, 2012). It is important to introduce many assistive devices and provide them to LVI to enable them to access tailored electronic resources like curricular materials and textbooks. For LVI, computers and Braille are among the tools that enable them to participate in educational activities. Burgstahler (2010) emphasised the importance of accessing printed publications in alternative formats, including Braille and electronic text. Burgstahler (2010) further highlighted that e-text uses a screen reader to voice the information electronically using a speech synthesiser or by utilising a printer with a Braille display (Zeleeuw, 2016; Ralejoe, 2021). By so doing, LVI can easily access learning materials. It is, therefore,

important that specific programmes designed for the use of IT be made available to teachers and LVI in the mainstream to make teaching and learning easy for LVI.

5.5.2.7 Adapting assessment procedures

In the teaching and learning process and the education sector, assessment plays a major role in ensuring that real inclusion in primary schools occurs (Zezelew, 2016). Assessment helps in self-assessing the learning of learners and measures the success of the concept area to ascertain if the teacher and learner have achieved it. This can help the teacher to modify their mode of delivery to improve the learning of LVI. P1 (School A) stated:

“I think it is appropriate for teachers and principals to give LVI more time when writing their examinations because their vision-related challenges delay them when writing in the same space as their sighted counterparts.”

P2 (School A) had this to say:

“I agree with other teachers that we should exercise more patience when attending to LVI. We ought to demonstrate humanity, too. When setting final examinations for Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), MoET should also consider LVI, allowing them extra time and the level of assessment should differ, too.”

P6 (School A) and P4 (School B) stated:

“Assessments contribute to building learners’ academic history. I think LVI must be given extra time to complete their tasks. Teachers need to have an academic background in LVI from the first term in order to educate the LVI properly. This will also benefit us as teachers in terms of changing teaching styles, approaches, and strategies because we will be aware of the learners’ abilities.”

P5 (School A) and P1 (School B) indicated:

“I like assessment because it helps us as teachers show how much the learners have understood the concept taught in the classroom. It is the scale learners and teachers use to measure the success of the teaching and learning process. Then teachers will have to engage appropriate teaching and learning styles to address all the learners’ needs in diverse classroom situations.”

P2 (School A) said:

“Assessments give us the real picture of learners' performance to know where to improve. I think the old model involving the use of oral assessment should also be considered as a method to be used to assess LVI.”

Based on the findings cited above, teachers considered assessment to be important in ensuring that LVI inclusion is practiced to address the needs of LVI. These findings show that giving LVI extra time, changing teaching and learning styles, oral assessments, and frequent feedback can also help in supporting LVIs. It is acknowledged that LVI learn in different ways. Therefore, the flexibility afforded by extra time, feedback to LVI, oral assessment, and different teaching and learning styles can accommodate all learners' specific needs. The findings revealed that from the beginning of the first term, the assessment of the learning needs of LVI is important for both the teacher and the learners because it enables the teacher to understand the learner's academic ability and learning styles and the teacher's delivery approaches.

According to the findings cited above, the teaching and learning environment should be supportive of the teachers and learners so that inclusion can take place adequately. The teaching and learning environment is said to be supportive when it allows learning to suit each learner, is easily adaptable, and enhances learning. The findings indicate that teachers should use different approaches and strategies, as well as human and non-human resources, and plan together as general and special education teachers. This can play an immense role in improving teachers' skills concerning improving the academic performance of LVI. Therefore, there is a need for teachers to consider planning together, blending their strategies as well as human and non-human resources to enhance their skills. Therefore, academic performance among LVI will improve.

5.5.2.8 Financial resources

In the teaching and learning environment, the provision of adequate and relevant resources plays an immense role in making teaching more understandable. The inclusion of LVI needs support systems from other sources like NGOs, individuals, private companies, the community, and developed countries to assist with some resources. The support can be in

the form of specialist human or material resources. Including LVI requires accessibility of human, physical, and financial resources. Teachers, particularly P3 (School A), intimated, thus:

“The learning of LVI is very expensive. I wish we could get funding from developed countries, or companies to buy Perkins Braille machines to accommodate all learners.”

P2 (School A) added:

“Yes, it will be very helpful if we can get funding in different aspects, either equipment or money. The money can assist in repairing broken machines and purchasing other school needs.”

P1 (School A) indicated:

“I remember one time, during COVID-19, when we had to close the school before the official closing date because LVI residing in the boarding facility did not have food. It was frustrating. I think we need funding.”

The findings from the participants’ responses revealed that funding is vital in supporting LVI. It helps in academic issues like teaching and learning by purchasing teaching resources and addressing the welfare of learners. Since the integration of LVI requires human and non-human resources, a well-structured funding arrangement is desirable to meet the needs of LVI. Generally, primary schools that accommodate LVI should be allocated special funds by the government to maintain some school projects and the production of electronic learning materials (Zeleeuw, 2016).

5.5.2.9 Accessing the physical environment

The participants indicated that the environment should be barrier-free for LVI to access education like other learners without disabilities. The physical environment is one factor that plays a major role in enhancing or impeding teaching and learning. When the environment is enabling, learners will have the curiosity to go to school and enjoy learning together with their counterparts. P4 (School B) expressed the following comments regarding the issue:

“LVI come to school a week earlier than their peers to familiarise themselves with the environment under the guidance of their teachers. They get to know the distractive places. So, they know their areas, moving from one place to another. We make them aware of and avoid open windows outside.”

P6 (School B) stated:

“We hope to pave pieces of the school surroundings until we finish the whole school. Yes, LVI can move from place to place without being harmed, we struggle to move around because it is bumpy, and what more with these LVI? If we had funds, we should have paved the school environment long ago.”

The findings show that an enabling environment contributes to the enhancement of good school attendance by LVI. The findings indicate that teachers see the need to make physical adaptations inside and outside the classrooms by modifying the infrastructure to accommodate all learners. Studies conducted by Mosia (2014) and Ramatea and Khanare (2021) highlight that the lack of resources in rural schools puts children at risk of receiving inferior education. This displays their vulnerabilities (Mosia, 2014). Olludare (2011) indicates that the quality of education learners receive becomes significant if school resources are available. This creates an enabling teaching and learning environment. The provision and availability of resources subsequently have direct relevance in enabling learners to learn in conditions that guarantee quality education (Makhate, 2020).

