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**EXPLORING EXPERIENCES OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS ON
SUPPORT SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS IN LESOTHO**

by

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DECLARATION

I, *Retselisitsoe Kitima Kojana*, (2015190362) in submitting this doctoral degree thesis electronically, "*Exploring experiences of visually impaired students towards support services in higher education institutions in Lesotho*", declare that the entire work contained herein is my independent work. I am the sole author and declare that the copyright is vested in the University of the Free State. All references used have been acknowledged and indicated as references. This thesis has not previously, in its entire form or in part, been submitted by me at another university to obtain any qualification.



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Date

DEDICATION

“All of God’s children are on earth to be given the opportunity to learn and live ,,,,,,,,,,,,,, .Be we reminded that a perfect body is not required to achieve one's divine destiny. In fact, some of the sweetest spirits are housed in frail or imperfect bodies. Great spiritual strength is often developed by people with physical challenges, precisely because they are so challenged” (Nelson, 2012).

“To my late father Ntate Tieho Lucas Kojana oa Letebele and my cousin Morena Lucas Nonyane oa Mohlakoana, thank you for valuing education and its importance in transforming our lifes”.

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SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Background and Aim: Higher education institutions (HEIs) are regarded as the apex of the education system in many countries of the world. These institutions play a leading role in providing qualifications for their students, intellectual and physical skills necessary for innovation, creativity, self-reliance, and to survive societal and economic demands. Inclusion and admission of persons with disabilities has increased diversity in the student population. The admission of persons with disabilities brings with itself a package of factors and demands among the visually impaired students (VIS) who encountered multi-faced experiences. This study aimed to explore the daily experiences of VISs towards various available student support services in two Lesotho higher education institutions to address a significant gap in the existing literature.

In the context of Lesotho, much literature has been published on disability issues specifically on visual impairment in educational institutions. However, limited studies and research addressed the support services provided to students. Appreciative inquiry, as a theoretical framework and a human rights-based approach as a conceptual framework were triangulated to establish how VISs are embraced, celebrated and appreciated by support services in their respective institutions. The human rights-based approach was used to uphold the support offered to VISS as education rights holders in higher education institutions.

Method: The philosophical underpinning of this study was the Interpretivism paradigm that enabled the researcher to make reflections on beliefs, views and principles about the world that one lives in. The study was guided by the phenomenological research design to understand the participants' perceptions, experiences and perspectives towards support services. Nine (9) VISs and thirteen (13) student support services officials in two higher education institutions participated in this study. In-depth interviews, narrative interviews and an observation adopting complete observer were used as data collection tools. The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse qualitative data which is flexible and participant-oriented to acquire the real-life experiences of visually impaired students. The IPA allowed the interpretation of single units to reflect the general patterns across units.

The findings: several findings relating to the experiences of VISs towards support services were made. Higher education institutions have academic and non-academic support services for student in their academic journey. The findings are that disability the units are the most favoured and used support services by VISs in the institutions. The library, health centre, computer lab, counselling and guidance services are the least used support services. Student affairs, student welfare and special education services are partially used by visually impaired students. There are no guiding principles, models or policies guiding and governing disability issues in both institutions. Further findings are that lack of expertise, assistive devices or lack of learning material in

the library not only compromise the learning by VISs but they also influence negative perceptions towards the use of these services. Disability units must be equipped with more assistive devices such as desktops with JAWS, screen readers and magnifiers. The relationship and attitude of non-visually impaired students, lecturers and support staff differs from one visually impaired student to the next. The study finds that VISs encounter several challenges in their residences including theft of properties, poor living conditions, and poor security.

Conclusions and Implications: The study concludes that the journey and experiences of each student are dynamic. Each student has his or her highs and lows towards different support services that may compromise or enhance one's academic success. To safeguard the academic and social well-being and success of visually impaired students, it is important for institutions to consider developing disability policies that will guide disability issues. This will protect their rights to receiving quality education, eradicating learning and teaching barriers that hinder their academic success. Development of a disability policy and guidelines will be a token of appreciating and embracing diversity in higher education institutions.

Key words: *Visual impairment, visually impaired students, higher education institutions, support services, student experiences,*

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AI	:	Appreciative Inquiry
CADE	:	Convention against Discrimination in Education
CEDAW	:	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CDT	:	Critical Disability Theory
CRC	:	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DSE	:	Department of Special Education
DSA	:	Department of Student Affairs
HEP	:	Higher Education Policy
HEI	:	Higher Education Institutions
HRBA	:	Human Rights Based Approach
ICIDH	:	International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps
ICT	:	Information Communication Technology
ICESCR	:	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IPA	:	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
LIEP	:	Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy
MOET	:	Ministry of Education and Training
MSD	:	Ministry of Social Development
PDEA	:	Persons with Disabilities Equity Act
PRD	:	Phenomenological Research Design
SSA	:	Sub-Sahara Africa
SSS	:	Student Support Services
UN	:	United Nations
UNCRPD	:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

- UNHRC** : United Nations Human Rights Commission
- UNICEF** : United Nations Children's Fund
- VIS** : Visually Impaired Students
- WHO** : World Health Organisation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.0. Introduction

The higher education institutions (HEIs) are regarded as the apex in the education system of many countries. They play a leading role in providing people with qualifications, intellectual and physical skills necessary for innovation, creativity, self-reliance and coping skills to meet the societal and economic demands (Omede, 2015). In recent years, these institutions have experienced a fundamental shift due to the composition of the student population. This includes the increased diversity of students with disabilities which have posed multi-faced challenges that demand urgent attention (Sefotho, 2020). Among these students are the visually impaired students (VIS) who experience several barriers and setbacks as they venture on the acquisition of higher education. Croft (2020) argues that experiences of students with vision impairment in higher education institutions are relatively under-researched due to the underpinned tenuous assumptions about the disability. For this reason, VISs are positioned within the negative underpinnings of the academic institutions.

The visual form of disability is a barrier that affects disabled persons not only in their functioning in the family or society but also in their academic endeavour and economic participation (Miyauchi, 2020). This deprives them of their right to access education and active participation in the personal and national economy. Visual impairment can thus be defined from the educational and legal perspective. It can be inherited or be acquired sometimes later in life. The inherited causes of visual impairment include optical nerve hypoplasia, cortical visual impairment, retinopathy, glaucoma and others. This form of impairment can also be acquired through trauma, cataract, accidents, inadequate nutrition, sometime in ones' lifetime. Therefore, before VISs are engaged in learning activity, Kapur (2017) point out that it is vital for the educator to acquire basic information about their impairment and how such impairment can influence student participation. This is because visual impairment imposes limitations upon students' effective learning and participation.

Having been engaged in a HEI for a few years as a tutor, it came to my attention that VISs encounter diverse challenges, adversities and experiences. These include social isolation, emotional difficulties, discrimination, mental and health retardation, unfair assessment, lack of teaching and learning aids, a negative attitude of some members of the academic institutions and poor teaching approach by some teaching staff (Mosia & Phasha, 2020; Ministry of Education and Training, 2018;). Besides, deformity and destruction of a person's vision brings about a reduced amount of sensory capability. This leads to insufficient or delays in learning or mastering other skills through observing others (Kapur, 2017). This implies a that demand for students to access support services is increasing and may lead to escalating problems while at the same time resulting in negative consequences to students, educators and institutions. I, therefore, admit that academic support services must commit their effort to work toward supporting VIS in their academic achievement, psychological needs and social experiences to accomplish good academic success (Manitsa & Doikou, 2020). Education researchers purport that support services must be accessible to student community regardless of their social or economic status, disability, identity or race (Fernandez, Cantrill, Kamal & Shrestha, 2017; Perez & Sabato, 2023; Habulezi & Phasha, 2012).

1.2. Student support services

To address the diverse needs and challenges of each student with visual impairment and to improve their overall access to educational activities, support is vital to their academic success (Manitsa & Doikou, 2020). The student needs must be addressed efficiently through academic support structures' for student which must assist students to pursue their educational goals and retain top achievement (Ntoyakhe & Ngibe, 2020). Giesen, Cavanaugh and McDonnall (2012) view student support services (SSS) as an important structure for students' achievement. They are the services which are related to academic activities that influence supplementary instruction, mentoring and tutoring during and after-school guidance programmes. Additionally, Perez and Sabato, 2023 describes student support as the services responsible for assuring cognitive, organising and emotional wellbeing and support that is provided to underperforming students or to enrich programmes and to advance the learning opportunities to higher achieving students. Skakane-Masango, Mtshali and Ngcobo (2023) refer support services as anything positive other than the actual course material, which an academic institution may provide to its student. These services may include student counselling, library services, financial aid, internet services, remedial tutorials and study centres.

Academic support services entail broad processes encompassing numerous educational strategies which are eligible to guide and assist a student on their academic journey. The design and purpose of each strategy is intended to enhance students' performance in several ways. Research reveals that academic support may improve students' attendance, participation and engagement, improve academic performance, and can boost their socio-emotional skills (Matsie & Stofile, 2021; Naftzger et al. 2015). Some of these strategies may be tailor-made, depending on the needs and experiences of individual students, while others are generally institutionalised, depending on the composition of student population (Kizilaslan, 2020; Jumani, Bhatti & Malik, 2013). Lukianova and Fell (2016) support the notion that educational strategies on academic support are intended to increase the general performance of the school, teachers' effectiveness and the learning and teaching of students. Students need support in all aspects of education including emotional and social demands (Mosia, 2017).

Several researchers have revealed that academic support of VIS can be triggered by numerous factors (Manitsa & Doikou, 2020; Ntoyakhe & Ngibe, 2020; Ferreira & Sefotho, 2020; Haakma, Janssen & Minnaert, 2018; Aciem & Mazzotta, 2013). Therefore, different support strategies are essential to address the diverse needs and experiences of each student with visual impairment. These may include social and psychological support, academic development, rehabilitation and learning and teaching support. Some researchers affirm that support of VIS should address both internal and external obstacles to equitable learning, instead of focusing on detecting their shortfalls that may require specialised attention (Ferreira & Sefotho, 2020). Therefore, support for VIS should not be seen as extra work, but a routine part of everyday practice (French, 2017).

Educational institutions must provide support services and address the challenges of their students. In the educational system, these services have the key task to ensure the intellectual well-being, physical, moral, psychological, social and spiritual development of students and ensure focus on their learning (Jumani, Bhatti & Malik, 2013). Therefore, the provision of academic support and resources can enhance the participation of students in the academic activities, social functioning, social interaction and development (Manitsa & Doikou, 2020). These researchers also maintain that support services to students with vision impairment from the school community may promote personal independence and self-esteem. Therefore, any factors that would prevent students with any form of disability from obtaining any support services to enable active participation in educational activities are viewed as a violation of students' basic human rights (Habulezi &

Phasha, 2012). When support services are holistically and wholeheartedly addressing students' needs, the impact and results can be far-reaching.

The inaccessibility of support services is regarded as contesting an enabling learning environment for students with learning disabilities (Hanass-Hancock, 2014). The literature reveals that little has been done to offer adequate support for VIS in Lesotho (Ralejoe, 2016; Mosia, 2014; Friamiatoe, 2013). The exclusion of VISs in HEIs is also seen as a violation of human rights to access education (Mosia, 2015; Chataika, Mckenzie, Swart & Lyner-Cleophas, 2012). UNICEF (2019) asserts that integrating students' rights into the classroom is an important opportunity for institutions, educators and students to actively promote the identification and protection of disabled persons' rights. Educators are therefore encouraged to participate in guaranteeing support and realizing students' rights in the school environment and society.

Within the changing landscape of higher education, support services are necessary to enhance the student experiences and ultimately maintain and improve the retention of students with disabilities. Bornschlegl and Caltabiano (2022) and Mizunoya, Mitra and Yamasaki (2016) contend that most students with disabilities encounter challenges that may demand academic support services to respond to the specific needs of their university life. If these services are inefficient they may hamper their basic right to access quality education. Wodon, Male, Montenegro, and Nayihouba (2018) pointed out that millions of children with vision impairments never enrol. Alternatively, they drop out of school prematurely. Children who have the opportunity to attend school often receive compromised education due to a lack or poor support programmes, inadequate student orientation programmes, inappropriate psychological and social advice, inappropriate recreational programmes, lack of learning aids and a lack of expertise to assist them academically (Kpodoe et al., 2019; Jumani, Bhatti & Malik, 2013).

The transition from secondary to tertiary education level can be challenging for many students, particularly for those with visual impairment (Plotner, et al., 2020). Access to higher education is not only about challenges. It is also about multiple social experiences which can encourage a feeling of belonging, and feelings of inclusion among students with vision disability (Croft, 2020). Ideally, international agencies have found it necessary to include VIS to enrol in HEIs, hence Koehler and Wild (2019) and van Jaarsveldt and Ndeya-Ndereya (2015) maintain that experiences on accessibility and availability of learning aids, and lecturers' approaches can influence students

feeling of inclusion in academic institutions. Therefore, HEI must improvise alternative ways of supporting VIS, especially those who experience minimal help to shoddier difficulties that impact their studies negatively and whose needs are not prioritised. As ordered by the Lesotho's higher education policy, I am of the view that providing support to students with visual impairment can contribute to the provision of higher quality education for both students and institutions as they progress in their academic success.

1.3. Higher education institutions and visually impaired students

The core function of any HEI is to teach, support and provide an enabling learning environment for all its students. Therefore, the provision and accessibility of support services to VIS is an essential aspect that must be considered by HEIs. Haakma, Janssen and Minnaert (2018) point out that HEI must provide academic support to students by providing them with educational structures, by involving them in the learning activities and allowing autonomy. The extent to which students are supported can have a crucial influence on their engagement in the classroom. Hence Vansteenkiste (2010) suggests that psychological support is vital for students' competence, autonomy, relatedness and involvement by positively influencing their motivation and responsiveness in the school environment.

The VISs and students with special learning needs deserve not only consideration but also an appropriate support which can enable them to thrive academically in an inclusive learning environment. Papadatuo-Pastou et al. (2015) concede that a large proportion of students, experience psychological or study-skills-related difficulties which may deny them an attainment of good academic potential and enjoyment of their university life. Some of these experiences are life-threatening, leaving such students in despair and hopelessness. Hanass-Hancock (2014) concedes that academic support aims to address the psychosocial well-being of students in general, and that students are more at risk and vulnerable than others. The VISs need special consideration and support through their mainstreaming disability experience. They encounter multiple challenges regarding their human rights as they are the most excluded and marginalized groups. In this regard, they are robbed of their right to education and denied participation in their communities (UNICEF Canada, 2012).

Addressing the teaching and learning needs of each student with visual impairment and improving their overall accessibility are vital to their academic success. Every student is unique and interacts

and learns differently because much of what they learn is gained through vision. Supporting these students psychologically and socially can improve their level of competence, autonomy and relatedness with other students; this can result in increased motivation in their learning (Haakma, Janseen & Minnaert, 2018). Educators and the school management can support students by responding to their psychosocial needs by creating an enabling learning environment, and providing learning resources and psychosocial support. The provision of academic support and resources can enhance the participation of students in their academic activities, social functioning, social interaction and social development (Manitsa & Doikou, 2020). Habulezi and Phasha (2012) suggest that the provision of academic support to VIS requires class adaptation, adjustment and modifications, and curricular and pedagogical practices. My concurrence is that, students need support regardless of their status in all aspects of their education, including the academic, emotional and social demands of higher education (Milner, Cunningham, Murray and Alvarez, 2017).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) Article 24 constitutes the right to education as a right of children living with disabilities. Mizunoya, Mitra and Yamasaki (2016) indicate that the majority of education systems lack the human expertise and structural capital capable to respond to the specific learning needs of students with disabilities. This situation denies them their basic right to access quality education. Therefore, the social model and human right models of disability should be adopted to promote the view that disability is a result of social, attitudinal and environmental challenges and is more about disabling organisations and the environment which prevent access and integration into the education environment (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2014).

1.4. Problem statement

Scientific research is regarded as a critical exercise that can enable individuals, organisations and authorities to make decisive decisions on critical matters concerning them. In academia, research can be conducted because there is a gap that highlights particular issues which may lead to problem statements and research questions. Ajemba and Arene (2022) indicate that the research gap emanates from asking questions and discovering new things that need to be explored or developed based on past conducted research. All the gathered information and findings thereafter are deemed necessary to allow intervention where possible. I undertake that conducting educational research is a call to increase accountability in our academic sphere. I also regard such

exercise as a call for accountability that must come from both within and outside the school communities as outlined by Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010). The outside communities include parents, politicians and communities, while the inside communities are regarded as educators, school management and school communities. Through scientific research, researchers and educators are optimistic about obtaining accurate and reliable information about important issues facing the academic fraternity.

In Lesotho, researchers and educationists with research interests in disability studies, inclusive education, educational psychology and learner support are also investigating the critical matters on disabilities, inclusive of the education and special education needs in basic education. A few of these researchers focus on students in HEIs. This brings about the accountability of inside and outside communities to focus on basic education and thereby compromise accountability in higher education. I regard HEIs as essential public entities that strengthen the economy, social security, democracy and the quality of life. By so saying, HEIs are essentially established to improve the quality of life of people regardless of their socioeconomic status, disability, gender or race. This makes great relevance in making decisions on economic and social matters and in capacitating communities to increase employment opportunities and contribute to eliminating social exclusion (Morina, Mena & Carnerero, 2020). Therefore, HEIs must establish support services that place greater importance on meeting the expectations of their clients (students) to participate effectively in their learning (Kakada, Deshpande & Bisen 2019).

In over a decade now, much research on visual impairment in Lesotho focuses on learners' challenges, their experiences and inclusion in primary and secondary schools (Matobako & Jita, 2022; Matsie & Stofile, 2021; Khumalo & Khanare, 2021; Ralejoe, 2021; Ramatea & Khanare, 2021; Tseka, 2021; Phetoka; 2020; Mosia, 2014; Eriamiatoe, 2013; Matlosa & Matobo, 2007). A few researchers seem to have an interest in student disability and their support in higher education. After much reading and searching, I came across only a few publications (Masia & Pasha authored in 2017 and 2021; Matlosa & Matobo, 2007) focusing on student disability in higher education. These publications focus mainly on the experiences of students with disabilities and their access to HEIs. This implies that there is a gap in the literature on experiences of VISs and support services, student rights and how they are being appreciated or included in participating effectively in their learning. Secondly, the lack of confirmed or official records of VISs and other impairments in higher education also poses a challenge in the planning and provision of support. Croft (2020)

illustrates that VISs' experiences in higher education are an underrepresented area in the wider literature, with minimal research focusing on their learning experiences and support. It is against this brief background that the present study proposes to address a gap in knowledge and literature by exploring the experiences of VISs on the support services in HEIs of Lesotho.

For HEIs to live up to its obligations Lesotho's higher education policy stresses safeguarding and equitable access to HEIs for people with disabilities; it also guarantees that Lesotho lives up to its international obligations (MoET, 2013). Besides, the same policy reveals that much still needs to be done to support the visually impaired, physical and deaf students as there is a lack of specialised support for many. As a result, the students with physical, deaf and visual impairments are compromised. They do not fully participate effectively in their learning. The visual impairment may cause difficulties for students in executing their daily learning activities and thus compromise their studies (Matsie & Stofile, 2021). Along with that, researchers have observed that student support services are still a neglected area in HEIs. Students, administrators and management of institutions remember about it only when unrest prevails among students (Allen, 2020). That being the case, much research on the support of students with vision impairment must be conducted to guide our policymakers and leadership of HEIs. Such literature will be essential to allow researchers to identify critical factors that influence visually impaired students to use support services. Secondly, similar reviewed literature could be used to establish the form of support services available in HIEs. Lastly, the same literature could allow researchers and educationists to identify strategies that can improve support of student in HEIs. With this basis, VISs will be able to share their experiences and perceptions about support services. Because everyone has distinctive experiences in their context, the available literature would be important to establish if VISs are being celebrated, embraced and appreciated in HEIs.

With this in mind, multiple studies reviewed valuable insights into the potential effects and concerns of VISs in Lesotho's education institutions. The question of how HEIs support VISs, the factors influencing VISs to use SSS and the forms of support services available in such institutions remains unanswered, highlighting a need to fill a gap in knowledge and literature. Within the parameters of SSS and inclusion in higher education, I regard the lack of access to the literature as being a critical issue that must be addressed. This could be done by engaging and identifying how VISs are being appreciated and embraced as right holders of quality education and support who want to be loved and accepted.

1.5. Theoretical framework

Qualitative studies on visual impairment and academic support have taken different forms and are guided by different frameworks to explain and understand the experiences of students in academic institutions. I chose to approach this study by drawing on the experiences of VISs regarding support services in HEIs. I was also motivated by how the rights of VIS are being considered by support services and communities of academic institutions. I also find it essential to draw on how VISs describe, explain or account for the realities in HEIs. As a result, it is considered necessary to triangulate the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which would be flexible and liable to approach data analysis. The frameworks for this study were drawn whole-heartedly on philosophical underpinnings of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Human Rights Base Approach (HRBA)

1.5.1. Appreciative Inquiry

David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastava authored *The Appreciative Inquiry (AI)* in 1987 at the Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland Ohio. AI embraces the positive organisational approaches to development and collective learning. These scholars argued that organisations were used to be problem solvers and this eventually compromised any form of social improvement. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) authored AI as a new approach of inquiry to generate new ideas and models in corporate world. As a theory, AI is based on the assumption that every person has some unique talents and can sometimes do something right at times (Hlalele & Mashiya, 2018) when supported. The philosophical underpinning of AI in this thesis is to engage all related stakeholders within the education system in inquiry about what works in supporting VISs in their institutions. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) describe appreciation as valuing, affirming the past and strengths, successes and potentials, recognising the best in people and the world around them, and also perceiving the things that give life such as health, vitality and excellence to the living system.

The call for AI in this study is to allow students to share their experiences and to discover their perceptions about support services within their reach and how they are being celebrated, embraced and appreciated by HEIs. Through the lens of AI, everyone has distinctive experiences and must be recognized as a human being, sharing similar needs and wants such as being loved, appreciated, celebrated, and accepted (Alston-Mills, 2011). Bushe and Kassam (2005) state that AI has a

specific way of seeing things and describing it as a "generative metaphor". It means that VISs will be enabled to articulate their provocative discoveries and perceptions about support services and their future in HEIs. Students share their perceptions through the 4-D model of inquiry (*Discovery-appreciating what is, Dream-imagining what could be, Design-determining what should be, and Destiny-creating what will be*).

1.5.2. Human Rights-Based Approach

The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) assumes that all persons, including those with visual impairments and special needs, have inalienable rights. The HRBA also promotes the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which declares that “all human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity” (United Nations, 2015:4). In the context of education, it is unlawful to discriminate individuals against any form of disability and even offering limited support (Kendall, 2016). HEIs have a responsibility not to discriminate directly or indirectly against students with visual impairment. The HRBA advocates for the rights of persons to access quality education equally and to receive support services without being discriminated, against or marginalized. The United Nations Article 26 articulates that everyone has the right to education and education shall be free and compulsory at least in the elementary and fundamental stages (United Nations, 2015:54). The role of HRBA is to strengthen the learning opportunities for all persons, including the persons with visual impairment. It affirms that they certainly have inalienable rights (Centre for Consumer Action, 2011). Therefore, the aim of engaging HRBA in this study is to explore how HEIs and support services are coherent with and do not undermine the legal obligations to support, respect, protect and fulfil local and international conventions towards VISs.

As framed within the principles of AI and HRBA, it can be assumed that support of VISs and their experiences in HEI are often underpinned by broad and nebulous assumptions and uneven theoretical underpinning (Croft, 2020). It is through the lens of these theories that I find it eligible to explore their experiences, how far they are being appreciated and accepted by support services in their social reality and whether their rights are observed regardless of their disabilities.

1.6. Research objectives and questions

The following sub-section tabulates the research objectives and questions that inspired this study.

1.6.1. Main research objective

To explore experiences of visually impaired students regarding support services in higher education institutions in Lesotho.

1.6.2. Research objectives

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- 1) To explore the provisions made by student support services to enhance academic success of visually impaired students in higher education institutions in Lesotho.
- 2) To determine the factors that can influence visually impaired students to utilise support services in higher education institutions in Lesotho.
- 3) To determine the forms of support available to visually impaired students in higher education institutions in Lesotho.
- 4) To identify the strategies that can improve the provision of support for visually impaired students in higher education institutions of Lesotho.

1.6.3. The main research question for this study is

What are the experiences of visually impaired students regarding the support services in higher education institutions in Lesotho?

1.6.4. Subsidiary research questions

The subsidiary research questions for this study are as follows.

- 1) What provisions are made by student support services to ensure academic success of visually impaired students in higher education institutions?
- 2) What are the factors that influence visually impaired students to utilise support services in higher education institutions in Lesotho?
- 3) What forms of support are available for visually impaired students in higher education institutions in Lesotho?
- 4) What strategies can be recommended to the improve provision of support to visually impaired students?

1.7. Significance and innovation of the study

This study explored and provided an overview of VISS experiences on students support services in two HEIs in Lesotho. The study was intended to critically unpack how support services impact on

academic success and to identify the factors that lead VISs to use these services. The study was also intended to explore how HEIs support students with visual impairment and create a learning environment for them.

The significance of this study is thus viewed from different attributes which include a scholarly point of view, policy development, practitioners' engagement, a community of students, and theoretical perspectives.

1.7.1. Scholarly viewpoint

From the researchers' point of view, this study is important because it may establish the experiences of VISs in HEIs. It may also establish the receptions that the students receive and whether their rights are observed while they use different support services on campus. The philosophy of engaging support services and determining the experiences of visually impaired student needs to be considered in the teaching and learning setting. The current study may also motivate other researchers and to find it fit to investigate issues surrounding students support services in other levels of education and for other students with other special education needs in different contexts.

1.7.2. Significance for Policy development

This study also focused on how the authorities can be engaged to address the experiences and factors that either impede or support the VISs in favour of the enabling learning environment in HEIs. The policymakers are in a position to develop the legislations that create an enabling learning environment for all the students regardless their health or social status. Therefore, this research work may influence policymakers and other relevant stakeholders to find it necessary to incorporate appropriate support based on the existing psychological and social experiences of VISs and other student communities in HEIs.

1.7.3. Significance for practitioners

Professionals such as educational psychologists, psychiatrists, students support services staff and educationists may be aware of the concerns, challenges and experiences of VISs in HEIs. In addition, this study may contribute to the field of educational psychology and inclusive education by improving the efficiency of students' support services and inclusion of VISs and students with other disabilities.

1.7.4. Significance for the community of students with visual impairment

The focus of this study is on educational matters that have an effect on the academic success of VISs in the higher learning institutions environment. This study may therefore raise the awareness and provide advocacy for students with visual impairment and their rights to education and citizenship. Such students may know if they have a right to access quality education despite their status. The significance of the study for students with visual impairment is that they may need parents and schools communities to support them to thrive academically. This study may provide an overview of the perceptions and experiences of VISs about support services.

1.7.5. Significance of the study for the theoretical framework

The theoretical engagement in this study is significant because it shows the basis of the contribution of the theory to the body of knowledge and how it fits in the field of education and its traditions and practices. The mandate of the United Nations and its allies is clear in protecting the rights of students with visual impairment and advocating for inclusive education in Lesotho and other countries of the world in creating enabling learning environment. Theoretically, this study may establish how VISs in HEIs are appreciated and embraced by the student community, the support staff and the administration of the institution. The body of knowledge may exemplify the importance of support services in HEIs.

1.8. Research methodology and design

This sub-section briefly highlights the research design, paradigm and data collection instruments, trustworthiness and data analysis, as applied in this study.

1.8.1. Methodology

This qualitative research study was intended to attain a deep understanding of VISs' experiences through an in-depth qualitative exploratory approach that facilitated finding quality responses (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). The focus of this study is based on daily experiences of VISs where two HEIs were targeted as the sites of the study. A qualitative research study gathers participants' behaviour, experiences or perceptions focusing on the hows and the whys of the research questions. At its core, Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger (2020) illustrate that qualitative research is able to explain the processes and patterns of participants' behaviour, attitudes and experiences and to explain why, what or how they feel.

The study participants included VISs and the different officials of SSS in the two sample institutions. As a significant process, data collection entails in-depth interviews, observations and narratives which brought about the richness and depth of the data within the real world of VISs (Njie and Asimiran, 2014). The two Lesotho higher education sample institutions included a college and a university as the research study sites. Each institution was presented with its rich history and background since Lesotho gained independence¹ from Britain. Detailed demographic information on the participants, and a description and background of the two education institutions are articulated in chapter four of the study report.

1.8.2. Research design

This qualitative study adopted the Phenomenological Research Design to manage its data gathering processes. Pathak (2018) points out that the Phenomenological Research Design (PRD) attempts to understand the participants' perceptions, understanding and perspectives towards a particular phenomenon. On the other hand Creswell (2013) points out that PRD examines participants' experiences by providing descriptive information where little knowledge is available. At its core, PRD investigates the daily experiences of the participants to learn and understand the meaning and interpretation they make of their experiences and others. The phenomenological design allows the researcher to acquire an understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon. The goal of the use of PRD in this study was to enable me gain an understanding on diverse experiences (Bliss, 2016) of visually towards support services in two HEIs of Lesotho.

1.8.3. Research paradigm

The set of ideas, beliefs, values, and assumptions of the Interpretivism paradigm were adopted to gain an understanding of the experiences of VISs on the support services in HEIs. Interpretivism was considered as the approach to follow on how to conduct this research study including its patterns, structure, scientific system and academic ideas, assumptions and values (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). It assisted me to understand the subjective world of VISs' experiences. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) assert that interpretivists assume that reality is subjective and can differ considering different individuals. They are interested in giving some meaning to the individuals to understand other humans, their realities and that the society they live in (Pulla & Carter, 2018). Antwi and Hamza (2015) concede that interest of Interpretivists is to understanding

¹ Lesotho was under British colonial since 1868 and gained independence on the 04th October 1966. After 1966, Lesotho experienced a lot development in different sectors including education, trade and health.

the world from the participants' subjective experiences. This study has investigated the experiences of VISs towards the available support services in their institutions. Therefore, incorporating the Interpretivist perspectives and values in this study has helped me to establish the participants' realities, what they make of their world and how interacting with them has shed new knowledge about their academic journey and success.

1.8.4. Data collection tools

In-depth Interviews, narratives and observation were used as the data collection instruments to identify the experiences of VISs concerning the support services available in HEIs.

1.8.4.1. In-depth Interviews

The interview guide consisted of open-ended (or semi-structured) questions which were customized depending on the situation of each participant and the prevailing situation. Shawkat and Parveen (2017) indicate that the benefit of using open-ended questions is that it allows the researcher to develop a rapport with the participants, making them feel comfortable and welcome as they share their experiences regarding the support services in HEIs. The body language and expressions of each participant were also observed and noted. Moreso, during data gathering process I was able to write field notes as the necessary information for events and observations. Also, I used an audio recorder electronic device to record the interview sessions to minimize bias in generating the transcripts and to ensure rigour and validity in this qualitative research (Truong, 2021).

Since this study focused on exploring not only the students' experiences but also the support services available in HEIs, interviews were considered crucial to discovering the interconnectivity in a common context (Truong, 2021). The interview sessions enabled me to observe verbal and non-verbal cues about the mood of the participants. Semi-structured interview questions do not only allow participants to express their views and to describe the situations, events or experiences, but they are valuable when little is known about the phenomenon under investigation (Truong, 2021).

1.8.4.2. Observation

The process of observation entails watching the life and the behaviour of participants in their environment, by recording their social interaction, conduct or actions in their context (Lopez &

Whitehead, 2017). Observation protocol was used to detect the support that VISs receive in different support services on the campus, the approach and attitude of the officials offering the services and the response of such students. This study engaged a structured/direct observation and the researcher's observations were recorded against the designed checklist. I also adopted the complete observer method in this study. The complete observer is confined to “only observe and not interact with participants” approach. However, I revealed my status to visually impaired participants while orientating them to this study. The complete observer method demands ethical considerations if the observer does not reveal the participants are being observed (Lopez & Whitehead, 2017). I also recorded field notes once I arrived at the site of the research study.

1.9. Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed five principles to ensure qualitative research design are sustain the value and superiority of the study under research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). These five principles confirm and uphold various quality assurance standards from different disciplines and philosophical underpinnings. The credibility, conformability, reflexivity, dependability and transferability were used to safeguard the trustworthiness of this study. Each of these principles will be discussed in detail in Section 4.7 in Chapter Four.

1.9.1. Crystallisation

The use of multiple and various research methods, literature sources and theories enhances the collaboration and application of research findings and exhibit in the research study (Thomas, 2017; Anney, 2014). Gilbert and Stoneman (2016) point out that triangulation cross-examines respondents from diverse backgrounds to reduce bias and to obtain information from various sources and to verify such information through numerous research approaches. Multiple research methods were used to investigate a similar identified problem. The use of similar methods could bring diversity of the investigation and strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. Participation of VISs and support services officials was considered as a strategy to reduce bias for the researcher to obtain information from different sources. Triangulation is regarded by Korstjens and Moser (2018) as a way of handling different sorts of data to respond to the researchers' questions. To attain credible findings, observations and interviews were triangulated to enhance the quality of the collected data participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

1.10. Data analysis

The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was engaged in this study to explore how experiences of VISs towards available SSS in HEIs impacts on their academic success. The application of IPA also allowed the researcher to establish whether students with vision impairment were appreciated and accepted by the higher education communities. The IPA provides the researcher an opportunity to explore how participants make meaning of their social experiences from an inter-subjective perspective (Allan & Eatough, 2016; Tuffour, 2017). With IPA, the researcher was completely immersed in the gathered data to step into the participants' shoes while making sense of it. The analysis allowed the researcher to appreciate each participant regardless of his or her role in the research study.

To conduct the Interpretivism phenomenological analysis of qualitative data, Smith and Nizza (2021) suggests that the researcher must adopt the following steps;

- a) Develop, read and explore the list of significant statements by grouping information into large units (data coding process or themes),
- b) Formulate experiential statements to describe textural experiences of participants (writing a description of what the participants in the study experienced in the phenomena),
- c) Finding connections on participants experiences (describing how participants experiences occurred and reflecting on the context in which the phenomenon was experienced) and,
- d)The researcher must compile a written mini statement or paragraphs that inform the reader or audience about participants' experiential themes based on what each participant has experienced in his or her given contextual format.

1.11. Value of the proposed research

The study has explored and provided an overview of how identified student support services impacted on the academic success of VISs in HEIs. It was intended to critically unpack the forms of support available for VISs, how their needs are accommodated and how their rights are observed in creating an enabling learning environment.

1.12. Ethical considerations and research governance

Negrin, et al., (2022) concedes that human participation is critical in qualitative research when the researcher is intending to yield comprehensive information from the participants in their environment. Before the field work and data collection began, researchers are obliged to discuss informed consent with participants. In this phase I obtained formal access by sharing information and soliciting the individuals' consent to participate in this study. The informed consent for human participants is an essential part of the research endeavour whereby their human rights must be protected (Dankar, Gergely, & Dankar, 2019). To comply with the ethical consideration of the University of the Free State, I obtained ethical clearance and consent from the two HEIs and participants. The ethical considerations adopted in this study is based on the seven principles of 1947 Nuremberg Code of Ethics. They are informed consent, free from coercion, voluntary participation, avoidance of harm, justification of the potential benefits and necessity of the research adequate protection of participants and proportionate risks and the capabilities of the researcher (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2016)

1.13. Clarification of operating concepts

Multiple operating concepts were clarified to guide the reader in the context of this study. Clarification of these concepts plays an important role in educational research. Clarification of operating concepts do not just involve concepts and their definitions, but rather influences all aspects of the research, from measurement, application, research methods and how to answer research questions (Bringman, Elmer & Eronen, 2022). The following six concepts are clarified to enhance the elements of applying theories, research methods, data collection interpretation (Scheel et al., 2021)

Impairment – a loss or limitation of physical, mental or sensory function on a long-term or permanent basis. Impairment is an abnormality of physiological, psychological or anatomical structure or functioning of some body parts ICIDH (2001).

Disability – it is the limitation or loss of opportunities for a person to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal basis or level with others due to physical and social barriers. Disability is regarded as a restriction or lack of ability to the perform activity within a range or manner which is considered as normal by human beings. The inability of a person due to impairment may lead a person to be unable to carry out certain activities considered for age or sex which thus results in disability (ICIDH). In the context of this study, disability denotes the

impairments, limitations and restrictions that a person with an eye conditions faces in the course of interacting with his or her physical or social environment.

Visual impairment – when a person has an eye condition, he/she will experience vision impairment or blindness caused by environmental barriers which are likely to lead in limitations in everyday functioning. Visual impairment encompasses various characteristics due to how different authors define it. These characteristics include limited sight, blurred vision, squint eyes or tunnel vision which cannot be corrected by wearing spectacles (WHO, 2019). Visual impairment is regarded as a loss of vision or decreased ability to see to the degree that causes problems which cannot be corrected with spectacles. Visual impairment is defined as the best corrected visual acuity of worse than 20/40 or 20/60 by World Health Organisation. Visual acuity of the eye is an index of the sharpness or clearness of vision which is measured by requiring a person to identify symbols on a chart at a distance.

Table 1: The classification of severity of vision impairment based on vision acuity in the better eye (source: WHO on vision report)

Category	Visual acuity in the better eye	
	Worse than	Equal to or better than
Mild vision impairment	6/12	6/18
Moderate vision impairment	6/18	6/60
Severe vision impairment	6/60	3/60
Blindness	3/60	—
Near vision impairment	N6 or M 0.8 at 40cm	—

The vision impairment occurs when a person experiences an eye condition that affect the visual system and one or some of its vision functions (WHO, 2019). In this study visual impairment refers to partial sightedness, low vision, legal blindness or total blindness as used in an academic setting. Low vision and legal blindness are based on measurements of a person’s visual acuity and visual field. A person is regarded as having low vision when he/she has visual acuity of 20/70 to 20/200 in the better eye after wearing eyeglasses or contact lenses. Legal blindness is defined as visual acuity of less than 20/200 in the better eye after correction or visual field less than 20.

Students support services (SSS) - In higher education, SSS are a cluster of departments or facilities of services that provide academic, emotional and social support for students in higher education. These services serve as interface to students to enhance their growth and development to ensure academic success. These services are rendered by the institution as a mechanism that supports students to learn effectively (Essel, Tachie-Menson & Owusu, 2016). Provision of SSS depends on adequate number of professional staff which includes a holistic approach based on the needs and demands of different students and their specific characteristics. They comprise tutoring, counselling, academic skills development and various special programmes that serve students who are have special learning needs

High education institution - The Lesotho Higher education policy (2013) orders that a higher education institution is any academic entity that provide courses or programmes at post-COSC or high school level regardless of whether it is a public or private institution as declared by the Higher education act of 2004, section 18 and 37 respectively. Such an institution must be registered with the Ministry of education and training as an academic institution.

Experiences – the experiences of students with vision impairment differ depending on their personal circumstances, availability of learning resources as well as intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. More often, experiences of VISs within higher education are underpinned by broad and vague perceptions of campus community about vision impairment. These include attitude and behaviour of campus community, treatment, and availability of teaching and learning resources, enabling learning environment, access and availability of assistive learning aids, lecturers approach and the role and impact of support staff. Mosia and Phasha (2020) illustrate that student experiences consist of academic activities and participation as well as emotional and social support of students at their disposal. Their experiences encompass students’ development based on their academic and emotional aspects which can enhance the quality of education

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0. Introduction

After setting the tone and layout of this thesis in the previous chapter, this second chapter focuses on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform and guide this study. Whether focused on individual student development, campus environment, student learning, student engagement or institutional functioning or student status, these two frameworks attempted to explain complex phenomena relating to the experiences of visually impaired students (VISs) in higher education institutions (HEIs).

2.1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

“There is nothing as practical as a good theory” (Lewin, 1945).

Both conceptual and theoretical frameworks give life to a research study. They are regarded as the backbone of every research study. The conceptual framework is defined by Mensah (2020) as a structure by which researchers’ beliefs can appropriately define the nature of the phenomenon under study. It is regarded as the overall alignment and association of critical issues that form the underlying thinking, practices, plans and structures that lead to the implementation of the research study (Mensah, 2020). Generally, a conceptual framework is the overall, sound positioning organisation of all the factors that form the fundamental structures, plans and practices and how the entire research study is implemented (Chukwuere, 2021). The theoretical framework is viewed by Grant and Osanloo (2014) as the blueprint for the thesis structure and the basis through which knowledge is constructed. Swanson (2013) and Troudi (2010) indicate that the theoretical framework serves as the structure and support for the rationale of the research under study, its problem statement, significance and research questions. Furthermore, some researchers point out that the theoretical framework is engaged to understand the theories and concepts used in the study and how they relate to the body of knowledge under scrutiny (Heale & Noble, 2019; Adom, et al., 2016). In this study, I found it necessary to deploy the Appreciative inquiry (AI) as a theoretical framework that guides me to underpin the significance of the support services and how VISs are accepted, appreciated and celebrated by institutions of higher education and intertwine and incorporate it with HRBA. The human rights-based approach (HRBA) as a conceptual framework incorporates the views and experiences of VISs and their right to receive appropriate support from available support services in their institutions.

The conceptual and theoretical frameworks of this thesis are a bricolage of the theories that provide a set of interconnecting concepts, definitions and propositions that present logic in a researched phenomenon. They also stipulate the relationship of different variables to clarify and envisage the phenomenon under study (Balfour, 2012). These frameworks are engaged to explain, predict and understand the experiences of visually impaired students as the variables and the support services as a phenomenon in HEIs. These theories also challenge the existing knowledge, within the limits of the critical bounding assumptions (Chukwuere, 2021).

My decision to engage in AI was primarily informed by its stance to discover the best in people, their organisations, and the context in which they live and work. As such, AI assumes that every person has some unique talents and can do something right sometimes (Hlalele & Mashiya, 2018). It also allows people to focus on things that work by using positive thinking, imagery, strengths and successes, and moving away from weaknesses and failures ((Fynn, 2013; Howieson, 2011; Myender & Hlalele, 2018). In social organisations, AI is regarded as an approach used by the management to focus on identifying and developing what works rather than trying to fix what is not working. Therefore, I concur with Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) that AI is an action research inquiry designed to place participants in a fundamental positive stance, allowing them to identify their achievements and to think deeply about their potential.