5.5.2.10 Curriculum adjustment

Curriculum adjustments are important because they respond to the diverse needs of LVI in mainstream teaching and learning settings. Curriculum adaptation aligns with the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP) (2018). That curriculum should be adapted to suit learners' needs. An adjustment of the curriculum in primary schools should be tailored to offer teaching and learning services through strategies relevant to LVI. To that end, P1 (School A) highlighted that:

“In inclusive teaching and learning settings, the curriculum should suit every learner regardless of their diverse needs. The current curriculum is not inclusive; it is purported to be inclusive.”

P3 (School B) postulated that:

“LVI face challenges in using this curriculum, which does not cater to their needs. In simple terms, we do not have such relevant books as those written in Braille, and lack the relevant human resources in the mainstream system. This curriculum is not conducive to LVI.”

The findings encapsulated in the above statements revealed that curriculum adjustment can be achieved by changing the learning environment, knowledge of content, learning and teaching styles, teaching methods and approaches, the entire teaching and learning process, as well as human and non-human resources. This can be a milestone towards an adjustment of the curriculum. The findings reveal that besides the regular school curriculum, LVI need to master all specific core skills: Braille literacy, orientation and mobility techniques, social and daily living skills as well as assistive technology (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020).

5.5.2.11 Using portfolio

The findings from the participants’ narratives indicate that they teach LVI without having a clear understanding of their portfolios, and if the teachers can know or have access to the learners’ background history, they will know how to teach each learner based on their individual needs. Regarding this issue, P4 (School B) stated:

“Each LVI should have a file that contains the learner’s background history. The files should be kept in the school office for referrals. This can be helpful for teachers to know about the learner’s challenges, such as their interaction with other learners and how they perform in classroom situations.”

P3 (School B) said:

“Knowing about the learners gives the teacher a good direction regarding the approach and teaching styles the teacher can use to help the learners improve their academic performance.”

P4 (school) indicated that:

“The portfolios could also be helpful if all stakeholders, such as specialist teachers, doctors, counsellors, psychologists, and transcribers, are brought together in the school environment. Teachers believe that with time, things will gradually improve.”

The findings further reveal that it is important to know learners' backgrounds to prevent teachers from uncomfortably treating learners. They must have information about the social and intellectual well-being of LVI. The findings revealed that teachers can employ different teaching styles to support LVI and improve their academic work. The findings further revealed that professionals should be in the schools for referral purposes, as their knowledge can help teachers build up the whole being of learners. The sentiments cited above align with the findings of a study conducted by Ajuwon (2016), which indicated that teachers need portfolios to assess learners' progress to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning. The portfolios are effective in the evaluation of educational assessments, parents' opening days one-to-one report collection meetings, and , evaluation reports. Moreover, they can enhance the teaching and learning process.

5.5.2.12 Government engagement

The participants from School A showed that the Government is supportive of MoET, together with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), though the life of LVI is very expensive. The ministries are taking responsibility for paying school fees for some of the learners. The findings show that the Government is responsible for all learners' school fees.

P1 (School A) said:

“The Government does a good job by helping us. We should not have gone far if the government had not assisted us. We appreciate the assistance. Although they used to give us support, it has now been two years without us getting funding. So, it is not easy to support these LVI.”

P3 (School A) added:

“The Government’s payment of school fees for LVI should be automatic, as there are some learners who cannot proceed to high school because of lack of funding and the poverty that struck their families.”

P2 (School A) said:

“Being among these LVI, and watching them experience challenges pains us as teachers. Sometimes, we even fork out money from our pockets despite earning little money. You know what I am talking about because teachers’ money does not meet our basic needs.”

P3 (School B) indicated:

“The government should remember that teachers in both School A and School B, teach these learners. However, by the time they give incentives, they also forget to give to our school. They only focus on School A as the feeder school. They discourage us from putting more effort into teaching.”

The above statements from the participants indicate that the government, through MoET and MSD, it plays a supportive role in helping LVI meet their needs. However, the Government’s assistance should be consistently provided. In this case, the Government should consider all the schools to accommodate all learners with diverse needs. This also prevents conflict among teachers or schools. The Government, through the MoET (2010), has done a lot to provide free and compulsory education to all learners. Still, it seems it has forgotten teachers' role in educating LVI by not supporting them with monetary and non-monetary incentives.

5.5.2.13 Implementing Individual Educational Plan

The Individual Educational Plan (hereafter IEP) is important because it helps teachers to develop a teaching and learning programme for individual learners. The policy aims to outline the requirements that assist governments in identifying the required support to foster students’ educational achievement. Teachers indicated that the IEP should be used for each learner in diverse and inclusive teaching and learning settings and, in that case, teaching can be meaningful and suitable to all and can achieve its long-term goals. IEP helps LVI to develop

their self-efficacy and self-motivation. In this regard, the performance of LVI will improve. Regarding the same issue, P6 (School A) said:

“I think teaching in one class, as a general teacher and special teacher, can be helpful too. The general teacher should help learners without learning disabilities, while a special teacher should help LVI. I think that system can work for us.”

P3 (School A) stated:

“IEP is very helpful. I sometimes use it, but because of huge teacher-learner ratios, applying it daily becomes a challenge.”

P4 (School A) and P1(School B) noted:

“IEP is very good for the benefit of LVI. If LVI are taught at their pace, it builds their self-efficacy and that of the teacher, too. The teachers become happy when learners perform well.”

The findings reveal that teachers find it appropriate to use IEP in a diverse class. Each learner will be taught appropriately according to the learning style that suits them, and the results could also be pleasing to all the learners, irrespective of their disabilities. The findings suggest that it is appropriate that schools use this planning approach because it supports personalised learning that has the potential to improve learners’ academic performance. Other research studies have shown that when schools use a planning approach that supports personalised or individualised learning, the academic achievement of all learners improves (Makhate, 2020). The findings further show that co-teaching, as implemented by general and special teachers, can help build up IEPs as both general and special teachers collaboratively plan and assist learners with diverse needs in the same classroom, employing their different teaching skills to support all learners.

5.5.2.14 Peer tutoring

Two heads are indeed better than one. The participants’ comments show that learners can learn better when they discuss their learning experiences with their friends or peers because they feel more comfortable expressing themselves when they do not understand certain concepts. In line with that issue, P1 (School B) indicated that:

“Sometimes, I pair the learners to discuss the work during classroom activities. I realised that in peer tutoring, learners are free to ask their peers where they do not understand certain concepts.”

P4 (School B) said:

“Yes, as teachers, we have to use many approaches that focus on changing disabilities within individual learners, which finally improves academic performance among LVI.”

The findings reveal that the peer-tutoring approach is a valuable learning style for learners to learn from each other. They tend to understand concepts better when discussing them with friends or age-group peers. The approach can increase the social skills among learners and can reduce the level of peer rejection. Peer tutoring is vital as learners learn from each other as age mates. Using this learning style, the learners can express themselves freely, directing their learning according to the causal agents in their learning experiences, and they find their learning enjoyable, interesting, and meaningful; therefore, their autonomy and motivation improve (Turner, 2019).

5.5.2.15 Collaborative learning

The participants identified collaboration as one of the strategies that simplifies the learning of LVI in classroom situations. The participants said this learner-centered approach benefits all learners in mainstream teaching and learning settings. The participants indicated that lessons are delivered in interactive and participatory ways in collaborative teaching and learning. P4 (School B) said:

“The group work that I give to these learners always works very well, and by the time I go around to check if the work is done within the given time, I find it necessary to extend time because of the inclusion of LVI.”

P4 (School B) highlighted that:

“I agree that these learners work better in groups, as this teaching and learning strategy develops learners in oral communication, and I have noted that most of the learners have improved classroom participation.”

The findings from the participants’ responses reveal that learner-centered approaches to teaching and learning have proved to be beneficial to all learners. The findings have revealed that collaborative skills also enhance communication skills. During educational activities, learners need to communicate, negotiate, discuss, and debate learning problems to agree on the problem to be solved. The findings further revealed collaborative learning as important because it encourages learners to collaborate, discuss content concepts, and enhance their knowledge. If learners' motivation is supported through collaborative learning, learners tend to be more intrinsically motivated, willing to engage in less interesting tasks, and often value academic tasks (Badura, 2012).

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The interpretation of data presented in this chapter enfolded on the data generated through focus-group discussions, telephonic interviews, and non-participatory observation method. The chapter focused on data presentation, analysis, and discussion of the findings. The first part has provided details of data generated from focus-group discussions with participating teachers selected from two mainstream primary schools. The second part presented data elicited from observations and focus-group discussions. The third part presented data generated through the telephonic interview method to gain in-depth information. About exploring teachers’ skills and how they can be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools. Data were then analysed using the thematic analysis method. Focus-group discussions were used to respond to the first and second research objectives and to supplement the second and third data sets generated through observations and telephonic interviews. The results generated by these methods indicated that most teachers face multiple challenges while teaching LVI, with some teachers indicating discrepancies in the administration of assessment involving these learners. Since the discrepancy in the facilitation

of the teaching process and the administration of assessments involving LVI, improvement in their academic performance was compromised, resulting in the need to enhance the learning of such learners. Data emerging from this study were presented according to themes and sub-themes. These findings are elaborated further in the next chapter, which summarises the major findings and a detailed presentation of the study's recommendations and conclusions.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented data analysis and discussed the study's findings. This is the final chapter. Therefore, it summarises the findings in response to the research questions and highlights the recommendations that emerged from the findings and the study in general. This chapter also highlights the recommendations for future research. Finally, the researcher outlines the concluding remarks and the researcher's experience when conducting the research study.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the research questions guiding this study.

1. What challenges teachers encounter in teaching visually impaired learners in selected mainstream primary schools in the Maseru District?
2. What are the challenges teachers face in administering assessments to visually impaired learners in selected mainstream primary schools in the Maseru District?
3. What ways could be used to enhance teachers' skills in the selected mainstream primary schools in Maseru district?

The responses from participants at the selected primary schools express the need to enhance teachers' skills in improving academic performance among LVI. Therefore, the participants' responses were categorised into three themes, summarised below.

6.2.1 Theme 1: challenges faced in teaching learners with visual impairment

The findings revealed that teachers clearly Teachers' understood that their skills and knowledge of content on teaching LVI are limited, which presents a challenge to the teaching

of LVI. This challenge influences LVI to lose interest in school, and in that way, their academic performance also diminishes. The statement disagrees with the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP). The teachers understand very well that LIEP demands the deployment of competent and skilled teachers equipped with relevant skills and strategies to provide quality education to LVI in the mainstream classes. Therefore, teachers understand very well that for them to improve the academic performance of LVI, they need relevant skills and knowledge of content to cater to the needs of all learners in the mainstream teaching and learning environment.

The participants understood that teachers lack relevant skills and knowledge in teaching diverse learners in mainstream classes. The teachers find it necessary that for them to improve the academic performance of LVI, there is a need to provide teachers with continuous training, such as in-service and pre-service training and workshops. Teachers believe they will gain confidence, the requisite competencies, and the capacity to teach LVI if they can be offered training to teach such learners in mainstream classrooms. As a result, teachers were not fully equipped with the relevant skills and content knowledge to teach LVI in the mainstream system. These findings reveal that for teachers to be appropriate to the teaching of LVI, they should go through the necessary training, which will make it easy for them to facilitate proper teaching and learning in mainstream educational settings.

6.2.1.1 Environmental Challenges

The findings from this study highlight that environmental challenges, such as the unavailability of human and non-human resources, hinder the performance of LVI in mainstream classes. The findings prove that the aforementioned resources are the most important as they can assist in improving the academic performance of LVI.

6.2.1.2 Human resource

The findings from the study revealed human resources are of great importance. Teachers understand very well that to provide relevant teaching skills, as frontline people, they need

to be equipped with relevant skills, strategies, approaches, and the necessary content knowledge. The findings reveal that teachers in the mainstream understand that if they can be offered proper training, they will be fit to teach LVI.

6.2.1.3 Non-human resources

The finding of this study revealed that the limited resources, or absence thereof, can negatively affect the academic performance of LVI. Teachers understand that to achieve and be relevant to the teaching of LVI. There should be human and non-human materials to make teaching and learning successful because they go hand in hand in supplementing the teaching and learning. Human and non-human resources, according to the findings, play a major role in improving the academic performance of LVI. Teachers understand that it is essential to provide quality education to LVI; hence, both teachers and LVI need to be assisted with relevant resources for the teaching and learning process to be more meaningful. The findings indicate that teaching materials such as Braille reading and writing equipment need to be included in the teaching of LVI and teachers of such learners need to be knowledgeable about Braille. This combination of resources can significantly improve the academic performance of LVI. The teachers understand very well that if they can be offered training and the resources, they believe that they can attain high self-efficacy, and their teaching will be smooth. Therefore, teachers believe that the academic performance of LVI will improve too.