Conversely, the integration of the Human rights-based approach as a conceptual framework is inspired by its stance to advocate for the rights of persons to access quality education equally, without any form of discrimination or marginalisation. Several researchers uphold that HRBA is an approach to monitoring educational initiatives and support programmes which hold the right bearers, policymakers and academic institutions accountable for their commitments and also to empower the rights holders, VISs to know and claim their rights to education (Liyanage, 2017; Njelesani, Cleaver, Tataryn & Nixon, 2012). The HRBA is based on the assumption that all the persons including those with visual impairment and special needs have inalienable rights. With this note, I concur that HRBA thus promotes the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which declares that “all human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity”.

2.1.1. Appreciative Inquiry

Adopting appreciative inquiry (AI) in this study was to avoid focusing largely on problems that exist in higher education (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Various opportunities are offered by AI to 'identify good practice or "what worked" for students (Discovery), to imagine their situation at its best (Dream), to allow

them to voice their suggestions for the way forward (Design)', to empower and instigate change (Destiny) (Clouder & King, 2015).

Engaging AI in this study was not intended to solve problems of the VISs in HEIs, but to search for what works, to set concrete tools and strategies for developing a positive relationship between VISs and support services in HEIs, and to focus on the positive instead of the problems and how they can be solved. This can be done through the innumerable success stories of individual students within the institutions of higher education. These stories are embedded with the excitement, creativity, pride, pain and hope of individual students in their revered institutions. I view AI as an approach followed to move away from defining and identifying all the situations and experiences as problems. Instead, AI helps us to focus towards trusting what has worked with the support services in the past and what works, rather than trying to fix what does not work in supporting the VISs.

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes”

Marcel Proust

The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was authored by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastava in 1987 at the Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland Ohio. They were then joined by academics such as Barrett, Bright, Bushe, Carter, Johnson, Ludema, Powley, Sekerka, Stavros and Thatchenkery among others. AI stems from the social constructionist theory and the perspectives of positive organisational scholars and organisational development. These scholars argued that organisations were used to solve problem and this eventually compromised any form of social improvement. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) point out that AI was authored as a new approach to inquiry to assist in generating new ideas and models. However, Bushe (2012) indicates that the authors of AI wanted people to focus on and understand the philosophy behind AI as an approach and not a technique. Hence Eow et al. (2010) regards AI as a theory-guided by models, principles and beliefs and how human systems work and embrace humanity. Cooperrider and Srivastava (1987) comment that institutions are socially constructed realities shaped by the forms of inquiry and effectiveness of AI in educational research is by focusing on strengths to build the capacity of members of such institutions.

AI is grounded in social constructionism theory which underpins that we live in worlds of meanings and social organisations that are imagined and made by human beings (Mohr, Kelly & Watkins, 2011). McAfdams (2001) speculate that a human being understands and values the world and others in ways that

emerge from our personal history and shared cultures. Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2020) concede that AI works to find possibilities within an organisation and can rest upon social constructionism to foster stronger, more compassionate, fairer and more inclusive inquiries. Initially, AI was largely used in corporate and non-profit organizations to increase productivity, workforce compatibility, efficiency and customer care and satisfaction while other researchers found it appropriate to apply AI to the health (Moorer et. al., 2017; May et al., 2011) and education sectors (Alston-Mills, 2011; Eowa, Zahb, Rosnaini & Roselan, 2010; Miller & Katz, 2002). In defining AI, Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) describe appreciation as valuing and recognising the best in people or the world around them, affirming the past and strengths, successes and potentials, and also perceiving the things that give life such as health, vitality and excellence to the living system. In addition to the above explanation, Ahmed (2018) defines appreciative as an action word that looks for what enables organizations to exist and thrive rather than looking for weaknesses and problems. Appreciation is also said to increase the value, prize, esteem and honour of individuals and organizations. Furthermore, AI assumes that every person has some unique talents and can sometime do something right (Hlalele & Mashiya, 2019). To inquire is described as the act of systematic exploration and discovery by asking questions and studying, being open to seeing new potentials and possibilities in individuals and organisations (Eow et al., 2010). Inquiry is regarded as "inquiry" because it relies mostly on close collaboration with members of the organisations as the primary source of information by drawing out participants' stories in their respective institutions (Ahmed, 2018).

The authors and practitioners of AI (Barrett, Bright, Bushe, Carter, Cooperider, Johnson, Ludema, Powley, Sekerka, Stavros, Thatchenkery and Whitney) initially set and base their perspective on a model that entails a 4-D cycle, These are the four phases named Discovery (*appreciating what is*), Dream (*imagining what could be*), Design (*determining what should be*) and Destiny (*creating what will be*). However, another phase was added by other researchers, being Defined at the beginning of the model, making it a 5D cycle (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins Magruder et al., 2011). Each phase is guided by its assumptions to translate images into possibilities, intentions into realities and beliefs into practice (Eow, et al., 2010).

2.1.1.1. Modelling Appreciative inquiry

The define phase is the beginning of the process of appreciation and inquiry to take root in the 5D model. Priest et al. (2013) indicates that the define phase is critical as it chooses and clarifies the focus of what needs to be investigated. This phase aims to emphasise and build on support services and experiences of students with visual impairment in HEI as a phenomenon. Students are expected to define their concerns and

experiences in the form of topics that need exploration and their expectations about support services in HEIs (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2018). As they define their experiences and how essential they are, my stance is to establish and acknowledge how support services acknowledge VISs, how they value, appreciate and regard them as important members of their academic institutions. Hammond (1996) emphasised that the Define phase is the crucial step in the AI process because it focuses on how our realities become and the act of asking questions can influence others in some way in a group.



Figure 1: Appreciative Inquiry 5-D model (*Source: Davidcooperrider.com, 2019*)

Secondly, the Discovery phase involves the process of valuing things that are worth doing for the participants (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). Interviews, dialogues, observations and conversations are used to facilitate different forms of discovery and exploring the experiences of VISs on support services in HEIs. The discovery phase aims to pursue and appreciate what gives life and energy to persons and organisations (van der Haar, & Hosking, 2004). During this phase, VISs are at liberty to reflect on their experiences and discuss their concerns about support services. Through interviews, visually impaired students are expected to relate their experiences in different sectors of SSS; reflect on the best aspects of support services, and or factors that impede or improve their academic success and how their rights are considered and respected, and to establish factors that require them to utilise support services on the campus.

The third phase of AI is Dream, where participants can envisage and imagine the possibilities in their organisations. Eow et al. (2010) presume that naturally, the mind begins to imagine and envision the untapped potentials of individuals and organisations. This is done through passionate and critical thinking, and positive images of the desires and the desired (Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2012). At this stage, participants are asked to share their views and imaginations about how and where they wish to see themselves, where they wish their organisations to be and to identify their own aspirations (Bushe, 2012). Therefore, the role of support services is to be useful to VISs to envision their strengths and compensate for their shortfalls (Rao, 2015). As a result, whatever experiences VISs have in HEI, their visions and strengths are critical in co-creating their desired future.

It is in this situation that VISs are enabled to “think out of the box” and envisage a future they want by co-creating a vision of themselves and their institutions (Breslow, 2015). With the assistance and guidance of support services, VIS can share their aspirations and imaginations the about factors that improve or impede their academic success and strategies that can be used to improve their academic support. The dream phase considers the practicality and possibilities that support services can offer, based on students' experiences and challenges in HEIs. This can be done by using the data gathered from the interviews in discovery to elicit the key issues that emerged (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). Hence Giles and Kung (2010) regard this phase as intentionally generative because this is where students can imagine their future and what it would look like if their experiences and concerns were sincerely addressed and considered by support services.

Once the participant's dreams and imaginations are in order, the participants then design and engage in the work of co-constructing the system and the future that they want. Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) concede that students are engaged to design their possibilities and the ideal institution they feel is capable of magnifying and realizing their dreams. VISs are empowered to act and achieve what they envisaged in the previous phase. In the design stage the participants' curiosity is triggered to explore beyond what they have in hand to facilitate self-development and discover their untapped potential as well as realise their dreams. This phase is defined by Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2008) as social architecture for the organization. To construct the organisation we want, all the elements are brought together to construct the organisation that we want. As the implementation of dreams occurs in the design phase, the emphasis shifts from dreaming to co-constructing the future that the VISs want. The process is conducted through a widespread dialogue about the nature of structures and processes to be erected in the organization.

With the guidance of the support services, institutional management and other stakeholders are required to create an enabling learning environment for VISs, to act and achieve their dreams in this phase. Hammond

(1996) points out that design is the decision-making phase where decision-makers and students use convergent thinking to draw plans to achieve the envisioned future for their institution and its students. I undertake that all the discovered experiences and concerns which were gathered through interviews and observation are explored and addressed. The VISs are allowed to create bold statements of possibility for the ideal institution. They also enlist multiple experiences that they have in the different sectors that support students and how they enact a positive core (Priest et al., 2013). All the listed factors must be designed to facilitate support for students in expanding their self-development and capabilities, allowing them to realise their dreams (Eow et al., 2010).

The last phase, destiny, is the conclusion of the discovery, dream and design phases. As an on-going process, the destiny phase allows a continuing dialogue and open discussion where all stakeholders will contribute to the realization of the vision of the institution and its members (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros (2008). Ahmed (2018) indicates that the destiny phase yields action plans that pose questions like “what will be” to achieve the designed vision statement and sustained images of the future.

The destiny phase is based on the assumption that once a consensus is reached by the relevant stakeholders, participants can make self-chosen and personal commitments to consistently act on their visualised designs (Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2012). The VISs and management of the institution and support staff can be engaged in a dialogue on issues that concern the academic success of VISs and how they can be supported (Lourens & Swartz, 2016). This can be strengthened by the support, guidance and capabilities of the support services by focusing on the experiences and visions of VISs. Eow et al. (2010) point out that the destiny phase enables the participants to reflect on how they are going to empower their discovered and enlisted academic experiences, skills and knowledge. Furthermore, participants are encouraged to look beyond the current situation, needs and yearnings. Bushe (2012) grants that strengthening and capacitating the entire education system can enable such a system to build hope and a purpose to create efficient supporting structures for learning, adjustment and creativity.

In the destiny phase, the VISs are at liberty to construct and implement their vision, and to articulate the support that they want based on their experiences. Such students are guided by support staff and lecturers in building long-term hope and momentum in their life (Eow et al., 2010). In a nutshell, all intentions, interactions, experiences and visions are practically developed in the form of an action plan. Bushe (2011) concedes that all the designed statements are sought; the plan is orchestrated where students and school authorities make commitments to act consistently with the designed element in this phase. In this situation,

all the concerned parties are authorised to take the actions that they believe can help the design to fruition. The destiny phase strengthens the affirmative capabilities of VISs by focusing on development and innovation and by assisting students to build long-term hope and momentum in their academic voyage (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2018). As a result, support in different stages of enrolment is essential for the academic success of VISs.

2.1.1.2. Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

For more than a decade, authors of AI such as David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastava have been avoiding designing a specific method to guide this theory. They articulated a set of principles to inquire appreciatively. As a complex philosophical approach, AI engages the entire system in an inquiry about what works through its principles (Buchanan, 2015) which have been influential statements which were widely accepted in different social organizations (Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1987). The theoretical underpinning of the principles in this thesis is to resonate and explore how the academic experiences of VISs on support services impact their academic success in order to embrace the processes and structures that work, instead of dwelling on what does not work in HEIs. These principles are used by researchers and practitioners to guide their practice to investigate dynamics in social organisations (Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006). In this regard, these principles are intended to bring about strategies that can improve the support of VISs in HEIs. The principles of AI are incorporated in the AI 5-D model.

The principles of AI are the Constructivist principle, Simultaneity principle, Poetic principle, Anticipatory principle, and Positive principle. Johnston (2008) indicates that the first and second principles bring energy or life to individuals or organizations in the social setting to bring reality. Let me point out that adopting these principles is not a quick-fix process, but a matter of developing new habits as I explore the experiences of VISs on support services in HEIs. Also, these principles as propounded by Cooperrider and Srivastava in 1987 are meant to link theoretical development and practical experiences of participants in their organisations. Again, these principles encourage those who have been traditionally subjugated within their institutions to participate fully in the dialogue of inquiry (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2020).

2.1.1.2.1. The Constructivist principle

“Words create worlds”.

The constructivist principle is based on the notion that members of organisations create realities through conversations and interaction. Hlalele and Mashiya (2019) point out that there are multiple realities which are constructed through social interaction, allowing members of the organisation to agree on how they view

their world. Through interviews, students were allowed to share their stories about the available support services on their campuses. However, the interaction and conversations between the VISs and support services can reinforce or change reality through hope, or fears about the past, the present and the future that they want about their institutions. This can lead to how they behave or react to what is happening in their social institutions (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2001).

The purpose of the inquiry in AI is viewed as inseparable and intertwined with the action in the creation of a theory about future possibilities in the social organisations. Bushe and Kassam (2012) point out that as organisations are socially constructed and co-constructed realities emerge through interaction and conversations. The emphasis on social organisations is that a socially constructed reality is an on-going dynamic process as people are allowed to respond and interpret what is happening around them (Macpherson, 2015). Through positive questions asked about support services in HEIs, students and support services staff will be engaged in the inquiry process about their experiences and focus on articulating a desirable future (Tosati, Lawthong & Suwanmonkha, 2014; Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2005). Therefore, the experiences of VISs will determine the point of action on how support services are impacting their academic success.

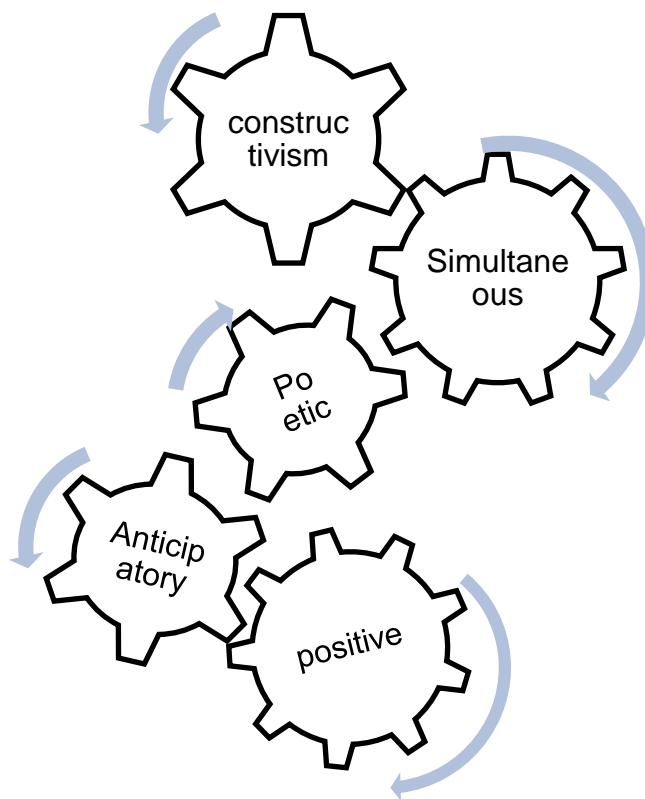


Figure 2: Principles of Appreciative inquiry (*Source: Davidcooperrider.com, 2019*)

2.1.1.2.2. Simultaneity principle

“Inquiry is change”

The simultaneity principle recognises that inquiry and change are not separate, they happen simultaneously (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2001). This principle acknowledges that participants must spend considerable time and effort to identify what the inquiry is about and focus on critical issues that need special consideration (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). My responsibility as a researcher is to inquire about the experiences of VISs and to explore the support services and what needs to be adjusted or changed to meet their academic needs. Macpherson (2015) grants that inquiry and change are not separate, because what people think and talk about is the basis of what they wish to do. This inquiry can lead to a conversation about the prospects and the possible future that they wish to construct.

Croft (2020) illustrates that the experiences of VISs in HEIs are often fortified by vague assumptions about their disability and are eventually positioned within a disabling narration and uneven terrain to negotiate. From an AI viewpoint, my stance is to inquire about vague assumptions and how others view or narrate visual impairment, VISs' experiences and how support services impact their academic success. Watkins, Mohr and Kelly (2005) point out that the words and questions that we ask set a stage for what we find and discover and that what we find creates stories that lead to conversations about how organisations and members construct the future that they dream of. Dovestone and Keenaghan (2006) maintain that the researcher must carefully construct affirmative questions that can allow all the participants to identify and reflect on the areas for growth and development. AI theorists maintain that the moment a researcher asks a question is a fateful time that thrive change (Buchanan, 2015). As a result, from the moment a researcher poses questions about the support services and HEIs, change is effected and the emerging information thus forms the basis for change.

2.1.1.2.3. Poetic principle

“What we focus on grows”

The co-authors of AI define the poetic principles by using a metaphor in describing organisations as “open books”. A story of any social organisation can be constantly authored or co-created by members of that particular organisation. Several AI practitioners (Bushe, 2011; Coperrider & Whitney, 2005; Witkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011; Fry, Barret, Seiling & Whitney, 2002) indicate that social organisations are open books,

where their members can virtually study and discuss any topic that affects them. Their discussion is not only about facts but also about feelings and affections that members experience in their organisations (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011). As members of organisations share their experiences, Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2008) illustrate that this is a never-ending fountain of learning, inspiration or interpretation of endless possibilities. Therefore, the poetic principle affirms the value of listening to and sharing stories of VISs and their shared experiences, values and aspirations so that they can feel part of the higher education community (Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006).

In the poetic principle, AI practitioners view narration and interview as valuable aspects of the process of inquiry because they are a way of gathering holistic information about administrative issues, membership and processes in an organisation. Therefore, this inquiry allows me an opportunity to gather views and stories of VISs when they reveal their experiences and encounters towards support services in HEIs. The purpose of the present research study is to inquire about how support services affect the academic success of VISs, and how these students interpret their experiences in HEIs. Priest et al. (2013) state that there are endless choices for the focus of topics for an inquiry and the poetic principle affirms the value of listening to such stories and sharing them with the concerned members of the organisation. I, therefore, support Hlalele and Mashiya (2019) in their view that individual stories are continually a product of the narration by individual members of the organisation and how they interact with each other.

2.1.1.2.4. Anticipatory Principle

“Image inspires action”

The anticipatory principle suggests that the image of a social organisation is a powerful tool in mobilizing the behaviour of its members (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Organisations and people have a tendency of expanding in the direction of their positive images for the future. What people believe and envision can be accomplished and possibly and constantly be shaped by their conversations about it (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly (2005). By focusing on the future, rather than the past, the conception of the anticipatory principle is that the future the VISs anticipate is the future that they create. Organisations and their members must clearly articulate compelling images of how they wish to succeed instead of imagining the impossibilities (Conklin & Hartman, 2014). Focusing on what members want and anticipate has more significant advantages than what does not work. The VISs imagine or anticipate a positive future which will guide them towards their desired vision (Hlalele & Mashiya, 2019). They move away from their fears and unfavourable experiences. When VISs anticipate positive outcomes about their academic success, efforts and capabilities of support services, this principle gives assurance that they will receive positive outcomes.

2.1.1.2.5. Positive principle

The positive principle is based on the assumption that organisations and people must focus on the positive elements that already exist in a given situation, appreciating and building on them (Ahmed, 2018). These elements include a positive attitude, positive emotions, serenity, amusement, a positive approach, hope, aspirations and sheer joy (Alson-Mills, 2011). It is believed that a positive approach to any issue is valid as a basis for learning. The positive outlook and words that we say in our communities and or academic institutions can widen our thinking, which can be built up over time and banked to create a protective reservoir (Kamarzarin & Hosseini, 2019). In this regard, AI seeks to build and expand positive aspects of support services that exist in HEIs in ways that allow for integrity and positive initiatives that focus on the true, the good, bettering and possibilities for VISs. Watkins, Mohr and Kelly (2011) conclude that a positive question has power in promoting and building social bonding in organisations. Any form of inquiry strengthens peoples' relationships and increases positive emotions and positive feelings which inspire people for resilience flexibility, integrative, open-minded to information, creative and critical in thinking (Bushe, 2011).

In social organisations, the positive principle is espoused to create energy and hope. These organisations are viewed as affirmative systems which respond best to positive thoughts and knowledge that exist within such organisations (Cooperrider, 2008). Through the lens of positive principle, AI recognises the unique qualities of VISs, by appreciating and embracing them as human beings, sharing similar educational needs, experiences, aspirations and goals with others. This is done by focusing on how support services effectively embrace and appreciate VISs as part of the larger community of HEIs. For this reason, academic institutions must be built on a positive core, with a positive attitude as an initiative that values differences and embraces diversity with the positive language that people speak and the positive questions that they ask. This initiative pursues to enhance the fundamental values of academic institutions and their members to think beyond the boundaries of external differences which stem from positive emotions and relationships (Alson-Mills, 2011).

Guided by hope and positive thinking, the art of using the above-mentioned AI principles is inspired by the support of positive thinking, and a positive future (Hlalele & Mashiya, 2019). Through these principles, AI adheres to engaging the relevant stakeholders in self-determination where change is most critical in our HEIs. The AI probably advocates for the best of what is, to imagine what could be and then the collective designs of a desired future state of individual students living with vision impairment and no incentives, coercion or persuasion required for change to be effected as reflected by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005).

2.1.1.3. The notion of student support with Appreciative Inquiry

Through the lens of AI, each individual is recognized as a human being, sharing similar needs and wants such as being loved, appreciated, celebrated and accepted (Alston-Mills, 2011). The AI focus involves the art and practice of asking a question that strengthens the positive potential. Rather than making a list of things that do not work for a person, AI concentrates on what works; what has worked in the past and what would likely work in the future (Bushe & Kassam, 2012). Fisher (2008) insists that AI begins with discovering what gives life; this includes the capability and effectiveness of our education system. AI helps to find the best in VISs and the stance of education institutions to celebrate, embrace, accept and appreciate them by offering them all the necessary support that they deserve. Life in HEIs and communities must be viewed as a universe of strength rather than a place where problems are solved (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). As a theory, AI thus enabled me to understand how students with visual impairment are embraced, celebrated and appreciated by the communities of HEIs and how available support services impact their academic success.

The determination to deploy AI in this study is because of its relevance as a collaborative process that engages VISs to discover the best of themselves in HEIs. AI aims at appreciating what is positive in the social world, while concurrently exploring different opportunities that make the essence of what individuals experience presently and in the future (Giles & Kung, 2010). The VISs were allowed to narrate and express their views about inhibiting factors, allowing them to articulate their concerns, visions and experiences in the learning environment (Khanare, 2012). The probing of support services also enables VISs to share their views on what needs to be improved, changed and which can rally for a change of attitude of different stakeholders in the inclusive teaching and learning environment (Hanass-Hancock, 2012). As a result, school communities can also discover the potentials and possibilities that lie within the appropriate support of VISs through different support services in HEIs. Finally, my choice to incorporate AI in this study to explore opportunities and experiences that identify good practice or what worked for students (Discover) for them to imagine their situation with support services (Dream), to give them a chance to voice their views on how they can be supported and accommodated (Destiny), to empower them and initiate change (Destiny) in HEIs.

2.1.2. Human rights-based approach conceptual framework

The human rights-based approach (HRBA) is a conceptual framework based on universal human rights standards and works towards the promotion and protection of human rights. This approach gained prominence on the global stage in 1986 during the Declaration on the Right to Development along with the United Nations in promoting and protecting human rights. Aurora (2016) asserts that HRBA seeks to analyse

multiple practices of inequalities, discrimination practices and injustices that compromise human rights. HRBA provides direction on operational standards set out in the international conventions focusing on the right to education (Moriarty, 2018).

The human rights-based approach undertakes that the human right to education is not a passive instrument, but a legal obligation that requires action from authorities. Persons with disabilities hold the same rights as all people, and empowering them primarily depends on their rights being observed (UNHRC, 2019). As a basic human right, education is essential for sustainable social and economic development where every citizen regardless of race, disability, gender socioeconomic status or age must take part. However, disability has been reconceptualised as a complex issue which form of social oppression on par with racism, sexism and other sources of social disadvantage phenomena (Liasidou & Mavrou, 2017). To eliminate these factors and practices, UNCHR purports that disabled persons must be empowered to take hold of their inherent power to reshape and redesign their future and the life of their communities.

Within the realms of education, the main purpose of HRBA is to allow students their freedom to human rights as rights holders and to capacitate those who have the obligation to promote, protect, respect and fulfil those rights (rights bearers) (UNCHR, 2019). More importantly, HRBA is about empowering the rights bearers to claim their rights in education. It is about increasing the ability and accountability of academic institutions to appreciate, observe, protect, respect and fulfil their obligation to support underrepresented students communities such as the VISs (Fitriani, 2022). This will allow VISs greater opportunities to participate effectively in shaping their future and deciding on the decisions that impact their studies. In the process of empowering duty bearers, inhuman measures and practices that violate the rights of right holders, the VISs must be diminished (Mosia & Phasha, 2020). Broberg and Sano (2018) note that if HRBA is properly executed, affected individuals will have an opportunity to think through how observing human rights can best deliver care and support to VISs. The role of HRBA in this study is to ensure that the students support services uphold the dignity and respect of VISs and that the support of disabled students is at the centre of policy and decision-making.

Students with impairments are faced with multiple intersecting challenges in their academic endeavour and exercise of their rights due to social status and underrepresentation in HEIs (Croft, 2020; Kpodoe et al., 2019; Chataika et al., 2012). As a point of departure, a human rights-based approach to education uses commitments made by our states and government toward its citizens. Engaging HRBA thus allows the researcher to determine how the rights of VISs are being observed, and how they are being supported by SSS

in HEIs. On the other hand, HRBA enabled the present researcher to determine the accessibility of support services and how barriers to learning are addressed (Viswanath, 2014). Compared to their non-impaired peers, VISs are more likely to be marginalised in accessing some support services. Kpodoe, et al. (2019) contends that the violation of their rights is also worsened by the barriers they face when claiming their rights such as the right to participation, to express their views and to be heard in decision making and access to appropriate academic support.

The role of HRBA is to ensure that dignity and respect are at the centre of policymaking and decision-making regarding the support of individual students (van Veen, 2013). When HRBA is applied in education, marginalised students such as the VIS have an opportunity to think through how their human rights are considered in the delivery of care and support services. Moreover, Viswanath (2014) illustrates that HRBA seeks to create a positive effect at all levels of education engagement, changing how educational programmes are designed, implemented and evaluated to enable the effective participation of VISs in learning. McCowan (2010) points out that HRBA in an educational setting seeks to address issues that violate human rights and alters the practice and design of education policies. These include discrimination, ill-treatment and exclusion of disabled students in the learning activities. As a result, failure to recognise the rights of students with disabilities and to address the barriers that hinder their access to support services can result in further marginalisation and impact their academic success negatively (Fitriani, 2022).

The application of the human rights-based approach to disability in education reflects a paradigm shift in attitudes, decision-making, practices and approaches to students with disabilities. Njelesani, Tataryn, and Nixon (2012) emphasise that this is a shift in focus not on a person's limitations that can arise from their impairments but also the multi-faced barriers within the learning environment that are eligible to prevent impaired students from accessing basic support services and enjoying their rights. However, van Veen, Regeer and Bunders (2013) concede that the human rights approach is a shift in perspectives from the impaired individuals to the environment role in defining, amplifying and bettering the effects of disability in the learning environment.

The United Nations Report on Disability and Development (2019) indicates that integrating human rights in education is viewed by the international community as the beginning of a new era which places human rights as the core principle of academic institutions, thus committing to uphold the dignity and worth of all human beings regardless their social status. Due to an increased diverse student population in higher education, Thomas (2014) asserts that HEIs must be alert to uphold human rights and provide additional support that

must be accessible to students. I regard disability as one aspect of diversity and our society should adopt and accommodate existing differences in human existence. The education of persons with disabilities and their development to education beyond primary and secondary education seem to be lagging (Chataika et al., 2012). Njelesani, Tataryn and Nixon (2012) emphasise that people with disabilities must be viewed as humans with rights and capabilities in claiming their rights and making decisions for their lives and education based on free and informed consent. As rights holders, VISs must be recognised by rights bearers as the subjects with rights and agency to claim their rights in making meaningful decisions as active members of HEIs.

Education, as enshrined as the basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 serves as the basis for all rights. The United Nations undertakes that education is a fundamental human right and an essential condition for every person to develop and participate effectively in society (McCowan, 2010). Nonetheless, research reveals that many persons with disabilities continue to be denied education as their fundamental right (Mosia & Phasha, 2020; Sim, 2020; Temesgem, 2018). This results due to numerous barriers and obstacles, including prejudice, discrimination, lack of qualified teachers to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities, inaccessible schools and lack of learning and support aids (Matsie and Stofile, 2021; Omede, 2015; Chataika et al., 2012). As a result, many academic institutions are moving to a human rights-based approach to address the above-mentioned challenges and obstacles. The role of HRBA in education is to seek comprehensively and identify all possible challenges and obstacles by designing programmes to analyse and address them (Wilkinson, 2011). For this reason, the human rights-based approach can be used to guide educational policies; it can inform students' assessment and strengthen educational processes; it can be a mechanism to ensure access to information, effective participation, support and provision of social justice in a teaching and learning environment (Viswanath, 2014).

To ensure effective implementation, HRBA is primarily founded on five principles that are meant to eliminate all forms of discrimination, abuse, humiliation or punishment. The principles of Equality and Non-discrimination, Participation and Inclusion, Accountability and Rule of Law, and Empowerment are important in applying an HRBA in support of students with disabilities. In an education setting, these principles are meant to guide, design and strengthen the educational programmes in ensuring that human rights are observed and respected (Watson & Vehmas, 2020). Apart from that, Craissati et al. (2007) maintain that HRBA principles are integrated as goals to guide the outcomes of the development and education programs and processes. These principles guarantee equal opportunity through the elimination of all socially determined barriers that may be physical, social, psychological or financial and which disregard, discredit or restrict the full participation of underrepresented groups in society (UNICEF, 2007).



Figure 3: Principles of Human rights based approach (Source: *The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency*)

2.1.2.1. Participation and Inclusion

The principle of participation is closely linked to freedom rights such as freedom of movement, association, assembly or speech (United Nations, 2019). Chataika, et al. (2012) argues that HRBA paves the way to challenging barriers to participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in all sectors. Full and effective participation of persons with disabilities may be hindered by interaction with various barriers in their environment. Institutions are obliged to establish mechanisms that facilitate the inclusion and active participation of underrepresented groups such as the VISs (UNICEF Canada, 2012). Kpodoe, et al. (2019) point out that in recent years, a growing urgency from the international community to include disabled persons including the visually impaired people in higher education is impressive.

To integrate the norms and standards of HRBA, UNICEF (2007) creates awareness among the rights bearers of their obligation to include and allow full participation in the education programmes. UNICEF (2007) articulates that *“all persons are entitled to active, free and meaningful participation, contribution to and enjoyment.....through which human rights and fundamentals of freedoms can be enjoyed”* in particular. Moriarty (2018) admits that concerning HRBA makes and sets boundaries with an obligation for the right bearers to ensure that the rights holders are entitled to and enjoy their rights. However, Croft (2018)

concedes that HEIs should attempt to offer positive outcomes for marginalised and underrepresented students by widening their participation and fair access to support services. Supporting VISs in HEIs means that students should participate in decisions about the support that they acquire in their institutions. Their participation and involvement in decisions affecting their rights are central to ensuring and adopting a human rights-based approach to education. Craissati et al. (2007) suggest that students' voices must be heard when they need support as they have the right to participate in a meaningful life in the modern world through education. Education must be meaningful, available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable (Viswanath, 2014). Meaningful participation and inclusion of VISs should guide support programmes and implementation of good practices for inclusion that enhance and empower such students to enjoy their rights in full and on equal footing as their non-impaired peers.

2.1.2.2. Equality and Non-discrimination

In academic institutions, a great deal of discrimination and inequality against disabled persons originates from cultural, economic, social, political or institutional practices, both overt and covert. People living with disabilities should be guaranteed the right to education at all levels, based on equal opportunities, without any form of discrimination (UNICEF, 2008). Children with disabilities have the right to free and compulsory primary school basic education, while people with disabilities should have access to tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning. In this regard, the education system is obliged and must be committed to the recognition of human rights to embrace disability as diversity in education institutions (United Nations, 2019). This framework emphasises the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and guarantees them the right to equal and quality education. The HRBA is a means to focus on the protection and realisation of the rights of VISs towards available support services in HEIs. Fitriani (2022) asserts that students as rights-holders must be free from discrimination and allowed full access to learning; they should be protected by teachers against unfair practices and social approaches by other members of the school community.

In order to apply HRBA to education, where the rights of disabled persons are violated, there must be alteration and re-design of education programmes and policies (Fitriani, 2022). This involves tackling illegal practices of discriminatory actions. The HRBA means that the rights bearers and institutions must fight any forms and practices of discrimination in the realisation of human rights; any forms and practices of discrimination must be eliminated, prevented and prohibited (Lawson, 2005). Clearly defined policies, guidelines and laws should be used to combat discriminatory practices and education institutions, as the rights bearers, are required to prioritise the rights of the marginalised students who face barriers to realising their rights on academic support and hindering their support (Clouder et al., 2016). Although students with

disabilities are not recognised as having equal standing with their non-disabled peers, which factor can justify them claiming their rights, HRBA serves to widen the economic base in the society, thus strengthening the economic capability of people with disabilities (Lawson, 2005). Discrimination against disabled students is also fuelled by prevalent stigma and negative stereotypes about their impairment (UNHRC, 2019). For this reason, the equality and discrimination principle seeks to redress the structural forms of inequality that seek to victimise marginalised groups such as the VISs in HEIs.

2.1.2.3. Accountability

In education, HRBA implies accountability of the rights bearers with duties or obligations in fulfilling, respecting and protecting the rights of the rights holders to access education. Accountability requires institutions to improvise effective monitoring strategies to observe human rights standards and remedies for breaching human rights for students (UNICEF, 2008). The HRBA seeks to hold the rights bearers accountable to fulfil their obligation toward the rights holders. However, the right holders also must be responsible for observing the rules and laws of their institutions and the state. UNHRC (2019) maintain that states must place a comprehensive and coordinated legislative and policy framework in ensuring accountability and realisation of the human rights of people with disabilities. States and institutions as the right bearers are answerable for the observance of human rights. Watson and Vehmas (2020) illustrate that states must take a proactive step as the guarantor of the human rights of people with disabilities. For effective accountability in implementing HRBA, there must be appropriate programmes, laws, policies, administrative procedures and mechanisms that safeguard the human rights of marginalised groups such as the VISs in HEIs (Fitriani, 2022).

While education opportunities are improving globally over the past years, the greatest challenge seems to be parity and accessibility to education for persons with disabilities (Mosia & Phasha, 2020). Chataika, et al. (2012) point out that the education of people with disabilities and their development beyond primary school seem to be lagging. These people are not recognised as having an equal standing as non-disabled persons to justify their claim to education rights. The HEIs have not been originally structured to accommodate students with visual impairment due to attitudinal prospects and discriminatory actions by lecturers and their non-disabled peers (Kpodoe et al., 2019). This has a negative influence on their academic achievement. The VISs are not in a position to do anything where their rights are violated (Viswanath, 2014). Furthermore, Viswanath (2014) further indicates that violation of human rights in most cases is committed by governments and institutions with the rhetoric given that human rights are not incompatible with education. Violation of human rights in educational institutions increases disparity and implies a lack of accountability by governments and institutional management. In education, HRBA binds education institutions and

governments to take on-going and proactive action to address any form of the rights violation in education, accessibility, completion and learning (Moriarty, 2018). Moreover, HRBA binds government and education institutions to take it upon themselves to provide and fulfil human rights through maximising and strengthening students' rights to education and enhancing the utilisation of support services in learning and the provision of learning resources (Viswanath, 2014). Admittedly, HRBA to education holds the rights bearers accountable for failing to fulfil their obligation towards the rights holders.

2.1.2.4. Empowerment

In education, HRBA is regarded as an essential tool to empower marginalised and minority students. Empowerment enables individual students (right holders) to learn freely, to act freely and `walk in the direction that enables them to realise their potential to make decisions (Craissati, 2007). Empowerment is the process by which rights holders are capacitated to claim their human rights (Practicums, 2016). Similarly (Craissati, 2007) states that students are empowered to claim their rights rather than wait for policymakers, right-bearers, institutions or legislation to act for them. The HRBA initiatives focus on building the capacity of students to hold those responsible to account (Bruun, 2017). Capacity building and empowerment develop and harness the capabilities of the rights bearers to fulfil their obligation to rights holders to claim their entitlements and right to education (UNICEF, 2007). Empowerment enables the right holders to know their rights and enables them to challenge the right bearers and lodge complaints when their rights are violated (Tavati, Brennan and Helgeson, 2016). As the rights bearers, institutions of higher education must empower and enable students with disabilities to identify their needs.

Recognition and application of the HRBA principles in education poses a strong commitment to ensuring that persons with disabilities are recognised as active members of the school community and that educational programme are designed to promote and respect their rights and needs. Matsie and Stofile (2021) state that students with visual impairment experience “social death” as their rights are violated and are subjected to oppressive practices. Their voices are faint and unheard and they are denied control over their academic destiny. Various challenges that are experienced by VISs in higher education lead to emotional isolation, loneliness and frustration in their academic endeavours (Sim, 2020). Therefore, HRBA empowers the VISs by supporting and fostering their agency, equipping them with competencies and knowledge that creates an enabling environment to determine their future and how they can exercise their rights (Fatrini, 2022). An appropriate application of HRBA in education institutions means that VISs and institutions of higher education should know their rights and available support services. The VISs should be fully supported and empowered to address the factors that impact their academic success and to claim their rights where

necessary (Bruun, 2017). Such students should be empowered through appropriate advocacy support to understand what their rights are and how they can claim them.

2.1.3. Education as a human right

In 1948, human rights were embodied by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and adopted by United Nations. Many state constitutions across the globe protect human rights as incorporated into the international and national legal frameworks. The umbrella definition of human rights "constitute a set of norms governing the treatment of individuals and groups by governments and private institutions based on ethical principles regarding what societies consider fundamental to a decent life" (OHCHR, 1948). Human rights are defined by Watson and Vehmas (2020) as legal and moral norms that aim to define and protect fundamental entitlements and freedoms for all humans. Human rights emanate from thirty articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights as the aspirations of the international community. Article 26 (sub 1, 2, and 3) declare that all persons have the right to education. Article 26 further declares that "education shall be free at least in the elementary stages, however technical and professional education shall be made available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all based on merit".

Education is a basic human right and an essential condition for individual development and effective participation in society. It enables individuals and groups to reach their full potential as human beings (UNESCO, 2019). Under the auspices of the United Nations, numerous human rights treaties guarantee education as a human right. These treaties include the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960, CADE), the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966, ICESCR), the the1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979, CEDAW) and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, CRC). These treaties, as enacted in the 1960s have ushered hope for the marginalised and underrepresented groups such as the disabled in education institutions. As Marks (2016) asserts, these treaties constitute the primary source and point of reference for what belongs to human rights.

Conceptually, the right to education guarantees that an individual is centrally positioned in education programmes and frameworks (UNESCO, 2019). Education is not a privilege or a charity whim, but it is a human right. Human rights identify specific obligations on education institutions as the rights bearers concerning certain entitlements of the rights holders (Tiwary, 2012). Apart from that, education acts as an enabling right that functions as a voice through which other rights can be claimed and protected (Hart & Brando, 2018). However, every day millions are deprived of educational opportunities as a result of social, cultural and economic factors. The Disability and Development Report of 2018 revealed that too many

persons with disabilities are denied this basic human right due to different barriers and obstacles and also injustices imposed on them (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). Persons with disabilities must be guaranteed equal opportunities to exercise their right to education by eliminating all socially determined barriers, which may be physical, financial, social or psychological (Chataika et al., 2012).

There is a dominant discourse that higher education has a moral imperative to support and guide the needs of students with disabilities (Clouder et al., 2016). However, an emphasis is placed on the support of students with vision impairment making a transition into higher education, the nature of adjustments and available support structures that enable students to succeed. Karten (2017) concedes that based on the degree and severity of vision impairment along with the impact on a student's academic performance, support can vary greatly. Education institutions must make the necessary and appropriate modifications or adjustments to ensure the enjoyment or exercise of fundamental rights and freedom. Visually impaired students face specific barriers that deny them to enjoyment of their right to education, support and accommodation and effective access to education and to fulfil their potential on an equal basis with non-disabled students (UNESCO, 2019). Cole (2012) emphasises that the rights bearers must identify eligible barriers within the school environment, teaching and learning strategies and attitudes that prevent full enjoyment of their rights to education. Rights bearers need to create an enabling learning environment and offer appropriate support along with reasonable accommodation to allow VISs to thrive socially and academically.

While HEIs are make education accessible to students with disabilities and more specifically the visually impaired (Mosia, 2017), such students must be afforded appropriate support in an enabling environment. The VISs as humans with rights to education must be accepted, celebrated and appreciated by academic institutions (Hewett et al., 2017). The responsibility of rights bearers is to design and develop support programs that are accessible and available to every student (Croft, 2020). These support programmes must cater for the diverse learning needs of all students. Guided by hope and the power of positive thought, VISs must be allowed to maximize gains in their academic endeavours. This can be achieved regardless of the disparities that may exist in how support services deal with multi-faced experiences of VISs in HEIs. Invoking the academic success of VISs remains a possibility until it is tapped into (Hlalele & Mashiya, 2019). While observing the right to education of VISs, based on individual experiences, the perspective of AI is to discover the best in them and their institutions, what has worked, what is working and what can work for them to thrive academically (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003). AI accentuates a search for what is working and identifies strategies that work for the academic success of individual students. Besides, the basis of AI is to focus on what works on support services rather than to focus on the problems thereof.

Despite several efforts made by governments and international agencies to preserve the rights of the disabled and marginalised persons, violations and breaches of their right to quality education persist. Academic institutions as rights bearers also fail to contribute to the full development of the human personality as they undermine the rights of disabled students to education (UNESCO, 2019; Morina, Sandoval & Carnerero, 2020). Considerably, the integration of HRBA into education is a framework that can address the rights of VISs to access support services in higher education and be respected, appreciated and accepted as rights holders as noted by Fitriani (2022). Moreover, HRBA education promotes the respect for the human rights of all individuals in the teaching and learning process, while at the same time, it offers education as an entitlement, rather than a privilege (Tiwary, 2010). Many state laws and international treaties affirm that every child and person is entitled to quality education. In this regard, governments and education institutions have the obligation as rights bearers to support the achievements of students with learning needs, through directed autonomous responsibility, self-directed learning and preparation for full citizenship (UNICEF, 2007). Liasidou and Mavrou (2017) maintain that the purpose of these laws and treaties is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity as affirmed by Article 1 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006).

2.1.4. Disability and human rights

Disability is theorised as another multi-faced form of social oppression. In education institutions, this has placed a serious emphasis on the promotion of the rights of disabled persons. Clouder, et al. (2016) assets that people with disabilities are less likely to be employed than their peers without disabilities and those who enrol in higher education are estimated at three times more likely not to complete their studies. Morina, Sandoval and Carnerero (2020) point out that the institutions of higher education essentially improve the quality of life, as it gives relevance to economic participation and social decision-making while capacitating students to increase employment opportunities. On the other hand, Tiwara (2010) concedes that education is an essential factor in enabling a people to be fully functional in their society. In addition to the above, the mandate of HEIs in Lesotho is to ensure that students receive the requisite skills to empower students to fully participate in economic development. Prior to the Lesotho's MoET (2018), Cole had already observed that people with disabilities can contribute economically and socially if their rights to access education are respected as members of the society.

Persons with disabilities as individuals and as groups represent one-third and the largest minority group in the world. Historically they have been subjected to violations of human rights due to their disability. Many of them have been denied the fundamental right to education due to numerous barriers and obstacles to education (Cluder et al., 2016). These barriers include prejudice, lack of support, discrimination, bullying and negative attitude of members of the school community, lack of learning aids, inaccessible schools and unqualified teachers to accommodate students with disabilities (Morina, Sandoval and Carnerero, 2020; Watson and Vehmas, 2020; United Nations, 2019; Chataika, et al. 2012;). In Lesotho, Harrington (2015) notes that people with disability are faced with multiple barriers hindering them from participation in active economic development and access to education. She further indicates that discriminatory attitudes and lack of national legislation to protect the human rights of disabled persons persist as barriers. Persons with disabilities frequently experience these inequalities, their rights being violated, and encounter prejudice because of their disabilities. Their right to education is compromised. In 2007 the United Nations ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to protect, promote and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities in all member states. CRPD was enshrined as a comprehensive description of how schools must be transformed to facilitate access to education for people with disabilities (Mosia, 2017).

Affirming universality and protection of human rights for all disabled persons including those who require intensive care and support, is the message reflected in the preamble of CRPD (Degener, 2014). In focusing on higher education, CRPD requires all member states to ensure that "disabled people have access to tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning on an equal basis with others without discrimination". Degener (2016) posits that this convention has tremendously generated dignity, hope and respect for persons with disabilities whose rights have been violated by the social systems globally. The UN 2018 Disability and Development Report (2019) points out that CRPD requires states to provide all the necessary support and use measures that are essential to propel the quality of life of persons with disabilities. Emphasis is made on article 24 of the CRPD which demands that students who belong to any form of impairment group are provided with assistive aids to support them educationally, based on their learning needs (Degener, 2014). Moreover, Chataika, et al. (2012) comment that to fulfil the Article 24 obligation of CRPD, governments and education institutions are mandated to recognise the rights of disabled people to education and to ensure that education systems include them at all levels of lifelong learning. I, therefore, embark that to acquire education as a right; a person is not required to be free of impairment to be a right holder.

2.2. Conclusion

The breadth and depth of supporting VISs in HEIs is not only about facilitating support, contributing to their academic success or career plans, nor increasing their chances in continuing and meeting their academic needs, or enriching their skills for academic success (Johnson, 2022; Okpych, 2020; Lenz-Rashid, 2018). Student support is also not only about emotional or social aspects of a student. It is not about their academic distress, anxiety, depression or future planning (Saleh, Camart and Romo, 2017) or lack of learning aids and assistive technology (Kuriakose, Shrestha and Sandnes, 2020; Vojtech, 2016; Johnstone et al., 2009). It is not based on the factors that hinder their success; these are the factors such as social stigma, inequality, discrimination and exclusion (Liasidou and Mavrou, 2017; Liyanage, 2017; Ncube, Anyanwu and Hausken, 2013). SSS in higher education are all about appreciating, valuing, accepting and celebrating VISs (Kurth, Lyon and Shogren, 2015), focusing on the positive elements that work (Hlalele and Mashiya, 2019), anticipating a positive future for the members of the higher education community (Ahmed, 2018). Support services are meant to ensure that students' human rights are being considered, respected and that the students' well-being is enhanced (Kaur, 2016).

The SSS facilitate ideological paradigm shift as necessary, because legally VISs have rights and entitlements (Liasidou and Mavrou, 2017); and also to ensure that education is accessible as a human right irrespective of the disability (Mosia, 2017; Ramaahlo, Tonsing & Bornman 2018). More importantly, SSS are meant to empower and capacitate students to claim their rights; to eliminate multi-facet barriers to effective participation and the exclusion factors encountered by visually impaired student, and to guarantee equal educational opportunities at all levels without any discrimination (Chataika et al., 2012); and to ensure that institutions are accountable to respecting and protecting the rights of students to access quality education regardless their disability (Fitriani, 2022; Watson & Vehmas, 2020).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.0. Introduction

The first chapter sketched an overview of this thesis, while chapter two discussed the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of this study.

A sophisticated, substantive and thorough review of the literature is a ritual that researchers have to embark on in their educational research. Researchers want to know and understand what has been done before how they should conduct their research studies and what the strengths and weaknesses of the existing studies are (Boote & Baile, 2005). Hart (1999) illustrates that to acquire an understanding of the experiences of visually impaired students in higher education institutions (HEIs), a researcher has to know what other researchers have previously done and what the key and relevant issues on the topic under investigation are. This chapter extensively discusses the scholarly body of knowledge about visual impairment, academic support services and how HEIs appreciate and celebrate the livelihoods of visually impaired students (VISs). Furthermore, this chapter discusses the global prevalence of visual impairment in higher education. It critically appraises and synthesises the current state of knowledge (Carnwell & Daly, 2001). It relates the experiences of students' support services in higher education and identifies the gaps in knowledge and issues that study seeks to address. It is imperative to glance on the models of support, social and academic challenges towards support services and the prevalence of visual impairment in higher education. The voice of the legal frameworks and their stance toward the support of VISs is worth incorporating into this chapter.

3.1. Vision Impairment at a glance

Vision is considered the dominant sense that plays a critical role in every stage and facet of our lives. It is regarded as an important aspect and indicator of health and quality of life (Vitale, Cotch & Sperduto, 2006). Hashemi, Khabazkhoob, Ostadimoghaddam and Yekta (2018) purport that blindness and impairment affects the quality of life of individuals and their families. They have important and proven socio-economic consequences on peoples' lives. Good vision and visual health form a pivotal part of an independent, healthy and well-functioning person. I also believe all persons with or without vision deserve equal opportunity to embrace education and employment opportunities and enjoy a satisfactory quality of life. As a widespread challenge, Sha, Frank and Ehrlich (2020) caution that vision impairment disrupts peoples' engagement with their social

world. It is a condition that may cause difficulties for individuals to perform their daily activities such as reading, walking, playing, cooking and driving. Sim (2020) postulate that persons with vision impairment can experience difficulty in performing manual activities as well as emotional isolation, alienation, frustration and loneliness. It is in this regard that the effects of vision impairment negatively affect the daily experiences and multiple aspects of development in our societies (El-Zraigat & Alshammari, 2020).

The prevalence of vision impairment has been on the rise in the past two decades. In 2010, the World Health Organisation (WHO) report on vision loss and blindness estimated that 285 million people had moderate to severe vision loss. The report further revealed that 39 million people were blind. The 2019 World Health Organisation report on vision estimates that globally 2.2 billion people had vision impairment or blindness. Multiple factors persist to increase the numbers of people with vision impairment and loss despite efforts made by opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists to combat them. It is imperative to establish causes and numbers and the negative impact of vision impairment requiring relevant services to minimise the risk of vision loss. In the Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) region, which is characterised by the highest population growth, poverty and poor health status (UNDP, 2018), it is estimated that in 1990, 4.1 million people contribute to the global number of blind population. In 2010 it is reported that there was a growth rate of 12.9% in Sub-Sahara Africa and comparatively 14.8% globally (Naidoo et al. 2014). The 2019 report on vision impairment revealed that approximately 26.3 million people on the African continent have a form of visual impairment. It is noted that 20.4 million of that number has low vision, while 5.9 million are estimated to be blind. The world health governing body WHO, further confirms that 15.3% of the world's blind population resides in the African region.

Mutanga (2019) indicates that the focus of international studies for students with disabilities in higher education has evolved. There has been significant progress in the body of knowledge of incorporating students' voices in higher education. Students with disabilities and or with visual impairment represent a relatively small percentage of the total student population in higher education (Croft, 2020; Riddell, Tinklin and Wilson, 2005:3). This has posed a powerful dimension of exclusion (Signal, Lynch and Johansson, 2019) to such students in receiving favourable support to succeed in their educational endeavour. Bishop and Rhind (2011) point out that visually impaired student are less likely to complete their higher education studies than their non-disabled peers. This reflects the negative impact of vision impairment on the academic success of students in higher education. It is the result of lack of support, attitudinal barriers, policies and an inaccessible environment (Kpodoe et al., 2019; Bishop & Rhind, 2011).

Vision is regarded as the most actively used sense by any human being and the one in which knowledge predominantly grows. Various scholars note that vision impairment affects the daily functioning, falls, mobility, and the emotional and physical well-being of people. Xulu-Kasaba and Kalinda (2022) indicate that vision impairment impacts individuals' health negatively; although good and healthy vision improves the chances of employability and participation. Visual disability is viewed by El-Zraigat and Alshammari (2020) as an aspect that affects students' academic achievement, psychological development and non-verbal communication. Intrinsically, vision impairment affects individual autonomy, independence and physical health. It also increases social withdrawal and depression (Hazzan, Haibach-Beach, Lieberman & William, 2022). Some scholars have observed that vision impairment may impede the reading process and consequently affect reading performance because students with low vision experience degraded inputs (Mohammed & Omar, 2011). The reading performance includes reading speed, accuracy and comprehension. Therefore, it is critical to acquire relevant support services to minimize the negative impact of visual disability.

Traditionally, students with vision difficulties have been seen as responsible for support services. For this reason, Mosia and Phasha (2020) are of the view that HEIs are mandated to provide support services that enhance students' experiences and provide quality education. To establish and understand the educational needs of VISs, support services ought to understand the experiences, challenges and needs of students with low vision and blindness and what modifications can be made (El-Zraigat & Alshammari, 2020). Bishop and Rhind (2011) dispute that statistically VISs are less likely to complete their studies compared to their non-impaired peers. It is a fact that this underrepresented community of students may withdraw or perform poorly due to lack of support, insufficient guidance, and the attitude of lecturers and other members of the school community. Matshediso (2010) points out that insufficient information regarding the availability and use of educational support services may affect the success and performance of students with disabilities. Therefore lecturers and key personnel in higher education need information, training and support to create an enabling learning environment which is necessary for one to be conscientious about the needs of VISs in higher education.

3.2. Modelling disability

Historically, educationists and social and disability activists have embarked on multiple models or approaches to human disability. Each model or approach defines and explains disability and provides competing definitions and explanations. Whiteneck (2006) illustrates that a model of disability and their mode of functioning is an apparatus used to define impairment and its functioning as can be used by institutions, societies and governments to devise policies and strategies to respond to the needs of those with disabilities. Nonetheless, Mutanga (2020) points out that in recent years, scholars and organisations focusing on disability issues argue

that the disability models have conflicting differences. The analysis conducted by Lawson and Becktt (2021) revealed that some scholars have started bringing these models together to analyse how they complement each other. These models are the medical model, the social model of disability and the human rights model of disability. Amponsah-Bediako (2013) upholds that each model adds value and influenced by its philosophies to understanding of disability and they need to be treated as such. Therefore the call to triangulate these three models is in line with the assumption of appreciative inquiry which inquiries about what works in our organisations, valuing, recognising the best in people and affirming the past and strengths, successes, potential and perceiving the things that give life. An appreciative inquiry also allows people to focus on things that work by using positive thinking, imagery, strengths and success and moving away from weaknesses and failures (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), while disability is a complex concept that continues to evolve (Signal, Lynch & Johansson, 2019). The experiences of VISs are also a complex phenomenon that cannot be underestimated (Croft, 2020). In the following section, a discussion of each model and its views towards disability and its relevance to supporting VISs in higher education made.

3.2.1. Medical model

The medical model was developed in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and became prominent in the mid to late nineteenth century to advance the bio-medical understanding of health and disease. Mutanga (2020) point out that the medical model is regarded as the first analytic approach to comprehensively define and understand disability. Although certain disabilities are the individuals' medical problems that need attention, the medical model towards disability holds that a person's functional limitations are the root causes of insufficient attention to rectify or treat impairment (Goering, 2015). The medical model is rooted in an undue emphasis on clinical diagnosis, which is destined to lead to a partial and inhibiting view of disabled persons (Brisenden, 1986). For a people with disabilities to perform effectively, they must have access to mobile devices and assistive technology to provide them with a fair opportunity (Signal, Lynch & Johansson, 2019). A person must be provided with adequate support to live a normal life and to participate in society.

In the continued perspective of the medical model, interventions such as rehabilitation, maintenance programme and provision of assistive technologies are splendid for people with disability. A range of effective medical interventions exists to reduce the risk of acquiring vision impairment or any form of eye condition (WHO, 2019). World health reports on vision affirm that health interventions are for the promotion of the empowerment of people to increase control through literacy efforts, rather than focusing on risky health conditions (WHO, 2019). Effective health interventions may include compliance with spectacle wear, the use of

sunglasses or times spend outdoors. The intervention is critical to treating people with disabilities justly as this may require education regarding disability rights and pride (Georing, 2015).

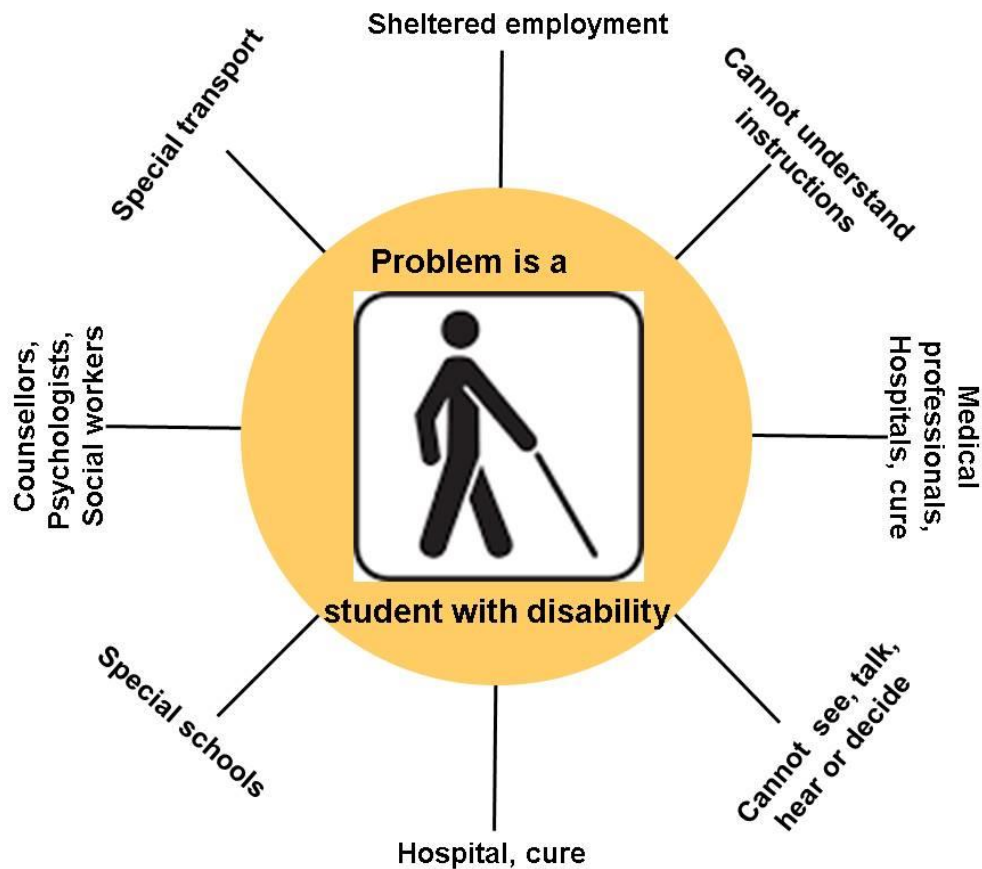


Figure 4: Medical model of disability (Source: Amponsah-Bediako, 2013)

The specific health condition of individuals may lead to impairment in eye functioning or other body structures (Shakespeare, 2014). In response to the challenges faced by VISs, the process of intervention thus commences when data is collected and analysed about the status of their impairment and the form of intervention required (Wodon, Male, Nayihouba & Smith, 2019). The straightforward intervention to address visual impairment in academic institutions is to screen and provide eyeglasses to those in need. From the perspective of the medical model, physical rehabilitation and the provision of assistive technology are essential interventions to relieve and to improve the well-being of the person with a disability (Mutanga, 2019). Therefore, medical standards and recommendations must be considered to avoid destructive consequences.

The medical model is popularly known and negatively interpreted as using medical intervention to address disability (Mutanga, 2019). The focus of the medical model is diagnosing individuals and prescribing the appropriate support for intervention by medical practitioners. To address the challenges of people with vision

impairment, the medical model suggests that optometrists, opticians and ophthalmologists are eligible professionals to give advice and precautions on eye care or the required assistive devices (Xue, Downie, Ormonde & Craig, 2017). Bornman (2022) illustrate that the medical model of disability is a medical experience with a set of impairments to be treated. The perspective of the medical model makes adaptations which will be accommodative of individual differences. To effect such adaptations, visually impaired persons should accept treatment to ameliorate the consequences of their disability (Shyman, 2016). The important effect of the medical model is that it can control the treatment of individuals with vision impairment and allow medical professionals to diagnose and recommend suitable support and intervention (Shyman, 2016).

A vast majority of the literature argues that the medical model perceives disability as a problem caused by disease, trauma, and or health condition which may require sustained medical attention of individuals by professionals. Some scholars (Shakespeare, 2014; Burchardt, 2004) argue that the medical model views people with disabilities as having deficiencies which should be diagnosed and somehow treated. Others presume that the problem with the medical model is that it determines both the treatment and the form of life that a person with a disability should live (Brisenden, 1986). This model locates disability as a problem where an individual differs from the average physical and or mental abilities (Mutanga, 2019). Oliver (1996) argues that the medical model defines impairment as any loss or abnormality of physical, mental or anatomy of the body while disability is viewed as a restriction or inability of a person to perform daily activities within the range considered normal for a human being. Barton (2009) in Haegele and Hodge (2016) indicate how disability is defined is as significant as the language used to describe individuals with disabilities as this stimulates their expectations and how they interact with the environment. Some researchers purport that the medical model perceives disability negatively and views it as a problem that needs to be fixed in society through medical treatment and care, where treatment and rehabilitation are used as interventions (Mitra, 2018).

It may be reasonable to argue that despite the above claims about the medical model, health issues are a significant part of our lives and those living with disabilities (Mutanga, 2019). Singal, Lynch and Johansson (2019) contend that the medical model allows disabled people to substantially contribute and participate in the development and academic activities without considering environmental and personal factors. However, the medical model has merits since being healthy has a mammoth influence on people's lives (Mutanga, 2015). Students with vision impairment need a medical assessment to determine the form of intervention and support that will allow effective participation in their studies. They have a right to access health services and to be healthy. It is in this regard that HEIs as human systems move from focusing on deficits and problems or what is lacking about the health status of VISs. Instead, the focus must be on appreciating and examining the strengths

and successes of the system and its processes (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). This will ensure that VISs are not at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to their non-disabled counterparts.

3.2.2. Social model

In the 1970's many social and disabled people non-governmental organisations and activists accused the medical model of ignoring how external and environmental factors impact the livelihoods of persons with disabilities. Such organisations and individuals dispute that the medical model views disability as a problem which is caused by accident, trauma or health condition. The medical model aims at curing or adjusting the person's behaviour that would lead to an effective cure (Shyman, 2016). The argument is that the medical model views disability as defects that need fixation, cure, elimination or medical interventions by medical professionals (Haurylchanka, 2022; Degener, 2016). Nonetheless, the social model does not deny the valuable role of medical intervention and care. The medical procedures and technologies can treat only impairment, while disability requires a different approach (Mladenov, 2022). Consequently, these arguments led to the birth of the social model of disability. Finkelstein, Hunt and Oliver are regarded as fathers of the social model (Shakespeare, 2010). This trio realised that a paradigm shift is required to diffuse how disability is interpreted and viewed by society.

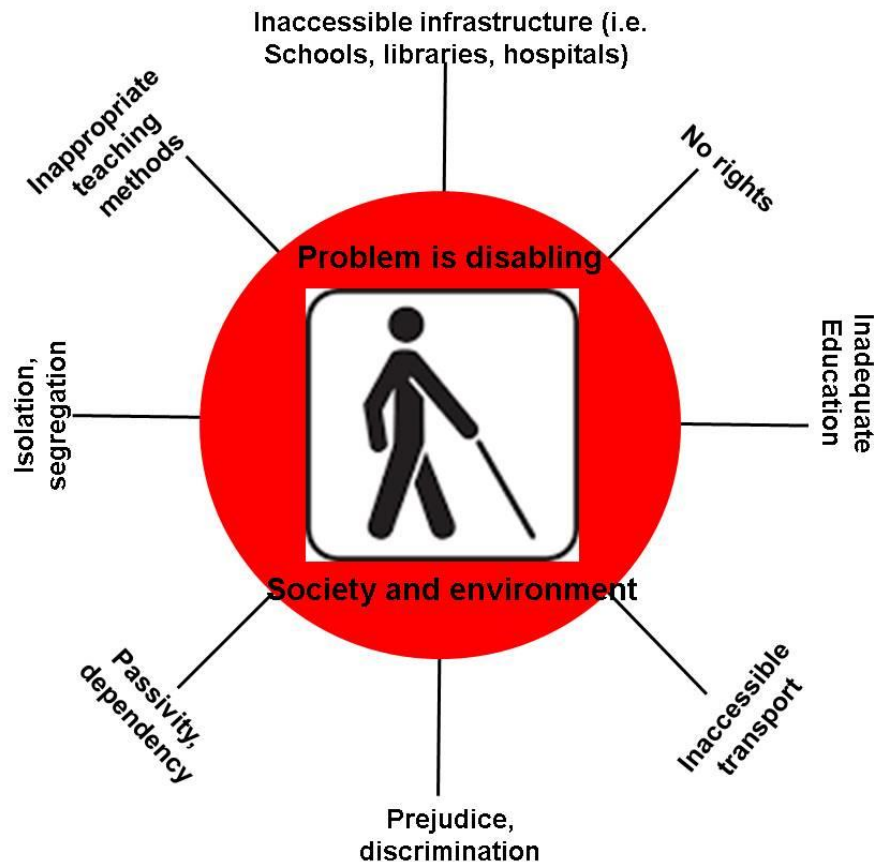


Figure 5: Social model of disability ((Source: Amponsah-Bediako, 2013))

The social model of disability is regarded as the "big idea" by the movement advocating for radical change in practices and understanding of disability (Mladenov, 2022). The social model of disability proposes that what makes a person disabled is not their medical condition, but rather the ecological reception, physical structures, institutional norms and cultures and social attitudes (Haegele and Hodge, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2006, Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Social activists concede that there is a sharp distinction between disability and impairment. Disability is regarded as a restriction an individual experiences from society, while impairment is understood as a state of the body that is without standards with defective organs (Goering, 2015). The emphasis made by the social model of disability is that disability is a socially created problem and how individuals can be integrated into society (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013). Therefore, disability is not an individual attribute but it is a complex collection of conditions which are within the social environment (Goering, 2015). Apart from that, Owen (2015) illustrates that the problem of disability requires social action and the collective responsibility of the society, making environmental adjustments that paves the way for the full participation of people with disabilities hence Owen advocates for the social model dispute that disability exists due to cultural or labelling representations and social attitudes towards human differences (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013).

Not all people with disability perceive disability in the same way. For example, Anastasiou and Kauffman (2013) assert that people with disabilities perceive disability through their subjective experiences. As they interact with their environment and their experiences are socially constructed, they reflect the thoughts, feelings and values of their social milieu. However, VISs in HEIs often experience academic and social challenges where they are forced to develop their mechanisms and skills to adjust or survive (Kpodoe et al., 2019; Almog, 2018). For instance, Mohammed and Omar (2011) point out that low-vision students experience reading problems, accuracy in reading, comprehension and speed. On the other hand, Hazzan, Haibach-Beach, Lieberman and Williams (2022) comment that vision impairment may have effects on physical health, mental health, and level of autonomy and affect the quality of life. Due to the disabling environment and attitudinal barriers experienced by VISs, they may likely perform poorly and their academic success may be more compromised than their non-disabled peers (Kendall, 2017). The majority of real-world barriers experienced by disabled students are due to environmental obstacles that result from an inaccessible education environment (Mosia & Phasha, 2020; Almog, 2018). Therefore, the perspective of the social model is that disability is a socially produced injustice which can be challenged and eliminated through radical and social change (Lawson & Beckett, 2021).

The call for social change and provision of support services for students with vision impairment may be the removal of environmental, attitudinal and social barriers rather than meeting the needs of VISs. In fact, Degener

(2016) views social model of disability as the heuristic venture of a rights-based approach to disability that pays attention to the anti-discriminatory laws rather than on welfare programmes. The visually impaired students are not disabled by lack of sight, but by the lack of accessible reading and learning aids such as Braille and audiobooks and such as a misconception about blindness (Almog, 2018). As a result, the teaching and learning experiences of students at higher education level is increasingly encountered with administrative and support services. For this reason, the social model regards disability as a socially constructed endeavour imposed by environmental factors on persons with disability for support to eliminate barriers that hinder academic participation and success.

3.2.3. Human rights model of Disability

While the social model of disability has been predominantly the preferred paradigm in emancipating persons with disability, Goering (2015) admits that the social model has done wonders for the disability rights movement and liberation. In addition, Mladenov (2022) mentions that disability rights activists and scholars consider the rights of persons with disability as living independently and with decency in the societies. Bornman (2020) purports that the social model is designed as the basis upon which the human rights model is formulated as it regards disability as a human rights issue. After an array of alternatives to how disability should be interpreted, then emerged the human rights model of disability. Lawson and Beckett (2021) comment that the human rights model focuses on the inherent dignity of the human being as enacted in the Bill of Rights. The human rights model of disability is a comprehensive approach that encompasses both sets of human rights, civil, political economic, educational, social and cultural rights (Degener, 2017). This model further encompasses the values of a disability policy that acknowledges the human as a being with rights. This model positions a person's disability as an important aspect of humanity. It affirms that all human beings irrespective of their disabilities have rights which are inalienable (Degener, 2016).

As people with disabilities interact with various barriers that may hinder full and effective participation in their environment on an equal basis with their non-disabled persons, the human rights model of disability activists argue that full participation is a fundamental right even for persons with disabilities (Singal, Lynch & Johansson, 2019). Embedding any human right in education institutions is a sine-qua-non element of empowering all stakeholders to play a positive role rather than discriminating or oppressing persons with disabilities. Liasidou and Mavrou (2017) illustrate human rights model of disability conceptualise impairment as an essential aspect of human experience; it upholds human dignity and rights. Worm (2012) interprets disability as an evolving concept that results from the interaction between impairment and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder one's full participation on an equal basis in society.

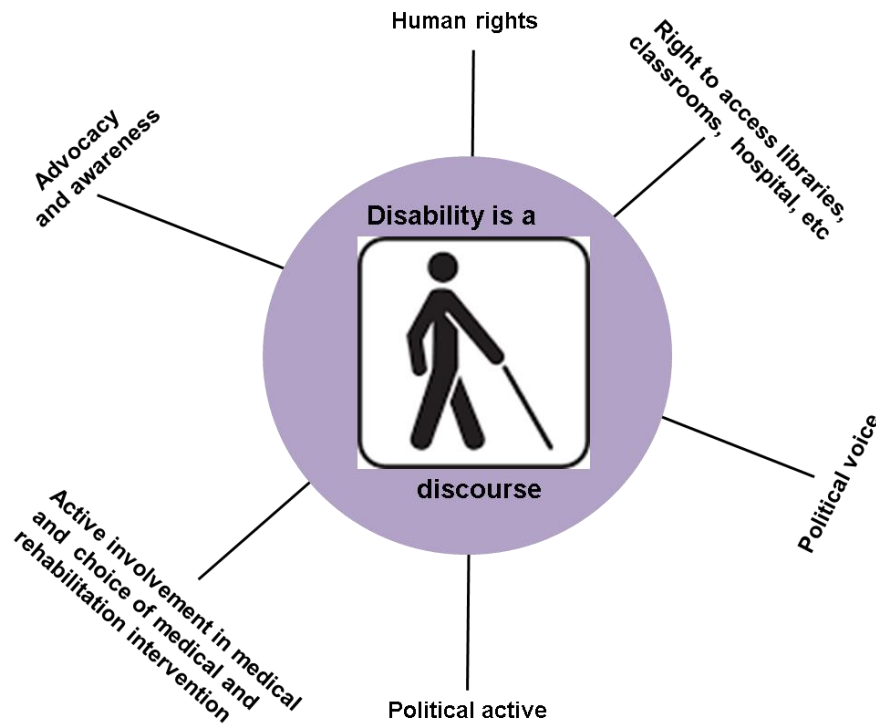


Figure 6: Human rights model of disability: ((Source: Amponsah-Bediako, 2013))

This model was built upon the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in parallel with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) according to which "all human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity". Therefore the human rights model ensures equal rights and participation in education, development and economy for persons with disabilities as a legal obligation (Ramaahlo, Tonsing & Bornman 2018).

Degener (2017) points out that the human rights model of disability advocates for social justice in situations where persons with disability are marginalised, oppressed or denied their rights. This model encompasses the first and second generation of human rights such as civil, political and the right to life, socioeconomic rights, employment, social security and the human rights which are referred to as blue and red rights. Within the realms of disability rights, the human rights-based approach to disability is characterised as a tool that stipulates equality and citizenship (Degener, 2016). The human rights-based approach to disability regards people with disabilities as active subjects with the right to make legal claims and that people with disabilities have the ability and the need to participate in societal and educational activities on equal bases with their non-disabled peers. The HRBA to education is encourages access to quality education and supports development in school environments (UNESCO, 2007). Liasidou and Mavrou (2017) illustrate that HRBA recognise disabled people

as rights-bearers without pre-empting the absence of impairment and that such people need more than civil and political rights to participate actively. On the whole, the human rights model of disability valorises impairment as an indispensable aspect of the human experience that does not undermine human dignity or violate disabled people's identities (Degener, 2016).

Beside multiple challenges faced by every student in higher education, VISs have even more challenges. The aspect of declaring the right of students with disabilities to have equal rights as members of education institutions should be regarded and treated with respect and support (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). In response to the challenges encountered by VISs, Almog (2011) illustrates that HEIs have a responsibility to design policies and adjustments. They also provide support services for visually impaired people. Within the human rights model of disability, the relevant statutory law and policy must be effectively implemented and monitored (Bornman, 2020). In cases where persons with disability are confronted with challenges, the human rights model simultaneously advocates for social justice to protect them (Fitriani, 2022). This model clarifies that governments and institutions must uphold, promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities (Ahmad, 2016). Governments and institutions must consult with people with disability organisations when developing policies, laws and programmes that protect their rights. In particular, the human rights model encompasses the value and need for a disability policy that acknowledges the human dignity of disabled persons (Degener, 2016). Figure 5 outlines the descriptive and perspectives of medical, social and human rights models of disability in enhancing academic success of disabled students in the learning environment.

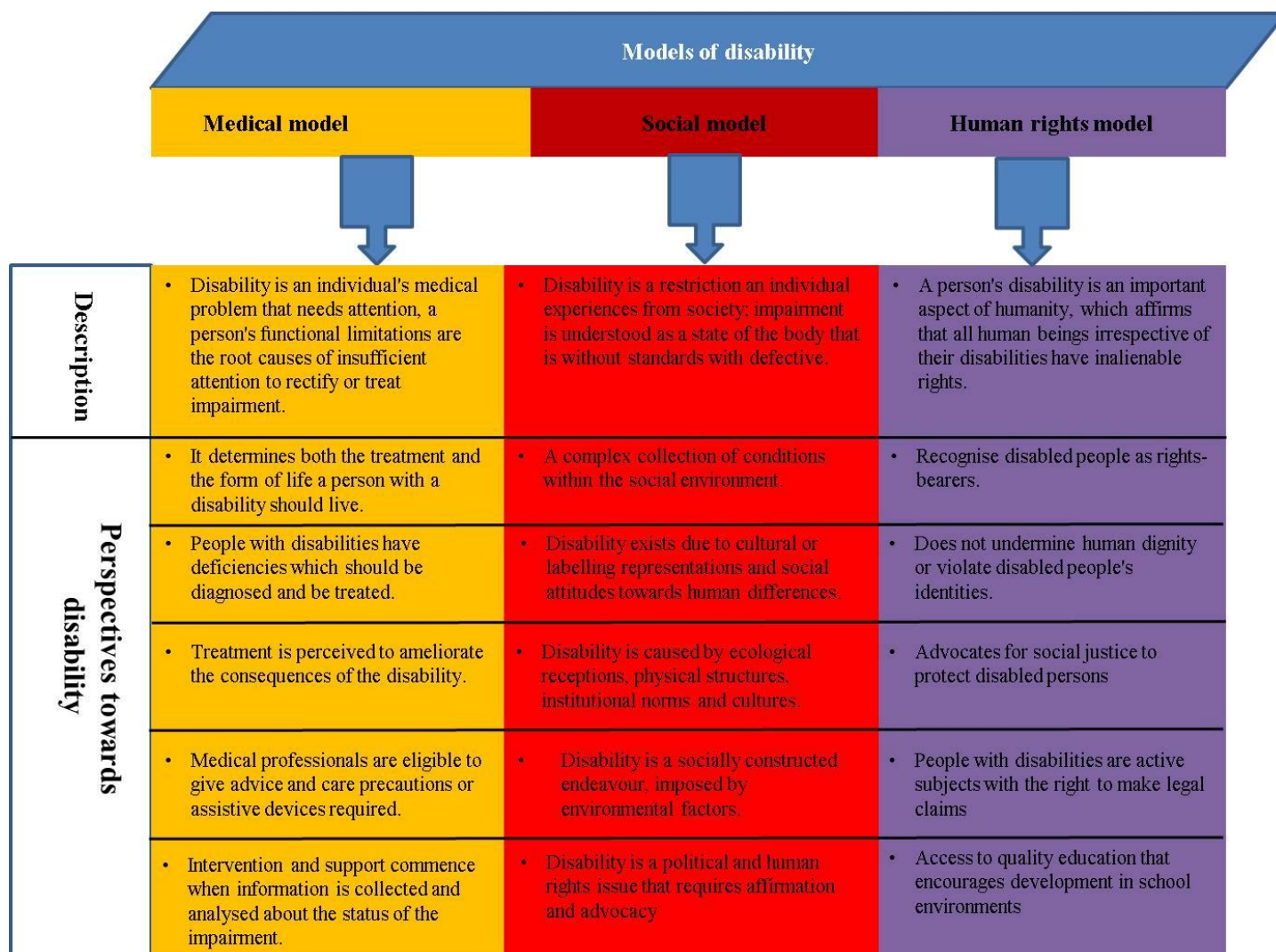


Figure 7: Description and perspectives of disability models

3.3. Challenges of visually impaired students

While VISs encounter some challenges on their journey to attaining higher education, they normally feel overwhelmed and start to disengage and fall behind in their studies. Therefore, it is vital for HEIs to provide such students with suitable and appropriate support to promote learning, personal development and retention in higher education. However, Hammond, Thorogood, Jenkins and Faaiuas (2013) in Paideya and Bngesai (2017) point out that supporting and enhancing students' capability requires all aspects of education institutions – philosophies, structures, strategies and policies to be integrated and coordinated to aid student engagement and success.

Besides the challenges faced by every student in higher education, VISs are faced with many extreme and unbearable challenges. Such students experience attitudinal, social, academic, physical and institutional barriers

that impact negatively on their academic success (Ahmad, 2016; Rao, 2015). Alves et al. (2009) illustrate that the loss of vision ability causes unfavourable consequences which can lead to psychological, social and economic problems and can affect the quality of life as it may lead to loss of autonomy and self-esteem. A concern to support VISs in their personal and academic life is however an integral element of academic institutions to have the ability to develop support mechanisms that enable them to attain educational goals. With this in mind, it is pragmatic for HEIs to provide appropriate support that can accommodate the academic, social and psychological needs of VISs. Bornschlegl and Caltabiano (2022) indicate that academic support is beneficial for student success when such support meets the needs of increasingly diverse backgrounds of the student fraternity. Academic support relates to specific activities that have a significant influence on academic achievements such as supplementary instruction, tutoring or mentoring (Giesen, Cavanaugh & McDonnell, 2012). Academic support relates to the emotional and social aspects of educational demands in higher education (Kaur, 2016).

As a heterogeneous group of students, VISs have a varied nature of problems that demand adequate attention and suitable support to achieve good academic performance and success. Amin et al. (2022) contend that VISs entering HEI face various obstacles which may hinder their pursuit to study. As a result, HEIs are poorly prepared to support students and to accommodate their needs (Amin et al., 2022). Similarly, the academic performance of VISs is deprived by their vision status which includes problems in understanding academic concepts, doing and writing assignments and assessed of work done (Kapur, 2017). Agesa (2014) points out that loss of vision imposes various limitations which include a range and variety of experiences. Some of these experiences include the ability to get and control the environment and oneself (Agesa, 2014), the mass of visual materials to which they are exposed, class schedules, models, images and graphic materials (Butler, Holloway, Marriott and Goncu, 2017; Kapur, 2017), access to learning materials and communication with others (Omede, 2015; Agesa, 2014), the attitude of peers, lectures and school community (Kpodoe et al., 2019; Temesgen, 2018;), discrimination (Lukianova & Fell, 2016; Liakou & Manousou; 2015), poor or lack of learning and assistive devices and technology (Croft, 2020; Kamaghe, Luhanga & Kisangiri, 2020; Matsie & Stofile, 2021) and access of services within the campus (Mosia & Phasha, 2020; Almog, 2018).

In a quest to establish the challenges experienced by VISs in HEIs, the literature reveals that their academic performance is in a deprived state (Kapur, 2017). Such students experience problems not only in understanding academic concepts but also in their performance in classwork, assignments, tests and examinations (Kapur, 2017). A study conducted by Butler, et al. (2017) revealed that VISs encounter some challenges in processing information with maps, plots, diagrams, plans and tables. Their findings also revealed that such students found it difficult to access graphical materials. The problems and experiences of these students call for skilful and

adequately trained educators with special needs education. Amin, et al. (2021) insists that the challenges of VISs come from various aspects that include their lecturers, peers and the school community in general. Besides, the institutional misunderstanding of the needs of VISs and the form of support that they need also contributes to their difficulty to be accommodated by support services in higher education (Amin et al., 2021).

The experiences of VISs are also associated with their challenge of access to the services in HEIs. Access to education is a means to empower people with disabilities and to allow them to be self-sufficient and independent (Mosia, 2017). Mutanga (2020) points out that inequality in accessing support services by students with disabilities is on the rise in higher education. Blind students can be handicapped and restricted in their ability to get about in order to familiarise themselves with the environment. Blindness prevents change of ones' surroundings and securing opportunities that a person with sight has (Agesa, 2014). Ones' mobility has two components, mental orientation and physical locomotion. Ndurumo (1993) in Agesa (2014) regards mental orientation as the ability to recognise his/her environment and spatial relation with self and others. Locomotion is defined as the movement of oneself from one place to the other utilizing an organic mechanism. Mosia (2017) found that VISs require mobility to autonomously navigate their learning and living environments. Moreover, Amin et al. (2021) observe that support services are necessary by students with disabilities to familiarise them with the social surroundings to improve their quality of life. Therefore, support staff and educators must be trained on how to support and provide resources for VISs as suggested by Samui, et al. (2017). Prominently, access to support services in higher education requires institutions to involve all the relevant stakeholders to inspire one another for full commitment.

Considering that research has discovered that VISs are a highly dis-homogeneous category with a wide range of specific disabilities, abilities and needs (Bocconi, Dini, Ferlino, Martinoli & Ott, 2007), they have a right to access and use e-learning tools and assistive aids (Amin et al., 2021). Scholars on disability issues acknowledge that the provision of assistive technologies provides relief and a sense of well-being and the freedom to achieve valuable functioning for its users (Mutanga, 2020; Mosia, 2015). Alves et al (2009) indicate that the use of assistive technology enables VISs to better adjust and participate effectively in their regular learning and academic activities. This gives them access to the same information source as their peers without vision impairment. However, VISs encounter various barriers such as lack of support and absence of accessible assistive technology devices and poor planning associated with individualised special educational needs (Amin et al., 2021). The main drawback of assistive technology and learning aids is that they are expensive to access (Landsberg, Kruger & Swart, 2019; Matshediso, 2010) and many students with vision impairment cannot afford them. Along with that, Dyal, Carpenter and Wright (2009) admit that assistive technology devices can be

simple, complex and costly for students with vision impairment. Bryden (2021) contends that people with disabilities rely on assistive devices and modifications which allow them to participate in their learning and society. However, they experience several barriers resulting in unequal opportunities to attain such devices. This may affect their access to invest in assistive technology.

The literature illustrates that lack of financial resources to procure assistive devices, lack of knowledge and technical support from teachers, lack of students' willingness, complicated design unreliable devices and lack of opportunities that result from the insufficient provision of assistive technology devices are some barriers to the access and use of assistive technology (Hussin, Folkestand and Makela, 2013). Sefotho (2020) illustrates that the fourth industrial revolution has ushered technological orientation in teaching and learning, and that education systems must cater for marginalised students with no access to assistive technology. Bocconi et al. (2007) point out that due to the widespread technology use in the field of education, disadvantaged and minority groups including the disabled face the danger of being marginalised, and have no access to and use of assistive technology. Assistive technology seems to be a great equalizer that enable students with disabilities access to education the same as non-disabled students. Therefore, institutional support staff needs to take the trouble to find out which assistive devices best suit the disabled students' learning and how they can be adopted. As students support services expand through the responsible use of assistive technology, access is vital for decision-making and policy-setting for technological and instructional infrastructure (McCracken, 2005). Access and use of assistive technologies disrupt the traditional practices of teaching and learning, thus allowing the transformation of pedagogy to accommodate students with vision impairment (Sefotho, 2020). On the whole, technology support must meet special learning needs and advance the quality of teaching and learning for VISs.