6.2.1.4 Parental support

The findings from the current study showed that parental participation plays an important role in the learners' performance. Therefore, parents or caregivers should support teachers in teaching LVI, especially when given homework. Teachers fully believe that if they work hand in hand with the parents, the performance of LVI will improve. The findings reveal that if parents take responsibility, the teachers will feel encouraged to help LVI. One can understand that the parents and the Government are very important in raising teachers' self-efficacy and LVI in their academic performance.

The teachers showed that the Government should realise the need to implement pre-schools and work with parents to construct pre-schools in the ten districts in Lesotho to meet the needs of all learners so that they can join the primary school with the basics needed in the school or learning environment. This will be beneficial to them when they join Grade 1. This study indicates that teachers understand that if LVI are supported by families, they feel a sense of ownership. In this regard, teachers believe that LVI academic work will improve. The findings also reveal that Botho/Ubuntu, meaning humanity among teachers, parents, or caregivers, can play a major role in building up self-efficacy, and the performance level of LVI will go higher.

6.2.1.5 Remuneration of Teachers

The remuneration of teachers is another factor hindering teachers' effectiveness in teaching LVI. The findings reveal that it is very important to increase teachers' salaries as the teachers feel that their salaries do not cover their basic needs, yet they are given more workload to include LSEN in their classrooms. The findings reveal that the teaching of LVI need highly skilled teachers, and the materials should be availed. Among the human and non-human resources, higher remuneration for teachers can positively contribute to effective teaching and learning. Teachers understand well that the salary increase can motivate them to put in more effort. The teachers would complement the Government's appreciation of their work. The findings reveal that salary increments can positively improve teachers' and learners' self-efficacy, which can subsequently contribute to an improvement in LVI academic work.

6.3 TEACHERS ADMINISTERING ASSESSMENTS TO LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

The findings from this study suggest that teachers can administer assessments of LVI in many ways. The teachers thought of different strategies that could be put into practice to improve academic performance among LVI. Among these strategies, the training of teachers has been identified as a major issue to be attended to; teachers emphasised that without relevant

training to teach LVI, it is also not proper to carry out the assessment. However, the rigid curriculum and assessment tools also make it difficult for teachers to teach LVI in inclusive classroom settings. Furthermore, an enabling environment is also one component that teachers use to support LVI in mainstream schools.

6.3.1 Inexpert teachers

The findings revealed that in the mainstream schools' teachers of LVI are challenged in facilitating and administering assessments among LVI. The findings highlighted that the lack of training for inexpert teachers who teach LVI in mainstream classes created constraints in the teaching and administration of assessments for LVI. Teachers understand that improper training of teachers of LVIs affects the preparation and administration of LVI assessments t. These findings revealed that teachers discovered that the rigid curriculum excluded LVI and contributed to the unsatisfactory academic work of these learners . The findings further indicated that one of the major factors that hinder the smooth learning of LVI is the lack of training among teachers when implementing the integrated curriculum in primary schools. They understand very well that the effectiveness and flexibility of teachers are robbed by the rigid curriculum, which incorporates all learners with their diverse needs but does not fully cater to their inclusion. Therefore, teachers understand that they can be relevant to everyone in the classroom and they should give feedback, which is discussed based on how learners performed as reflected in the assessment processes.

Teachers understand that feedback should be given to LVI. The feedback will be discussed based on the results' strengths and weaknesses. The teachers understand that the learning environment is currently relevant for sighted learners and general teachers who do not specialise in accommodating LVI in their classroom activities. The findings indicate that teachers understand that if the mainstream system is meant to educate all, there should be continuous training of teachers to improve the academic performance of LVI in the mainstream system.

6.3.2 Rigid curriculum

The findings from the study highlighted the inflexible curriculum and assessment of LVI as other factors hindering teachers' efficiency in administering assessments for LVI. One could understand that if the new curriculum in Lesotho does not cater to learners' diverse and individual needs, there would be a great challenge in accommodating LVI because of the loopholes of the national curriculum and assessment tools, which are too exclusive to accommodate all. This would result in the deployment of teachers who are too incompetent to deliver quality education to LVI. However, if the curriculum and administering assessments were more flexible to inclusive teaching and have clear guidelines to direct teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners, it would be profitable for both teachers and learners as this creates an enabling teaching and learning environment.

6.3.3 Constraining learning environment

These findings revealed that teachers and learners need an enabling teaching and learning environment that allows a smooth teaching and learning atmosphere, which contributes to a higher academic performance for LVIs. The teachers believe that without accessible teaching and learning environments in schools, learning cannot be fruitful. In the study of Ramatea and Khanare (2020), participants explained that for teaching and learning to be successful, there should be an enabling environment full of resourceful teaching and learning to boost teachers' skills, which will improve the academic performance of LVI in the mainstream system.

6.4 EFFECTIVE WAYS OF ENHANCING TEACHERS' SKILLS TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

6.4.1 Enhanced teamwork

These findings revealed that collaboration among teachers is a powerful tool for supporting and enhancing academic performance within the mainstream school system. Teachers understand that if they work as a team when teaching LVI, they will exploit different strategies

for assisting LVI. If teachers work together, learners' needs will have to be discussed. Therefore, the academic performance of LVI will be improved.

6.4.2 Improved teaching and learning resources

The findings from the study revealed the many ways teachers can administer assessments to LVI. Teachers understand that different strategies can be put to the test and into practice to improve learners' academic performance, especially LVI. Among the strategies, the training of teachers is identified as a major issue to be attended to. The teachers understand that without relevant training designed to teach LVI, it is not easy for them to teach LVI and carry out assessments of such learners. The situation is compounded also by the rigid curriculum and inflexible assessment tools. Therefore, an enabling environment is one component that can contribute towards the support of LVI for them to improve their academic performance.

6.4.2.1 Teachers' development

Teachers believed that they needed to be developed or trained to teach LVI. This will enable them to contribute fully with knowledge in an inclusive classroom. The teachers believed that for them to be valuable, they should be equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge needed to enable them to attain adequate capacity through continuous training development activities that can allow all teachers to contribute fully, with high self-efficacy towards an inclusive setting that will improve academic performance among LVI.