Even though some of the challenges encountered by VISs are those experienced by normal-sighted students, Croft (2020) concludes that VISs are positioned within a disabling narrative that creates underlying associations of deficit which are reinforced by various expectations that demand changes in their learning environment. Beyond that, the challenges experienced by these students are often underpinned by comprehensive and vague assumptions about vision impairment and disreputable information that makes it difficult to succeed in higher education (Manitsa, & Doikou, 2022). Besides, Matshedisho (2010) views insufficient information regarding the availability and use of educational support and how such support might impact the academic success of the visually impaired as another contributing factor. For students with disabilities to benefit equally, Mutanga (2017) expressively indicates that for support to be effective there must be clear information and positive policy for students with disabilities. This information can be used to assist students to develop survival skills and knowledge, instilling motivation, and enhancing social, emotional and academic success. Croft (2020)

illustrates that research offers a holistic understanding and adds to the work of other researchers and colleagues that explore the experiences of VISs in higher education. Emphasis is also made on support services to provide assistive technology as a great equalizer between disabled and non-disabled students in higher education. For VISs to access specific and personal support within the campus, it is crucial to their experiences and expectations in meeting their educational rights.

3.4. Praxis of student support in higher education

One of the fundamental challenges facing higher education in Lesotho and many countries of the world is the issue of support to students with disabilities (McGowan & Wang 2003). A large number of these students come from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds. Manitsa and Doikou (2022) view student support as a complex and multi-layered problem which may result in shallow academic success for many VISs. As research unfolds, Jacklin and Robinson (2007) point out that the term support is conceptualised on the basis of participants' interpretations. Some of them define support as material resources (Fluke, O'Connor, Hoff, & Peterson, 2014); define it as guidance, advice, provision of information or direction (Mishra, 2020), while others view support as being the same as encouragement (Martijn et al., 2020). However, the role of support services is to identify and engage with students in a meaningful way to bring together in-class and out-of-class experiences and to enhance the total learning experience in higher education (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). Besides, Strydom, Kuh and Loots (2017) imply that support services are dedicated to enhancing student success by providing appropriate support across various areas that include social, cognitive, technology and academic performance and satisfaction in higher education. It is imperative to support students with disabilities in order to meet their academic challenges and demands and to provide academic skills development and support to enable them to develop effective learning strategies (Vaughn et al., 2017). Bartram (2009) insists that student support has always been the responsibility of professionals in higher education. It is identified as one key auditable area within the quality assurance guidelines in higher education. It is outlined by the Lesotho higher education policy that student support must be considered to enhance student success and quality assurance in higher education.

Support of students with vision impairment or any form of disability is crucial for their success and access to quality education (Habulezi & Phasha, 2012). The concept of student support which stresses the complete view of student learning has three dimensions of support. These are academic support, psychological support and social support.

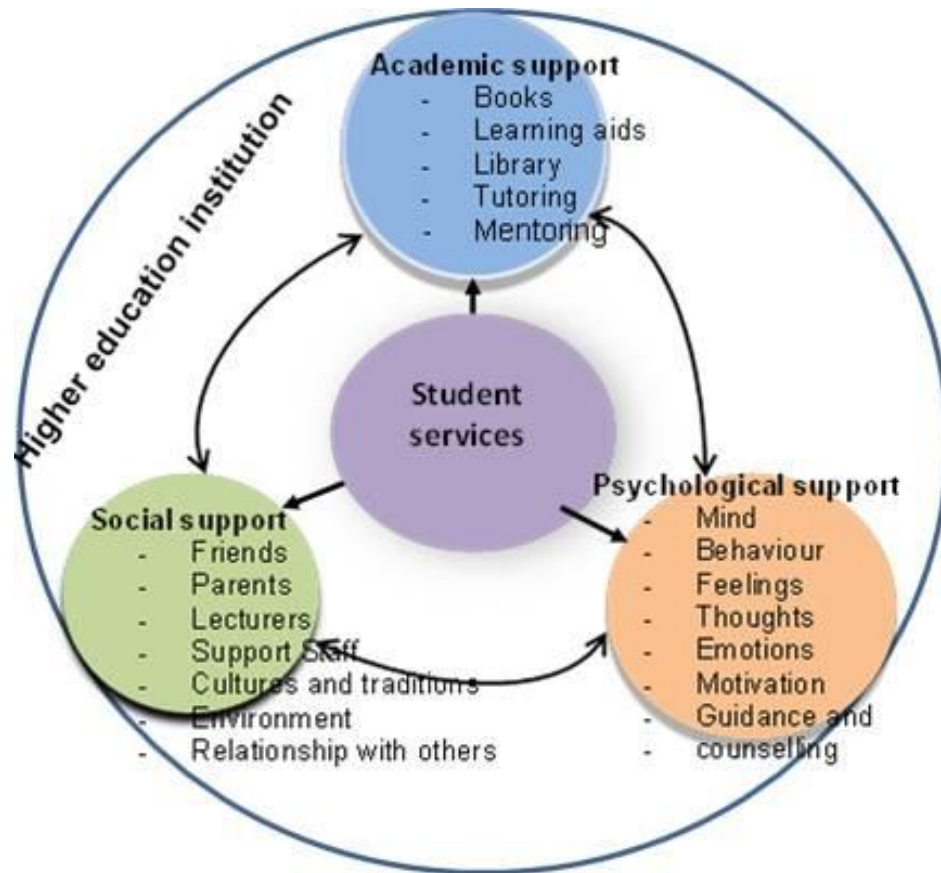


Figure 7: Dimensions of student support services

3.4.1 Academic support

The concept of academic support may refer to a variety of educational services, learning and teaching resources or instructional methods provided to students to help them improve their participation in learning, to meet learning standards and to be at par with other students and to succeed in school. Authors like Paideya and Bengesai (2017) argue that academic support is an under-researched phenomenon in higher education. They also view academic support as a shadow world in the academic sphere that goes unnoticed. It is evident that many students with vision impairment and other disabilities attempt to access and attain higher levels of education; support in higher education becomes an integral aspect to satisfy their academic and social needs. Giesen, Cavanaugh and McDonnall (2012) indicate that various aspects of academic support such as tutoring, mentoring, supplementary instruction or any form of the after-school care programme have a significant influence on students' academic success. Academic support also entails tuition and guidance during the course of the study to ensure effective students' learning experiences. Education researchers speculate that academic support enhances personal confidence and status which enhance student success and retention of unwavering knowledge and life skills (Kakada, Deshpande & Bisen, 2019). Other critical aspects that facilitate VISs'

success in higher education are sufficient availability of libraries and audio textbooks, brailed reading and learning materials. Apart from that, Mayanja, Tibaingana and Birevu (2019) concede that academic support reinforces students' confidence in and outside the classroom. In addition to that, Naseer and Rafique (2021) find that academic support has a lot of positive influence on academic motivation, learning ability and student satisfaction. As a significant aspect of higher education, motivation is a force that strengthens student behaviour and energises individual students towards their academic success.

In a quest to establish the importance of academic support, researchers illustrate that academic support entails various programmes, strategies or activities used by institutions to increase the academic success of students outside traditional academic instruction, particularly for those students who may be at risk (Kaur, 2016; Fluke, O'Connor, Hoff & Peterson, 2014) like the visually impaired. Notably, these academic support programs may be designed for individuals or a specific student population. Huebner, (2011) illustrate that academic support programmes are devoted to cultivating a learning culture that promotes creativity which is constructed and perpetuated by fellow students. Moreover, these programmes are essential in building a suitable learning environment for VISs. Disability researchers contend that regardless of where students are in their studies, academic support is paramount in enhancing their success. Logically, Troiano, Liefeld and Trachtenberg (2010) assumed that academic success is linked to academic support and this relationship is created between support services and students as a guide and perceived support for their academic achievement. Therefore, academic support programmes are positively associated with socio-emotional skills such as resilience, creativity, problem-solving and self-efficacy which can improve student success. As such, SSS are required to design comprehensive programmes dedicated to promoting learning, personal development and retention in higher education.

In the learning and teaching environment, the loss of vision imposes multifaceted limitations and challenges upon students and educators. Kapur (2017) notes that this impact negatively on individual students' performance as they cannot perceive and use visual information to interpret different teaching and learning situations. The challenges experienced by VISs in higher education call for effective and appropriate support programs to guarantee their academic success. Furthermore, Kapur (2019) concludes that to effectively address the full range of challenges that affect the academic success of VISs, collaboration among the various sections or departments within the institution is critical. Researchers indicate that integrating support programmes has a link to student success and increases aspects of learning and teaching such as establishing a safe and supportive academic environment that strengthens academic support programmes (Pinto, 209; Troiano, Liefeld and Trachtenberg, 2010). While such collaboration is critical to students' academic support, such academic support

services should not be universal. They can vary from student to student, but certain forms of services can be more critical in HEIs to a wide student population (Troiano, Liefeld & Trachtenberg, 2010). Students' academic success depends not only on what is happening in the classrooms but also on the effectiveness of support programmes that connect students with support services within the institution (Mishra, 2020).

3.4.2. Social support

As a multidimensional concept, social support has been conceptualised differently by various researchers. For example, Huurre (2000) suggests that each definition varies from the degree of specificity, stability of the interpersonal relationship and the breaths of transactions encompassed in a given context. Researchers such as Papadopoulos et al. (2014) define social support as the assistance that a person receives or expects to receive from someone that they come in contact with. Suryaratri, Komalasari and Medellu (2022) illustrate that social support is used to define a feeling of care, security, appreciation or assistance from others. It includes peoples' willingness through love and presence. In higher education, social support is viewed as a relationship or social interaction provided to others as assistance or a feeling of attachment to a student or group of students for academic success (Mishra, 2020). Motivation or encouragement from social networks, care, high aspiration and a positive attitude are some factors that lead to positive academic success in higher education. Other than that, social support refers to the pro-social behaviours or attitudes that one receives in ones' family and society to enhance social participation, functioning and interaction (Manitsa & Doikou, 2022). However, Lestarir and Fajar (2020) view social support as the interaction of two parties exchanging resources. These are the giver and the recipient with the intent to improve the welfare of the recipient.

Social support is regarded as an umbrella term that comprises enacted (received) support and perceived (functional) support. Research has demonstrated that each form of social support displays its unique pattern of correlations and creates a more positive affective condition in people with disabilities as each one has a distinct construct (Lestari & Fajar, 2020; Hadidi & Khateeb, 2014). Perceived (functional) support is viewed by Altermatt (2019) and Papadopoulos et al. (2015) as the form of social support which is offered in times of need. It can be provided by family, friends, peers or people within the same circle. Besides, perceived support is thus measured by the availability of psychological and material resources from one's interpersonal relationship (Melrose, Brown & Wood, 2015). Conversely, perceived support is associated with an improved emotional adjustment that results due to stressful life experiences. Likewise, enacted (received) support is the support that an individual receives or is reported to have received in a specific period or situation, from a specific person (Papadopoulos et al., 2014). Enacted support may be influenced by personal characteristics such as the severity of impairment, employment status, gender, independent mobility, self-skills and management. It is also

regarded as affective support which entails expressions of being or feeling, being respected, being accepted, or acknowledging one's emotions.

Student social support is regarded as an essential component for students' retention, success and satisfaction in higher education. It has been claimed by researchers that social support has significant benefits and that it reflects a positive impact on the social inclusion of VISs in higher education (Manitsa & Daikou, 2020). Kef (2002) points out that social support promotes psychological well-being and improved satisfaction in students. Social support received by VISs may promote their sense of autonomy, future independence living, social relations and friendship with peers and classmates (Manitsa & Daikou, 2020). Papadopoulos et al. (2014) view social support as an effective buffer against depression that may result due to depression. Moreover, Rodrigues and Cohen (1998) find social support as a mechanism that can buffer against the negative impact of stressful events meant to enhance an individual's perceptions about one's ability to cope with the demands of higher education and to enhance coping strategies to address both practical and emotional consequences thereof. On the other hand, Yuan, et al. (2022) comment that social support significantly helps the psychosocial well-being of VISs by fostering their self-esteem, feeling of worthiness, sense of security and self-assurance in their environment. These researchers reach a consensus that social support requires a holistic approach that considers students' success.

In a quest to support VISs in higher education, Lestari and Fajar (2020) and Altermatt (2019) admittedly reveal that there is a correlation between social support structures and appreciative inquiry. The duo comments that social support and appreciation from the social environment are essential to people with disabilities. Consequently, social support in the form of appreciation plays a vital role in shaping one's self-esteem (Harris & Orth, 2019), and enhancing the exchange of resources between the giver and the recipient to improve the welfare of the latter (Ji, Rana, Shi & Zhong, 2019). Tahir, Inam, and Raana (2015) concede that appreciation support is required by people with disabilities to increase their self-esteem when they interact with their social environment. In HEIs, appreciation support is obtainable from educators, peers, friends, support services officials, the campus community and the management of the institution. In the study conducted by Manyumwa (2018), the participating VISs revealed that receiving support from their sighted fellow students and members of support services is related to practical assistance with a caring attitude. The same participants revealed that receiving social support from educators and members of support services staff made them feel accepted and secure. Apart from Manyamwas' findings, Bodaghi et al. (2017) observed that participants felt valued, respected and appreciated because of the support from the librarians.

The literature on social support in HEIs is about valuing, recognising, accepting, celebrating and appreciating VISs. On the whole, social support is regarded as the protective factor found to be effective in counteracting the negative effects of psychological functioning and accepted strategies for combating psychological stress among students in higher education (Farrell & Langrehr, 2017). With this note, the following section discusses the empirical nature of psychological support in HEIs.

3.4.3. Psychological support

Considering that research has discovered that visual impairment is a risk factor for students' psychosocial ability in the learning environment (Agesa, 2014), Pinto (2019) concludes that it is important to incorporate psychological support and adjustment in the issuance of their independence, autonomy and control over their studies. Amin et al. (2021) argue that students with low vision or blindness face a constant challenge of psychological and social adjustment due to their disability. Visual impairment is potentially distressing because of the form of disability and fear of total vision loss and struggles associated with it (Dev et al., 2014). A vast repository of scholarly work on vision loss reveals that visually impaired people may gravely suffer from psychological consequences ranging from lack of self-confidence, self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, loss of physical integrity, lack of sense of self, lack of contact with self, lack of career and vocational opportunities, disengagement with the environment and disorganisation of personality and self (Singh, 2019). Augestad (2017) has revealed that persons with vision impairment present more emotional challenges which are associated with fear, anxiety and or depression.

Research has revealed that visually impaired people may suffer from severe psychological consequences ranging from loss of physical integrity to lack of self-confidence, self-esteem, posttraumatic stress disorder, lack of sense of self, lack of contact with the real environment, depression, obscurity, lack of both written and oral communication, anxiety, lack of career and vocational opportunities, financial insecurity, being less active socially and interpersonally, and at times complete disorganization of personality and self (Singh, 2019; Demmin and Silverstein, 2020; Augestad, 2017). Moreover, to deal with the daily educational challenges, VISs also suffer a range of emotions such as denial, frustration, seclusion, fear or anger (Stevellink & Fear, 2015). Similarly, Omede (2015) points out that visually impaired people encounter various psychosocial, emotional, physical and environmental hazards and barriers which hinder their success to perform their daily activities. Research has shown that mental health symptoms and problems can impair a person's functioning in major life domains such as family, social life, school and work (Schuh, Jones & Torres, 2017). A study conducted by Nyman, Gosney and Victor (2010) found that the overall mental well-being and quality of life of persons with vision impairment is poorer as compared to their sighted peers. Consequently, Pinguart and Pfeiffer (2011)

conclude that the more severe the visual impairment, the worse the impact on the psychological well-being of such a person.

Generally, individuals differ in how they accept their disability. Students with vision impairment not only need specific facilities to overcome, adjust or cope with psychological challenges but they also need support to continue with their learning (Barrow, Ting & Patel, 2018). Students' psychological problems are caused by deficits and inabilities of skills within the individual student and structural factors such as loss of pastoral relationships between support services and individual students. Priestley, et al. (2022) found that traditionally, students with psychological health difficulties are seen as responsible for counselling services within the SSS. Getachew (2019) undoubtedly holds that the failure to complete studies in higher education by many VISs results is a result of emotional disorder. Therefore, HEIs have the responsibility to create an enabling environment that supports and encourages students to manage their mental life and academic work effectively (Strydom, Kuh & Loots, 2017). Increased recognition of the need for emotional support must be provided as an integrated service to enhance support services and act as a protective factor against psychological challenges (Barrow, Ting & Patel, 2018).

Researchers have found that the number of students experiencing psychological challenges in higher education is increasing and support services must enhance their emotional stability (Mutanga, 2020; Riddell, Tinklin & Wilson, 2005). Haakma, Janssen and Minnaert (2018) have found that supporting the psychological needs of students in the learning environment allows them to feel competent, autonomous, and motivated and it can also have positive effects on their education. The autonomy of VISs to negotiate whatever learning environment they find comfortable should be observed to overcome the impact and deficits caused by vision impairment and the stigma associated with its effects (Aciem & Mazzotta, 2012). More importantly, psychological support must meet the emotional and mental needs of each student from their increasing backgrounds, including their learning styles as they go through different learning development. This resonates with the social model of disability which focuses on the need to remove environmental and societal barriers to the participation of students with disabilities.

3.5. Modelling student support services

Systematic to coordinating support services can help academic institutions are tailor-made and provide support within the diverse students' community to have a blend of services. Based on students' demands, experiences and goals, HEIs and education systems are identified and defined by their uniqueness to support students. Student support in higher education: campus service utilization, impact, and challenges (Johnson, et al., 2022).

This uniqueness is defined by models of support that draw students towards increasing their autonomy to confront their academic and non-academic problems (Busaba , Tanawastien , & Tantaswadi, 2019). The models are viewed by Warner and Palfreyman (2000) to provide a range of support services as distinct entities or a group of support services for management purposes in higher education. Besides, Awang-Hashim, Kaur and Valdez (2019) admit that HEIs are entities with complexities created by the diversity that demands the development of a model that can support students. Although there are multiple models of delivery, I found the integrated student support (ISS) model and the proactive model to be more relevant for use in the present study due to their principles. The delivery model of student support may differ from one institution to another, according to the design and structure of individual institutions. The following section thus shared the light on definition; importance and application of each model applied in this study.

3.5.1. Integrated student support services

The Integrated student support services (ISS) model is regarded as the outcome of the United Kingdom higher education system as a commitment to respond to the pressures and changes within the learning environment (Warner & Palfreyman, 2000). This model is a holistic approach used by educational institutions to address students' barriers and challenges by fully engaging the school community. Sacks, Moore, MacClay and Pina (2022) find that the ISS model recognises the students' health, social, cognitive and behavioural development. This quartet further clarifies that ISS is a school-based approach intended to promote students' academic achievement and success by coordinating the various departments to address academic and non-academic barriers that affect students. The ISS model entails programmes that target at-risk and homogeneous students that need additional support and opportunities to succeed in higher education (Moore, 2017). While student support programmes may take different forms, Moore and Emig (2014) suggest that integration is critical to support individual students' needs and ISS programmes in the school.

The overall aim of the ISS model in academic institutions is two-fold: to expand students' access by making SSS an extension of the classroom and; to increase the quality of support services and delivery of educational instructions more seamlessly for diverse student cohorts (Dadgar et al., 2013). Therefore this school-based approach promotes students' academic success by developing or securing and coordinating support where the ISS model targets academic and non-academic barriers to achievement. Dobbie and Fryer (2011) assume that ISS is a potential strategy to address disparities in academic outcomes resulting from persisting inequalities experienced by students in an educational environment. Researchers argue that the ISS model embraces a whole student perspective which recognises the importance of health, safety, behaviour, social, and emotional

development and the relationship of a student with his or her educational success ((McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Castrechini & London, 2012).

The ISS model meant to improve the academic success of students in higher education is composed of five elements which are Needs assessment, Coordination of support for students, Integration of supports, Community partnership and Data collection and tracking. The application and relevance of these elements in this study are based on Kristin A. Moore's (2014) report titled "Integrated student support: Assessing the Evidence of 2014".

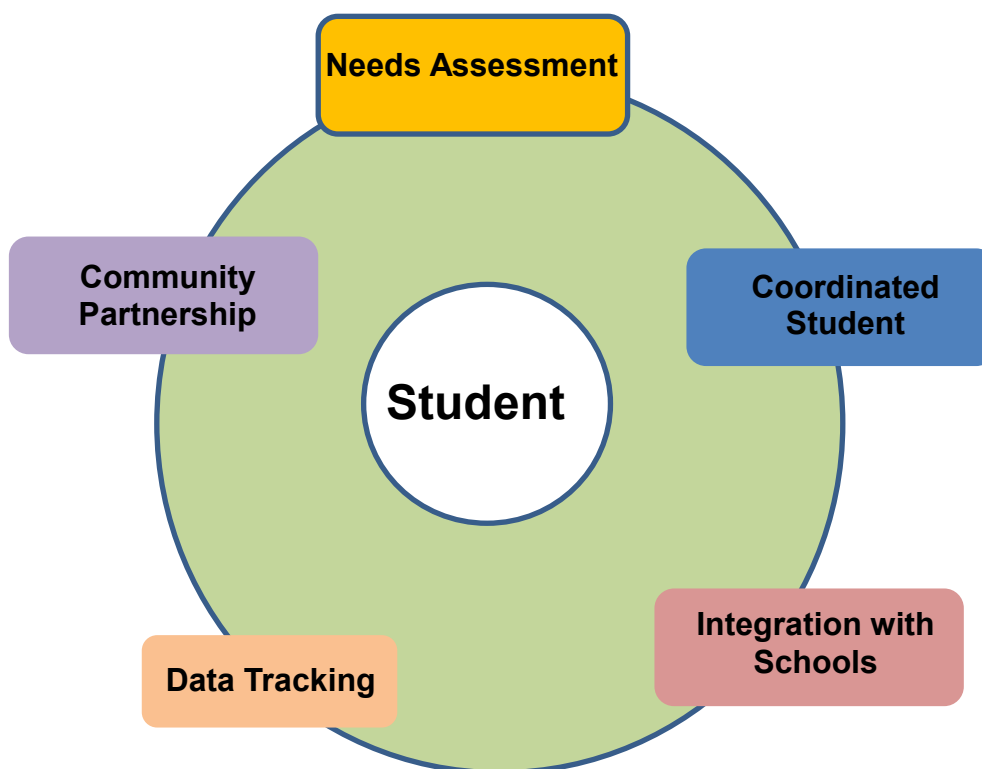


Figure 8: Integrated student support services model

3.5.1.1. Needs assessment

The central element that drives the ISS model is the comprehensive needs assessment which is both initial and on-going. Needs assessment² occur at different levels of the project with different stakeholders or participants (Moore & Emig, 2014). The ISS determine the needs and form of support required by students in an educational institution while at the same time, gauging the types of support being offered to identify the service

² Needs assessments are a tool used to collect information from individual students relating to their academic and non-academic needs in the institution. This information can be gathered through the one-on-one interview from a particular service point, during orientation or on registration

gap. With this in mind, needs assessment helps the SSS to determine the types of support or services that need to be provided. Moore and Emig (2014) state that after student assessment is conducted among students cohorts, students who are classified as at-high risk like disabled students must be referred to SSS officials for more intense support which is referred to as "targeted support" or "tier two support". Despite the student's level of disability, ISS may employ screening to assess students in order to identify their circumstances, needs and intensity of their disability. Institutions use needs assessment to establish students' academic and non-academic needs for a homogenous community of students who may need extra support.

To provide a holistic view of disability support services in higher education, it is imperative to gather all the necessary information on students' needs and concerns (Dadgar, Nodine, Bracco & Venezia, 2013). In this regard, Schuh, Jones and Torres (2017) grant that needs assessment would determine the types of services and programmes that student may need. Data identified academic and non-academic barriers to learning and match support to individual students' needs and assess progress. In collaboration and in order to enhance student academic and support functioning, needs assessment is the responsibility of the SSS (Dadgar, et al. 2013). This exercise is conducted to develop or locate the needed support to coordinate support and to reinforce tailor-made support on the basis of individual needs. The ISS model is data-driven to track students' needs and outcomes either before offering the services or as an outcome of planned services (Schuh, Jones & Torres, 2017). The ISS employ needs assessment, facilitate integration within institutions, enable stakeholders' partnership and coordinate various types of data tracking support in order to provide a wrap-around support. This model could enhance academic achievement and educational success and that needs assessment provides the basis for the effective ISS model implementation (Moore, 2014).

3.5.1.2. Coordination of support for students

To improve student academic outcomes, Moore (2014) point out that coordination is a critical element in the implementation of ISS. Coordination of various support services in higher education is a fundamental initiative to remove academic and non-academic barriers for all students to achieve academic success. Weissman et al. (2009) comment that if support services are not well coordinated within higher education functioning and having a separate administrative section for students, then support and academic services can be obstacles for many students especially those with disabilities like the visually impaired. Schuh, Jones and Torres (2017) point out that bringing support services together into integrated support services makes it easy for such students to access them. Therefore, this initiative could enhance interdepartmental coordination by placing resources and programmes where they are best utilised.

HEIs are embedded in supporting students academically and non-academically to create a direct and purposeful connection among the student population and to expand support services to more students. The principle of coordination in ISS is designed to ensure that various programs are accessible to those who seamlessly need them (Moore, 2014). Researchers illustrate that ISS is a school-based model that promotes students' academic achievement and education success by coordinating a seamless system of wraparound support for the students regardless of their education needs (Sacks, et al. 2022). In this regard, ISS practitioners emphasise the importance of coordination in adding value to address students' needs in academic institutions. Nodine, Dadgar, Venezia and Bracco (2012) assert that when ISS are well coordinated across academic and support functions it can offer seamless transition experiences for students. Conversely, Croft (2020) disputes that the experiences of VISs in higher education are underpinned by broad and nebulous assumptions about disability and positioned within the negative underpinnings despite measures to address disability barriers. For this reason, students who feel socially integrated are less likely to quit higher education since several programmes provide support to buffer their academic and non-academic needs (Thomas & Hanson, 2014).

3.5.1.3. Integration of support

Integrating student support services in higher education is a culture shift intentionally designed and offered broadly and systematically to equitably address the diverse needs of students (Moore et al. (2014). The integration of student support in a school setting is regarded by Bronstein and Mason (2016) as a vital component that promotes change in how educators approach students and vice-versa. Moore (2014) concedes that applying the ISS model requires a shift in mind-set about how and why people serve the student community. Therefore, an effort to design and sequence support services with equitable results may help educational institutions to reach students who are in need. Moore and Emig (2014) point out that institutions must design their services to be intentional, timely and seamlessly integrated into students' experiences.

The element of integration of support in higher education demands institutions to design their support services to be intentionally, timely and flawlessly interwoven with the students' experiences (Moore and Emig, 2014). Aliedan et al. (2023) illustrates that support services play a critical role in facilitating access of students with disabilities to higher education and trying to establish how they conceptualise support. Support services must be consistent and organised to build student confidence and self-esteem and to increase the likelihood that students will take caution to use more support services. McIntosh and Goodman (2016) undertake that the successful adoption of the key components of the ISS model is a high level of integration to facilitate coordination of support and to influence a positive school climate. Therefore, the integral aspect of ISS is the emphasis that the supports services must be offered within the campus and be coordinated and monitored to fully embrace the cultural shift of academic and non-academic support provided by HEIs.

3.5.1.4. Community support partnership

The ISS model seeks a close partnership with the institutions' leadership, family and community to enhance support towards their students. Cobb and Schmitz (2017) point out that the element of community partnership strengthens external partnerships to forge a strong alliance with various staff agencies, community-based organisations, government agencies and relevant stakeholders to offer support that meets the needs of students and to help students shape and attain success in their academic endeavours (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). The initiative to engage the campus community and other stakeholders in a concerted effort has the potential to develop a cohesive campus community and better support students with special education needs. Moore (2017) clarifies that the ISS model does not only seek to improve institutional outcomes but views them as a vital source to implement the model. To address the academic and non-academic needs of students, the ISS model relies on partnerships with the internal and external partners of the institution.

The ISS rely exclusively on a school-community partnership to address the needs of the homogenous student population in HEI, envisioning their role as agents of support (Moore and Emig, 2014). The partnership may emerge from different sections, such as student welfare, disability services, continuing and academic advising, counselling and guidance. Moore and Emig further note that partnerships can be unsolidified and modified according to the ebbs and flows of identified academic and non-academic needs of each institution and student. Consequently, students' academic emotional, behavioural, social and cognitive development can be influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors of the school setting. Ensuring the academic success of such students is a shared responsibility of the school community, their families and other related stakeholders (Castrechini & London, 2012). Bronstein and Mason (2016) speculate that meaningful and mutually beneficial partnerships between academic institutions, stakeholders and civil organizations may lead to an enabling learning environment. As a result, student may experience an expansion of resources to support students, diversity in support staff and accessibility of support services. Researchers have shown that the difficulties and challenges encountered by students with disabilities are not solely the problems of individual students but the institution and other actors in higher education as well (Partap & Banga, 2017; Jacklin & Robinson, 2007). As a result, the implementation of the ISS model is to lead to positive student outcomes, within an enabling learning environment and community context. Moore and Emig (2014) conclude that the successful implementation of ISS requires holistic participation of the school community and external stakeholders with the context that support the initiative of support services in higher education.

3.5.1.5. Data Collection and Tracking

The ISS model is data-driven and tracks students' needs and outcomes for the students that it serves. Moore (2014) illustrates that the element of student data collection and outcome tracking plays a critical role in helping institutional support services staff to identify academic and non-academic needs and barriers, to compile support that matches individual students' needs; to determine how students can be supported and to assess progress. Maxwell and Person (2016) state that needs and outcomes must be gathered and tracked over time to determine the most suitable support, the progress made and the evolving needs of students. With the already existing students' database in HEIs, support services staff could guide, plan and implement student support (Dadgar et al., 2013). The exercise of collecting data involves gathering and entering accurate and reliable data from qualitative and quantitative sources. Moore et al. (2014) suggests that data should be analysed to inform support planning and possible adjustment and be evaluated to ensure that appropriate support is provided to meet student's needs and goals. Designing a useful and reliable database is a primary source of variation that can be used to assess how well HEIs are achieving their objective of supporting underrepresented and minority student populations (Maxwell & Person, 2016). The sources of variations include standardization of data collection procedures, the types of data collected and the sources of data.

To ensure the efficiency and usability of the data collection and tracking system in ISS, Moore (2014) indicate that data systems need to be able to inform the users about the key information about individual students so that services can be customised, sequenced and assessed accordingly. Appropriate systems must be designed to allow institutions to make use of data to evaluate what is working and what is not. To ensure quality support HEIs must design and maintain data systems that are accessible and used by SSS staff and administrators to improve persistence and to ensure successful support. For this reason, institutions may use such data not only as a tracking and reporting tool, but also as a guide to improving the success of underrepresented student populations such as students with disabilities.

Table 2: An example of what data records may look like using data collection and tracking elements

No	Student ID.:	Section/dept. providing services	Official ID:	Service activity	Start time	End time
1						
2						

In the quest to ensure quality support, HEIs must design and maintain data systems that are accessible and usable by SSS staff and administrators to improve persistence and to ensure successful support. For this reason, Moore and Emig, 2014 concede that institutions may use such data not only as more than a tracking and reporting tool but as a guide to improve the academic success of underrepresented student populations such as students with disabilities.

A hallmark of the ISS model is its student-centred approach which requires that student support is matched to the unique needs of identified students or educational institutions. Moore (2017) illustrates that the ISS model seems appropriate for "at-risk" students because they are offered a mixture of support that vary depending on their needs and circumstances. Therefore, this model is intended to promote positive outcomes and to reduce the negative outcomes for students in general. The student-centred approach thus provides customised, comprehensive, continuous and coordinated support services and learning resources to address students' socio-emotional, health, family and academic needs (Warner & Palfreyman, 2000). Moore (2014) mentions that the above-discussed elements of the ISS model are characterised as the guiding principles rather than a prescribed set of activities. While the ISS models may vary and their programmes may take different forms, researchers acknowledge that integration is critical to support individual students to meet their educational and social needs and that ISS has several common characteristics to address the barriers to learning (Achieving the Dream, 2018; Moore, 2017; Moore & Emig, 2014, Weissman et al., 2009).

3.5.2 Proactive Model of student support

“Proactive”, as the name says, acts proactively to support diverse students cohort in higher education. This model puts students’ experiences first in their academic journey. The proactive model allows students to access a range of support services from pre-entry to post-exit of their higher education to allow a better understanding to learn and be responsible for their studies (Warner and Palfreyman, 2000). Researchers show that timely intervention and support enable educational institutions to improve student success and to achieve equitable outcomes (Greenstein, Phillips, Matese and Cho, 2021). However, Simpson (2008) asserts that effective SSS must take the initiative for outreach and timely interventions for students in need. Proactive interventions consist of efforts undertaken in advance to handle the challenges and to prevent or modify their forms before they occur (Deepthi, Jeyavel, Subhasree and Jojo, 2022).

Warner and Palfreyman (2000) find that the application of the proactive model of support in a higher education environment upholds that SSS would become more student-centred by being more issues-centred than reactive. Williams, et al. (2017) illustrate that the proactive model focuses on future orientations undertaken in advance as the potential issues of concern. The proactive model helps students to identify issues that may be of concern

and enable support services officials to address them, tailor success and ultimately increase student retention and success. To deliver proactive student support, the authors of this model outlined the following strategic priorities for action (Deepthi et al, 2022; Williams et al. 2017). a) Education institutions must maximize student engagement to make it easy for students to connect with their peers and other members of the institution. This can be done on campus, online, or outside the campus as the starting point to engage students' experiences; b) streamline SSS to deliver flexible student self-service experiences that allow them to find answers quickly. This may scale support that creates an effective and tailor-made approach that fits student needs; c) create a holistic and impartial advising experience that allows every student to make it easier for support staff to understand their academic and non-academic needs; d) Foster student well-being as a concern for institutions to invest in modern technology for support and strategy.

These strategies focus on providing an array of SSS such as disability services, personal and career counselling, peer tutoring, academic advising and peer tutoring. Offering an array of SSS in higher education enables education institutions to meet the diverse academic and non-academic needs of students and increases their persistence and successes, thus helping homogenous and underrepresented student groups to overcome the barriers in their studies (Dietsche, 2012).

The following are the characteristics of the proactive student support model as correlated by Purnama and Sahrani (2021), Aspinwall and Taylor (1997) and Schwarzer and Luszczynska (2008). a) Proactive support is more focused on future challenges; b) Proactive support entails foreseeing upcoming challenges perceived as potential self-promotion; c) Proactive support uses positive emotional strategies that use available resources and that promote personal growth; and d) Proactive support is more goal-management-oriented and positive because it sees demands as challenges that need to be addressed.

The application of the proactive model leads to the realisation that students support services are one sub-system that exists in HEIs (Warner & Palfreyman, 2000). This implies that support services are viewed as a holistic approach with a range of generic abilities to support students. Schwarzer and Luszczynska (2008) conclude that the benefit of the proactive model of SSS in higher education is nothing but the ability to anticipate future challenges and appropriate utilisation of available resources

Emergence of SSS models in higher education is linked to two major reasons; the high withdrawal rate of students and increased student diversity in HEIs. Research has revealed that SSS in HEIs contribute to the quality of student's learning experiences and their academic success (Amin, et al. 2021; Manitsa & Dokou, 2022; Haakma, Janssen & Minnaert, 2018; Bartman, 2009; Jacklin & Robinson, 2007). More importantly,

support services are designed to communicate the fundamental values of academic institutions to their clientele (Jung & Hong, 2010). As a multifaceted and student-centred initiative, Thomas (2014) states that the proactive model of SSS in higher education is meant to enhance the quality of life, holistic wellness, student experiences and success.

3.6. Theorizing disability towards student support

Providing enabling and equitable learning environment is essential in creating opportunities for all students to have equal learning opportunities and access to support services. The SSS are expected to ensure that students receive quality services and to fully engage in building campuses which thrive for diverse learning experiences (Sanger & Gleason, 2020). This says the mission and vision of the support services must be aligned with certain philosophies that can develop or flourish with structure, appreciation and respect for the diverse experiences of students in their institutions. The philosophical viewpoint of each school of thought must facilitate, support and recognise each student as entitled to the support services in their institutions (Williams, 2017). Therefore, a brief background, assumptions and practicality of Humanism and the Critical theory will be discussed towards the enhancement of SSS and their effects towards academic success of VISs in higher education.

Reason and Kimball (2012) suggest that student support practitioners and institutions must have a broad and advanced knowledge of philosophies to allow for an informed and eclectic approach at administration level.

3.6.1. Humanism

The humanistic theory can be traced as far back as the middle ages. Basically, as school of thought humanism proposes that every person is valuable and has the right to be self-actualized through rational thought and reasoning. Historically, the humanistic theory is based on the assumption that a positive environment that is non-judgemental and that comprise trust and respect can promote positive thinking. The humanistic theory focuses on human beings and their existence (Khatib, Sarem & Hamidi, 2013). Humanists emphasise that human beings regardless their socio-economic background, education level, race, gender or disability are inherently good, and that they must be provided with the basic needs to enhance their wellbeing. Humanism focuses on the human virtue and on discovering sensible options to solving human problems. Firdaus and Mariyat (2017) affirm that a human being has a right and responsibility to give meaning and shape their own lives while building a more human society through natural values and ethic based on humanism in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. With this in mind, Braidotti (2013) conceptualise humanism as a legacy of the enlightenment, which is associated with the cherished notions of autonomy, community bonding, principles of equality, responsibility, social justice and self-determination.

Bland and DeRoberis (2018) illustrate that the humanism theory and approach take the root of humanistic psychology, which emphasise that education should focus on the rational ways to teach the “whole person” and appreciate the uniqueness of each individual. The emphasis of the humanism psychology looks at the whole person and stresses concepts such as self-efficacy, self-actualization, self-concept, personal growth, creativity, choice, and free-will (Bermea, 2022). Rather than concentrate on dysfunctional aspects of an individual, the humanism approach strives to assist students to fulfil their potential and maximise their well-being in the learning environment (Parker-Katz, 2021; Moleke, Montle & Mogoboya, 2020). Instead of focusing on impairment and the shortfalls of VISs, academic institutions and education system must strive to support such students to fulfil their potential and maximise in studies. The humanistic approach engages ones’ skills, feelings, artistic skills and intellect as part of their education. Along with that, Khatib, Sarem and Hamidi (2013) point out that student’s emotions are central in the humanistic psychology.

In explaining how humanistic psychology views an individual, scholars emphasise that human dysfunction is caused by faulty or interrupted development processes which vary from social to psychological processes (Moleke, Montle & Mogoboya, 2020). Individuals are aware of the circumstances which contribute to their unfavourable conditions and thus recognise the adverse circumstances which compromise their development throughout life. The literature that demonstrates an accommodating and positive attitude towards students, could promote an enabling learning environment (Firdaus & Mariyat, 2017). Essentially, the positive humanistic approach identifies and upholds the basic goodness within each individual. As it advocates for student autonomy, the humanistic theory support the idea that if students are exposed to non-threatening and supportive environment (Jingna, 2012), certainly they can make informed academic and non-academic decisions. For this reason, Bermea (2022) emphasise that humanists concentrate on developing students’ autonomy, empowerment, creativity, rationality, affections and concerns for humanity within their students. Roger concludes that if given the right learning conditions and opportunities student will move towards autonomy and self-direction.

Practically, the relevance of the humanistic theory in this thesis is beheld by its five principles as outlined by Gage and Beliner (1991). Tulasi and Rao (2021) suggest that the humanistic approach is established on humanistic principles to regard a student as a person and to recognise education not as a level of individual intelligence, but as about instructing and supporting the “whole person” to reach maximum capabilities. Each principle is contextualised and conceptualised towards how VISs can be supported to attain academic success. Firstly, students should be able to choose what they wish to learn. This implies that each student, regardless his/her disability, has the ability and right to education opportunities. Such students must be motivated, guided

and supported to learn and allowed to choose what they want to learn. Secondly, the goal of education is to foster students' desire to learn and teach learners how to learn. This principle suggests that education systems and institutions must promote a desire to learn and should enable students to be independent, self-motivated and self-directed in their studies. Thirdly, humanistic educators believe that grades are irrelevant and that only self-assessment is meaningful to evaluate student performance. The humanistic approach encourages self-assessment in teaching and learning to promote self-enhancement and performance. Humanists contend that tests are meant to test students' ability to memorise. They do not provide realistic feedback on student performance. Fourthly, "Feelings are as important as facts and personal". This principle implies that humanistic educators believe that students' feelings and knowledge are important in the teaching and learning process. Khatib, Sarem and Hamidi (2013) indicate that the goal of humanistic education moves beyond student intellectual and cognitive abilities by also acknowledging students' emotions and feelings. Humanistic teachers do not separate the cognitive from the affective domains in the learning process. Humanists insist that student's feelings and aspirations are to be respected paying attention to students' emotional side, which can lead to positive self-concept and self-esteem (Al-Shammari, 2021; Jingna; 2012). Students with disabilities, including the VISs have feelings and emotions like their non-disabled peers. Their emotions must be considered to enhance their self-efficacy. In the teaching and learning process, Tulasi and Rao (2021) regard emotions and knowledge as equally vital and must not be overlooked. Lastly, students learn best in a non-threatening environment. Humanists contend that education institutions need to provide students with non-threatening learning environment, where they feel secure to enhance their learning. Mu'is, Baharun and Suwandi (2022) illustrate that learning can be more meaningful when the learning aids are provided and relevant to students' learning needs. The humanistic theory treats and views a student as a complete person, with complete involvement in the learning process. This minimises anxiety and increases personal security (Al-Shammari, 2021) especially when education institutions provide an accepting, understanding and supportive environment that can remove or decrease the threat and fear of visually impaired student to lead to their academic success. HEIs must be espoused with an enabling learning environment oriented with psychological, emotional, physical and non-threatening factors (Moleke, Montle & Mogoboya, 2020). Bermea (2022) points out that the humanistic theory promotes a positive learning environment, free from any form of judgement and which supports the intellectual and emotional aspects of a student.

3.6.2. Critical Disability theory

In the early 1970s', the Western world experienced evolution with the emergence of critical disability studies which extended to the early 1980s'. Disability studies are an academic discipline with an interest in the meaning, nature and consequences of disabilities in social societies (Kashikar, 2021; Meekosha & Shuttleworth,

2009). The focus of critical disability studies emerged as an approach that is centred on understanding disability as a socio-political, historical and cultural experience. As products of the disability civil rights movement that emerged in the mid-twentieth century, organisers and activists mobilised to fight for equality and inclusion and against the oppression of people living with disabilities. Based on social and political power relations, Reaume (2014) views disability studies as both lived reality where experiences of persons with disabilities are dominant in interpreting their live experiences in their environment. In this growing field that is gaining recognition, activists and researchers have increasingly recognised disability rights as an important aspect of social justice (Bornman, 2020). Notably, Cory, White and Stuckey (2010) assert that critical disability studies diverge from the medical model of disability which posits that disability in a person is something that needs to be fixed or cured. In spite of this, the activists compared the realities and conditions of people with disabilities to those of people without disabilities. It was only in the 1990s when the Critical Disability Theory (CDT) was founded as a theory within disability studies to further push for the rights and equality of people with disabilities in different sectors. The CDT is regarded as the standard framework within disability studies to eliminate obstacles and oppressions towards racism, homophobia and albinism.

Researchers pronounce the CDT as a social, cultural and political and social phenomenon which criticises and fights the traditions aimed at oppressing and violating the rights of people with disabilities (Vehmas & Watson, 2014; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Hosking 2008). In addition, Melinda (2019) illustrates that CDT refers to a diverse and interdisciplinary set of theoretical approaches that analyse the cultural, political, social and historical phenomenon of disability. This theory is a broad interdisciplinary field that emerged out of the disciplinary rights movement to challenge ableism. It is positioned on liberating the norms and values with the actualisation in the daily life of persons with disabilities. The underpinning of CDT is regarded by Potheir and Devlinr (2006) as an approach to challenge assumptions and presumptions that oppress and violate the rights of people with disabilities and forbids their full participation in their societies. Schalk (2017) concedes that CDT is involved with criticising the social norms that define impairment as disability, social conditions and structures that distil stigmatization in our societies. Hall (2019) undertakes that CDT is tasked to analyse disability as a historical, social, cultural, historical and political phenomenon. As an approach to analysing disability, it says that applying the convictions, values, principles and assumptions that underpin CDT can analyse and critique artefacts, social and cultural scenarios that relate to disability. In this regard, critical disability theorists direct their activism work towards the confinements of the academic sphere. The intention of using critical disability theory in this study is to capture a broader understanding of the approaches used by SSS either academic or social to support VISs in HEIs.

Lack of critical theorizing disability stands as a challenge in higher education, where knowledge, enlightenment, truth-seeking, research and inquiry are fundamental. Schnellert, et al. (2019) disputes that institutions of higher education cannot interrogate themselves as sites where knowledge is produced about demands, challenges and contend of democracy, equality and social justice. While academic institutions were expected to produce and reproduce disablism and ableism. Dolmage (2017) contends that it is expected that HEIs position themselves to abstract knowledge and address practices of marginalization for minority groups. The CDT makes efforts to analyse the impact of support structures, practices and how higher education embraces and enacts cultural and political/relationships in support of VISs. To understand the experiences of VIS towards support services, it is imperative to establish how the principles of CDT can be applied in this study.

From the researchers' position, the CDT seeks to understand the experiences of VIS to know about social justice as a means to enhance support and academic success in higher education. This theory further seeks to understand how and why particular barriers which impede the full support of VISs and their full access to teaching and learning material exist. Various support services available in higher education are eligible to offer support as required by the student community. In all aspects of supporting disabled students, and giving support services a new direction, four guiding principles for support from the critical disability perspective were identified. Crocker (2015) illustrates that citizenship, individual control, equality of human rights and universal design are central to supporting persons with disabilities. Therefore critical disability theorists point out that institutions, groups and individuals who offer support need to be guided by the same principles to maximise it.

a) Citizenship

All persons with disabilities, regardless of the form of disability or its intensity, have the same rights, privileges and responsibilities as equal as people without disabilities. In education, students with disabilities have rights to academic and social support; and have privileges and opportunities to access learning aids and support services just as the students without disabilities do. Therefore all socially constructed barriers which impede their full participation and policies, practices and cultures that discriminate against students with disabilities must be eliminated. Devlin and Potheir (2006) dispute that in an enabling citizenship people with disabilities need to be unshackled from the ideologies and practices that impede that right to active participation in their communities.

b) Individual control

It is advisable to involve persons with disabilities in decision-making when developing disability programmes and policy as well as in designing support. Students with disabilities must be involved at all stages when

developing disability services, support, programmes and policies. Phasha and Mosia (2017) assert that many students with disabilities in HEIs experience limited freedom of choice in matters related to their affairs. Therefore supporting persons with disabilities to practice their legal right capacitate them to be part of the decision-making exercise that could enhance their self-determination (Madhesh, 2023).

c) Equality and human rights

Disability studies which emerged out of an effort to transform the meaning that is attributed to disability confirm that people with disabilities are subjected to oppression in various ways, ranging from the denial of citizenship and human rights as well as dehumanised practices. In providing support services in higher education it is pivotal to shift equal access to the learning material and to enabling a learning environment. Bornman (2020) insists that people with disabilities are denied their right to quality education, academic and social support, health care and protection against abuse, exploitation and discrimination. Critical disability theorists advocate for the elimination of discrimination and barriers that adversely impact on academic success of students with disabilities in educational institutions.

d) Universal design

The infrastructure environment and processes must be designed to be usable and accessible for people with various disabilities. Disability support services must be designed to accommodate persons with different disabilities from pre-entry level to exit level (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). Kashikar (2021) argues that impairment is a natural occurrence phenomenon; however inaccessible buildings and surroundings are imposed on persons with disabilities. In education institutions, universal design not only applies to buildings but it also applies to building the course content, teaching material and delivery methods as well as the support services accessible and usable by diverse student communities (NDACE, 2014). Disability is created when buildings are not accessible, when policies are not universally designed to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities and when social arrangements are inaccessible and unaccommodating to persons with disabilities. Critical disability theorists conclude that universal design tries to eliminate the difficulties experienced by various persons due to the learning methods and environmental barriers (Stambekova et al., 2022).

The support of VISs in higher education as centred on critical disability theory and the emancipation against practices, values and norms that impede their academic success (Eilers, 2021). Melinda (2019) posits that in educational institutions CDT can help to discover and understand how and why certain barriers that impede disabled students' full inclusion and participation exist. Critical theorists concede that the CDT considers the rights-based approach as an indispensable tool for promoting equality and support for their full integration into the learning environment (Sztobryn-Giercuskiewicz, 2017). In conclusion, Eilers (2021) maintains that

disability studies must work towards dismantling the hierarchy of knowledge that acts as a blockade towards the liberation of disabled students. The educators, students, and support services providers must contribute to the conversation about inclusion and support of students with impairments. On the whole, an adequate conception of equality that supports the social and academic demands of VISs for full inclusion in higher education must be considerate of the realities of diverse needs to advance the principles and objectives of CDT (De-Los-Santos, 2022). As Hosking (2008) advises, the objective of CDT is to support the transformation of our societies and institutions to allow diversity, equality and integration of disabled persons into their communities.

3.7. Lesotho legal frameworks on disabilities

This section discusses how legal frameworks in Lesotho perceive disability and how students with disabilities should be supported. It also deliberates on the responsibilities of academic institutions towards students with disabilities. The Lesotho Constitution of 2011, Higher education act of 2004, Education Act of 2010, Higher education policy of 2013, Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy of 2018 and Persons with Disabilities Equity Act of 2021 were discussed.

3.7.1. The Lesotho Constitution of 2011

Lesotho is a sovereign democratic state, governed by laws, policies, by-laws and regulations. The National Assembly is the authoritative body that enacts all the laws and policies guiding government entities and systems. In 2011, the National Assembly amended the Constitution of Lesotho to protect the fundamental human rights of the Basotho nation. Chapter III, Principle 28 of the constitution, clarifies that Lesotho shall make the necessary efforts to ensure that education is available to all its citizens. Secondly, the country shall adopt national and international policies which secure education as directed to the full development of human personality and dignity and that observes and upholds human rights and fundamental freedoms. The constitution of Lesotho aligns with the 1948 UDHR, article 26, which articulates that everyone has an education freedom and it shall be directed to the full development of human personality and strengthening of respect for human rights. This says that all people living in Lesotho are entitled to access education irrespective of their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political affiliation or disability, origin or socio-economic status. Contrary to this statement, the constitution indicates that this principle cannot be enforced by any court of justice considering the economic and development limitations in Lesotho. The constitution does not specify the rights of persons with disabilities and their roles in society. Nonetheless, the national assembly enacted the Education Act of 2010, the Inclusive Education Policy of 2018, the Higher Education Act of 2004, the Higher Education

Policy of 2013 and the Persons with Disability Equity Act of 2021 to safeguard the rights and access to quality education for persons with disabilities.

3.7.2. Higher Education Act of 2004 and Education Act of 2010

The Higher Education Act of 2004 was enacted for the regulation of higher education and the composition and functions of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in Lesotho. This act is the fundamental law for the establishment of the CHE and its functions in ensuring that quality assurance is promoted in HEIs. The act stipulates that admission policies for higher education should not discriminate against persons because of their gender, religion, race, nationality or political affiliation. The act does not list admission, access and support of persons with disabilities in academic institutions. Nonetheless, in 2008 Lesotho ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to oblige the country to make the education system accessible to persons with disabilities. The UNCRPD Guidelines (2016) article 24, guideline 149 states that institutions must adopt the measures which ensure that students with disabilities receive individualised support according to their learning needs within the regular education system. In education institutions, Kutnak and Jonasik (2014) suggest that admission and support staff should actively promote disability services to ensure that incoming students are aware of the support programmes and services that would enhance their educational experience and academic success.

Following the enactment of the Higher Education Act of 2004, the Lesotho National Assembly developed and enacted a more detailed law to enhance the access and participation of persons with disabilities in education institutions. The Education Act of 2010 was enacted for the provision of free and compulsory education, to align education laws with decentralised services, to align the provision of education with the constitution of Lesotho and to detail and clarify the roles and responsibilities of all persons tasked to administer education affairs. However section two, sub-section 2 state that the Ministry of Education and related stakeholders must ensure that students are provided with learning opportunities and facilities that enable them to develop physically, mentally, socially, morally and socially. Societally, educational institutions are places used to develop students psychologically, socially, intellectually and morally (Lebona, 2023). Sub-section 2- b) further emphasises that when circumstances permit, a student with a disability must be given special treatment, education, care and support required for his/her form of disability. Following these provisions, sub-section (c) stipulates that every student must not be discriminated against in accessing education and must be allowed all educational opportunities regardless of his/her status. Discrimination is a barrier influenced by social factors which make it difficult for the promotion of equal access and continuity of persons with disabilities in higher education (García-González, et al. 2021). About the aim of this study, both acts do not have guidelines on how institutions must allow access and support to students with disabilities. De Bruin (2019) concludes that lack of a

clear mandate of the legislative frameworks makes it difficult for the rights bearers to explain, implement and recognise the rights of students with disabilities. It also puts an unfair burden on the right of proof where the victims are required to take legal action for the disproportional effects on such students.

3.7.3. Higher Education Policy of 2013

The Higher Education Policy 2013 (HEP) was enacted and approved by the National Assembly Higher Education Act of 2004. The HEP forms the general guide for the Ministry of Education and Training, HEIs, CHE and statutory professionals as the key stakeholders to contribute to the provision of higher education in Lesotho. The HEP ensures that HEIs align their programmes with the national priorities, to ensure that HEIs harness information communication technologies. The policy also ensures that quality assurance is observed as the robust pillar of the regulatory framework by allowing institutional programmes, systems and processes to be quality-assured. The formulation of this policy was aligned with other national, regional and international legislative frameworks, conventions and treaties that impact the provision of higher education. Section two of the HEP states values that guide this framework. They are “Botho”, Equity and Diversity (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2013).

“Botho”

From the humanistic philosophy, "botho" entails a set of ethical principles encapsulated in the treating of others with respect, and being accountable and responsible towards each other as members of society.

“Equity”

Higher education institutions must reflect fairness in their admission policy, enrolment, support and allocation of education opportunities for all Basotho who meet minimum entry requirements to succeed in their studies.

“Diversity”

Higher education institutions must recognise and respect the views of others to ensure mutual understanding. All stakeholders in higher education should demonstrate tolerance and treat others with respect and dignity.

In its quest to widen access to and participation in higher education, the HEP has set objectives centred on equality of opportunities, equality of participation and equality of achievement. These objectives are meant to enhance accessibility of persons with disabilities, the HEP has aligned its objectives with the UNCRPD as adopted in 2006 and ratified by Lesotho in 2008. Policy objectives, as mentioned in Section 8.3.5.1., dictate that

CHE will safeguard that persons with disabilities have equal rights to access higher education. Secondly, HEP will ensure that Lesotho as a member state of the United Nations lives up to its international obligations towards enhancing access and support towards persons with disabilities in education. In ensuring equitable access to education opportunities, UNCRPD guidelines (2016) article 24, guideline 145 states that institutions must adopt measures to ensure that persons with disabilities are not excluded from the mainstream education system based on their disability. The 151 guidelines of the convention further detail that institutions must facilitate the learning of Braille and mobility skills and facilitate peer support and mentoring for students with vision disabilities. Therefore the CHE commits to monitoring the efforts made by both public and private institutions of higher education to accommodate and support students with disabilities

3.7.4. Inclusive education Policy of 2018

The Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy of 2018 (LIEP) is a legal and constitutional framework that demonstrates the commitment of the government of the Kingdom of Lesotho to securing education that is directed to the full development of human personality, dignity and respect for human rights. The LIEP is committed to ensuring that every student is provided with opportunities and facilities that enable him/her to develop holistically, to ensure that each student is provided special care support and education based on his/her condition and to ensure that each student is free from any discrimination in accessing educational opportunities. In addition, this framework guides the actions necessary to provide quality inclusive education for learners with special learning needs or disabilities. Conversely, the LIEP challenges the use of out-dated definitions such as "handicap" and negative perceptions about students with disabilities. Clearly defined are the basis of child-friendly schools and an enabling learning environment. The MoET has crafted this legislation to eliminate exclusion that results in negative attitudes and lack of response to diversity in the learning environment.

3.7.5. Persons with Disabilities Equity Act of 2021

After much has been done to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, the government of the Kingdom of Lesotho, through the guidance of the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), established the Persons with Disabilities Equity Act of 2021 (PDEA) . The purpose of this legislation is to domesticate the UNCRPD and its guiding principles to uphold the basic human rights of persons with disabilities. The legislation also provides access to education, where no one should be denied access to study based on his/her disability. Where necessary, educators and support staff at education institutions must be trained on how to use assistive devices and Braille on the basis which shall be provided by the Department of Special Education (DSE) of the MoET (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2021). Section 3, subsection 1. a) of the Act stipulates that the principal or management of an education institution should not deny any person with a disability admission to any course of study,

especially when such a person has acquired substantial learning ability to enrol in such a course. Sub-section 3. b) and c) of this law states that education institutions should provide assistive devices for persons with disabilities and the institution must deploy a qualified educator who is eligible to access various format methods. The training should include at least the methods used to read, write and teach persons with various disabilities. Section 5 directs the DSE to prepare and submit a detailed report on the training and completion of the Braille course to the MSD. Despite the enactment of several disability legislation frameworks adopted to support students with disabilities in Lesotho and many countries of the world, researchers maintain that education systems, inclusive education practitioners, educators and support services have not done enough to eliminate the barriers experienced by students with disabilities in higher education (McKinney & Swartz, 2022; García-González, et al. 2021; Shaw, 2021; Majoko, 2018).

3.8. Conclusion

Globally, support for students with vision impairment is still a challenge in HEIs. Experiences of VISs can be determined by the availability of assistive devices and learning material, provision of support, competence of support services officials or support programmes and legal documents in place. The HEIs have to improvise mechanisms to address the diverse needs of VISs. Models of disability can be used as the guiding principles to ensure that support services address the academic and social needs of VISs in HEIs. Various disability models can be incorporated to understand the psychological, social and academic needs of VISs. The literature concludes that support services models are an integral strategy that education institutions must take into consideration when designing support services programmes. Similar support service models can be intertwined with disability models to enhance efficiency and strategic approach towards the support of VIS. Finally, HEIs must take into account existing laws which advocate for the rights of students with disabilities and align their policies and support strategies with them.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.0. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed a review of related literature to establish what other researchers say about student support services (SSS), visually impaired students (VISs), higher education (HEIs) and the voices of local and international policies, laws and treaties. The aspects discussed in this fourth chapter are the purpose of the study's research approach and the overall presentation which is based on the methods employed to execute this study. The chapter presents the methodological approaches and instruments used to explore the experiences of VISs concerning the availability of support services in HEIs. I also presented a justification for using this form of research methodology. The research design, approach, method, paradigm, research sites of the study, participants' background and recruitment strategies and how data were collected are presented in this chapter. I found it imperative to explain the data analysis framework followed and how ethical procedures were adhered to. Data gathering and analysis were presented as grounded on theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guided this study in order to achieve the outlined objectives and to respond to research questions which were outlined in chapter one, section 1.6. This chapter restates the research objectives which inspired this study.

4.2. Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative approach which allows the researcher to seek and establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the participants' view point. A qualitative research explores the meanings and insights in particular situations, event or individuals (Mohajan, 2018). A qualitative approach in a study enables the researcher to interpret, to make sense of peoples' experiences, to make sense of the observed phenomenon through the participants' meaning and to understand the participants' social reality (Dooley & Moore, 2017). Tracy (2013) advice that in qualitative research small cues and notes on the reactions and the behaviour of participants make sense of the context and gradually build knowledge on the phenomenon under investigation. As a rule, qualitative research includes data in the form of words rather than numbers (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). It brings to light the humanistic virtues of qualitative research as well as the interpretative paradigm which are

essential to understand the experiences of VISs in Lesotho HEIs and the complexities that emanate from the SSS (Njie & Asimiran, 2014).

Rahman (2016) purports that qualitative approach has various advantages to take into account in a thesis. Firstly, the strength and advantage of using qualitative approach lie in its ability to explore and provide complex description and interpretation of the meanings of actions and experiences of VISs when they interact with the various support services in their respective institutions. Secondly, it allows the researcher to understand VISs' values and how they live out to their values on a daily basis in their context. Thirdly, it helps the participants and the researcher to understand the world around them (the HEIs), and the society (members of support services and the higher education community). The fourth advantage of the qualitative approach is its ability to allow the researcher to use various data collection instruments to understand the details of a phenomenon from different perspectives (Mwita, 2022). In-depth interviews, narrative interviews and observations were used to explore the experiences of VISs.

Despite the above mentioned advantages, qualitative research has disadvantages which can affect credibility and the findings of the study. Qualitative research studies use a smaller sample that may range from two to ten participants in a big population. Mitwa (2022) point out that such sample could not be sufficient and convincing for generalisation of findings. Secondly, interpretation and analysis of massive volume of data in qualitative research is a difficult and complex process (Rahman, 2016).

Despite the above-mentioned short-comings and many others, I regard qualitative as the prominent approach to explore, describe and interpret VISs' experiences in HEIs of Lesotho. Along with the merits and demerits of this approach, the study has allowed me to uncover the ethical considerations pertinent for the interpretation of the findings, understanding, and respect of participants' views and the trustworthiness of the findings. Therefore, if conducted appropriately, this qualitative research had to answer research questions as stipulated in Chapter One, section 1.6.

The rationale for using a qualitative approach was to explore the interaction of VISs in two HEIs towards students support services. As I found it pragmatic to engage the qualitative approach, it is vital to indicate that several reasons have persuaded me to do so. A qualitative study is influenced by the interpretive philosophy of the study which is guided by its

epistemological and ontological stance (Kivunja & Kuyin, 2017). The epistemology and ontology of this study are meant to establish the subjective truth and nature of reality about how support services engage with VISs. Qualitative methods are tailor-made for exploring social processes and behaviours which are known or which have little knowledge about them (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, this qualitative research methodology is relevant and expedient in exploring how support services impact the academic success of VISs in HEIs. This approach determined the form of support services which are available for the visually in their campuses.

The basis of qualitative research lies in the interpretive approach and description of participants' lived experiences in their social reality. This allowed me to understand the social world of VISs and to seek answers to the "*why and how*" of the support that they received in higher education. Consequently, experiences of VISs and their interaction with support services as a phenomenon under investigation in HEIs were revealed and the role of each institution and the participating individuals were cherished and considered.

Given the contextual nature of qualitative research and its characteristics, strengths and weaknesses in addressing known and unknown contemporary phenomena in a real-life context, I believe that it is imperative to discuss its relationship to the theoretical or conceptual framework in educational research. Firstly, qualitative research is open to align with theory or conceptual frameworks which are influential in the research design, research questions and methodology, data analysis and reporting of the findings (Stenfors, Kajamaa & Bennett, 2020; Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Grant and Osanloo (2014) assert that theoretical framework in a research study is the base on which knowledge is constructed and supports the rationale, the problem statement, the purpose and the research questions. Using qualitative research in a study involves selecting a theoretical or conceptual framework to answer specific research questions that employ data collection instruments and analysis procedures consistent with such a framework (Stenfors, Kajamaa & Bennett, 2020). In this instance, data are analysed and interpreted in the light of the concepts and assumptions of appreciative inquiry and human rights based approach orientations. Sutton and Austin (2015) concede that qualitative data is inductively analysed, interpreted and theorised against the theoretical standpoint of the researcher. The inductive nature of qualitative study thus allows research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes emanating from the raw data (Alase, 2017). Doing this qualitative study entails studying the experiences

of VISs towards the support services within the context of higher education through triangulating both frameworks as mentioned above.

In addition to the philosophical and theoretical aspects of the study, the selection of a research method must align with qualitative methods which comprise multiple methods, namely the in-depth interviews, observations, group discussions, data analysis or survey (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Observations and interviews were utilised as the methods used to explore the experiences of VISs and their interaction with the support services officials at two HEIs in Lesotho. Crowe, et al. (2011) state that multiple sources of data collection are a way of increasing the validity of a study because it is assumed that collecting data from different sources should lead to similar conclusions that can help in developing a holistic picture of the phenomenon. However Crowe, et al. (2011) caution that data collection in a qualitative study needs to be flexible enough to allow a detailed description to be developed. Consequently, this qualitative study created a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of VISs while focusing on the key guidelines that enabled me to yield an appreciation of available support services in HEIs. When integrating the use of a qualitative approach in this study I identified the generalization and prognosis which involve the contextual knowledge of the study, practical wisdom and common sense response to the phenomenon under study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Table 3: Research design

Research design	Strategy
Design	Phenomenological research design
Methodology	Qualitative research study
Paradigm	Interpretivism
Sampling method	Non-probability
Sampling	Purposive sampling,
Data collection instruments	Observation, interview, narratives and field notes,
Data analysis	Interpretive phenomenological analysis
Ethical consideration	Consent from participating institutions and subjects, ethical clearance issued by UFS.

4.3. Research paradigm

The philosophical stance of this study is viewed from the Interpretivism paradigm³. According to Goldkuhl (2012) applying a paradigm in educational research reflects the researcher's beliefs, views and principles about the world that one lives in. This entails how the researcher examines the methodological aspects of the research project, and how the data is gathered and analysed (Kivunja & Kiyini, 2017). The research paradigm is also viewed as a frame of reference to organise the researcher's observations and motives on how the world works. It is based on collective assumptions, practices, concepts and values (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Babbie, 2010). The basis of incorporating the Interpretivist paradigm in this study is based on its goal to understand the meaning that people make of their experiences, and how they create their meaning when interacting with the world around them. Emphasis is made by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) that the central endeavour of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. This paradigm makes the researcher reflect, understand and interpret what the subject is thinking, describing, meaning, narrating or explaining in a given context (Lincoln & Lynham, 2011). Therefore the basic belief of the Interpretivism paradigm is that reality is socially constructed (Chowdhury, 2014).

The philosophical underpinning of Interpretivism in this study is in line with Appreciative inquiry (AI) assumptions which speculate that the participants' experiences can be discovered in their social organisations and in the context that they live in. At the same time, AI allows participants to dream and imagine the life and organisations that they envisage (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). This paradigm thus enabled me to interpret the explored experiences of VISs, and how to describe their situations towards the support services in their institutions. To comprehend the meaning and situation of the participants' experiences, Chowdhury (2014) posits that Interpretivists use inquiry to grasp the meaning that constitutes their experiences. This intertwines with the constructivist and poetic principles of AI which maintain that participants create realities through inquiry, conversation, discussion and interaction to share their feelings, experiences and affections. Therefore, Interpretivism considers the process of inquiry between the researcher and the participants as an objective to gain knowledge about their actions, affections and experiences in their social world (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Chowdhury, 2014). In the context of higher education, Interpretivism helps the researcher to understand the experiences of VISs by meaningfully

³ A research paradigm is a systematic approach that encompasses four elements that interrelate to the practice, thoughts, concepts and values that define the nature of the research process. These elements are epistemology, ontology, axiology and methodology.

interpreting how the support services inhibit or enhance their success and what meaning they produce and reproduce in their everyday life in HEIs.

The Interpretivist research paradigm entails four elements that enabled the researcher to understand the practice, perceptions, thoughts, values and concepts that define the nature of the research process. The four elements are the subjectivist epistemology, the relativist ontology, the naturalist methodology and the balanced axiology (Kivunja & Kuyini (2017). The elements provided an interpretive framework to guide the entire research process, including data collection, the research approach and design and data analysis.

4.3.1. Subjectivity epistemology

The central focus of the subjectivist epistemology is how the researcher is aiming to discover knowledge to know the truth and reality from the natural setting (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Scotland (2012) asserts that epistemology is the process where the researcher comes to know are truth and reality from the participant's social world. The researcher constructs this knowledge as a result of personal experience in the real world within the investigated natural setting (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). To know the truth and reality about the engagement of VISs towards the support services, I interacted with the students and the support services officials at their institutions. This allowed me to construct knowledge, to know the truth and what the participants encountered and experienced in their academic journey and interpreted their situation. Dean (2018) purports that Interpretivists assume that epistemologically, the know-ability of the phenomenon cannot be collected or divorced from their natural setting to construct or discover knowledge. Similarly, the reality was co-constructed when I interacted with the participants and reflected on the outcomes and the lived experiences of VISs in HEIs. Therefore, the qualitative nature of this study is meant to explore and allow the researcher to see the world as constructed, interpreted and experienced by the participants in their natural setting (Amtwi & Hamza, 2015).

4.3.2. Relativist ontology

The relativist⁴ ontology is concerned with the nature of existence and reality. Kamal (2019) draws on the works of Lincoln and Guba (1985) by remarking that there are multiple realities

⁴ In research, ontology is concerned with the nature of the social world and what is there to know about it. Ontological questions focus on whether or not there is a social reality that exists independently of how humans conceptualize and interpret, whether there is a shared social reality or only multiple or context-specific ones

in the social world. Ontology is regarded by Antwi and Hamza (2015) as a process that the researcher uses to define the truth and reality in a social world. Interpretivism assumes that ontology specifies the form and nature of reality as it attempts to methodologically capture and understand the phenomenon from the subjective experiences of the participants (Vasques, 2013). As a branch of philosophy, ontology assumes that to establish whether a social phenomenon makes sense or logic or whether such a phenomenon is real, the researcher must engage in enquiring about such phenomenon (Scotland, 2012). Similarly, a phenomenon can have multiple realities that reflect various experiences and beliefs of each participant in his/her social world (Morgan, 2014). Ontologically, I presume that the experiences of VISs on available support services in their institutions differ from one participant to the other and from one institution to the other. Moreover, the reality is that the impact of the support services differs from one student to the other. For this reason, Interpretivists concede that multiple realities can be explored and meaning can be made or constructed through the interactions of the researcher and the participants (Scotland, 2012).

4.3.3. Naturalist methodology

Researchers define the naturalist methodology as the strategy or plan of action which lies behind choosing particular methods to conduct the study (Erciyes, 2020). Methodology refers to the practical way of digging for the "unknown to be known", "how to study the world" and "how one acquires knowledge" (Kamal, 2019). This qualitative study was inductively approached to gather data from participants. To explore the experiences of VISs in HEIs, in-depth interview guides and observation protocols were triangulated as research instruments. Dean (2018) postulates that Interpretivists draw from a range of methods, techniques and instruments to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being researched. Nonetheless, Scotland (2012) maintains that some ontological and epistemological assumptions have different views of knowledge and reality which must reflect in the researcher's choice of methodology. As a result, the methodological aspect of research must align with the epistemological and ontological stances of the research under study (Kamal, 2019).

4.3.4. Balanced axiology

Nguyen (2019) asserts that balanced axiology refers to the ethical issues that entail the understanding, defining and evaluating the concepts of right and wrong conduct relating to

the research study. Within the confines of qualitative research, the Interpretivist paradigm is recognised for the value that it provides to the research process (Okesina, 2020). Validity, credibility, confirmability, reliability and generalisability are elements that bring value to the research study (Erciyes, 2020; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Balanced axiology focuses on the value or nature of the value of the study. Researchers maintain that axiology in research is context-bound, value-laden, value-driven, biased, value-neutral, balanced and culture-sensitive (Alharahsheh & Pius (2020); Nguyen, 2019; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Fard, 2012). The aspects of value and ethics were critically considered in this study. Chilisa and Kawulich (2012) indicate that axiology assumes that Interpretivists maintain the relationship and values of the researcher and the participants during the inquiry process. A detailed discussion of the value and ethics of this study is discussed in sections 4.6 and 4.7 respectively.

4.4. Research design

This qualitative study is embedded within the Phenomenological Research Design. Pathak (2018) point out that the Phenomenological Research Design (PRD) attempted to understand the participants' perceptions, understandings and perspectives towards a particular phenomenon. On the other hand Creswell (2013) points out that PRD examines the participants' experiences by providing descriptive information where little knowledge is available. At its core, PRD investigates daily experiences of the participants to learn and understand the meaning and interpretation that they make of their experiences and others. The phenomenological design allows the researcher to gain an understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon. The goal of using PRD in this study was to enable me to gain an understanding of the diverse experiences (Bliss, 2016) of VISs towards the support services in two HEIs in Lesotho.

Pathak (2017) illustrates that phenomenological research has its roots in philosophy and psychology; hence it is guided by four characteristics to reflect on the predetermined experiences and phenomenon under study. A phenomenological research design has three characteristics that guide this study, a) phenomenological research design aims to reveal and interpret the meaning of a particular experience of individuals or a group of people. Multi-faceted experiences of VISs in higher education were identified by utilising interviews and observations (Lodigo, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2010). b) This research design is descriptive in nature (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological research design aims allows a researcher to

accurately describe the structure of a phenomenon. The description of the research problem was unpacked in chapter one. C) A phenomenological research design upholds bracketing that requires a researcher to set bias and assumptions aside and to focus on the participants' immediate experiences (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing requires the researcher to put aside his previous knowledge, understanding or assumptions about the phenomenon and focus on the phenomenon as it unfolds. Bracketing enabled me to avoid interference and put aside my personal experiences and beliefs about VISs and various support services in different education institutions. The researcher is required to describe the lived experiences of the participants objectively and to reflect on the description with reference to the theories about the phenomenon under investigation (Silverman, 2011). A reflective approach on the principles of appreciative inquiry and human rights based approach was adhered to in order to ensure relevance and credibility of the research design in this study.

Basically, the intension of phenomenological research design is to understand the phenomena in participants own terms and to establish the participants' descriptions of the phenomena, as it was experienced by the participants (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). This allowed the emergence of the experiences of VISs from the researcher's perspective. With its descriptive nature, phenomenological research design is investigative to determine the participants' experiences as they are lived. To maintain a state of neutrality, and to determine the description of the phenomena, in-depth interviews and observations were used to collect data. Bliss (2016) concedes that a deep and vulnerable conversation between the participants and the researcher helps the researcher to explore and to the discuss experiences of each participant. Through the use of interviews and narratives, I had an encounter to listen to VISs, sharing their experiences, which led to fruitful results to interpret their experiences. However, my intension for being a complete observer in this study was to maintain bracketing which attempted to accomplish neutrality.

In an attempt to understand the VISs' perceptions, experiences and perspectives towards the support services in HEIs, I found the Transcendent Phenomenology as the most appropriate approach for this study. Creswell (2013) points out that a transcendental phenomenological research design is interested in individual experiences and interaction with their world. Transcendental phenomenologists suggest that any research initiative to discover reality should transcend experience (Mokotso, 2017). Besides, Bliss (2016) comments that phenomenological researchers should engage in the "epoche" process; which implies bracketing and reduction of the researchers' attitude, feelings, perceptions, beliefs,

knowledge and experience relating to phenomenon under investigation. This qualitative study sought to explore, describe and interpret the experiences of VISs, rather than to explain them. The transcendental phenomenology stimulates participants' perceptions on their lived experiences while embracing the breath, depth and richness of their experiences.

4.5. Research process

The following section discusses the research data collection process and how the collected data was analysed.

4.5.1. Researcher's Position and Role

In educational research, the position of the researcher is deemed to have a strong influence on the outcomes of the study (Holmes, 2020). Along with that, a researcher is considered instrumental in the process of collecting data in qualitative studies without influencing the study outcomes (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Based on the Holmes comments, I had no impact or influence on the outcomes of this study. In the process of being instrumental in data collection, I avoided any bias, assumptions, or expectations or applying former experience to qualify my ability to conducting this study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) maintain that the presence of the researcher as an instrument in the lives of invited participants is fundamental to the research process. It was my opportunity to exhibit some qualities of a human instrument such as establishing a good rapport, reassuring confidentiality to the participants, trustworthiness, good listening skills and appreciating each participant's circumstance. These qualities enabled participants to talk freely and confidently, to narrate their experiences and perceptions about the support services on their campuses. These precautions enhanced rich, authentic and detailed data.

To gain access to the research study sites I sought the assistance of the gatekeepers to conduct interviews and observations. They introduced me to some officials. As I was a stranger to all the participants (the VISs and support services staff and officials), I visited research the sites several times to familiarise myself with the surroundings to establish sociable relations and to become accustomed to participants. This allowed them time to prepare and to share information without doubts and inhibitions.

4.5.2. Selection of Participants

Following the non-probability sampling technique, as suggested in Chapter One of this study I used purposive sampling to

- Select the participating institutions beforehand.
- Identify and select the participants prior to collecting the data.
- Select people whose experiences I could substantially learn about.
- Select the participants who would give rich and thick descriptions of their support services experiences in their HEIs.
- Purposefully select the participants on the basis of their knowledge of their support services experiences in their HEIs.
- Choose participants that are accessible

As a result, students with various vision impairments and SSS officials in the two HEIs were selected on the basis of their experience in interacting with one another.

4.5.2.1. Sampling technique

This qualitative study applied purposeful sampling to select HEIs, VISs and SSS officers. The logic and strength of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information rich-cases about the subject of the study (Benoot, Hannes & Bilsen, 2016). The participants included partial and blind students, from freshers to completers in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

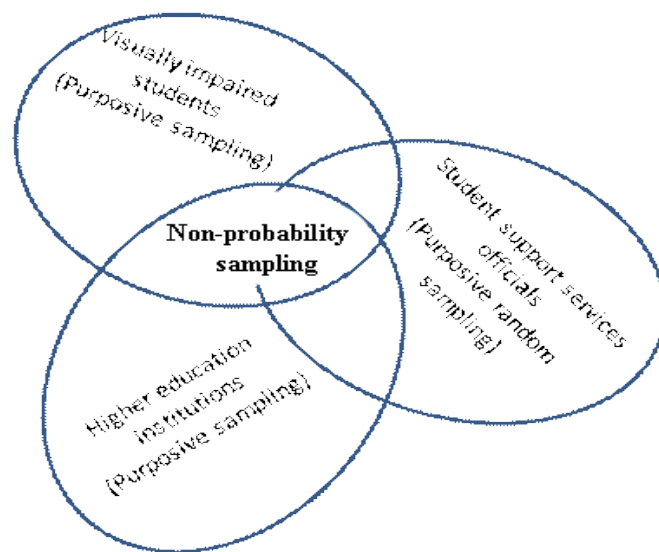


Figure 9: Sampling of participants

4.5.2.2. Visually impaired students: Higher education institution 1 (HEIone)

In the 2022-2023 academic years, the HEIone enrolled two (n=2) male visually impaired students. Both of them agreed to participate in this study. One was a completing third-year student enrolled in the faculty of social sciences. He acquired his blindness at the age of two. He was preparing to write his final examinations one month after the research interview. The other was a first year student with partial vision impairment. He acquired his vision impairment at the age of six. Both of them were staying at the student residence on campus. The details and demographic information of the participating students are shown in Table 4. To guarantee confidentiality, each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Table 4: Student participants in HEIone

No.:	Names (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Form of vision impairment	Faculty/ Program	Year of Study
01	Mohlanka	Male	Blindness	Social science	3
02	Lekaota	Male	Partial/short- sightedness	Secondary school teaching education	1

4.5.2.3. Visually impaired students: Higher education institution 2 (HEItwo)

In the 2022/2023 academic year, the university enrolled nine (n=9) visually impaired students. Eight (n=8) students accepted my invitation to participate in this study. These students were either partially impaired or blind. Two female students were blind. There were six male students; four of them were partially visually impaired and two were blind. They were enrolled in the faculties of social sciences and humanities at different undergraduate levels. All the student participants were staying at student residences on campus and each of them was allocated own room. One male student was enrolled in an Adult education programme at satellite campus in Maseru. He was staying at a private residence in Maseru City.

Table 5: Student participants in HEItwo

No .:	Names (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Form of vision impairment	Faculty/programme	Year of Study
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01	Mohale	Male	Short-sighted	Social sciences/Social work	4
02	Dan	Male	Blind	Humanities	2
03	Hlomla	Male	Blind	Humanities/Pastoral Care and Counselling	2
04	Jappie	male	Short-sighted	Social sciences	4
05	Fifi	Female	Blind	Social sciences	4
06	Nare	male	Short-sighted	Diploma in Adult Education	1
07	Molepe	male	Short-sighted	Humanities/Degree in Pastoral Care and Counselling	4
08	Khothu	female	Blind	Social sciences	2

To ensure that all the participants make informed decision to take part in this study, I explained the purpose and aim of my research study and how they would be involved. I explained why they were invited; participants were assured that all the information that they provide would be held confidentially, safely secured and eventually destroyed; I assured them that anonymity would be maintained; and confirmed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage of the research process (Burton, Brundrett & Jones (2011). At least one officer in each section of the support services departments was requested to participate in this study. The purpose of selecting students and support services staff was to gather rich and in-depth information to establish the "what" and "how" experiences of VISs without making any predictions and to uncover multiple perspectives about support services in the HEIs (Lodigo, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010). All VISs from both sampled HEIs agreed to participate in this study. They were enrolled in different academic years and faculties. The invited students' support services staff welcomed my request to participate in this study.

4.5.3. Research sites

To understand the context in which this study was conducted and to portray a clear picture about the factors that inhibited or exhibited the experiences of VISs, it is essential to have information about each research site. Marshall and Rossman (2016) concede that choosing

and setting an appropriate research site is fundamental to the study design and serves as a guide for the researcher.

This research study was conducted in two HEIs in the Maseru district, Lesotho. One institution is a public college and the other is a public university.

4.5.3.1. Higher education institution 1 (HEIone)

The HEIone, formally a training college was established in 1975 by the government of the Kingdom of Lesotho. It is the sole provider of basic pre-service teacher education to the diploma level. These qualifications are meant for basic education (primary and high school) teaching. Since its establishment, Higher Education Institution 1 has provided thousands of certificates and diplomas to pre-service, in-service and part-time distance teacher education students to enable unqualified teachers to become qualified. Under the guidance and auspices of the government of Lesotho, this public college was established to replace five denominational teachers' colleges owned by the Anglican Church of Lesotho, the Evangelical church, and the Roman Catholic church of Lesotho. Upon its establishment, the college enrolled seventy eight students under the guidance of 17 lecturers and advisors.

In 1993 the college offered both in-serve and pre-service programs leading to certificates. However, in 2002 certificate programmes were replaced by diploma programmes with similar duration. In the same year, the college was granted autonomy by the government of Lesotho and was renamed the HEIone (pseudonym) College of Education. Since then, the college was privileged to determine its programmes and strategic plan and to allocate or distribute its resources internally. The college offers three faculties, the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Sciences with various programmes in each faculty. HEIone admits students with different impairments (vision, hearing and physical). In the 2022/2023 academic year, the college enrolled two (n=2) VISs.

4.5.3.2. Higher Education Institution 2 (HEItwo)

The Higher Education Institution 2 (HEItwo) is recognised as the oldest higher education institution in the Kingdom of Lesotho. Around 1938, this Catholic College was founded at a village about 30 km away from the Maseru capital city. It was later given another name, Tloutle College (pseudonym) to offer external degrees of the University of South Africa. In 1954 Tloutle College was granted an Associate college status as a form of decentralizing

certain degrees. It replaced by the independent, non-denominational university of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland. After Lesotho and Botswana gained their independence in 1966 it was called the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS). In 1974, the UBLS offered five-degree courses, four post-graduate degree courses and 11 diplomas and certificates courses.

In 1975 the government of Lesotho, the Tloutle college administration and other stakeholders renamed the college and established a national higher education institution in Lesotho through the National Assembly Act No. 13 of 1975 (Institutional Calendar 2006/2007). HEItwo is the heir to the 80-hectare at the Tloutle valley, buildings, a ground, which was initially occupied by church college. The HEItwo campus is situated some 34 kilometres southeast of Maseru. At present, HEItwo has seven faculties and one institute of extra mural studies campus situated in Maseru city centre. In the 2022/2023 academic year, the university enrolled seven (n=7) students in the undergraduate and post-graduate programmes. The number of students with disabilities was thirteen (n=13). In the same academic year, 2022/2023, the university enrolled seven students with visual impairment in various faculties.