6.4.2.2 Teacher-learner ratio

Teachers are clear that the teaching and learning process will not be productive when the classrooms are overcrowded. They know that it is not easy to cater to the needs of learners with diverse needs in overcrowded classrooms. The teachers understand that LVI requires extra time to help them reach their potential, which is impossible in overcrowded classroom environments. However, if the class sizes were manageable, it would be easy for teachers to accommodate all learners and assist them in improving their academic performance.

6.4.2.3 Teacher teaching methods

Teachers understand that workshops can enhance their teaching skills to support LVI. They hope workshops can boost their self-efficacy so that they can teach learners with passion. They understand that when they are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills, teaching will be smooth in teaching and learning of LVI. In this case, they believe that teachers should be given appropriate training to build their capacity to teach all learners in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, teaching in an inclusive classroom needs teachers who use relevant approaches that suit each learner irrespective of their learning styles and differences.

6.4.2.4 Financial resources

The teachers understand that financial resources are important in inclusive schools. Teachers said funding is important to the teaching of LVI because teaching LVI demands a lot of money. Teachers find a lack of financial support as a hindrance to the education of LVI because they lack the resources, such as the Braille machine, that match the learners' numbers in class. Teachers would find learning to be manageable if the government could assist the schools with funding to make inclusive education beneficial to all learners.

6.4.2.5 Curriculum adjustment

The teachers understood very well that it is important for the curriculum to be flexible and accommodative to all learners in inclusive classrooms, irrespective of learners' disabilities. The rigid curriculum also hinders teachers' competence, as teachers cannot educate every learner in an inclusive classroom situation. Teachers understand that they should have the relevant skills to teach and, in the end, assess LVI. They believe that if the curriculum is flexible and has appropriate guidelines. They understand that their teaching will be smooth and productive for both teaching and assessment facilitation. Therefore, MoET, through curriculum developers, should consider the needs of LVI when designing a curriculum.

6.4.2.6 Accessing Adaptive Technology

Teachers believed that assistive technology (AT) could help improve the academic performance of LVI, and resources like phones, computers, Braille machines, recording machines, and e-text. Adequate resources to teach LVI are important to remove barriers to learning and ensure the full inclusion of LVI. Teachers understand that AT can be very helpful in overcoming many challenges faced by LVI. They believed that technology could benefit LVI because teachers believed that AT could help LVI to easily use educational devices to enhance their involvement in inclusive teaching and learning.

Therefore, it is important to provide LVI with many different special devices so that they have access to electronic devices that can enable them to participate fully in educational activities, which LVI can refer to when not in the classroom situation. The devices can help LVIs have the same information as their peers without disabilities.

6.4.2.7 Government engagement

The teachers understood that MoET and MSD should offer support to LSEN so that they could meet their educational needs. They hoped that the Government would consistently help LVI. This help should be offered from primary schools and should automatically extend to high school through the primary school administration. They understood that the supply of Braille machines, magnifiers, stylus, and audio tapes, should correspond to the number of learners who use the material for reading and writing; interpreters and ongoing training of teachers will help to improve the academic performance of LVI.

6.4.2.8 Portfolios

The teachers found it imperative to know the different backgrounds of LVI. They found it important for each learner to have a file detailing their background history in the school office. This information would be very helpful to teachers and the entire school. The teachers

understood that the information would direct them on planning without leaving any learner behind. Teachers believed that different professionals should be incorporated into the school environment for teamwork and academic success of LVI.

Among the strategies developed to improve the academic performance of LVI, teachers considered IEP the most suitable for remediating learners with special educational needs. The teachers in the mainstream school system understand that it is important for teachers to draw IEPs, so teachers should draw up learners' IEP plans based on their weaknesses and strengths for them to be productive.

6.4.2.9 Collaborative Learning

The teachers understood peer tutoring and collaborative learning as capable of being a very good method of teaching LVI. They understood that learners can learn better when discussing concepts among themselves. They believed that pairing learners in class discussions can enhance their communication skills. They further believed that learners can freely express themselves among their age mates. Peer tutoring and collaborative learning are learner-centered approaches that encourage learners to learn together. Therefore, peer tutoring and collaborative learning can play a vital role in improving the academic performance of LVI.

6.4.2.10 Parental Involvement

Parents are frontline players in their children's learning, so they are considered the relevant sources of information to the teachers and school administrators because they know their children better than anyone else. The teachers understood that parental involvement and support in children's education can greatly help. Therefore, parents need to be involved in their children's education so the children to improve their academic work.

6.5 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The study explored how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru District. The study employed a qualitative research approach that comprised three data generation methods: focus-group discussions, telephonic interviews, and non-participatory observation. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which revealed many strategies for enhancing teachers' skills to improve the academic performance of LVI. Through data analysis, some factors were considered important in enhancing teachers' skills, which can help improve the academic performance of LVI. However, the factors preventing teachers from efficaciously teaching LVI were also explored.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the recommendations that are based on the outcome of the study. Based on the study findings and conclusions, the recommendations are as follows:

The Government of Lesotho (educational planners and educational policy makers) should provide Braille machines, braille books, stylus tablets, canes, magnifiers, and audio tapes as appropriate resources for the teaching of LVI in primary schools to provide quality education for all. Then the use of audio tapes can be used after school, when the learners are relaxed, the audio can be reversed to learn the concepts that LVI did not master in the classroom until the learners get an understanding of the concepts.

The study recommends that:

- MoET should review the integrated curriculum to see if it meets the needs of all the same as the needs of learners without disabilities in terms of human and non-human resources so that they can be independent when studying.
- General teachers should work collaboratively with special education teachers to equip each other with appropriate educational strategies to cater to the learning needs of individual learners. Again, LVI should be given extra time during both formative and summative assessments.