4.5.4. Procedures: Recruitment of participants

A letter of request was addressed to conduct a study in each higher education institution. At the HEIone, the letter was submitted to the office of Research and Administration on 01 August, 2022. My request was approved on the date 05 September, 2022 (Appendix 5). At the HEItwo, a letter of request to conduct a research study was submitted to the office of the Registrar on the date 15 August 2022. However, I received permission on the date 22 August 2022 (Appendix 6)

4.5.4.1. Recruitment of participants in HEIone)

The recruitment of participants was first conducted at HEIone on 14 November 2022. After my request to collect data at the HEIone, I met the gatekeeper who introduced me to the special education officer who, in turn, introduced me to VISs on campus. After introducing my study and presenting an invitation, I gave each would be participating student a braille transcribed consent form to read. After three days I visited them to collect braille transcribed consent forms which were thumb-signed. A date was scheduled for the interview session and it was agreed to have an interview session on the same date. Each student was allowed to suggest a convenient time and place for his/her interview session. Each student was told that his/her participation was voluntary and that any participant was free to participate or

withdraw at any time without explaining anything. Both students accepted my invitation to participate. The first interview session with a student was conducted on campus on the 16 November 2022 at 11:45. It lasted one hour, fifteen minutes. The second interview session was conducted on the same date at 14:30 on the campus and lasted one hour and five minutes.

Table 6: Student support services officials in HEIone

No.:	Names (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Department/section	Job description/ position	Years in service
01	Budda	Male	Computer lab	Lecturer,	12
02	Mama	Female	Disability office	Disability officer	7
03	Nthatuoa	Female	Early childhood dept.	Lecturer	10
04	Mokubung	Male	DSA	Head of dept./welfare officer	2
05	Sister1	female	Health services/clinic	Nurse clinician	1
06	Makholu	Female	Library	Librarian	4

4.5.4.2. Recruitment of student support services officials

The gatekeeper circulated an email to all staff in the institution to inform them about my presence on the campus and study that I was conducting. In the process of recruiting students, requests were also submitted to different SSS officials to participate in the study. I requested the gate keeper not to show or accompany me to the various offices when I went to submit requests for participation. I was not familiar with the location of the offices of student support officials. I asked either a student or any staff member to direct me to the various offices around the campus. I introduced myself and extended an invitation to participate in this study. Participants were purposive randomly sampled and the interview sessions were scheduled at their most convenient time and place. Six SSS officials were invited to participate and all of them accepted my invitation. For ethical issues, they were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw without informing the researcher about the reasons for withdrawal.

4.5.4.3. Higher education institution 2 (HEItwo)

The following section discusses how the recruitment process of participants was conducted at HEItwo.

4.5.4.3.1. Recruitment of visually impaired students

Recruitment of VISs was also conducted at the HEItwo. To acquaint myself with the research site and the targeted participants, I visited the Office of Students Affairs which directed me to the disability office at the institution. The disability officer introduced me to the students and agreed to exchange their mobile phone numbers. After introducing my study, braille transcribed consent forms were issued to each participating student to read and thumb-sign in their own spare time. I allowed each student to suggest a convenient time and place for the interview session. I scheduled interview sessions with each student. I also informed each student that his/her participation was voluntary and they were at liberty to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without explaining the reasons. The first student interview session was conducted on 13 December 2022. The demographic information of HEItwo participating students are shown in Table 6 while the details of the SSS officials are shown in Table 7.

4.5.4.3.2. Recruitment of student support services officials

The SSS officials were recruited at the Higher education institution starting during the first week of November 2022. I was not familiar with the location of their offices. To locate them, I asked either students or university staff members for directions. When I found each relevant office, I introduced myself and extended an invitation to the occupant to participate in the study. An invitation was extended to all purposefully sampled participants and an interview session was scheduled at their most convenient time and place. The seven SSS officials who were invited to participate accepted my invitation and signed consent forms. For ethical issues, all the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study without informing the researcher about their reasons for withdrawal. The first interview session was conducted on 29 November 2022 with the office of the counsellor. The last interview was conducted on 15 December 2022

Table 7: Student support services official at HEItwo

No.:	Names (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Department/ Section	Job description/ position	Years in service
01	Mookameli	Female	DSA	Head of department	17

02	Stebo	Female	DSA	Student welfare	7
03	Rele	Male	Disability unit	Disability support officer	3
04	Kutlo	Male	Counselling	Student counselling/psychologist	4
05	Mda	Female	Library	Reference librarian	5
06	Coach	Male	DSA	Sports officer	11 months
07	Sister 2	Female	Health services/clinic	Nurse clinician	14

4.5.5. Data generation process

Data gathering techniques used in this study include in-depth interviews, field notes, observation, narratives document analysis and photo analysis. Tenny, Brannan and Brannan (2022) illustrate that a qualitative research study methodology at its core includes asking people questions, observing what happens and so on. This says multiple sources and methods of gathering data are used to achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and through triangulation to confirm the emerging findings and to point to contradictions and tensions in a study (Arthur, 2012). Interpretivists argue that data is brought into being through the process of inquiry (Chowdhury, 2014) to allow the researcher to make sense of the feelings, experiences, phenomena or social situations as they occur in the natural setting (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2012). Congruent with the central endeavour of the Interpretivist paradigm in this study, I had the opportunity to discover and interpret what the VISs are thinking, describing, meaning, narrating or explaining about SSS in higher education.

4.5.5.1. In-depth interviews guides

The primary purpose of in-depth interviews is to generate data that gives an authentic insight into peoples' experiences (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). Semi-structured interviews and narrations were used as the two forms of interviews in this study. The data gathering methods in this study were inspired by innumerable pieces of literature. Some of them were reviewed in the previous chapters of this thesis. Since I intended to explore the experiences of VISs, semi-structured questions allowed me to maintain a focus on each interview while at the same time allowing SSS officials to provide their insights about how students used various support services in their respective institutions. The use of semi-structured interviews has an element of flexibility to reflect on the given answers and the possibility to probe for more in-depth

follow-up questions or revisit previous questions (Roberts, 2020). However, Nieuwehuis (2016) maintains that the success of interview probing depends on the attentiveness of the researcher to the reactions of the participants to identify critical issues that relate directly to the phenomenon under investigation. The AI was used as a theoretical framework to inspire this study and also as a methodology to inspire the development of interview protocols.

4.5.5.2. Interview Guide for visually impaired students

The interview guide, as designed by me is divided into four sets of questions, including the demographic fragment as the preliminary set. These segments are; a) Experiences of VISs; This first set of questions addressed the first research objective (To explore how support services impact the academic success of VISs in HEIs in Lesotho). The questions focused on students' understanding and interpretation of visual impairment, how students perceive vision impairment and their conceptualization of support services on campus; b) Impact of support services; this set of questions addressed the second research objective (To determine the factors that can influence VISs to utilise support services in HEIs in Lesotho) and probed how these services impacted on their academic success; c) Reasons for using support services; the third set of questions addresses the third research objective (To determine forms of support available to VISs in HEIs in Lesotho), these questions inquire about students' success, satisfaction with support services and availability of learning aids; and c) Strategies to improve support services; this last set of questions addressed the fourth and last research objective (To explore strategies that support services can use to improve support of VISs in HEIs in Lesotho). The questions focused on students' perceptions about support services, interaction and relation with the campus community, their views and perceptions and recommendations about support services.

In-depth interviews with open-ended questions were conducted face-to-face with all visually impaired student participants. Each student was interviewed on ones' campus in the comfortable space one chose and at ones' convenient time. Students' interviews lasted from one hour to one hour and 15 minutes. Interviewing at the research participants' location created a relaxed atmosphere which enabled students to yield rich data. On the consent form which the student signed before the interview, it was indicated that the interview process would be audio-recorded. During the interview, I also informed participants that the interview will be recorded for transcription purposes. As the interview process unfolded, I was also open to other emerging issues as elucidated by the participant. This brought more insightful information from the participants, which I used in the following sections.

4.5.5.3. Interviews guide for student support services officials

The support services staff interview guide was designed and initiated by myself to establish how disability issues are addressed by students' support services and the availability of working tools to safeguard the well-being and academic success of VISs in higher education. This guide comprises twenty open-ended questions that probed the experiences of VISs towards the support services in their respective institutions

4.5.5.4. Support services staff interviews

The purpose of interviewing SSS officials was to know the students' support state of affairs in the two HEIs. This includes the role and responsibility of each student support office or department, the forms of support offered, the disability services, the participants' interaction with disabled and VISs; barriers in their line of duty, their views and recommendations in improving support services. Each interview session was audio recorded and lasted about 35 minutes to 45 minutes. The SSS staff members were interviewed at their offices, and at their most convenient time minimizing the risk of interrupting their work. The use of open-ended interviews allowed the staff to share rich data and to bring insightful information about the status of support services and disability issues in HEIs. The participating support services staff was cooperative and willing to provide as much information as possible.

4.5.5.5. Observation

I further opted for a complete observer approach in this study. Two students were each observed for three different days in the course of their engagement with different support services on campus. Two students at HEI two were observed from around 7:30 in the morning when they left their residence for the classroom until 16:00. One HEI one student (Lethula) was observed when leaving his residence at around 08:00 in the morning to the classroom. Researchers such as Jhangiani, Chiang, Cuttler, and Leighton (2019) and Johnson and Christensen (2012) indicate that observation consists of detailed notations that focus on individual or group behaviours, events and surroundings where events are taking place. Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2012) illustrate that observation is a way of gathering data by watching the behaviour of individuals, a group or events or noticing physical characteristics in their natural setting.

To precisely explore the experiences of VISs in this study I believed that direct observation would provide a first-hand experience of the participants under investigation Jhangiani, et al. (2019). Aray, Jabos, Sorensen and Razavieh (2010) suggest that the direct observation allows

a researcher to determine how particular behaviour is presented in a natural setting. My role was to identify and record the behaviour of VISs and occurrences while interacting with support services in HEIs. Observation involves looking and listening carefully to the subject under study. To maintain consistency and avoid biases, I used an observation guide and recorded all the incidents and things relevant to the aim of this study. While students were asking for service or assistance from support staff or no-VISs, aspects such as willingness to assist, the approach or attitude of the assistants were observed. Photos and field notes were also taken during the process.

Since observations can be overt (participants know they are being observed) or covert (participants do not know that they are being observed), I requested permission from three lecturers of identified students to join their classes for 10 to 15 min. This allowed me to observe the lecturer's approach, the sitting arrangement and the furniture set-up. The benefit of covert observation is that participants will likely behave naturally if they do not know they are being observed, while in an overt observation they are likely to change their behaviour because they know that they are being observed (Silverman, 2017). Notes were taken and no photos were taken during lectures to avoid interruption and because ethical issues could arise (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). However, during my presence in the classrooms, I assumed that lecturers changed how they normally act during class. As described by Nma (2021) observation has a nonreactive or unobtrusive measure, where the observant researcher can conclude attitude or behaviour from the evidence without interrupting the participants or events under investigation.

The VISs do not use all the support services daily in both institutions and rarely use other support services. Observations were made on the use of the library services, classroom engagement and the disability unit, mobility to the classrooms from their residence, furniture and the sitting arrangement in the classroom. Although observation was imperative in exploring the experiences of VISs, it was time-consuming but valuable in exploring the issues that cannot be known during the interviews and the narration processes. Nonetheless, gathering data through observation had several advantages which include: - a) Collecting data where and when students received support or interacted with the support services staff; b) Direct evidence of what participants did rather than relying on what they said during the interviews, c) personal witness of information about the experiences with the support services rather than relying on the participants' willingness or ability to provide evidence.

4.5.5.6. Narrative interviews with visually impaired students

Narratives or life histories are often represented by focusing on a particular person in a given context (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Narratives are regarded as a form of qualitative method that seeks to gather comprehensive data about the personal life or a particular situation of a sampled participant (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015). This method derives from the Latin word *narrate*, which means “to report, to tell a story.” Although narratives are a good source of information about the individuals' beliefs, perceptions and experiences, they can also organise the memory of the respondent (Mohajan, 2018). The method of narration consists of the researcher asking an open-ended question that normally provokes the interviewee to respond in a narrative form by retelling the experiences and events as they occurred.

Narrative interviews as a means of collecting people’s own stories about their experiences, place the interviewees at the heart of the research study. Narratives were used as a means of collecting VISs' own stories about their experiences towards SSS in HEIs of Lesotho. Muylaert, et al. (2014) point out that narrative interviews are considered in-depth and unstructured tools with specific characteristics. These include the life stories of the participants and being cross-examined by the interviewer. Narrative interviews encourage and stimulate the respondents to relate a personal story to the interviewer about important life experiences in a social context (Muylaert et al., 2014). The two narrative interviews conducted adopted the Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) structure which entails five phases and is guided by several practical rules in each phase.

Table 8: Phases of interview narration

The phase of the narrative interview	Rules
Preparation	Exploring the field Formulating examinant questions
Initialization	Formulating initial topic for narration Using visual aids
Main narration	No interruptions Only non-verbal encouragement to continue story-telling Wait for the coda

Questioning phase	Only 'What happened to then?' No opinion and attitude questions No arguing on contradictions No why-questions Examinant into immanent questions
Concluding talks	Stop recording Why-questions allowed Memory protocol immediately after the interview

Source: Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000)

Since this qualitative study is intended to apprehend reality in its context as compared to other research methods which cannot, the role of the present researcher to develop a critical opinion that qualifies the in-depth of the collected data. This implied that the storytelling that emerged from the interaction of VISs and the researcher was an important dialogue and collaboration between the two parties. Two blind female students narrated stories of their life in HEI two. They reported on their experiences, the support that they received towards their academic success, and why they used such support services. These two participants told their stories at their private residences because at the time of the data collection process, one of them had just completed her degree and was awaiting the results. The other was in her second year and had just encountered blindness due to diabetes mellitus. She was had to submit an official withdrawal from her studies in the middle of the academic year. The narratives of both students were gathered through audio recordings and transcripts.

Researchers report that narratives seem to follow universal rules which guide the story production process (MacAdams, 2019). This is a semi-autonomous process, elucidated by particular rules which allow a flow of narration that draws on unspoken rules. In this study, students' narrative interviews were sustained by three characteristics; i) *Detailed texture*: This refers to the need of the narrator (a visually impaired student in this case) who provide detailed information to account for the transition from one event to the other. The students were allowed to give detailed information about their experiences to make the transition between events plausible; ii) *Relevance fixation*: The narrator mainly reported on the features of the events that were relevant according to her perspective as a student in HEI. This process enabled the student to select only the necessary and important events for her as a student. The reported events unfold around students' experiences, support services and their impact on

their academic success. iii) *Closing of the gestalt*: This characteristic is the core of the narrative interview, which details the events in the narrative. It says events are completely reported and have the beginning, the middle and the end. This threefold structure allowed participants' stories to flow once it has started.

Matobako (2021) indicated that the researcher has to ensure that narratives have a direct link to the phenomenon under investigation and must verify that such narratives produce data which responds to research questions. The data from of the student narratives addressed the research question which sought to explore the experiences of VISs towards the support services in the two HEIs in Lesotho. Table 9 provides a summary of the experiences of the participants, how different research instruments were used, as mentioned earlier. It also outline participants' roles and research objectives that merge in this study

Table 9: Summary of participants, data collection instruments, participants and research objectives

Institutions	Data collection methods	Participants	Research objective
HEIone and HEItwo	In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visually impaired students, 	To explore experiences of VISs regarding support services in HEIs in Lesotho.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students support services officials 	To determine the forms of support available to VISs in HEIs in Lesotho.
	Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher 	To explore the strategies that the support services can use to improve the support of VISs in HEIs in Lesotho.
			To determine the forms of support services available to VISs in HEIs in Lesotho

HEItwo	Narrative interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visually impaired students 	To determine the factors that can influence VISs to make use of the support services available in HEIs in Lesotho.
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4.5.6. Intertwine Appreciative inquiry in research methodology

To follow the ethos of AI, the 5D model as initiated by David Cooperrider was applied and integrated when conducting in-depth interviews and narrative interviews. Appreciative inquiry practitioners assume that the questions researchers ask tend to focus interviewees' attention in a particular direction (Ahmed, 2018). Most open-ended questions asked focused on strengths, positives, potentials, what is right in higher education institutions and the uplifting experiences of VISs. In the first Define phase of the 5D model, open-ended questions and narrative interviews allowed VIS to share realities, experiences and what they encountered when seeking support in various services in their respective institutions. Student support services officials also shared how they support and respond to the academic and non-academic needs of VISs. In the Discovery phase, VISs were asked questions that allowed them to reflect on their experiences, academic achievements, strengths and possibilities in their institutions. Support services officials were requested to reflect on how higher education institutions could improve support of visually impaired students and mechanisms that can be effective in enhancing their academic success. Along with that, participating officials were allowed to share accomplishments, strengths of their institutions and what they appreciate about visually impaired students. In the third phase, the Dream phase VISs were allowed to envision the untapped potential within support services in their institutions. Also to be critical in co-creating an ideal supportive and learning environment and desired future that could enhance their support. The design phase prompted participants to think and share how envisioned potentials in the Dream phase can be enacted and take shape. Ahmed (2018) concludes that the design phase is where provocative propositions or statements are articulated to capture the vision of the Dream phase. These include how various support services could be integrated to support VISs in HEIs. Finally, the Destiny or Delivery phase is where the implantation of ideas, visions and wishes articulated in the Dream phase happens. Priest et al. (2013) illustrate that in this stage, transformation, performance, increased productivity, efficiency and development come from how people think rather than what they do. Visually impaired students narrated their efforts and strategies they use to survive multi-faceted challenges in higher education institutions. Similarly, student support services officials illustrated the forms of support offered to VISs, means and measures they

used to respond to their academic, social and psychological needs. It is in this stage that VISs are required to take responsibility for their studies and support services officials are urged to be innovative in how they support VISs. Also, support services officials were required to identify aspects that did not work or should be improved or that do not work and should be dropped. In the destiny phase evaluation was conducted by support services officials to make recommendations on what could be useful and strengthened.

4.6. Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is intended to provide some key concepts around the phenomenon in which the data collection was constructed. The distinctiveness of qualitative gathering methods is normally reflected in the methods used to analyse such data (Nassaji, 2015). However, Alase (2017) declares that it is not about how many research methods are available in qualitative research methodology, but it is about which one is flexible and participant-oriented enough to acquire the real lived experiences of the participants in a research study. On the other hand, Wagner, Kawulich, and Garne (2019) concede that methods of data analysis approach stem from a combination of factors, which include the research questions of the study, the appropriateness of research techniques used to make sense out of the collected data and the theoretical foundation of the study. Qualitative researchers prefer to apply an inductive approach as a tradition to analyse the data as it allows the research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes extracted from raw data (Alase, 2017).

With this in mind, Daniel (2016) illustrate that qualitative data analysis seeks to reduce and make sense of the vast amount of the collected information from various sources to shed light on emerging research questions of the study under investigation. Yazan, (2015) concludes that the process of analysing qualitative data entails examining, categorizing, tabulating or recombining the necessary evidence to address the propositions of the study. It also involves noticing, collecting and thinking about the emerging patterns. Consequently, this process enabled me to identify consistent patterns so that I could make interpretations and generalisations about the findings In analysing the collected data about the experiences of the VISs towards the support services that emerged from the interviews and observations, I engaged a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide substantive explanations and meanings of a single phenomenon of interest (Nowell et al., 2017). Collecting data through multiple data sets and sources also allowed me to gain a more in-depth insight into the phenomenon than using only one type of data (Heale & Twycross,

2017). This process is viewed by Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2019) as an inductive process which involves going from a specific to a meaningful whole of approaching analysis at the data level.

The information gathered in this qualitative study was gathered from VISs and SSS officials in two HEIs in Lesotho. Priya (2021) asserts that the evidence from the subjects is stronger and more reliable to allow a comprehensive exploration of research questions and the phenomenon under investigation. Because each subject and sub-units are unique and special in a qualitative study, the analytical process follows a certain set of principles (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Therefore, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was adapted to analyse the collected data. Data analysis process seeks to reduce and make meaning of vast amounts of information from various sources so that impressions that shed light on research questions can emerge to enable sense-making interpretations (Attride-Stirling, 2014).

4.6.1. Contextualising Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

This study adopted an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for the analytical approach and interpretation of the results. Data analysis was conducted based on the principles of IPA because it looks into the participants' lived experiences in detail and determines how they make sense of their personal experiences (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2019). Some researchers acknowledge that IPA is committed to examining how people make sense of their major life experiences in a given context. However, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) illustrate that IPA is a systematic and attentive approach that reflects on the participants' lived experiences. In addition to that, Shinebourne (2011) concedes that IPA is concerned with the individuals' experiences in their social context as well as their world, thus allowing the researcher to describe and explore the experiences of VISs towards the support services, with limited literature, by defining the themes and subthemes from the emerging data. Within the realms of IPA, data analysis was influenced by Interpretive Phenomenology⁵ approach to reveal and interpret the meaning of an individual's lived experience (Charlick, Pincombe, McKellar & Fielder, 2016). From the philosophical underpinning of the interpretive phenomenology, knowledge of the participants' lived experiences can be discovered when interpretation is grounded within the context of the individuals and their relationship with the world (Smith et al. 2009). As a result, interpretive phenomenon allows an in-depth analysis of each subject and examines the relationship between the perceptual,

social, conscious and practical experiences of participants' experiences as influenced by time and space. Researchers undertake that the interpretive phenomenon allows an in-depth analysis of each subject and examines the relationship between perceptual, social, conscious and practical experiences of participants' experiences as influenced by time and space (Tuffour, 2017; Charlick et al., 2016).

Charlick, Pincombe, McKellar and Fielder (2016) maintain that interpretation of what meaning people make in their world must be in relation to the researchers' perspectives as influenced by time and context. Through interviews, narratives and observations, IPA enabled me to find themes across each subject and study them thoroughly, along with how VISs view support services in HEIs. In principle, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) asset that the aim of phenomenology is to identify the essential components of the phenomena and the participants' experiences which make them distinguishable from others. Therefore interpretive phenomenology enabled this study to reveal and interpret implicit experiences of VISs towards the support services in their HEIs. With this in mind, the application of IPA does not allow the researcher to extract self from the research study. It allows the researcher to make interpretations from their perspective. However a researcher must avoid bias and abide by the ethical principles, as mentioned in section 4.8 of this chapter.

4.6.2. Data analysis process

While conducting the interviews, I recorded each interview session to allow for data transcription and analysis. Data analysis was started in parallel with data collection from the time I set the first appointment. Because qualitative data can sometime be "messy" to deal with, my analysis process was on-going to enable refined interpretation of the findings. After data gathering, I was faced with converting audio data into text and immersed myself in volumes of data being gathered from 19 participants. McMullin (2023) defines data transcription as the process undertaken by the researcher to transform the recorded audio into written format for analysing a phenomenon or event under study. There is no best or most accurate transcription style (McMullin, 2023); however, I considered intelligent verbatim⁶ transcription most appropriate for this study. To ensure good transcription practice, I replayed the audio-recorded interviews several times to establish how participants had responded to the interview questions. This allowed me to note how emerging data could influence the

⁶ Intelligent verbatim is transcription that omits fillers, grammatical errors and repeating of words to optimise readability and clarity of the transcribed data. Intelligent verbatim is interested in capturing what being spoken, rather than how is being said.

interview process. Woods (2020) concedes that while transcription is regarded as part of data collection process, it is also an act of the data analysis in qualitative research.

The qualitative data transcription in this study was based on the Interpretivist paradigm which speculates that what is said is being influenced by the context and who is engaged in the conversation (Kivunja, 2017). The Interpretivists critically rely on describing and reflecting on the phenomenon under study and are interested in understanding the meaning that people make of their experiences and how they create their meaning when interacting with the world around them. After transcribing the data, the analysis process required several related operations such as establishing the categories and themes, the application of these categories to raw data by condensing data into manageable groups as well as purposeful and usable categories (Kothari & Garg, 2014). Categorizing data was purposefully done by coding through which data is transformed into symbols that are manageable, tabulated and counted. As coding is the key aspect in data analysis, Marshall and Rossman (2016) point out that work of analysis in generating the categories and themes is to apply the coding schemes and diligently and thoroughly marking some passages in the transcribed data to use the codes.

In the process of generating the categories with IPA, I designed a table with three columns. The first column entailed the experiential statements, the second column transcribed the data and the last column included exploratory notes. The transcribed data was structured into sentences which were numbered from one. I read and re-read the transcripts line by line to discover the themes. In the exploratory notes column (right column) I documented the thoughts, ideas, relevant words and comments about what transpired during the interview process. In the next stage I used the exploratory notes as the input to formulate experiential statements in the left column. These experiential statements were an interpretive summary of what is happening in the transcript text. I then created a structure of connections and clustering what is happening with the experiential statements. This stage aims at finding some connections, as well as how statements relate or contrast with each other. On a separate page, experiential statements were written to identify the connections; connected statements were grouped accordingly. I then developed a table of personal experiential themes to establish a relationship between the themes; and all identified connections were grouped accordingly. The clustering process enabled me to revisit experiential statements to make adjustments where necessary. It allowed me to culminate and define experiential themes of participants into a table of personal experiential themes. The next stage was to conduct a cross-case analysis that enabled me to look for similarities and differences between different participants

and their experiential themes. I did this by visiting different themes in each case on the table. The last stage was to write-up the study where I shifted from individual or group themes' writing to analytical writing process. This was done to tell a coherence interpretation and to summarise the tables of themes.

Table 10: Illustration of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis stages and composition

No:	Stages	Composition
1.	Exploratory notes and experiential statements.	<i>Formulate a table of experiential statements, data transcripts and exploratory notes.</i>
2.	Using exploratory notes to formulating experiential statements	<i>Transform notes into experiential statements.</i>
3.	Seeking connections and clustering experiential statements	<i>Define and compile personal experiential themes.</i>
4.	Compiling personal experiential themes	<i>Write narrative accounts and extracts from interviews; described and exemplify, analytical comments from the researcher.</i>
Cross-case analysis: <i>seeking similarities and differences among the participants and their experiential themes and accounts to identify the patterns and to develop the coding framework.</i>		

In illustrating the above stages, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) point out that IPA provides flexible guidelines that individual researcher can adopt in-line with their research objectives. Along with that, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) further advise researchers that they should be flexible, innovative and avoid treating IPA as a rigid recipe. Data was then presented and interpreted in accordance with the guidelines of phenomenological research design.

4.6.3. Data presentation and interpretation

The findings relating to the experiences of VISs towards the support services in HEIs as presented in super-ordinate themes were;

- a) Admittedly, this is my journey.
- b) Leaving no one behind.
- c) Towards a better learning environment.

Based on these super-ordinate themes, participants' narratives focused on how SSS contributed to the academic success of VISs, the factors that influence the use of support services, the forms of support available and the strategies found appropriate to improve the support of visually impaired in HEIs. The interpretation process enabled me to make meaning of the participants' responses perceptions as well as make connections, comparisons and explored causes and consequences of using SSS. Therefore, the research findings presented in the next chapter demonstrate the ways in which accounts from multiple perspectives on support services relate to one another how the differences can co-exist and how they contribute to the analysis.

4.6.3.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

In the process of data analysis, I engaged the inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that the findings are related to the research questions and to set the pre-defined characteristics used to identify the subjects that are eligible to be included or excluded. In engaging the inclusion criteria, the characteristics of the population (like demographic, geographic and eligibility in a study under investigation) are considered to answer the research questions (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). Porzolt, et al. (2019) indicates that inclusion criteria designate the conditions which qualify a subject to be included in the study while the exclusion criteria designate the conditions which a subject cannot meet to be included in a study. In each theme, I optimised the inclusion criterion to enact the sub-themes while analysing the data from verbatim quotations there were some subjects which were eligible to be included while others were excluded.

Table 4.9 illustrates the parameters and subjects that were considered in order to set the inclusion and exclusion criteria. After properly selecting the prospective subjects, the inclusion criteria optimised the internal and external validity of the study, improved its feasibility, minimised ethical concerns and reduced perplexity.

Table 11: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion parameters	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Education institutions	Universities and colleges registered with Council of higher education. Universities and colleges enrolling students with vision impairment.	Primary schools, high schools, preparatory schools, traditional schools, unregistered colleges and

		universities.
Students in higher educations	Blind students, partially impaired students, short sighted and long sighted students.	Students without disabilities, students with disabilities other than vision impairment.
Student support services	Departments offering direct academic, social and psychological support to students.	Departments which do not offer direct support to students.
Students support services officials	One official within the department offering direct support to students.	Officials in departments which do not offer direct support to students.

4.7. Trustworthiness

The hallmark of scientific research is the pursuit of trust and limiting errors and bias. Qualitative studies can be laden with uncertainty, confusion, conflicting literature, lack of structured models and loquacious vocabulary that may threaten quality of the study (Murphy & Yelder, 2009). Therefore qualitative researchers must ensure quality by considering how their research studies can be trustworthy. The criterion of trustworthiness is viewed by Guba and Lincoln (1985) as a golden and permanent standard to evaluate qualitative research. Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is a matter of persuasion whereby a researcher has to make data collection methods, research design, theories, literature and data analysis visible and auditable (Gunawan, 2015). Trustworthiness is viewed in terms of credibility, dependability, triangulation, transferability and validity as the criteria. Ghafouri and Ofoghi (2016) point out that each criterion can have an effect on others, while having effects on each other.

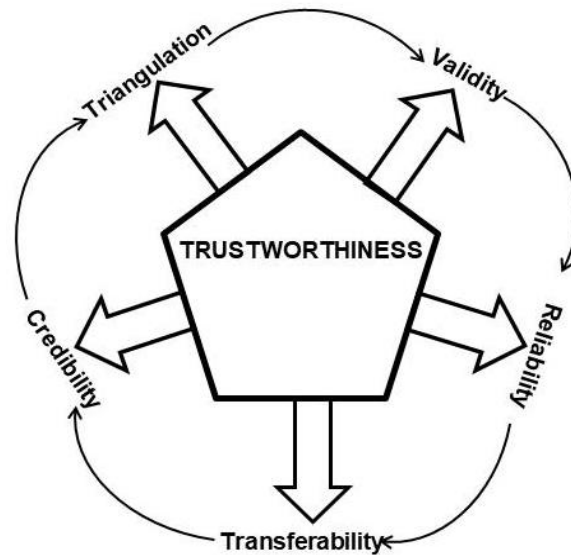


Figure 10: Trustworthiness of the study and its components

4.7.1. Credibility

Credibility is associated with the concepts “authenticity” and “accuracy”. The researcher must ask self whether the collected data and findings are suitable to be claimed and found suitable for the study under investigation. LeCompte and Goetz (1982) illustrate that a qualitative researcher has to demonstrate authenticity in the study. Credibility represents the “fitness” between the participants’ views and the researchers’ representation of such views by providing evident quality measures and strategies used during the study (Murphy & Yelder, 2009). To ensure credibility in this study I used four strategies: i) Member check was used to assess the accuracy of the findings with the participants to allow them to provide validity of their responses. I carried out a member check to show the participants’ interpretations and conclusions about their experiences towards the support services in higher education; ii) Prolonged engagement with participants at their free time and observing them as they move around their campuses. My prolonged engagement was carried out to enhance the likelihood of emerging and potential aspects which were not mentioned during the interview sessions; iii) Triangulation was used as an attempt to overcome any bias or weaknesses of a single research strategy. An Interview guide and an observation guide were used to collect the data; An appreciative inquiry and Human Rights Based Approach theories were used; VISs and SSS officials were participants in this study; iv) Peer debriefing was used to discuss the findings from the interview with the stakeholders on disability issues and with my supervisor to ensure that data was analysed correctly.

4.7.2. Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of numerous data sources, research methods, theoretical or conceptual frameworks to present the findings of the study. Purposeful triangulation overcomes weakness and bias in research (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). In qualitative research, triangulation entails three strategies as suggested by Guion, Diehl and McDonald (2011). Data triangulation- In this study, interviews were used to gather data from VISs and SSS staff. An observation guide was also used to observe the daily engagement of VISs with support services around their campuses. Triangulation of data sources can be influenced by time, place or participants. Secondly, it is the theory triangulation that combines different theoretical concepts and assumptions to analyse data. Assumptions of Appreciative inquiry and Human Rights based approach were used as the basis for the theoretical and conceptual philosophy of this study. Theory triangulation enabled me to utilise various outlooks to interpret the analysed data. It has also moulded the framing of research questions for orderliness in data collection, data analysis and coherent study clustering. The third strategy is methodological triangulation which gathers data from each participant and the cases are joined with the researchers' notes, journal entries and verbatim transcripts and with each case.

4.7.3. Validity

Guion, Diehl and McDonald (2011) indicate that in qualitative research, validity refers to whether the findings of a study are true and certain. In essence, the research findings must be accurate to reflect the situation in the context of the study and such findings should be supported with evidence. The findings from this study specifically emanate from the context where the study was conducted. The findings revealed experiences of VISs towards support services in their respective institutions. Hayashi, Abib and Hoppen (2019) concede that validity in qualitative studies makes it possible to assure quality and also to influence the final results of the study. In the quest to establish validity, interpretive validity⁷ was taken into consideration to ensure the participants' views and perceptions about the support services are true. The philosophical underpinning of this study is based on the Interpretivists' paradigm; therefore the interviews enabled me to understand the participants' hidden

⁷ Interpretive validity refers to the researchers' sensitivity and mental processes to capture and interpret or construct a meaning of the objects, events or participants' behaviours. Interpretive validity is motivated by the participants' values, beliefs, hidden intentions and conscious processes.

intentions, beliefs, expectations and values about the support services. Therefore, interpretive accounts of VISs and SSS officials are grounded in what they said and their perceptions about the support services in higher education.

4.7.4 Transferability

The transferability criterion implies that the findings of the research study are the same as the findings in the same situation and such findings will have relevance in the future (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). I cannot claim that the findings from this study can be applicable to all situations because the aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding about experiences of VISs at HEIs only in Lesotho. Transferability enables other researchers to apply the findings of this study to their own and to provide applicability in different contexts (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). To ensure transferability, in chapter four, I provided a thick description of the participants, data collection instruments and procedures used, research design and data analysis and emergent patterns and practices.

4.7.5. Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability assesses the consistency of the results over time. Reliability is associated with the description and detailed explanation of data and extraction of the research finding. Such data was extracted from interviews, data coding and the sample size (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). Reliability promotes stability of the study to be repeated over time in different settings and how the research instruments will be used to yield similar results (Golafshani, 2003). To enhance the reliability of the findings from this study, I documented a detailed report about the research design and processes of data collection. Interview sessions were audio-recorded to capture the study data from the participants. Multiple sources of data were used to improve the reliability of the research findings and this enabled the researcher to avoid bias or weakness of the study.

4.8. Ethical considerations

In conducting this study, the researcher observed and upheld critical research principles. Waller et al. (2016) concedes that consideration of ethics in a research study predominantly focuses on the relationship between the researcher and the individuals being studied. I was issued ethical clearance (UFS-HSD2022/0728/22) by the Faculty of Education, University of the Free State which enabled my interaction with participants. Since this study utilised

interviewing and observing VISs and support services officials and the sampled HEIs are autonomous, consent was offered by each institution to collect the data from their campuses.

Taking into account the importance of ethics in this study, Hammersley and Traianou (2015) report that there is a need to recognise the participants' fragility and human vulnerability. Also, to consider that the study does not cause any harm, no likelihood and impact of psychological, physical, social, legal and/or political risk to the research subjects. The risk of human vulnerability may also lead to the detriment of a person's dignity, integrity and human fragility. The VISs were issued braille consent forms to sign with their thumbs. The students' support services officials were also issued the consent forms to read and sign. The participants were informed that although their participation was valued, their role was voluntary and that they were at liberty to withdraw from the study should they feel uneasy at any given point. A commitment was also undertaken to conceal the names of participants and those of the institutions to which they were attached. In this regard, pseudo/code names were used to identify their participation. In conclusion, this research project would be made available to the participants on request.

4.9. Summary

For this chapter to take shape, various techniques were utilised in this qualitative study. The Interpretivism paradigm was considered appropriate to guide the philosophical underpinning because it allowed the researcher to reflect, to understand and to interpret the views of the participants. With its exploratory intent, a description was made on how a Phenomenological Research Design guided the data collection with semi-structured interviews, narrative interviews and observations. A thick description of the participants and the research sites was made to reveal how non-probability sampling was considered and applied. The processes of how IPA was used to analyse data and why inclusion and exclusion criteria were engaged in the data analysis were clarified. Finally, in ensuring quality and integrity in the research methods used and why ethical conduct is important in a qualitative study, various trustworthiness criteria were articulated. The following chapter gives a detailed process of data analysis and discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

5.0. Introduction

Data relating to the experiences of visually impaired students (VISs) towards the support services in their respective institutions is presented, discussed and analysed in this chapter. In this effort, qualitative data was extracted from the conducted interview sessions with VISs and student support services (SSS) officials. Data pertains to the four subsidiary research questions as listed in Chapter One, section 1.6.1 as generated from the interviews, observations and pictures captured on research sites. The findings claim concerns, challenges, highs and lows and support offered to VISs by various support services. Suggestions are made by participants on how HEIs can strategically improve support for the VISs.

The data for this study is presented in three super-ordinate themes as generated from ten participating VISs and twelve SSS officials' interviews and researchers' observations. In each theme, the write up of the findings is divided into sub-themes to detail the experiences of VISs towards support services in their respective institutions. Participants' voices were applicably quoted verbatim to provide a detailed explanation and justification of the trustworthiness of the findings. The three super-ordinate themes were generated and presented as:

- i. Admittedly, this is my journey.
- ii. Leaving no one behind
- iii. Towards a better learning environment

While IPA was engaged as the data analysis approach; the analysed data was generated from VISs and SSS staff. . They were analysed individually in their own right in this qualitative study. This enabled the researcher to establish the response of each participant in context, to read and explore experiential notes, to formulate experiential statements and to find connections and clustering of experiential statements. Following individual data analysis and interpretation, I was engaged in cross-case analysis to search for the similarities, differences, threads or similar themes across the participants and the observed incidents and portraits.

5.1. Admittedly, this is my journey

The presentation of the analysed data in this section is related to exploring the forms of experiences, perceptions and challenges that VISs encountered while being supported in various sections of their institutions. Data was drawn from four experiential themes: (i) orientation of students on arrival; (ii) guidance to choose the field of study; (iii) the assistive devices used, (iv) identified support services in the institution.

5.1.1. Orientation process - "Welcome to the fold"

This subsection outlines how the two institutions conduct orientation for the new students and describes how they are familiarised with the environment and their mobility around the campus. The two participating institutions conduct mainstream orientation at the start of each academic year. During mainstream orientation, various departments and sections present their services and mandates in support of the student community. All SSS officials at the college indicated that students are familiarised with the services offered in their respective sections during mainstream orientation. Lekaota revealed how he learnt about the support services when he arrived at the college.

"I learnt about the support services during orientation,"

Budda agreed with the statement made by Lekaota as one of his students:

"Actually, we normally familiarised VIS WITH WHAT? During the orientation"

At the university, a total number of six SSS officials said that students are familiarised with the support services during the mainstream orientation. Even though students are familiarised with library services during orientation, the library conducts special sessions to inform students about the specific services offered. Mda said:

"yes they are, all the students from undergraduate to postgraduate, and staff. We have interlibrary loan services for staff and post-graduate students,"

On the other hand, the disability unit officer said that VISs have a network of the visually challenged community; they inform one another about the state of support in the university.

Although they are offered orientation, they are treated like students with vision. The disability officer offers VISs mobility orientation from their residents, moving around the campus, in the lecture rooms or locations to receive different support services.

Rele said:

“Students with VI have a network from high school and I know most of them, they normally inform each other about the available services in the university and they are normally treated like any other person during the orientation”.

However, one counsellor was unsure how VISs are informed about the services offered in his department.

Kutlo said:

“Yes of course, students are familiarised”.

It can be concluded that both institutions conduct mainstream orientation at the beginning of the academic year. The purpose of this event is, among others, to acclimatise students to the higher education environment and orientate them about the support services as well as non-academic and academic life.

5.1.2. The choice of field of study

Normally, students are eligible to choose the field of study that they wish to enrol in. VISs make their choice when they fill in the application forms. Students with partial vision impairment or blindness have limited choices because, at the basic education level, they are not allowed to study subjects which have to do with statistics, calculations or mathematics. This channels them to enrol in the humanities and social sciences faculties. That is, they have to choosing non-mathematical, non-statistical or non-calculation subjects. Despite these limitations, VISs were satisfied with what they were studying.

One student (Mohlaka) at the college illustrated that his placement was determined by his matric results and he was not allowed to choose what he wished to study. In contrast to what Mohlanka said, his colleague, Lekaota, gave a different view about the choice of the field of study.

Lekaota notes;

“We were placed according to our matric results and which programme we qualify for. . I was not given any guidance.”

Lekaota states;

“No, I chose the department myself”

Just like Mohlanka, Mohale had a similar experience. He was placed and informed about what to study.

Mohale indicates;

“Nope, I applied during the grace period offered by the university and I was informed about what to study”

Dan, a student in the faculty of Humanities, majoring in Theology and African Languages at the university, proudly said:

“I chose it myself because I knew what I wanted to do. I want to be a pioneer in this major”

Nare, a first-year Adult education student at Maseru satellite campus had the same experience as Mohlanka. His choice was determined by his matric results. He said:

“Let me say I didn't receive any guidance, what happened is that I didn't obtain good matric marks, I just had to find something that I fit in”

However, Hlomla, a second-year diploma student in Pastoral care and counselling indicated that he was guided by one Non-governmental organisation which he is a member of. He stated:

“I didn't choose it myself; I was assisted by one NGO of the blind persons,”

Based on the above verbatim statements, VISs were not advised, counselled or guided to choose suitable fields of study. They were either placed by the admission office or exercised their right to choose what they wished to study. It seems that Hlomla was the only student

who received guidance and support from a private body outside the university. The VISs are aware that they are excluded from some fields due to their high school background. At both institutions, VISs had similar experiences of placement while other students were able to choose what they found most suitable for their careers.

5.1.3. Assistive devices – “Working tools”

Each participating student mentioned the form of assistive device used either inside the lecture room, for studying or for mobility in the learning environment. Therefore, this section expounds on the assistive devices that students use for mobility and studying.

5.1.3.1. My “GPS”

Blind students such as Mohlanka, Dan and Hlomla use white canes for mobility around the campus. While students like Lethula, Molepe and Jappie walk around the campus without using any assistive devices. To others, a white cane is occasionally used for mobility. They prefer to walk without any assistive devices.

Mohale said;

“I sometimes use a white cane, but not always”

Jappie said;

“Mmmm, nothing”

When I met with Molepe, Nare, Jappie and Mohale for interview sessions, I observed that they were not using white canes for mobility and nobody was accompanying them to our meeting place. These annotations were recorded in the observation guide and also in my field notes after the interview.