- Periodic workshops should be organised to train teachers on the use of a stylus, Braille, reading and writing, and technology so that LVI can effectively achieve their educational goals.
- Parental involvement in the education of LVI is essential for the learners' academic development and performance.
- Teachers and parents should have good relationships and smooth communication to share information on how to assist LVI in reaching their potential.
- General teachers teach all learners in the classroom without the help of a special teacher trained to teach LVI so this statement can contribute to the unsatisfactory performance of LVI. So, that means teachers cannot teach LVI. In this regard that means there is a need for teachers' skills to be enhanced to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools. Therefore, it is important to equip teachers with in-service and workshops so they can acquire relevant skills and strategies to teach LVI to assist LVI in reaching their potential. The study recommends that all teachers in School B should train to learn Braille reading and writing so that they can be relevant when teaching LVI. For the teachers to be equipped with relevant context and resources, effective teaching and learning will be successful.
- Teachers should be trained to enhance their skills in pre-service, in-service, and workshops (Iserbyt et al., (2017) recommend workshops in professional development. For them to improve their skills for the betterment of LVI. Then, after their training, the new skills, and content, teachers should use the skills to teach confidently, and LVI academic performance will improve.
- Introducing new technology in schools will benefit all learners, including LVI, as it equips them with modern ways of sharing the same information as their sighted counterparts.
- The school environment should have different stakeholders, such as teachers, transcribers, doctors, nurses, and counselors. This will help in the assessment of LVI, which will help advise the school on making relevant referrals.
- Regular community awareness campaigns should be provided to educate the community at large on how to support LVI within their community.

- Introducing pre-schools within the primary school environment will greatly help in equipping LVI with some basics during the early stages before going to primary school.
- Resource allocation should be commensurate with the number of learners and delivered in time before schools reopen at the beginning of each academic year.
- There should be the transition from primary school to high school should be put in place for all LSEN, including LVI.
- Learning institutions should have resource centers equipped with resources for teachers and LVI to access.
- The physical environment should be renovated to suit the needs of learners with visual impairment so that schools can have inclusive teaching and learning that is relevant to this caliber of learners.
- The curriculum should be flexible, accommodative, and inclusive enough for all learners to avoid excluding LVI.
- Incentives given to teachers at resource centres should be of the same and equal value as those of general education teachers to avoid conflict.
- Teachers' salaries should be revised upwards for teachers to be productive and to effectively help in improving the academic performance of LVI.

6.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH STUDY

This study focused on Enhancing teachers' skills to improve academic performance among learners with visual impairment: A case of selected primary schools in Maseru District, Lesotho. This study recommends that a wider sample of teachers should be used to allow a more differentiated collection of data. So that more information should be collected to extend the findings gained when large samples are utilised. Employing the Perceived Self-Efficacy Theory, other researchers should consider exploring the following topics to broaden the concept of IE in primary schools:

- What role does school management play in academic performance among LVI? This topic will provide information about the contribution of the school management to the academic performance of LVI.

- What strategies can be used to modify the Primary school environment to enhance the academic success of LVI?
- The topic would provide information about the contribution of the primary school environment to the academic success of LVI.
- The Government of Lesotho should request non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to assist with teaching resources needed to improve academic performance among LVI.

6.8 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

No study is completely flawless or inclusive of all possible aspects, hence, all research studies have certain limitations (Editage, 2019). The study limitations refer to barriers the researcher encounters that cannot be easily controlled (Mhlongo, 2017). One of the setbacks of the study is that participants in School A delayed in coming to the boardroom for discussion reasoning that they were preparing for the third term assessment, so the researcher experienced time constraints. In this case, the researcher had to reschedule the appointments because after the assessment session, the schools had to close for a Lesotho Independence break. Hence, the researcher had to extend the data collection time by more than two weeks.

In school B, the set principal highlighted to the researcher that she is experiencing the challenge that most of the researchers use school B as their research site. So, the process of interviews consumes teachers' and learners' time. In this regard, the process hinders learners and teachers.

In both schools, some teachers asked the research not to be audio-taped, so taking notes during the interviews consumed a lot of time because the researcher had to refer back to the participants repeatedly to get clarity on the information the participants gave.

The constraints that impacted the study were related to the research sample size. The sample selection covers one district because of the nature of the schools' accommodating learners with low vision and total blindness. The context in which this research study was conducted

presented a limitation. Therefore, the study is not generalised to reflect all the Lesotho Primary Schools.

6.9 MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS A RESEARCHER

The study allowed me to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced for learners with visual impairment in among learners. Through this study, I learned how general teachers struggle to teach LVI engaging with no resources and their limited content knowledge to teach such learners irrespective of their qualifications, which requires them to teach in primary mainstream teaching and learning. This study revealed a need for teachers already in the field and the MoET should equip them with some in-service training, workshops, and non-human resources that will assist teachers in their daily teaching to be more relevant to LVI.

As a teacher, I learned that the teachers' training in situations has some influence on the teachers' skills, content knowledge, and resources. It is therefore, understood that the teacher skills and resources can contribute to the quality education of LVI and can further contribute to the self-efficacy of teachers and learners. Bandura (1994) indicates that teachers with high self-efficacy improve learners' self-efficacy, motivation, and academic performance. Therefore, there is a need for teachers' skills to improve academic performance among LVI in primary schools in Lesotho.

6.10 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study explored how teachers' skills can be enhanced to improve the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in the Maseru District. The study highlighted the factors hindering the performance of LVI. The study also developed strategies for supporting LVI in the mainstream education system to enhance teachers' skills in improving academic performance among LVI. The research study revealed that enhancing teachers' skills to improve academic performance among LVI depends on improvement in the following aspects: teacher development, provision of sufficient teaching and learning resources, teachers' attitude towards LVI, effective management of overcrowded classrooms, improvement in

teachers' teaching styles or methods (from pre-school to higher education institutions) to support LVI, adapting assessment procedures, accessing adaptive technology, curriculum adjustment, compiling learners portfolios, will be of great help to know the background history of LVI, it would be easy for teachers to help such learners. Government engagement and individual Educational Plans should be tailor-made for each LVI to effectively implement collaborative learning, parental involvement, and community development. Therefore, it is the community's responsibility to raise LVI in a manner that improves their inclusion and academic performance.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

22-Aug-2022

Dear Ms Mathabo Lebona

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

ENHANCING TEACHERS' SKILLS TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOL IN MASERU, LESOTHO

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2022/0540/22

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

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APPENDIX 2: TITLE REGISTRATION



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3 December 2021

APPLICATION FOR TITLE REGISTRATION

Applicant: Lebona, M
Student Number: 2002099162
Discipline: Psychology of Education
Study Code: Doctorate (EDPY9100)

Dear Ms Lebona

Your registered title is as follows: "Enhancing teachers' skills to improve academic performance among learners with visual impairment: A case of selected primary schools in Maseru, Lesotho"

All of the best with your studies.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Mafora', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Prof Patrick Mafora
Chair: CTR committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Duvenhage', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Ms CS Duvenhage
Secretary: CTR committee

APPENDIX 3: LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

P.O. BOX 4504

Maseru

100

20th January 2022

The principal

My name is 'Mathabo Lebona; I am a PhD student at the University of Free State in Bloemfontein Campus, School of Education. My student number is 2002099162. The research, I wish to conduct for my PhD thesis entails **“Enhancing teachers’ skills to improve academic performance among learners with visual impairment: A case of selected primary schools in Maseru, Lesotho”**. I am hereby seeking your permission to conduct a study in your school to be able to engage participants in this research project.

The researcher aims **to explore how can teachers’ skills be enhanced in improving the academic performance of LVI in primary schools In Maseru, Lesotho**, and the following objectives will assist in responding to the main subject of this research study.

- To explore the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching visually impaired learners in selected mainstream primary schools in the Maseru district.
- To explore teachers’ challenges faced by teachers in administering assessments to visually impaired learners in selected mainstream primary schools in the Maseru district.
- To identify ways to enhance teachers’ skills to improve the academic performance of LVI in selected mainstream primary schools.

The study will be useful for many stakeholders in education in navigating ways to support teachers who teach learners with visual impairments in selected primary schools in the Maseru District of Lesotho.

Research Plan and Method

I intend to engage the participants in the following data generation methods. Telephonic interviews and focus group discussions will last for 60 minutes. The researcher will audio record the conversations and also keep the confidentiality of the research participants. The participation is voluntary, and the participants will be informed that data collected from them will be used for the research, not for anything else.

I will be grateful to get your permission to carry out the study in your school and upon the approval of the request; I will then seek permission from the teachers to be engaged in this research project.

For further inquiries and clarity of the information presented above, please do not hesitate to contact me at:

Cell phone #: (+266) 58435398

Email address: lebonamathabo687@gmail.com

Yours faithfully

.....

'Mathabo Lebona

REFERENCES

Dr. Kananga Robert Mukuna

University of Free-State – Senior Lecturer

Contact details: (+27) 810451473

Email address: MukunaKR@ufs.ac.za

APPENDIX 4: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Qualitative data tool1 (**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**)

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

1ST Session: To explore the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching visually impaired learners in selected mainstream primary schools in the Maseru district.

Participants: 6 purposively selected teachers

Facilitator: M. Lebona

Duration: 60 minutes

Welcome

Hello everyone, you are kindly invited to participate in this activity of the research study that aims at explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced in improving academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru district. The study intends to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced to support learners with visual impairments in selected primary schools in Maseru district, Lesotho. The researcher highlights that telephonic interviews and focus group discussions can submit fertile results. Please be enlightened that participation in these telephonic interviews, focus group discussions and observation will be very important as it is a journey towards the educational freeing of learners with visual impairments by giving appropriate support to teachers working with them daily so that they can provide adequate support to this marginalised group in schools. However, the participation is voluntary, and the virtues of the participants are private.

Introduction by the researcher:

My name is 'Mathabo Lebona. I am a PhD student at the University of the Free State. My research study aims to explore how teachers' skills can be enhanced in improving the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru district. I would like to thank you for your time in taking part in this research study a success.

May I humbly request you to introduce yourself and specify the number of learners with visual impairments in the classroom you are allocated?

GUIDE: The researcher will engage the participants in a discussion by asking the following questions:

1. What do you understand by challenging factors in an inclusive classroom?
2. How can teachers support learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools?
3. Why is it important that teachers know about the types of visual impairment affecting LVI in their classroom?
4. Why are physical arrangements in the environment so important for LVI learning?
5. What is the role of the teacher in inclusive education?
6. How do LVI make use of devices and materials to access the learning environment?
7. What are the main challenges facing teachers in teaching and learning?
8. What are the challenges that teachers experience in promoting classroom inclusion?
9. What are the LVI expectations and concerns?
10. What are the greatest challenges that you think teachers in Lesotho have to deal with?
11. Why is it important for teachers to have a high sense of self-efficacy and how would they maintain it?
12. What is the impact of teacher self-efficacy on the LVI learning outcome?
13. Through your experience, what are other important aspects which need to be discussed in relation to your understanding of self-efficacy in supporting LVIs?

Thank you so much for your participation in this research study.

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW GUIDE

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW DISCUSSION SCHEDULE 2

2ND Session: To explore teachers' challenges faced by teachers in administering assessments to visually impaired learners in selected mainstream primary schools in the Maseru district.

Facilitator: M. Lebona

Duration: 60 minutes

Hello everyone,

Thank you so much once more for your contribution to this study. Going through this journey together is overwhelming.

GUIDELINE: The researcher will engage the participants in a discussion by asking the following questions: -

1. What do you understand by administering assessments to LVI in primary schools?
2. How would a teacher accommodate a learner with visual impairment in administering assessments?
3. How do teachers provide enabling learning and teaching in the classroom to support LVIs?
4. How do other learners without disabilities provide enabling factors in mainstream classrooms to support LVIs? (How can a classroom help LVI)
5. How much do special needs learners at the school interact with their peers?
6. What are the issues we face as teachers when assessing LVI?
7. What are the main challenges in using assessments in an inclusive classroom?
8. What were the challenges encountered by teachers in conducting assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic?

9. Which role does the school play in supporting LVI in the mainstream during assessment?
10. What do you suggest can be done to actively engage to support LVIs in regard to enabling factors?

Taking part once more in this study has been a milestone for the researcher and your contribution once more in this study continues to be appreciated.

APPENDIX 6: OBSERVATION GUIDE

BACKGROUND RELATED

1. Good morning teacher.
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. How long did you teach in an inclusive school?
4. Which grades do you like to teach?
5. What are the challenges encountered in teaching all learners in an inclusive setup?

CLASSROOM RELATED

6. Which subject do you like to teach?
7. Explain the concept in the subject you like to teach most
8. Which resources are used to teach liquids and solids to LVI?
9. Who brings materials to schools?
10. How does a teacher help LVI use the materials?
11. How does a teacher introduce liquids and solids among LVI?
12. Does a teacher use a learner-centered approach or a teacher-centered approach?
Why the specific method?
13. How does a teacher assess LVI in the mainstream?
14. Which scientific skills, CONTENT KNOWLEDGE, and PEDAGOGY does the teacher engage in teaching LVI in an inclusive classroom?
15. What causes solids to turn into liquids and what causes liquids to turn into solids?