5.1.3.2. Study tools

For studying and reading, students with partial vision impairment use assistive devices like spectacles and magnifying glasses. When asked about which assistive devices they use for studying and reading, this is what Molepe said;

“Mmmm, I have spectacles, I use magnifiers to read, I don’t usually use books for studying, and I prefer to use soft copies”.

Nare, who is short-sided, said:

"I use spectacles which were funded by one NGO in town".

On the other hand, Mohlanka has this to say regarding assistive devices that he uses for studying and learning purposes:

"I am using a screen reader, object detector, my devices have a narrator, I download them, I don't buy them, they are free; for mobility, I normally use a white cane,"

Regarding the form of assistive learning devices used, students are assisted to download computer software suitably used by visually impaired persons. Nare said:

"It is only my laptop which has some soft-ware. I had this laptop from high school, I have only been given modules,"

Jappie said:

"It is only desktops with Jaws software; for reading I normally zoom or enlarge my screen reading".

Access and use of audio recorders as assistive learning devices in the classroom is essential for VISs to record the lecturers' presentations. Mama said:

"Students are allowed to audio record the lecturers' class presentations."

However, one student at the college, Lekaota, said that audio recorders and other learning aids are available and are provided by the college:

"Acheee, all the learning aids belong to the college, it's only electronic they use, but we need voice recorder but now we need to use voice recorders"

Lekaota's statement was confirmed by Mama. In the classroom, VISs are allowed to record lecturers as they present their lessons. The college disability unit was given audio recorders to

enable VISs to record the lecturers' presentations as a form of note-taking process. This is what Mama revealed about the access and distribution of the audio recorders:

"The college has audio recorders which were given to assist VIS but the department of special education denies them access and they are told to hire them although these audio recorders were distributed by the funder as a gift to the college to be used by VIS" (Mama).

Each student uses an assistive device depending on his or her form of vision impairment. Blind students are dependent on white cane for their mobility daily. It has been observed that partially impaired students either occasionally use a white cane for walking or prefer to walk without it. However, the three participating students do not use any assistive devices for mobility. Blind and partially blind students used different assistive devices for studying. At the college, assistive devices are available in the disability unit. However, some support services staff mentioned that VISs are denied access to some assistive devices for Special Needs Education management. This has therefore let students to use their mobile phones or to buy audio recorders to record the lecturers' presentations.

5.1.4. Support services- "Serving our fellow men"

This subsection is divided into academic support and student welfare support services as available in each institution. During the interview session, some students were not familiar with the word "support services" even though orientation was made before the consent form was issued and signed. As the interviewer, I was required to define and identify the forms of support services that may be available on their campuses. Several SSS were then identified by students and the mentioned the form of services they requested and received. Each institution has its services which are managed and administered based on their mission and vision. The identified SSS at the college include the Department of Student Affairs (DSA), the Library, the Computer Lab, the Health Centre, the Special Education Needs (SEN) and the Disability Office. The identified SSS at the university comprise the Counselling services, the Library, the Disability unit, the Student welfare centre, Department of Student Affairs (DSA), Health centre, Sports, Recreation and Culture Unit (SRCU).

5.1.4.1. HEIone support services

The SSS at the HEIone are categorised into academic and welfare support services. The academic support services encompass direct support towards academic performance and success of students. The welfare support entails social wellbeing of students outside the classrooms.

5.1.4.1.1. Academic Student Support Services at HEIone

Academic support services at the HEIone are directly linked to academic work and the success of VISs. For instance, the disability office ensures that VISs receive learning material in transcribed braille. Normally, before the classes commence, lecturers must submit prepared notes to the disability office so that they can be transcribed into braille. Notes are transcribed to Braille so that they can be accessible for VISs. The disability officers ensure that VISs receive learning material which is accessible to use. A disability officer also ensures that the learning environment is enabling for disabled students and consults with the lecturers about transcribing class notes, class tests and examination papers into braille. Mama said:

“I am more focused on students with vision impairment; I normally consult with their lecturers about transcribing their learning materials into braille, and also during the tests and exams times”.

She further articulated their responsibility as the disability office towards VISs.

“We assist students with their daily learning problems,”

On the other hand, the computer lab equips students with computer skills and literacy for research and reading. Computer lab ensures that regardless of their disability, students are well-vested in computer skills to study efficiently. The lecturer in the computer lab relate how they support students and those with vision impairment: Budda notes:

“From the teaching point of view, we do not have any specific support for them, our task is to set class tests and examination papers and the department of special education will convert them to braille for them to access. The special education officer then brings their feedback for marking”

In addition to that, Budda confirms that VISs are not left behind during class demonstrations and lessons:

“Normally when I give instructions I always make sure that they are also converted to audio to ensure that they can access them like other students with VI”.

The library is established as another section which provides direct academic support services to students at the college. Library services are provided and accessed by every registered student at the college regardless of their ability or disability status. Students can access learning materials as deemed necessary. Mamkhulu, the librarian, briefly mentioned how they provide library support to the student community:

“To support and provide learning and teaching material to students who may require them for their studies as well as to guide students on the appropriate books and articles that they can use for their research studies”.

Makholu confirmed that disabled students, even the visually impaired, use the library like all other students. However, she mentioned that there is no specific support for VISs: Makholu commented:

“There is no specific support for VIS, except that they have their section within the library building.”

Mohlanka mentioned that he once looked for books transcribed on braille or audio recorded but he could not find any in the library and at special education unit. He comments:

“Looking for books and audiobooks, learning material, our special education section does not have them, we do not access of any form of learning material, and the library doesn’t offer any assistance on online browsing of online materials”.

Academic support services had a great impact on the support of VISs, allowing them access to learning aids and effective participation in the teaching and learning process. The college

ensured that VISs had access to braille-transcribed learning material which allowed them effective participation and equal access to the education resources. One disability officer indicated that on several occasions lecturers either forget or ignore to submit class notes or class tests to be transcribed into braille. Students interpret this as a discrimination and bad attitude. Conversely, the computer lab has no specific support or assistive learning devices for VISs but the lecturer ensures that they are included in his class. He applies the principles of social constructivism to ensure that all the students are computer literate and well-vested in computer skills. On the other hand, the unit for VISs is located in the library. The library has no staff members who can support VISs and enable them to access the learning material transcribed in braille or audio-recorded format. Special learning needs of VISs are not catered for in the library due to the copyright laws as mentioned by the Makholu. VISs usually request their non-visually impaired colleagues to assist them in searching for books from the library shelves and for reading.

5.1.4.1.2. Student welfare support services

The Department of Student Affairs, Health Centre and Special Education Needs (SEN) are mandated to oversee the students' welfare at the college. Student welfare pertains to students' life outside the classroom. Each section is mandated by the college to ensure that students embrace an enabling learning environment for their social and psychological well-being. Mokubung, a DSA officer who has worked for two years in the college, explains that this office supports students in multiple dimensions including their well-being, welfare, residence and satisfaction:

"To ensure the welfare of students in all dimensions –psychologically, socially and academically, To develop policy that derives from student satisfaction survey conducted every year, To take care of the wellbeing of students including their health, To offer them accommodation and liaise with other offices about their academic concerns."

When asked how DSA relates to students with disabilities, Mokubung said:

"This department liaises with the students and other departments concerning their challenges and academic success"

To establish how the DSA secures welfare and enhances an enabling learning environment for the VISs, Mokubung adds:

"we ensure that the terrain and buildings are accessible, and also ensure that in buildings with more than one floor, they are placed on ground floors. Always advised them to consult with him about any concerns they have, we probably take the parental care role".

To enhance students' welfare, the DSA coordinates efforts with the health centre in support of VISs. DSA has made arrangements with the health centre that when VISs are critically ill, the clinic nursing sister is allowed to consult with them at their residence. Mokubung mentioned this when asked about how the DSA supports the VISs. He further claimed:

"Regarding their health I always arrange that the nurse is allowed to attend to them in their residence instead of going to the clinic".

The health centre also ensures student welfare by providing primary health care to students and the college community. All the registered students can access the health services during the working hours (08:00 to 17:00). The nursing sister, who has been engaged with the college for one year, clarifies the mandate of the health centre:

"To provide mainly the primary health care services, to the college care community which means. PHC services are into prevention that curing, we also treat minor ailments, some chronic diseases, like hypertension, sugar diabetics; we also provide antenatal care and family planning and HIV/AIDS care services; and also emergency services". (Sister1)

Although Motloun has indicated that a nursing sister visits the VISs when they are critically ill, the nursing sister has mentioned that they access the health services like all the other students, and there are no support programmes designed specifically for them. When the VISs visit the centre, the nursing sister makes some observations:

"What I have seen is that students with disabilities are normally accompanied by other students, but I have learned that it's not because they are vulnerable or need any form of assistance." (Sister1)

While focusing on students' welfare at the college, the Special Education Needs Office (SENO) has a stake. SENO ensures that all the students with disabilities are supported socially and academically. Although SENO provides academic service to all the students, it is mandated to guide, counsel and support the students with disabilities at the college. SENO also provides advice and guidance to the management of the college on disability issues. The SENO lecturer said:

“All students with disabilities receive support from our office. When they have concerns it is our responsibility to intervene, especially the academic challenges. We also advise and give guidance accordingly.”

Within the college, SENO comprises experts in disability issues and special education needs. All referrals on disability issues are addressed in SENO. Ntha indicated that SENO not only advices or counsels but it also addresses the concerns and complaints of disabled students;

“All complaints, advice and support relating to disability issues, it is our responsibility”.

To establish the forms of the support programmes designed specifically for the social welfare of VISs, it was explained that the college has not designed any such programmes. Ntha said:

“mmmmm no specific programs for disabled students, as we are striving for total inclusion here, we don't exempt them, however, if there is anything academically worrying them, we intervene”.

Student's life outside the classroom is safeguarded by DSA, SENO and the health centre. These departments ensure that the social welfare of students is guaranteed and VISs embrace an enabling learning environment. The support provided by DSA has ensured that students are psychologically and socially well. The office also oversees the students' well-being while on campus. While providing support for students, the DSA has the responsibility to provide accommodation for VISs and to assign a corridor assistant who oversees the safety of each student at student residences. At least one non-visually impaired student is also requested to be a study companion of one VIS in and outside the classroom. Mokubung has shown that the department of student affairs provides parental care to VISs. In ensuring appropriate care and welfare for students outside the classroom, there is a direct link between the DSA and the

health centre regarding the well-being of students. When VISs are sick, an arrangement is made to visit them in their rooms at the student's residence. In addition, SENO advises and guides the college management on the administration of disability issues and ensures that disabled student's complaints and concerns are addressed. Where necessary, SENO refers such students to the relevant departments for further assistance.

5.1.4.3. HEItwo support services

The SSS at the university are categorised into student affairs and welfare, academic and guidance and counselling services.

5.1.4.3.1. *Student affairs and welfare*

This section explains how the affairs and the welfare of the students' community are supported by the university. Within the students' affairs and welfare, three units that existed are the health centre, sports and recreation office and students' welfare. Each section is mandated to support students within its restrictions. The DSA and Welfare is regarded as the strategic department of the university that provides support and guides the discipline of students. It is mandated to create an enabling learning environment for all the students inside and outside the classroom. This department is an overseer of multiple support services offered at the university, ranging from the students' governance, social and psychological wellbeing and students' accommodation. Mookameli said:

“DSA drives the strategic objective of the university, being to provide support, welfare and discipline of students, to build a coStebonducive learning environment inside and outside the classroom,”

In addition to Mookameli's remarks, Stebo who is a social welfare officer in the DSA indicates that her office is a watchdog of student psychological to social well-being:

“My office is meant to oversee the general wellbeing of students, supporting them psychologically, socially and against any issues that affect their learning,”

Concerning how DSA and student welfare offices relate to disabled student' community and visually impaired student, Stebo states:

“We are like a child and the family; for us we are like their support system. This is where they come and lodge their concerns; they come and cry and say whatever they want; this is the main source of support for students with disabilities. ”

As Stebo mentions, it is understood that the welfare of students is an important aspect considered by the university to ensure student success by taking care of their well-being. In contrast to Stebo’s claims, Stebo, Dan, Fifi and Molepe indicate that their concerns were not addressed by DSA.

“We can express our concerns, but our concerns are not considered, we lodged many complaints but none was addressed”.

Fifi complained:

“I reported several cases of sexual harassment to the DSA, but they never did anything.”

Molepe claimed:

“At our residence about seven laptops were stolen within a few consecutive months; we were told to report to the DSA and they didn't help with anything. However, we're accused that it is due to our carelessness.”

For students to succeed academically, the university is mandated to support them socially and psychologically. To ensure the strategic objective of the university, SRO is entrusted to facilitate students' participation in sports programmes and recreational activities. In ensuring student support, Coach mentions the mandate of his office as follows:

“to create a sports-loving environment, with recreation, welfare and home away from home learning environment for students.”

To establish how SRO relates with VISs and the disabled community, Coach has this to say:

“Sports is for all and all must participate in sports and cultural activities; so far there are no specific programmes”

Coach indicates that his responsibility is basically to ensure active participation in different sports at the university. He commented:

" since being here, all I have done is to create an opportunity to ensure that all types of sports are available including the Paralympics, I made sure that sports are for all,"

In addition to affording support, student affairs and welfare are also mandated to oversee the health of the student community and staff within the university. The health care services are available on both Tloutle and Maseru satellite campuses. The main health centre is available at the Tloutle campus and is open five working days a week (Monday to Friday) from 08:00 to 17:00 CST. However, the Maseru satellite campus health centre opens for services twice a week from 09:00 to 16:00CAT. Sister 2 describes the mandate of the health centre in the university as follows:

“Basically to provide primary health care and services to university students and the staff in their own free time”

To establish the relationship between health care services and VISs, Sister2 states:

"There is nothing in particular", no programs, or and there is no specific support for VISs”.

Based on the remarks of the three officials in ensuring student welfare at the university, it can be concluded that there is no specific support for VISs regardless of their needs. The student welfare office under the auspices of DSA has a direct responsibility to oversee the wellbeing of VISs throughout their academic life at the university. However, three students have revealed that their concerns were not addressed, especially by the office which claims to support students with special needs. Coach is in the process of identifying, learning and engaging with students and to acquaint himself with the university environment and cultures. Although the SRO was established to cater for the physical and social needs of all the students, nothing is in place for VISs and students with different special needs. It is

concluded that such students are not enabled to showcase their talents. The university health centre provides health care services to the student community regardless of the disability. However, there is no specific form of support programme for the VISs.

5.1.4.3.2. Student academic support

The academic support of students is discussed in this section. The university has several sections which ensure that students' academic life is a life-changing experience and is successful. This section focuses on three units, namely the library services, the disability unit and the tutorship services as administered at the university. Each unit is tasked to serve the student community by offering support in the students' academic endeavour. For instance, the library services provide information on academic purposes, conventional information and online public access to students and the university community. Mda, the reference librarian, says the following about her responsibility;

“all students and university community, staff and students come to us on how they can access all academic information on journals, books and other learning materials”.

The library provides services and information to undergraduate and postgraduate students. When asked about the specific interaction with the VISs, Mda indicated that there is a study space for them in the library;

“yes, we have a room for the VIS”

Even though the library has room to accommodate the academic needs of VISs, there are no specific support programmes to support them. Mda admits:

“We don't have any programmes. It is because we don't have appropriate equipment, and no librarians are specifically trained to support VIS, I am the one who is assisting VIS in the room allocated to them.

Out of eight participating VISs at the university, only two used the library. Both were assisted by their non-visually impaired study mates to access library material. They highlighted their disappointment with the poor services that they received at the library; Fifi narrated:

"I could not go the library on my own, it was only when I found someone to accompany me to the library, I would find those old braille books, which were irrelevant to the course I was doing, there was only one computer with Jaws software within the library, this meant that I cannot do anything productive in the library".

Dan also said:

"The service was bad, I once used the library and I asked one friend of mine to read for book me,"

These two students revealed the reasons why they did not use the library.

Mohale complained:

"The library does not cater for our needs, all that we receive is not appropriate for our needs. No books for my learning needs,"

Jappie concurred:

"It is only a disability unit; I never use the library as the material is inaccessible"

Instead of using the library, these students preferred to use the disability unit because of their various learning needs. This is what Hlomla and Jappie said:

Hlomla;

"I only use the disability unit for studying and research purposes and searching for learning materials, because desktops have JAWS"

Mda highlighted the challenges of why the library is not offering VISs academic support as expected:

"as a library, we have no specific support made for them, there is a very old embosser machine and other equipment like desk-tops and others, but they are out-dated, they used to print braille for VISs"

Mda's remarks were confirmed by the disability unit officer when asked about improvements that can be made towards enhancing the support of VISs.

Rele indicates;

"There is a large room in the library, the devices in there are too old, and JAWS is not installed"

During orientation, students were informed about the library services. However and to their surprise, the services do not cater for their learning needs. As shown by the librarian, the equipment is out-dated; some of it is broken and there is no librarian with skills in approaching VISs among them. In addition, librarians do not have skills in reading or transcribing braille for accessibility. Along with that, the library does not produce audio-recorded learning material and braille transcribed books. The majority of VISs have not used the library because of poor services, old and broken assistive devices and lack of assistive technology. It seems that the participating students used the disability unit for their studying and research purposes. The disability unit, which was established in the 1999/2000 academic year, supports VISs with assistive technology devices. The VISs use the disability unit for support because available desktops are installed with JAWS⁸ software.

Six participating VISs confirmed that the disability unit is the most preferred support service that caters for their learning needs despite various shortfalls and the challenges in the unit. It was established to oversee disability issues in the university under the guidance of the Dean and the faculty of education. Rele points out that the disability unit is entrusted to support all students with different disabilities at the university. This is what he said about VISs:

"The most common is VISs are more than others and are the ones who come here, others like the physically impaired are very few, there is one physically impaired and 1 hearing impaired"

The disability unit is not a stand-alone division in the university. In collaboration with other faculties and lecturers, the unit supports VISs to ensure a successful academic experience.

Rele indicates:

⁸ JAWS (Job Access with Speech)- a computer application developed by Microsoft Windows as a screen reader for persons whose vision loss prevents them from seeing screen content or using a mouse. JAWS provides both Braille and speech output for computer applications

“My relationship with other offices is actually on the overall academic life of the VISs; this means their academic work. I have a mobility and orientation programme with the VIS.”

The disability unit also enables the VISs to have accessible learning material by transcribing the learning materials into braille. The academic support provided by the disability officer to VISs includes transcribing their learning materials into and from braille, giving orientation and mobility around the campus environment, supervising class tests and examinations and assisting students in searching for the study materials for their research projects. Rele interprets this as to

“To convert their learning materials to be accessible on braille, to enlarge printed work and to print it.”

As indicated earlier, the VISs spend much of their study time at the disability unit because it is the only accessible place with appropriate assistive learning devices. When asked about the most used and preferred support service on campus, all the students had the same answer: “the disability unit”. Among them, three students had this to say about the disability unit;

Molepe indicated

“It is the disability unit for almost everything, such as researching, reading and group work”

Hlomla notes;

“I only use it for research purposes and searching for learning materials, but the challenge is that the room is small for us to use it”.

Besides, Jappie assets;

“Or, as I said, I use the disability unit most of the time; it helps a lot when I write my assignments and exams.”

At the IEMS campus, there is no disability unit or disability officer placed to offer academic or social support. No embosser for transcribing learning material into braille, desktops installed with JAWS and magnifiers. Nare has a different view about the most preferred support service that he uses:

“I use the library and computer lab more often.”

For writing class tests and examinations, Nare is allowed to use a laptop. Normally, after writing a class test or examination, the lecturer or invigilator prints his work script for marking. He said:

“All was well received and welcomed, for instance, I was allowed to use a laptop while writing class tests or examinations.”

The VISs at the IEMS campus preferably report their concerns and challenges to their course coordinator. Nare indicates that the first person to consult when experiencing any challenge is the course coordinator. Nare has no access to assistive devices and disability unit support services such as students on the Roma campus. Instead, he has access to the computer lab, with desktops without JAWS. No students' residences at the IEMS campus, therefore Nare is bound to walk about one kilometre and half to his residence. At the Roma campus, despite the multifaceted challenges experienced by VISs, they find the disability unit as the most preferred and accessible unit for their academic needs. The room may be small, the desktops and other learning devices may be old and the learning and assistive devices may not accommodate all of them but "disability" is their castle. I have observed that some students do bring their laptops to the disability unit, there are only three accessible and operating desktops installed with JAWS. I also realised that some furniture such as chairs and counters were broken, posing a hazard to someone without vision.

Similarly, the library has equipment and assistive devices as the disability unit. To my observation, devices at the library included braille embossers, desktops and magnifiers which are broken or old-fashioned to be used for academic purposes. This has posed duplication of work and services in the same campus, instead of decentralising disability support services. Moreso, no librarian is familiar with support of VISs, and the no learning material either braille transcribed or audio-recordings. Many students have shown that the library does not cater for their learning needs hence why they prefer to use the disability unit.



Inside the disability unit room

5.1.4.3.3. Student guidance and counselling

Student guidance and counselling services are also available at the university. The services are offered to all the registered students regardless of the year of study, disability or faculty. Such services entail counselling, emotional guidance and support. The counselling unit reports directly to the DSA. Students must set an appointment with the counsellor for consultation. They are provided with the counselling services to enable their emotional well-being and coping mechanisms towards their academic and social matters. This is the mandate of the counsellor's office. Kutlo said:

“The university assists students by supporting them. It gives them counselling sessions so that they learn happily and effectively.” (Kutlo).

The counsellor's office works hand-in-hand with the welfare office to safeguard the psychological and social well-being of students. Mda notes:

“If a student is struggling psychologically, such student is referred for counselling sessions”

To establish how counselling offices relate with VISs and how they serve them, the counselling office and the students' welfare office visit VISs at their residences to find out and discuss their challenges and concerns.

Kutlo states:

“We set the schedule of when we can visit them although it's not regularly”

Visits of counsellors at students' residences are confirmed by Hlomla as he says;

"Counselling is there and they normally visit us at least twice a month, student welfare",

Although Jappie has never used counselling services, he is appreciative of the counselling services that are available at the university. He says:

"More also in counselling is one good service offered by the university."

Despite his struggles, Nare appreciates the availability of the counselling services and other services that he receives because they had a positive impact on his academic success. He complains:

"As I am struggling financially, anything like counselling, free wifi, they are very helpful and they impact positively my studies".

Fifi claimed that she had a bad experience with the counselling unit and DSA. They failed to assist her when she needed them most. She indicates that she was sexually harassed by one post-graduate student who was on internship. The office of the counsellor and DSA failed to help her when she was in need. She reported this incident to the Special Education Unit of the Ministry of Education and Training on the advice of her friend. She narrates:

"In most cases, I was harassed by the same people who were on internships; I remember one guy who was harassing me was an intern in the social work office, as a counsellor. You can imagine if I'm being harassed by the counsellor who reports directly to the DSA office, and being aware where that reported incident could lead they had to put "shap" block it and make it disappear, there was one nate who supported me wholeheartedly, he was someone outside the university. He was like a father to me, I was able to express my concerns to him and the challenges I was facing on campus, and he consulted the university's Department of Special Education which consulted the

Ministry of Higher Education for intervention. That was the time when I realised a shake-up at the HEItwo because they were afraid that they would be ripped off their credentials. After all, I had evidence and they failed to protect me. The DSA and others responsible had to confer and ask for forgiveness from the Ministry and promised that such incident will not happen again".

The majority of the male VISs have never utilised the counselling services on campus although they are aware of such services. They claim that they had no reason to seek counselling services. Only two male students appreciated the availability of the counselling services and the help that they received. One female student who used counselling services claimed the bad experience that she had with the counselling unit. The DSA also failed to help. She was obliged to seek assistance from outside the university because the offices entrusted with her safety failed to do so.

5.2. Leaving no one behind

The discussion of the second substantial theme is on the factors that influence the VISs to use support services and students' perspectives about the support that they receive. The findings revealed different reasons why students used or did not use the various services on campus. Some VISs have never used certain support services on campus as they either did not find any need to do so or they once used it and the reception was not welcoming. Each student has his or her own experience about the support that they received. Besides, the SSS officials also shared their views about the services that they offered the VISs'. They revealed some concerns and grievances as reported by VISs. The officials also shared how they addressed students' grievances as part of their responsibilities. To establish the various reasons why the VISs used the support services, such students revealed the forms of support they received. On the other hand, SSS officials shed light on the form of support offered by their department. Due to individual experiences, the VISs had different perceptions and interpretations due to the form of support and reception that they received from the various sections of student support. Some of them showed satisfaction while others were disappointed and dissatisfied.

5.2.1. Factors influencing the use of support services

Evidence from this study has shown that there are multiple factors why VISs were obliged to use some of the support services on their campuses. On the other hand, SSS officials mentioned the reasons that brought the VISs into their departments. However, in some

instances, there were contradicting responses between the students and the officials. Depending on the form of concerns and needs, students request support. Such support could be academic, social or psychological. VISs at the college may have similar or different reasons to students at the university.

5.2.1.1. Library services

Both institutions have library services which are mandated to serve the student community and the lecturers. The study finds that VISs have various reasons for using the library. As students went out to request support on the availability of learning materials at the college library, this is what this is what one of them, Lekaota, revealed:

"I requested some learning material and past question papers and audiobooks which they said they do not have"

Mohlanka indicates;

I was looking for books and audiobooks, learning material, our special education section did not have them, we do not access any form of learning material, librarian don't offer any assistance on online browsing of online materials"

Students from both colleges indicate that the library failed to offer them online learning material, audio-recorded books and braille-transcribed learning material. The librarian responded that there is no specific support for VISs at the library. She posed multiple barriers to why the library failed to support the VISs:

Makholu said:

The law of copyright to repackage books into voice or braille is worrying, because we cannot support them as we wish. The library cannot reproduce books or articles for them to access."

However, three students at the university had this to say about the library services.

Dan:

"To read Sesotho books with a colleague, there is a library which is useless to me, disability unit is the only better one"

Fifi narrated:

"So I could not go to the library on my own. When I found someone to accompany me to the library, I would find those old braille books, which were irrelevant to the course that I was doing. There was only one desktop with Jaws software within the library., this meant that I could not do anything productive in the library."

Nare states:

"It was just guidance on assessing reading material and how important the unit readings in my module are."

The above responses have a similar reason to use the library. It is to access the learning material either in braille form or audio-recorded books. To their disappointment, they did not receive either. Lekaota, Mohlanka and Fifi said that libraries in their institutions could not offer students with vision impairment any support. Although Dan was able to use the library, he received assistance from his colleague. Students such as Molepe, Jappie and Mohale mentioned that they did not use the library because it does not cater for their academic needs. States his reason for not using the library Mohale said:

"The library does not cater to provide any learning material based on my needs."

Molepe had an experience similar to Fifi's about the old assistive devices available in the library. Instead of using the library, he prefers to use the disability unit. He indicated:

"The library is available but it has very old computers which we never use. For this reason, I prefer to use the disability unit".

While discovering the reasons why VISs prefer not to use the library, Mda agrees with students about the old equipment available in the library. Although the library has no specific support for VISs, she also states the problem of old assistive devices. She states:

"But there is a very old embosser machine and other equipment like desk-tops and others, but they are out-dated, they used to print braille for VI",

Rele confirms what has been said by Mda and two other students, Molepe and Fifi, at the university:

“There is a large room in the library, the devices in there are too old, and no JAWS installed,”

The above-mentioned VIs decided not to use their libraries which do not cater for their learning needs. Based on students' and librarians' explanations, the university library is equipped with old-fashioned assistive devices and there is no support from the librarians. This means that their privilege to use the library is compromised. Hlomla, Molepe and Jappie (the latter two are fourth-year Humanities students, mentioned that they have never used the library because it does not cater for the learning needs of the VISs. Both institutions cannot respond to the learning needs of their students. The VISs encounter similar problems which include the nonexistence of braille transcribed books, no access to ICT technology assistive devices, no audio-recorded books or articles and the students do not have access to online library services. Students are compelled to use other means to access learning materials. The overall experience of VISs towards library services is not welcoming as they are denied the right to access the learning materials and support to access online materials.

5.2.1.2. Disability services

Both HEIs have disability units to address, serve and respond to the disability issues in the student community. The HEIone disability unit has two officials. One has direct responsibility to the deaf and hard-to-hear student community, while Mama is responsible for supporting students with vision impairments. Mama's responsibilities include enabling effective inclusion and active participation of VISs in learning. Both officers collaborate with the special needs education to oversee disability issues at the college. To ensure an enabling learning environment for VISs, this is what she said:

“I normally consult with their lecturers about transcribing their (VISs) learning materials into braille, and also during tests and exams times,”.

The disability unit at the HEItwo has one official who oversees its daily operations. Rele, who has been working in this office for the past three years, reports directly to the Dean of

the Faculty of education. Among his many responsibilities, Rele supports students with different disabilities. However, he found himself confined to serving VISs more than others. This is what he has said:

"The responsibility of this office (disability unit) is to support all students with different disabilities in the university. The largest group is the VISs. They are the ones who come here, others like the physically impaired are very few, there is one physical impaired and one hearing impaired student."

Both Mama and Rele have been assigned to offer support to VISs in their respective institutions. Some similar responsibilities that they undertake are to transcribe the lecturers' notes and other learning materials either from or to braille. They also transcribe class tests, examination papers and answer sheets from and to braille. Rele also familiarises the VISs with the campus life and environment through the mobility programme. This is what he said about his responsibility towards VISs at the university:

"It's their mobility around the campus, to convert their learning materials to be accessible, to braille, enlarge print works, and print them"

To establish what factors influence the VISs to use disability units in both institutions, they posed various reasons. All the participating students embraced and appreciated the support that they received from the disability units. At both the college and the university it seems that the disability unit is the most convenient and welcoming place to access learning materials, desktops installed with JAWS and to conduct online studying. When showing their gratitude for how important disability units have been to them, this is what each of them said. At the college, this is what Lekaota and Mohlanka said.

Lekaota:

"So far I'm grateful with Mama's office; Special education is still the most helpful"

Mohlanka notes;

"We have a special education section and a library; we write tests, assignments or exams; this is where we have embossers with braille,".

Students at the university had this to say about the disability unit and how they felt about it.

Jappie:

"I think the disability unit is still better up to now. The officer is friendly and can assist when requesting any form of assistance".

Fifi narrates her experience with the disability unit:

"We had a disability unit, where we had one support lecturer. There were how many of us when I arrived?, I think six....., the new students were four and senior students were just two. This lecturer was responsible for all of us.

Ntate Rele would write a reminder letter every year to the deans, heads of departments and lecturers that there is a disability unit for students with vision impairment, they should remember to issue notes and learning material on time.

But more often they never did, he would chase and beg for notes and learning materials from lecturers. We would only get learning material after begging and chasing them.

He would then transcribe the learning material into braille or he ensured that tests and exams were appropriate for us to access. He would invigilate us when writing tests and exams and then edit our work and ensure that our work was well-typed and that font sizes were fine".

Dan states;

"It's only Mr Rele who is helpful. I don't know others. The disability unit is the only better one. "

The VISs used disability units for academic purposes. They were obliged to use disability units because it is the only place with assistive devices with JAWS on the campus. The unit also had other learning aids such as magnifying glasses which enabled them to conduct online research. The disability units also ensured that VISs have access to learning material in a user-friendly format. The officials would ensure that VIS learning material, tests and

examination scripts are transcribed to braille. As mentioned by some students, the disability unit is the only preferred place to use, especially for academic purposes. A few students such as Fifi and Hlomla agreed that the disability officer supported them academically and socially. Despite the shortfall in the college disability unit, the VISs prefer Mama's support as the most important one academically and psychologically.

5.2.1.3. Guidance and counselling services

The counselling services are available at the HEItwo, while HEIone does not offer such services. Therefore all information in this section comes from HEItwo students and support services officials. The HEItwo counselling services serve the student community. Students are counselled, guided and advised on their social and psychological challenges. The counselling services are offered to all the student communities during the working hours, from Monday to Friday. The HEItwo has two officials who serve the entire institution. Students visit the counsellor's office only on scheduled appointments unless there is a critical matter to address. VISs are also welcome to visit when the need arises. When sharing the mandate of the counselling unit Kutlo said:

"The institution assists students by supporting them by giving them counselling sessions so that they learn happily and effectively".

The counselling sessions offered by the counsellors are face-to-face and one-on-one. The counselling unit reports directly to the director of student affairs and has made a schedule to visit VISs at their residences to extend their support. This was indicated by Kutlo when I wanted to establish how the counselling office has contact with the VISs.

Kutlo indicates:

"We have set the schedule of when we can visit them although it's not regularly"

Along with that, Hloma confirmed Kutlo's claims of visiting the VIS at their residences. He said:

"Counselling is there and they normally used visit us at least twice a month, student welfare,"

In addition to his remarks, Hlomla further confirmed that the counsellors visited them to find out about the various challenges faced by the VISs, either educationally, socially or psychologically and their concerns as students. He said:

"The officials visited us to hear from us about our concerns, problems and our situation on the campus"

Nare mentioned some of his challenges and praised the counsellors for the help that he received. The same counselling sessions did not only help him psychologically but also academically. He explained why he had to use counselling services;

"As I'm struggling financially, anything like counselling, free wifi, they are very helpful and they impact positively to my studies, the form of support I received was psychological and academically"

Nonetheless, other students such as Dan, Mohale, Jappie and Khothu have never used any counselling services. However, Jappie is grateful that such services are offered at the institution. When he first arrived at the HEItwo as a new student, Hlomla experienced loneliness and anxiety to the point where he thought of de-registering. However, he was advised by the disability officer to consult the psychologist on the campus. This is what he said:

"I think psychological, especially when I first arrived at the university, so it was very hard, I even thought of withdrawing"

He continues:

"I received advice from Mr Rele, the disability officer"

Unlike Hlomla and Nare who had a good experience with the counselling services, Fifi was dismayed about the counselling services at HEItwo. She revealed the bias and prejudiced reception of the counsellors while she was reporting the sexual harassment made to her by one post-graduate student who was on internship in the counselling office. Fifi commented about the harassment she experienced from two male students whom she did not know. They used vulgar language and spoke about explicit sex to her until she was irritated. She

confessed that she lost trust and confidence in how counsellors handled and addressed her cases after she reported to them. She said:

“There came these two guys who start talking vulgar and explicit sexual words, when they realised that I'm not comfortable with their language they then start talking lies about me”.

“I remember one guy who was harassing me was an intern in the social work office, as a counsellor. You can imagine if I'm being harassed by the counsellor who reports directly to the DSA office,”

“I lost trust in counsellors of HEItwo, and I decided not to set foot in that office again”

Students had various reasons why they use or do not use the counselling services offered by the institution. Two male students who utilised the counselling services received help that enabled them to endure the challenges and setbacks of higher education. The psychological challenges that they experienced forced them to ask for support from the counsellors. After attending the counselling sessions, both Hlomla and Nare were able to survive and overcome multi-facet psychological, social and academic challenges which could interrupt their studies. One female student declared that she lost trust in the counsellors and psychologists of the institution. She had a bad experience with the counselling services because the officials did not address her sexual harassment case fairly. Fifi had to request help from the Ministry of Education and Training due to nepotism and dishonest officials who fail to protect women who are always victims of sexual harassment at HEIs. She also illustrated her disappointment towards the director of student affairs who is a female. Fifi thought that Mookameli would protect and address her case fairly. Since enrolling at the institution, three VISs have not used or requested support from the counselling services. None of them revealed why they did not use the counselling services.

5.2.1.4. Students Welfare

The Student Affairs and Welfare office reported directly to the director of student affairs. This department serves all the students regardless of their disability, race, religion, faculty or level of study. The DSA is the mainstay of student support and welfare in the institution. The department has various officials who serve students in different capacities. This says that some student affairs are in charge of students' residences and allocation of rooms. Other officials are assigned to address the needs and challenges of students daily. Therefore, all the

students with or without disabilities are served equally. The student welfare officer has this to say about the role of her office towards students with disabilities:

“This is the main source of support for students with disabilities comes from”

In addition to Stebo’s remarks, Mookameli undertakes that it is the role of the DSA to create an enabling environment at the institution. This show how important this office is to the students’ survival daily. He explains its role as:

*“To create a conducive learning environment inside and outside the classroom,
to provide psychological and social support, to provide health, sports and recreation , to guide student governance at the university”*

Stebo indicated that her office is the main source of welfare support for disabled students. She further articulates some reasons that brought students to the department:

“Sometimes they come and complain about not being informed on time when there are special events on the campus. They say they are kind of neglected; they say they are not supposed to be treated like other students, especially at the end of the year. They don't have to vacate their rooms.

However, the head of the department was not aware of the grievances of the VISs because she pointed out that no complaints had been brought into her office. He stated:

“In my office of the director, there is none, however, I think you can get a better response of that in the housing department, but my observation is that it has been individual students not necessarily certain peculiar challenges from certain students or disabled students,,,,,,,,,,,,”

The VISs brought various concerns to the Office of Student Affairs and Welfare. The concerns relate to their welfare, safety at residence and theft of their property. Each one of them had a different experience. Molepe became a victim of theft when his laptop was stolen

in his residence and reported that to the DSA. To his amazement, the DSA and the welfare officers blamed Molepe and his colleagues for being careless in how they kept their property. HE explained:

"In the few consecutive months in our residence, we were told to report to DSA and they didn't help with anything, however, we're accused that it's due to our carelessness"

"I once visited DSA to lodge a complaint when my laptop was stolen, but my complaint was never addressed"

In addition to Molepe's explanation, Mohale expressed his disappointment about the safety of the residents. His disappointment came after he reported the loss of his laptop which was stolen in his room by unknown persons. He said:

"Seven students' laptops have been stolen since I arrived here four years ago. DSA did nothing about the safety of our properties and us, our safety is not their priority"

Hlomla, Dan and Mohale visited the welfare office to complain about the safety and setting up of their rooms, but the welfare officer could not help them. He commented:

"About our accommodation, the room is small and the student welfare said they cannot do anything about it",

Dan added:

"Our concerns are not considered, we lodged many complaints but none was addressed"

Mohale stated:

"Our concerns are being ignored by such officers like the dean of department or DSA"

At one point, some VISs approached the management and the DSA complaining about the disability unit room used by students and the internet connection. They received unfulfilled promises. Jappie recalled:

“We once approached the university management and DSA, complaining about the small room in the disability Unit, where we squeezed each other; we also requested them to install Wi-Fi around the unit so that we would not crowd in the disability unit”.



Dan's room

Figure 12: Dan's room

The issue of WI-FI was confirmed by Stebo, as she recalls when students went to complain in her office. Based on students' responses, the DSA has not addressed their concerns. Stebo stated:

“They complaint about Wi-Fi and internet access,”

In addition to the concerns of these male students, Fifi, who was sexually harassed on several occasions, also pronounced that her concerns were not addressed by the DSA. The study finds that students who lodged their complaints in this revered office were not helped. These are her claims;

“I reported several cases of sexual harassment to the DSA, but they never did anything. actually people who were harassing me were non-impaired post-graduate students staying with us in the same students' residence. ”

Several students with vision impairment lodged grievances to the Office of Student Affairs, especially the welfare unit. Based on their responses, none of these students was assisted by the welfare office and the Department of Student Affairs. Stebo mentioned various incidents where students reported their grievances. Students complain about small rooms, security, theft and WI-FI in their rooms and in the disability unit. The director indicated that she was not aware of any grievances brought to her department by the VISs.

Mookameli explained

“In my office as the director, there is none (grievances), however, I think you can get a better response of that in the housing department,”

However, after saying that, Mookameli was asked how this impacted their work to support VISs. This question was posed to establish her responsibility to support such students. He declared:

“We don't know their needs. We're likely to ignore them or over-support them. When a student can be able to adjust to the environment they may demand more and we may fall victim to that over-support because we're not aware of their situations,”

She further clarifies:

“Eeeee, this is my guess, because I don't see them coming to our offices. I think they are uncomfortable in approaching us maybe they feel neglected by us, we don't see them approaching until or unless they have unbearable challenges they cannot handle”

About Mookamelis' comments, as a researcher, I fail to understand why the head of the department does not know about the reported cases of theft, sexual harassment and poor living conditions of VISs at their residences. The welfare officer, who reports directly to the director of student affairs, articulated her interactions on several occasions with VISs about their concerns. The VISs were by virtue supposed to report their social and welfare grievances to the student welfare office because it is the right section assigned to help them. Although many students have shown dissatisfaction with how DSA handles their grievances. The same students continued to report their challenges to them.

5.2.1.5. Health services

Both participating HEIs provide primary health care services. The services are accessible to all members of the institutions. Students, academic staff and non-academic staff are entitled to access health services during the working hours from Monday to Friday. The VISs are entitled to receive such services when the need arises. The HEIone health centre deploys two health workers, a nursing sister and a pharmacist. The nursing sister is an employee of the HEIone while the pharmacist is attached under the project by a not-for-profit organisation. The HEItwo Health Centre was established by the Ministry of Health and has several staff members including the nursing sisters, pharmacists and other support staff. The health centre refers patients to the St. J. hospital when there is a need. The health centre has an ambulance to serve the HEItwo community. The VISs also visited the health centres to receive health and care services. When asked whether they have ever visited the health centre and why, Lekaota and Dan responded. Lekaota said:

“I was sick”

Dan's response was as follows:

“I was sick then”

A fourth-year student, Molepe, once visited the health services when he was a first-year student due to illness. In his remarks about the support he received this is what he said;

Molepe noted;

“I once visited it (health centre) when I was sick as a first-year”

When asked why she visited the health centre, Khothu indicated that it was mainly a routine check-up for her chronic illness. She said:

“I have been to the clinic because of my diabetics, I went there monthly to check its status/level, but because they were not offering insulin, I was referred to the St. Jos hospital to receive all my medication”.

Unlike Khothu would visit the health centre alone before she became blind, Fifi indicated that she never visited the health centre alone. She normally requested a student friend to accompany her. However, at one point Fifi decided to discontinue using the health centre at the HEItwo campus due to the rumours about her pregnancy after visiting the health centre. She decided to use St. J. Hospital for all health support services. Fifi clarifies:

"I never went to the clinic alone; I always had someone to accompany me, especially to read prescribed medicines for me. I normally enter the consultation room with the nursing sister only".

Regarding the leaked information about her pregnancy, Fifi had this to say;

"After information about my pregnancy leaked I decided to discard using the health centre on campus"

Based on her explanation, Fifi lost trust in the health workers on the campus because she knows that the patients' health is confidential. She decided not to use the services again.