PRE-OBSERVATION INTERVIEW – YES NO

1. Was the lesson presentation understood by LVI?
2. Was the lesson learner-centered or teacher-centered?
3. Are there any challenges in teaching LVI the topic of liquids and Solids?
4. Can teachers' skills be enhanced in teaching liquids and solids in improved?

THANK YOU SO MUCH

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION – APPENDIX H

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

<p>Objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clearly stated <p>Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-specific and age-appropriate.</p> <p>Accommodate LVI</p>	
<p>Introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Capture learners' attention. ➤ Is related to the topic: of liquids and solids. ➤ Spirality is used on knowledge to the previous knowledge. 	
<p>Teaching and Learning Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relevant ➤ Flexibility of using the materials. <p>Is LVI involved in using materials?</p>	
<p>Teaching methods and strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Appropriate ➤ Teachers' presentation in the terms <p>Integrating other learning areas.</p> <p>Teacher involving LVI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Teachers applying different teaching styles to accommodate LVI ➤ Praising who did well and encouraging those who struggle to get correct answers ➤ Correcting learners' mistakes ➤ Guidance in probing questions. 	
<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Is lesson planning in a sequential manner? ➤ Address objectives ➤ Teacher-oriented or learner-oriented. 	
<p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Specific ➤ Align with objectives 	

<p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In line with the lesson objectives Adequate. <p>were intended targets' skills to be developed</p> <p>Involved LVI and put into practice different assessment methods to address different learning styles to accommodate LVI.</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Teacher-centered approach or learner-centered approach</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>The main points and lesson plans emphasised</p> <p>Objectives covered</p>	
---	--

LESSON PLAN FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS TOOL

LESSON PLAN	COMMENTS
<p>Lesson Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound 	
<p>Requirements among LVI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous knowledge <p>Connects new knowledge with previous knowledge among LVI</p>	
<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate and capture LVI interest. <p>Are materials relevant to LVI?</p>	
<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age suitable and appropriate for LVI 	
<p>Teaching strategies/pedagogy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner-centered approach 	
<p>Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant to the content of LVI (Scientific, language, skill) 	
<p>Assessment</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relates to the lesson objective	
Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emphasises the main points to the lesson plan.	

APPENDIX 7: INFORMED CONSENT

P.O. Box 4504

Maseru

100

10th September, 2022

The Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is 'Mathabo Lebona. I am a PhD student at the University of Free State in Bloemfontein Campus, School of Education. I wish to engage you as my participants in my research project for my PhD thesis and the research I wish to conduct entails **“How can teachers’ skills be enhanced to improve academic performance among learners with visual impairment: A case of selected primary schools in Maseru, Lesotho”**.

The study **aims to explore how teachers’ skills can be enhanced in improving the academic performance of LVI in primary schools in Maseru district** and the following objectives will assist in responding to the main subject of this research study:

- To explore the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching visually impaired learners in selected mainstream primary schools in the Maseru district.
- To explore challenges faced by teachers in administering assessments to visually impaired learners in selected mainstream primary schools in the Maseru district.
- To identify ways to enhance teachers’ skills to improve the academic performance of LVI in selected mainstream primary schools.

RESEARCH PLAN AND METHOD

I intend to engage you in the following data generation methods: Telephone interviews focus group discussion and observation methods. The interviews and discussions will last for 60 minutes. I will audio record the conversation and also, I will come to the school and take pictures during the process of the interviews where necessary. I will be very considerable about confidentiality. Participation is voluntary and the participants will be informed that data collected from them will be used for the purpose of the research.

Please be assured that pseudonyms will be used as a security measure to avoid any potential harm and if at any point, you may 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 to professional and trauma counselling in the process, you will be encouraged to seek help without disclosing your problems to anyone except the professional help. Please also take into account that this study will be conducted using three methods Focus Group Discussion, telephonic interview and non-participatory observation method, on which sometimes, it is not easy to make absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity, especially when FGD are used as data collection method. Where some of the participants may reveal their sensitive information or privacy. However, be advised not to disclose personally sensitive information in the FGD adhere to set rules.

Any information given by you in this research study cannot be used against you and the collected data will 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 in this study is only in academic purposes and there are no financial benefits involved.

It will be my pleasure to engage you in this research project. The study will be important to many education stakeholders in navigating ways to enhance teachers' skills to support LVI in mainstream teaching and learning.

For further enquiries and clarity of the information presented above, please do not hesitate to contact me at:

Cell phone #: (266) 58435398

Email address: lebona.mathabo687@gmail.com

Yours faithfully

M. Lebona

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

NOTE: If you are willing to participate in this research study project, please kindly sign this letter as a declaration of your consent:

I (Participant's full names), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of the study will be anonymously processed into a research report.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

REFERENCE:

Dr. Kananga Robert Mukuna

University of Free-State – Senior Lecturer

Contact details: (+27) 810451473

Email address: MukunaKR@ufs.ac.za

APPENDIX 8: LETTER OF EDITING



Mufasa Research Consultancy

SERVING WITH DISTINCTION

29 February 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Editor's Letter

ENHANCING TEACHERS' SKILLS TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MASERU, LESOTHO

Below is the scope considered during language editing of the above titled doctoral thesis:

- Grammar check
- Sentence construction
- Spelling check
- Punctuation
- In-text referencing
- Formatting/document layout

As a professional editor, I pledge that the above aspects of the doctoral thesis were, to the best of my knowledge, meticulously and correctly done at the time the work was sent to the candidate. However, I am not responsible for any corrections that were made after the editing process finalised.

Yours faithfully,

Kemist Shumba (PhD)

PhD in Health Promotion: University of KwaZulu-Natal [UKZN]
Master of Social Science in Health Promotion (*Cum laude*): UKZN
Bachelor of Social Science Honours in Culture & Media Studies: UKZN
Postgraduate Certificate in Education: Great Zimbabwe University
Bachelor of Arts (English): University of Zimbabwe

Cell: +27 78 315 6186 **Email:** info@mufasarc.co.za **Web:** www.mufasarc.co.za
Address: 7 Chartham House, 180 Brand Road, Glenwood 4001, Durban, South Africa

APPENDIX 9: TURNITIN REPORT

ENHANCING TEACHERS' SKILLS TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MASERU, LESOTHO

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