To establish the issues that bring VISs to the health centres, Sister2 at HEItwo indicated that these students are not different from other patients and they like to be treated so. She responded:

"Their health challenges are the same as other people",

Sister1, from HEIone, had views similar to those of her colleague in HEItwo. She also said that VISs are normally accompanied by someone every time they visit the health centre. She responded:

"They access the services like all other students, but what I have seen is that students with disabilities are normally accompanied by other students, but I have learned that it's not because they are vulnerable nor need any form of assistance"

Based on their responses, students visited healthcare centres because they were suffering from certain illnesses. It is concluded that they were satisfied with the services that they

received. Hlomla explained that he had never been sick since enrolling with the institution; however, he visited the health centre to receive a COVID-19 vaccination. Both health centres accept and treat VISs like all other patients. VISs have not participated in sports or recreational activities from both institutions. Although they were interested in sports, the available sports facilities and games excluded them. Besides that, these students had never used the computer lab because there are no assistive devices, no JAWS software installed on desktops and computer lab. The facilitators do not have the skills to support and train students with vision impairment

5.2.2 Perceptions of participants about students support services

The VISs had different experiences since enrolling at HEIs. Some had positive experiences while others had unreceptive experience. In this regard, their perceptions were predominantly determined by their experiences and their interaction with the various support services in their respective institutions. Overall, the experiences of VISs are geared towards their overall daily interaction with each support service and how useful it has been to their academic success. Some students have used all the available support services on their campuses, while others have used only a few most useful ones to meet their needs. For instance, findings have revealed that all the students have not used computer labs and sports and cultural facilities because they could not accommodate their needs. The findings also indicate that some students used the library while others never used it regardless of how important it could be towards their academic success. All the students preferred to use the disability unit because it has assistive learning resources for studying, for research and for the expertise to support them. For instance, Molepe has this to say about the disability unit at HEItwo:

“I prefer to use the disability unit which is the only one we, VIS, use. It has, of course, helped me, because when you have a vision problem you know there are certain things that you can achieve. The official will assist with making some adjustments on our typed work. He'll help with the font size, font type”.

On a similar note, this is what Jappie said about the disability unit and how helpful it has been towards his academic success:

"I am using the disability unit most of the time; it helps a lot in writing my assignments and exams".

He further said;

"I think the disability unit is still better for now. The officer is friendly and can assist people when they request any form of assistance"

Both Molepe and Jappie had positive perspectives about the disability unit because they regarded it as the best place to study outside the classroom. All VISs at the HEItwo preferred to use the disability unit because the disability officer does understand and knows how to support them and respond to their learning needs. However, the findings revealed that some students did not have a good experience with some support services around the campus. Due to unreceptive experiences of students, they tend to have negative perceptions about such support services. When Dan is asked about the available support services and which one he thinks is helpful to his academic success, his response was as follows:

"There is a library which is useless to me; the services that we receive here are very poor. It's terrible. It's like we are served by people who have not suffered or who don't understand disabilities."

When Mohale was asked about how his concerns were addressed, this is what he said:

"Library and other service does not cater for needs, all what we receive is not appropriate for our needs"

Dan's comments and views are a reflection of someone who had unreceptive experience about the support that he received from some support services. For instance, he mentioned that the library does not serve its purpose to support and respond to his academic needs as a visually impaired student. Generally, Dan's experience and that of his colleagues with the support services that they received were unreceptive; hence they had negative impressions of the various support services.

5.2.2.2. Students' satisfaction

The students' point of fulfilment towards support services was geared by the form of support and ability to respond to their social, academic or psychological needs. Students' satisfaction was also based on availability of learning aids and assistive devices. Although students were not asked to mention their level of satisfaction, they were allowed to indicate whether they are satisfied or not. Some students were supported psychologically, others socially while others benefited academically. Other students were supported in different aspects since their arrival at the campus. Students also showed their satisfaction with how they relate and interact with students and community members of their institutions. When these three students were asked how satisfied they were about the support that they received, the following were their responses. Molepe said:

"Nope, I'm not satisfied, nooooo!, You will learn that some lecturers don't exempt me from other exercises in the classwork, one problem is that there is no policy that protects us and we receive favours at the discretion of individual lecturers".

Lekaota notes;

"Partly: I am satisfied with the special disability office"

Hlomla assets;

"No, I'm not satisfied: our room must be expanded or we should be given a bigger room,"

These three students mentioned the support that dissatisfied or satisfied their needs. For instance, Molepe was concerned about the approach of the lecturers in the classroom. Based on his explanation, some lecturers' lesson plans do not include or consider his learning needs. This propensity makes Molepe to feel discriminated. Because the lecturers are bound by the legal document of the institution, VISs cannot complain about such treatment. Contrary to Molepe and Hlomla's responses, he was dismayed by the small size of his room in the student residences. Hlomla wished that the rooms could be extended for better living conditions. At HEIone, Lekaota is partly satisfied with some support services and is fully satisfied with the disability unit of the institution.

From the academic support point of view, Jappie and Dan indicate that they are not satisfied about the support they receive from the university. Jappie indicated that he feels like they are on their own because there is no much support given. This is what he said about academic support in the library: Jappie says;

“No, they don’t give us any support, as a short sighted, if I want to read a certain book, and there is no magnifier, it means I’m restricted not to read anytime I wish. Secondly, I can only do school work when I am at disability unit, I can’t do school work at my residence room.”

Jappie’s response shows how academic support of student with vision impairment is compromised in HEItwo. Lack of assistive learning devices restricts him from study only when he visits the disability unit. Dan has also shown his dissatisfaction with the support that he received from some lecturers. Dan stated:

“I’m totally not satisfied, some lecturers exclude us in their lessons, and they give us classwork which cannot allow us to participate”.

The VISs from both HEIone and HEItwo revealed their dissatisfaction with the support that they received from different units. Some students revealed discrepancies with their accommodation. These include poor security and small rooms. Some students complaint about the lecturers approach and how they exclude them in the classrooms. They sometimes use graphics and demonstrations that exclude the students. This will therefore compromise active participation in their learning.

5.2.3. Attitude of the campus community

The VISs expressed disappointment with the attitude of non-vision impaired students, lecturers and other members of their institutions. This was observed when VISs requested or received support at different platforms. Attitude of some support services officials was positive enough to enable students’ positive results. Other students decided not to use some support services because of the negative attitude and reception that they received.

5.2.3.1. Attitude of Non-visual impaired towards visually impaired students

In this regard, the attitude of non-VISs had an influence on the academic success of the VISs and personal relations with them. The findings of the study are that some non-VISs manipulate or take advantage of the academic potential and capabilities of VISs. Others embraced their relations and became study partners and social friends. It was found that the attitude of some students was determined by how they engage with persons with disabilities, especially for those who have not engaged with them before. When asked about the attitude of the student community on campus Mohlanka and Lethula realised that some non-VISs had an attitude towards him; Mohlanka indicates:

“The challenge is that when we are freshers, they think I’m a stranger, but later on in our studying we get along very good”.

Lethula explains:

“Since I arrive here at the college their attitude is good, except few incidents that happened when I first arrived here. Actually the problem is that many students think we’re not ordinary humans it was hard for them to approach me, but now things are much better”

The two students at HEIone were seen as strangers by some students due to their disability. Some non-VISs viewed them as unordinary human beings. However, after getting acquainted with them, they were transformed and their approach towards them changed. In the HEItwo, some students were concerned about the attitude of some non-VISs. Even though both Dan and Molepe indicated that the attitude of some students was good, there are those who take advantage of their disability. This is what they say about students who manipulate them.

Dan said:

“It’s good. I am good with a few others, I don’t have a problem with them, except a few who take advantage if they need learning material, they become good but after they find what they need, they disappear.”

Molepe commented:

“It differs from one student to the other, attitude of others is good. However, not all student are good at us, but what I’ve seen is that some of them can exploit us especially when they need something”

Concerns of the VISs about the assertiveness of non-impaired students were also observed in non-academic interactions. Some students failed to understand that the VISs have feelings and emotions. These students do not only need study partners, they also need love partners. They can socialise and have leisure time like many others. When asked about the attitude of students towards them, Mohale revealed how disappointed he was about some of them:

“Its good from many students, but I have observed that others attitude is negative especially on our social life, they think it’s strange to go out and party or have a love affair or be intimate with someone. That is not good for us; they do not treat us well”.

Treating other students as strangers in higher education because of their disability shows that there is lack of education about disability. Some people fail to understand that disability is not inability. Because of their commitment and hard work, the VISs are exploited by non-impaired students. They get learning materials and any form of assistance that they require and disappear afterwards. This says that people take advantage of their disability. Students with disabilities expect others to allow them to express their mutual or intimacy towards others.

5.2.3.2. Lecturers’ attitude

Availability and access of learning materials and the approach of the lecturers inside the classroom and during the consultations is regarded as the form of support towards the VISs. Lecturers are expected to provide them with learning material and class notes in the accessible format on time. VISs view lecturers as the main source of their academic support. Before attending the classroom where VISs are, lecturers are expected to issue class notes to the disability unit officers to transcribe them into braille. The same braille transcription is expected to take place during class tests and examinations periods. However, both Rele and Mama bared their concerns about the attitude of some lecturers and their ignorance to issue notes, class tests and examination scripts on time. When asked about the barriers that they experience to support VISs, this is what Mama said:

“Some lecturers forget or ignore to offer us class notes, class test or exam papers to convert or transcribe to braille for accessibility of VIS”.

On the other hand, when Rele was asked about the grievances brought to his office by VISs this what he said about the attitude of the lecturers. Rele indicates:

“They complain about the approach and learning methods of the lecturers in the classrooms. Lecturers exclude them in the sense that when they write something or draw pictures on the board, they explain it as if all the students have vision. Lecturers don’t even explain thoroughly”.

Furthermore, Mr. Rele expressed his concern when he realised that some lecturers do not know how to approach VISs. He recalled.

“Lecturers don’t know how to approach or teach VISs, don’t know how they can be assisted them based on their learning need. Some lecturers would sometime become annoyed when discussing how we can assist them to learn effectively”.

At HEIone, the unwelcoming attitude was articulated by Mama when the Head of department of Special education and other members of the department refused the VISs access to audio recorders which were donated by the funder to be given to VIS. Mama revealed;

“The college has audio recorders which were given to assist VIS, but the department of special education denied them to access them, and they are told to hire them although these audio recorders were distributed by the funder as a gift to the college to be used by VIS”.

The unwelcoming attitude of the lecturers was observed on several occasions. The disability officer indicated that she often had to remind and request the lecturers about the students’ notes, classwork and class tests that need to be transcribed into braille. Although students are allowed to record the lectures in the classroom, some lecturers were not happy with that. However, the disability officer at HEIone had similar challenges as with the disability officer

in HEItwo. Rele also presented his concerns about the unwelcoming attitude of some lecturers and how it compromised his work to support the VISs. He revealed that some lecturers fail to submit students' classwork, class tests or examination papers beforehand to be transcribed to braille. He had to chase the lecturers to issue such learning material to transcribe. When asked how the lecturers' attitude affected his work, Mr. Rele's response was as follows. He said:

"During class tests and exams I have to make sure that I prepare their work so that they are all in order, I sometimes sleep in the office or knock-off very late because of workload"

He further clarifies how his work is compromised;

"I have to postpone some of the students' work that needs my attention like braille, enlarge printing. It's difficult to satisfy them more especially during exams".

The unwelcoming attitude of the lecturers was felt and observed by some students such as Fifi and Molepe. She narrated how she became a victim of the lecturers' attitude. Her being blind suggested how she was treated by some lecturers and how she ended up being a victim of circumstances. Fifi narrated:

"In the classroom, I used the recorder; however some lecturers were against it. They were saying it's against the policy of the university. However I didn't know how they were expecting me to learn because I'm blind. But also this recorder that I was using was also used as a weapon against me, lecturers were saying that they will not offer notes simply because I have recordings from the class. However, the recorder was benefiting me where I am still awaiting the notes from the same lecturer, so that I have somewhere I to refer. There are various things within the notes that the lecturer can talk about while teaching. The lecturer wanted me to transcribe the recordings. Meaning if one course takes three hours, this means that I need about 6 to 9 hours to transcribe and this imposed lot of pressure and affected me negatively. I had to suffer to that extend simply because I had a disability. Lecturers will often come to class to write class test or quiz

without giving the work to disability officer to transcribe to convert to braille. And at times no notes were provided; I will sit down doing nothing because I could not access learning material”.

Molepe complained:

“Some lecturers deny us notes or after-class individual consultations”

The lecturers’ unwelcoming attitude translates to the poor academic performance that students may encounter. The lecturer’s ignorance or forgetfulness jeopardised the disability officers’ responsibility to support VISs, while at the same time students’ academic success was compromised. Lecturers could not use appropriate teaching methods to include VISs in their learning. Sometimes the lecturers draw pictures on the class chalkboard do not bother to explain what such pictures entail. The form of note taking in the classroom for VIS is by audio recording lecturers’ presentations, however students were denied access to audio recorders in HEIone and demanded to buy them elsewhere. At HEItwo, students were not allowed to record the lectures in the classroom and were told it is against the policy of the institution. It is concluded that the unwelcoming attitude of the lecturers was not only compromising academic success of the VISs but it also jeopardised their support.

5.2.3.3 Relationship with lecturers

The academic relationship of students with their lecturers is regarded as an important aspect that can lead to positive academic outcomes due to their cooperative efforts. Students may safeguard such relationship by good behaviour and active participation in the classroom, timeous submission of assignments and classwork. Positive relations can yield a positive learning environment, improved students’ self-esteem and high academic attainment. In this regard the relationship of the individual students was driven by various reasons towards their individual lecturers. Following the verbatim responses of the VISs, each student had different experiences and views about how they relate to their lecturers. For instance, when talking about his relationship with the various lecturers as fourth year and completing student, Molepe revealed his experience with the lecturers:

“My relationship with philosophy lecturers is good, while majority of sociology lecturers there is so much misunderstanding”,

His remarks were provoked when he was asked about the support services that he is grateful about. He then revealed:

“Sociology lecturers are worse than I can imagine. They are not welcoming; they don’t care or listen to our concerns,”

Dan was in the similar situation. However, his sour relationship with one lecturer was stirred by his own behaviour. He declared:

“It’s good, eishhhhhh, except one lecturer whom I had problem with just few days ago,”

Unlike Molepe, another two fourth year students, Jappie and Mohale embraced a different student-lecturer relationship experience.

Jappie indicates;

“It’s also good if I can say that; I think they are of help where necessary”

He further emphasised why his relationship with most lecturers was virtuous. He said:

“Overall it was good, first, let me start with lecturers they are good, they provided notes, learning material, academic advice”.

Mohale said;

“My relationship with lecturers is good, more often I consult with them for clarification and guidance on study issues, and we even text on whatsapp social media”

Similarly, both Lekaota and Mohlanka are grateful about their relationship with other people at HEIone. Although there are shortfalls with other lecturers, overall relationship is good. Lekaota bragged:

“My relation is very good, they always make sure that I’m not left behind they are very supportive and welcoming, they make sure I’m included”

Mohlanka admitted that his relationship differs from one lecturer to the other:

“It’s good with others, while others is not neutral, some lecturers says we must behave as non-VISs”

The state of students-lecturers relationship is regarded as an important aspect inside and outside the classroom. The finding from the students’ interviews has revealed that some students have such a good interaction with their lecturers that they text each other to discuss academic work. Secondly, lecturers were able to provide students with learning material either voluntarily or when the need arises. The above verbatim responses of the VISs indicate how strong or weak the relationship is between the students and the lecturers. A good relationship is based on good communication, mutual respect, a positive and patient attitude and a positive reception that a student receives from the lecturers. The Majority of students were satisfied with how they relate to their lecturers. Such students were optimistic and embraced their relations in an effort to upsurge commitment in their studies. However, the findings also indicate that a few students had poor relations with some lecturers. Dan revealed that his sour relations with one lecture were stirred by the lecturer’s mindless conduct in the classroom. Poor relations between student and a lecturer may result in poor communication, inconsiderate attitude and disrespect.

5.3. Towards a better learning environment

This section presents the participants' views, recommendations and concerns on the support services, administration of disabilities issues as well as the challenges and barriers related to the support for VISs. The participants' views entail students' perceptions about SSS in their institutions and matters that need improvements. Participants also revealed their concerns about how disability issues are administered and addressed in both institutions. They also recommended the mechanisms that can be placed to enhance support of VISs. Members of the SSS department have mentioned various concerns, barriers and challenges that limit and hinder their support for VISs. The students' support services officials also explained why

VISs must be embraced, celebrated and appreciated and why their rights to enrol in HEIs are important.

5.3.1. Legal obligation on disability issues

To establish how SSS can be improved to respond to the needs of VISs, multiple considerations were made by the SSS officials and students. The support services officials in both institutions mentioned that they do not have a disability policy to govern the disability issues in these two institutions. Some VISs also mentioned that their institutions do not have a disability policy. Due to the unavailability of the disability policy, this implies that institutions do not have any guidelines or policies that address the disability issues. Despite that, Mookameli and Mokubung mentioned that the departments of student affairs are mandated to offer social, psychological and welfare support; this is what they said about the disability policy. Mookameli stated:

“From the student's welfare point of view, not yet; the one I assume is available is from the academic department”

Mookameli's views were supported by Stebo who mentioned that for the past seven years of her service in HEItwo, she had not seen any legal documentation that directs disability issues. Stebo claimed:

“I have not seen or known about disability policy since I arrived here”

On the same note, Mokubung declared that HEIone has a similar situation. He said:

“There is no such a thing (as disability policy)”.

While making the same claims from the disability officers from both HEIone and HEItwo about the disability policy this is what Mama and Rele said:

Mama:

“Yes, (there is disability policy) even though I have not seen it since I arrived here”

Rele assets:

“Nope, not that I know of, everything we do is all about negotiations and discussion”.

Both student affairs and disability officers in HEItwo stipulate that there is no disability policy or guideline in place to address disability issues in these two institutions. As Rele claimed, addressing concerns and challenges about the support of VISs is at the discretion and empathy of individual officials. On the other hand, Mama at HEIone claimed that the college has a disability policy which she has not seen or read in her 16 years of service. On the whole, various SSS have no legal obligation to reconsider the psychological, social or academic needs of students with disabilities. It can either be in the classroom, in the library, on curriculum issues, student governance or recreational and cultural issues in both institutions are not compelled to support VISs. Nthatuoa stated:

“Not specific policy for disability issues, however, we use the general policy that guides the college”.

However, regarding Nthatuoa’s response, the college addresses and administers the needs of disabled students using the same approaches, procedures or measures similar to the non-disabled students. With that in mind, any support received by VISs has not been mandated under legal guidance to enhance their academic success. This was also articulated by three participating students who indicated that their concerns are not addressed, mainly because there is no disability policy to safeguard their academic success and welfare. Hlomla, Dan and Molepe voiced their concerns about the disability policy. Hlomla illustrated:

“Nope, they do not observe our rights, the university does not have a disability policy and if some could offend you, it means you cannot sue the university”.

Dan stated:

"Our concerns are not addressed, there is no (disability) policy, lecturers or anyone gives support at their discretion, it's not an obligation".

Molepe:

"One problem is that there is no (disability) policy that protects us and any favours that we receive are at the discretion of individual lecturers".

It has come to the attention of students that their institutions have no disability policy that guides how they should be supported and how support services should address their academic and non-academic concerns. Due to the unavailability of a disability policy in these institutions, the rights of the minority group in the institution are in jeopardy and can be easily violated. Their rights may include access to infrastructure and learning aids, allowance to participate in the learning programmes and a fair access to support their learning needs. Various SSS officials and VISs had different views about observing students' rights in the academic sphere. Each official was asked how his or her department observes the rights of VISs. In response to how HEIone and HEItwo observe the rights of VISs, the following are the responses of the support services officials.

Mda (HEItwo library) narrated:

"Yes, of course in the library we do observe their rights, especially when we allow them to bring guides, when we provide assistive devices to learn. We observe their rights to learning resources, everyone has the right to education, I think the library and university are aware that they have learning equipment, resources and assistive devices to learn".

Nthatuoa (a special needs education lecturer in HEIone) stated:

"Yes we do, in HEIs like this one, we observe their (VISs) rights like anyone else, we offer them support like any other person".

Along with Nthatuoa's response, Mokubung claimed how they observe the rights of VISs:

“To enable them appropriate support is to allow them representation in the SRC, it should not be by being elected, but it should be mandated in the constitution. Of course, I can say they are allowed to exercise their rights to participate in elections”.

In an effort to ensure that the Department of Students Affairs fully observes the rights of VISs Stebo claimed:

“Yes we do, that's why when we make any changes or adjustments, we normally engage with them, we prefer to consult with them on any decisions we make and allow them to participate because they want our decisions to be inclusive”

While SSS officials affirm that their departments observe the rights of VISs and allow participation in different learning and mutual activities, such students have their view of the story to tell. When asking students whether their rights are considered within the institution, the following are some of their views,

Mohlanka notes:

“Yes, to a certain extent, they are respected and considered (human rights), but I think they are not fully recognised because we are not given all opportunities to enjoy our studies like others”.

Mohale said:

“My rights are not fully considered by the university because, for instance, no sport caters or accommodates us, and as a music DJ no support I received from anyone, I'm aware there is no discrimination or exclusion within the campus”.

Although Mohlanka and Mohale are placed in different institutions, they have similar observations about their human rights within higher education. To some extent, they believe that their institutions do consider their rights as disabled persons even though they are not supported to showcase their talents. One important aspect mentioned by Mohale is that sports facilities and games available in the university do not accommodate them. This response

indicates that VISs are marginalised within the recreational activities. In contrast to their views, Dan, Molepe and Jappie have different experiences.

Dan states:

“Acheeeee, I don’t want to say that human rights are never considered. They are terrible; I am not satisfied but I have to accept everything.”

Molepe related his experience:

“Nooooo, I will say no, many rules don't favour us as visually impaired persons. For instance, some lectures don't consider our learning limitations and they tell us that they don't spoon-feed us, some students don't want to discuss or share materials, I remember at one point a lecturer giving a quiz as classwork and unfortunately the quiz was not converted to braille, I could not participate. At one time I fell into trench thinking that maybe there construction work taking place and I nearly broke my leg; the toilets are not user-friendly for VISs.”

Jappie narrated;

“No, I’m saying no because some places are not accessible, while others cannot accommodate us, for example at the disability unit the room is small and once we have more than three students we're going to squeeze and there will be discomfort among us”.

The unavailability of the disability policies or guidelines has posed multiple challenges and uncertainties on the academic success of VISs in higher education environments. Extracts from SSS officials have shown that their departments support VISs and observe their rights. But the question is "What guides them to master such support"? Any form of support offered to VISs depends on discretion and empathy. All support services in the two institutions are "one size fits all". These institutions have no legal obligation to support students with special learning needs. The unavailability of disability policies or guidelines implies that the human rights of students with special disabilities such as visual impairment are in jeopardy. This can be supported by Mohales’ claims and concerns about the library. He illustrates:

"Nope, nothing is addressed. For instance, the library does not cater for our needs. What we receive is not appropriate for our learning needs. No books for my learning needs, security is not good at the residence and seven students' laptops have been stolen since I arrived here four years ago. DSA did nothing about the safety of our property and us; our safety is not their priority"

In this regard, the human rights of VISs are being violated. Nonetheless, such students cannot claim that the institution or its personnel are against the policy of the institution. The VISs are denied the right to claim that lecturers' teaching methods exclude them, that learning material is inappropriate or inaccessible or that the learning environment is inaccessible. Therefore the VISs are denied their right to equal education opportunities.

5.3.2. Administering disability issues

This section discussed how HEIs address the disability issues, enhancing support and safeguarding the academic success of VISs. This includes how each institution approaches multi-faceted special learning needs and the welfare of VISs. Such approaches include disability models and programmes established to guide both institutions and their support services to ensure appropriate support for students with special learning needs. In order to find out which model of disability each institution uses to address disability issues, different responses were issued by SSS officials. The findings from the HEI officials are as follows.

Nthatuoa:

"When we talk about inclusion of the disabled, we talk about at least two models, I would say we use a combination of social and human rights models"

Mokubung indicates:

"As far as I'm aware we don't have anything (disability model) of that kind, because for quite a long time we never had any students with disabilities".

After explaining what the disability model is (to Mama and Sister1 at HEIone), they responded.

Mama stated:

"I think it's a social model".

Sister1 noted:

It's a combination of human rights and the social model

About the above responses, Nthatuoa is the only official who knows and understands the disability model and inclusion of students with special learning needs in the learning environment. Although the college does not have any documented guidelines to manage disability issues, Nthatuoa, a special education lecturer, asserted that social and human rights models are used to administer disability issues. Both Mama and Sister1 did not know what a disability model is although they directly offered academic and welfare support to the student community. On the other hand, Mokubung conceded that the college does not use any disability model to administer disability issues.

The situation of HEItwo was similar to that of HEIone on the unavailability of disability policy and model. Some SSS officials failed to establish the preferred model or explain what a disability model is. Therefore I had to define a disability model and give examples of common models relevant to this study. A similar explanation was made to Mookameli, the director of student affairs department to find out her views about how they approach disability issues in the university. Mookameli responded:

"Model will be what, I don't understand?"

I then explained what a disability model is and made examples of different models which are aligned with this study. After that explanation, the following was her narration:

"OK I understand. As I have said, we don't have any policy guidelines as yet, even as a department, we're not even there as yet to understand disabilities that can be available in our institution and what form of intervention, support or approach. We have not determined that as yet. Actually, where we are, we are very reactive; let me make an example,

we have housed the students with vision impairment in a certain residence, just to ensure that they receive safety, we requested ramps for them,

We normally do something only if they come to us and lodge a claim or complain about something that interferes with their welfare,

We don't have anything in place that guides us to respond to the challenges of VISs. They may need or deal with their concerns,"

In the same manner, Rele, a disability officer at the university could not establish a disability model. Instead of asking about what the disability model is, this was his response:

"I think such issues can be explained better by the dean's office, when I arrived there was no one in this office, the person who was working there just retired. When I arrived I was not oriented about anything, everything was a mess".

As a follow-up question to Stebo about the disability policy and the disability model used to administer the disability issues, this is her response:

"As I have said earlier, we don't have any policy; this means we also don't have any model. We just provide support when a need arises".

At HEItwo, only one official knows what the disability model is. The other six officials, including the director, are not familiar with the various forms of models of disability. The institution does not have any documented guidelines for administering the issues relating to students with disabilities. Various SSS departments together with the university only react and address concerns and challenges of the disabled students when the need arises. No prior plans are in place to ensure that students with special learning needs are catered for accordingly. Neither institution conducts a needs assessment to establish the challenges and concerns of the student community. Although students disclose their disability on the application form, there is no follow-up on the intensity of their impairment and the form of support that they will require throughout their academic journey in these two institutions. Unless students lodge their grievances or confront the relevant departments, these institutions do not plan, budget or prepare for disabled students. The VISs at HEItwo are housed in one apartment to enable easy access and accommodation. This initiative was done by officials

who had empathy for VISs. Because the university does not have any legal obligation to offer VISs distinctive accommodation, anyone can change the initiative. The VISs have to first lodge their grievances so that their concerns can be addressed. The disability officer is also not familiar with the disability models that are used by the university to administer disability issues in the university.

The various SSS officials were requested to mention the programmes that are meant to support the VISs. If well executed, these programmes are meant to align with the disability policy and the disability model. The findings reveal that not all the support services have the designated programmes for the VISs. At HEIone, all the officials point out that there are no specific programmes designed to support VISs. However, the disability unit is the only section with specified programs to support the VISs in HEItwo. The disability officer mentioned two programmes that are designed to support the VISs.

Rele states:

“I would say mobility and orientation only, other than that there is none I know of”.

Stebo pointed out that one of her job descriptions as a welfare officer was to design programmes that could facilitate appropriate support for the student community. However, in her seven years as a welfare officer, she has not designed a single programme. She notes:

“Not any specific, but if I remember my job descriptions, it says I will design programs in this unit, but so far none”.

In section 5.2.1, the Department of Student Affairs claimed that orientation of VISs is facilitated from it. However, it was observed that the orientation of VISs is conducted by the disability officers when such students arrived. The orientation and mobility entails walking and familiarising students with the surroundings. These include walking them from their residences to the lecture halls, knowing various offices, libraries and where the essential services are located. These programmes are normally conducted at the beginning of the academic year.

5.3.3. Trials and tribulations in higher education

The academic life of VISs in higher education is a package full of multiple experiences. It includes the various challenges that make their academic life unbearable and identified the barriers that hindered their academic success. Along with the student package of experiences, SSS officials also bear various challenges and barriers that mired and limited their willingness to support VISs effectively. The findings indicate that the encountered challenges and barriers were administrative, social or academic. The participating students revealed how these encounters impacted on their academic progress while the support services officials revealed how their work to offer suitable support was affected.

5.3.3.1. Students package of experiences

The evidence extracted from the VISs revealed the challenges that have a direct effect on their academic success. These include lack of learning aids and assistive devices, the learning materials including the audio recorded books, braille transcribed books and the lecturers' ability to teach the VISs. For instance, when asking students at HEIone whether their learning needs were addressed in the library, this is what some of them said. Mohlanka stated:

"I was looking for books and audiobooks, learning material, our special education section does not have them, we do not access of any form of learning material, and the librarian doesn't offer any assistance on online browsing of online materials"

Lekaota added;

"I requested some learning material past question papers, and audiobooks which they said they do not have"

Both Lekaota and Mohlanka had a similar experience when requesting support from the library. Lack of learning material and inaccessibility of online learning material compromised their learning. Some students at HEItwo pointed out to some academic-related challenges with support in the library. Mohale states;

“Nothing is addressed, for instance, the library does not cater for our (learning) needs, all that we receive is not appropriate for our needs,”

Jappie:

“When I want to read a certain book, and there is no magnifier, it means I'm restricted from reading. Secondly, I can only do school work when I am at the disability unit, I can't do school work in my residence room.”

In addition to what Mohale and Jappie said, Hlomla also pointed out that they use old assistive devices such as desktops and magnifying glasses. Hlomla mentioned:

“The main problem is the lack of assistive devices and the ones we have are very old”.

At HEItwo not only learning material and assistive devices were challenges encountered by VISs. They also revealed that WI-FI was limited to spots on the campus. They even demanded to meet with the Dean and Pro-vice chancellor to request WIFI connection in their residents and expansion of disability unit room. They mention that they are limited to accessing the internet only when they are in the disability unit.

Jappie explained:

“We once approached the university management complaining about the small room of the disability unit, where we squeezed each other, we also requested them to install Wi-Fi around the unit so that we don't crowd in the disability unit.

“The disability unit must be expanded, equipped with more learning aids and equipment, we need more guides and staff must be engaged to support us”.

Mohale suggested:

“I think the infrastructure, I am talking about disability unit needs to be developed and extended with better equipment”

The academic challenges encountered by the VISs are numerous and they take different forms. Libraries at both HEIone and HEItwo have no audio recorded and braille transcribed

books to be used by the VISs. This indicates that VISs are denied their right to access learning materials, learning aids and assistive devices. They cannot demand any learning resources because these institutions do not have any legal obligation to provide such resources. The inaccessibility of learning materials, aids and assistive devices compromises the support of students and this can hurt their academic success. The visually impaired students find it necessary to approach the management of HEItwo to demand an improved learning environment and access to WI-FI. Students claim that WI-FI is not available in their residences and this makes their studying difficult. Every time they need to access the internet they have to go to the disability unit or search for contact spots.

5.3.3.2. Exposé of students support services officials

To enhance the support of the student community, SSS officials say that they encounter various challenges. The study finds that lack of expertise, understaffing and lack of assistive devices, financial support, copyright laws and the line of responsibility are some of the factors that affect and hinder their responsibility to offer support where necessary. Each department may have one or more of these factors. At HEItwo, Mookameli was asked about the barriers that prevent her department from supporting the VISs. This is what Mookaeli said:

"We don't know their needs, we're likely to ignore them, or over-support, even when a student can be able to adjust to the environment they may demand more and we may fall victim to that over-support because we're not aware of their situations".

Mookameli mentioned that lack of knowledge about the needs of the VISs seems to be a barrier towards their support. They do know the best way to respond to their needs and how best to support them. When Mookameli, the head of the department and Rele, the only disability officer in the institution, conducted a needs assessment to establish the needs and concerns of students with disabilities in the institutions, this is what Mookameli said:

"I do not know because my department is not part of the admission and registration processes and we don't know what happens at the registrar's office. We are only given the number of students with disabilities, like the number of vision-disabled, physically disabled

students or deaf students. Our role is to provide rooms and support accordingly. Let me say we're not aware of any assessment".

Rele stated:

"None, there is nothing that I know, but the registrar's office can know better."

Both the department of student affairs and the disability office are the fountains of student support but they are not aware of the needs of the students as part of their responsibilities. Both officials have similar expectations that the registrar's office is the one responsible for establishing the needs of the student community although they are the ones offering the support. They also indicate that there are students with other forms of disabilities. Because the Department of student affairs and the disability unit have direct contact to support VISs, they stand a better chance to conduct the needs assessment and the form of support required. At HEIone, Mokubung illustrated that his office is assigned to survey the students' satisfaction and needs assessments every year. As the overseers of disabled student support at HEIone, Mokubung and Mama identified the barriers that hindered them from supporting students effectively. This is what they said.

Mokubung:

"The challenge is that there is no policy or guidelines linking my department to the academic departments. Therefore, whenever students encounter a challenge, I can hardly be aware of that and I think there must be guidelines that will ensure that there is a link between us and the academic departments, My department is not only in charge with student accommodation it is also in charge with their welfare, in all the dimensions, it can be in the library, in the classroom, in the administration or elsewhere on campus. There are volunteer class representatives who are oversees of student welfare in the classroom,"

But we need the guidelines which will ensure that students are not ill-treated and if there is anything they can know what to do and to whom to report. It will help my office to interact with HODs or deans. I

believe that the DSA can be the relevant place where students' grievances can be addressed”.

Mama illustrates:

“Some braille equipment is old and the other is no longer in use. This hinders our responsibility to support VIS effectively. Some lecturers forget or ignore to offer us class notes, class test or exam papers to transcribe to braille for the accessibility of the VIS.”

While Mokubung is concerned about the administrative issues and the policy within the college, Mama is worried about the technical issues like availability of assistive devices and the attitude of the lecturers. The setbacks of unavailable disability policy affect the department of student affairs to effectively support students with various disabilities at the college. It seems that there is no clear demarcation of responsibility that has been drawn to know how far one has to go to support students. Mama's concerns revolve around old-fashioned assistive devices which must be replaced with modern technology devices. However, the lecturers' ignorance and forgetfulness about distributing the learning material on time to be transcribed into braille by the disability office seems to work. The disability officers distribute such material on time for classwork and for examination writing.

Nonetheless, at HEItwo Rele, Stebo and Mda also mentioned various barriers that affect them to provide suitable support to VISs. The concerns of these three officials revolve around understaffing, lack of financial support and lack of expertise. The following is what the respondents say.

Rele:

"The main problem is that I work alone and there are many VISs. Sometimes their work needs to be attended at the same time. During the exams I have to make sure that I prepare their work so that they are all in order. I sometimes sleep in the office or knock off very late because of the workload".

Stebo illustrates;

"The main challenge is that sometimes you would have planned some programmes. However, there may be no financial support. Sometimes

I wish to take students for recreational activities but the university does not have funds. Actually, there is no support, especially financial support, from the top management, even if I have good ideas or design a programme to support the students, I may be told that the university does not have money; that is the main thing that discourages us."

As a librarian, Mda said:

"We don't have a professional librarian trained to support VIS. As we partner with different faculties in the universities, one challenge that we have as a library is that if a faculty has not come and either lodged a complaint or requested support it's difficult for the library to know what their problems and the form of support they need are."

At HEIone Library, Makholu mentioned that there are barriers which impede the library from offering suitable support for the VISs. Makholu states:

"The law of copy-write to repackage books into audio recordings or braille transcription is worrying, because we cannot support them as we wish. Also, the library cannot reproduce books or articles for them to access"

During the COVID-19 pandemic, one visually impaired student who was a member of the student governing body confronted the clinic administration about the exclusion that the VISs experienced towards the COVID-19 education and the safety measures against the pandemic.

Sister 2:

"During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, we did not realise that they were forgotten (VISs), because education about COVID-19 did not accommodate them. One VI student who is a member of the SRC complained that they are being discriminated against about information and education on COVID-19. This was a wakeup call for us and had to visit them at their residence to teach them about COVID-19".

The university has one disability officer who is in charge of eight VISs. The same officer is responsible for the administration of the disability office. He is further in charge of various programmes that are available to VISs. Mr. Rele mentioned that he needs an assistant to run the unit because during class tests and examination periods, things get messy. He must braille transcribe class test scripts and examination scripts while, at the same time, he must be in the examination hall to assist the VISs where necessary. On the other hand, lack of financial support seems to affect the welfare support that must be offered by Stebos' office. All the plans and brilliant intentions to support students are jeopardised by financial issues. The findings also show that the university libraries not only lack assistive devices and learning materials but there is also no human expertise in assisting vision impairment while the college library lacks expertise and the copyright laws are regarded as an obstruction to offering students some learning material that are suitable for their learning needs. There is no clear line of communication when departments and faculties should request library support in various aspects. In *section 5.3.1.1.*, the VISs mention that they do not use the library because the learning materials are not accessible and the library cannot accommodate them. I would say that a lack of expertise in the library to support the VISs also influenced them not to use the library services. To ensure a healthy studying environment, the health services and education must accommodate and include all members of the HEIs

5.3.3.3. Theft and safety

Evidence from HEItwo has shown that the majority of VISs are victims of theft at the university. Students mentioned that while they are in class or studying at the disability unit, their property is stolen from their residences. Evidence brought by the senior students such as Mohale and Molepe revealed that in the past four years of their studying at the university, seven laptops and other possessions of the VISs were stolen from their residence. They further indicate that these possessions were never recovered; neither the culprits identified. The theft of students' possessions is also fuelled by poor security at students' residences. When reporting this incident of theft to the DSA the department does not assist them. The following is what Molepe and Mohale said.

Molepe states:

“Our security is in jeopardy, at our residence about seven laptops were stolen in a few consecutive months at our residences, we reported

this incident to DSA and they didn't help with anything, however, we're accused that due to our carelessness”.

Mohale added:

“Security is not good at our residents, seven students' laptops have been stolen since I arrived here four years ago. DSA did nothing about the safety of our properties and us, our safety is not their priority”.

When Mohale was requested to share his experience with various support services at the university, and how his grievances were addressed. He responded:

“I once visited DSA to lodge a complaint when my laptop was stolen, but my complaint was never addressed. I want to indicate that security in our residence is not good and it's even worse for female students with vision impairment.”

The theft reported to the DSA was confirmed by the welfare officer as a worrying matter that needs to be addressed urgently.

“Another important thing is that the residence of these students needs to be improved, their properties were stolen and cases of theft were reported. I think their residence needs a special locking system because other people with vision can easily see their key numbers and buy a duplicate to enter the rooms unauthorised to steal. Several laptops were stolen and this was not a break-in but students easily get inside. I think they need a more advanced locking system”.

In addition to the above responses, Fifi relates her experience with GE students' residents:

“When I first got to the student's residences, known as the German Embassy, we were only two of us, visually impaired ladies. I was the only one severely blind; the other one was partially blind. At the GE student residences, we female students shared bathrooms with the male students who resided there. While I was using a shower, a male student would enter the bathroom and use the toilet without knocking at the

door. All the students residing at GE shared the same bathrooms and toilets. I felt that I was exposed to danger when a man would enter the bathroom while I was using a shower, and he would use the toilet or the washing basin. I reported several cases of sexual harassment to the DSA but the department never did anything. People who were harassing me were non-impaired post-graduate students who were staying with us, in the same students' residents".

While students are aware that their safety is in jeopardy, the support services officials are also worried that they are not doing enough to support them. This is what they said about the safety of the VISs. Rele indicates:

"The challenge is safety in their residence (VISs), their laptops were stolen, and about seven laptops have been stolen in a short time. Such criminal cases were reported but the university does not seem to have any solution about it".

Stebo points out:

"No, I'm not satisfied. For instance, their rooms are not safe. Their rooms are separated by just a simple Masonite wood board. I am always worried about their safety against the blaze or any unfortunate thing. Let me indicate that these guys are cooking there and although I mentioned their brilliance, I'm always worried that something may go wrong. They don't have any facilities for disabled persons who are up to standard. For example, their showers or bathrooms are ordinary. They are like any others. They are not adjusted to their needs. The floor tiling in their showers is old and one can slip easily. As for me, I'm not satisfied, These VISs are allowed to cook in their rooms, but there is no cooking space or room for cooking."

She further recommends:

"I think their residence needs a special locking system because other people with vision can easily see their key numbers and buy duplicates so that they can enter the rooms unauthorised to steal. Several laptops were stolen and this was not a break-in. Students get inside easily. I think they need a more advanced locking system"

Based on the findings, the livelihood of the VISs was in danger. I observed that the doors in their rooms did not have steel burglar-proof and the locking system could be easily smashed. Another important aspect is that GE is not protected and is exposed to intruders, unlike other students' residences within the campus. The GE residence is not divided into male and female sections to promote mutual respect, privacy and gender disparity. Allowing males and females to share the same bathrooms and toilets puts the life of female students at risk and they can easily be sexually harassed.



Figure 13: Student rooms and sanitary

Although the safety and security of students at HEItwo residences is in jeopardy, it was observed that the situation is different at HEIone. In this institution, students are placed in different buildings but on the ground floor for easy access. Both VISs are satisfied with safety at their residences. To enhance the support of students in their residences, Mokubung had this to say:

"What we do is that we have what we call a corridor assistant who is responsible for each student under his or her watch, for students with VI, there are non-VISs assigned to watch and to ensure they are well".

5.3.3.4. Exclusion in sports and recreational activities

The VISs in these two institutions mentioned that they cannot participate in any sports or recreational activities. Available sports in these institutions do not accommodate them because the facilities, equipment and forms of support exclude them. Only one blind student at HEItwo disclosed how he refreshes in his spare time. When asked about the form of social support that he received at the university,

Dan said,

“I can only receive social support from the bar, by drinking alcohol with friends”.

Some students expressed their concerns about the exclusion that they received from sports and other recreational activities. These three students in both institutions mentioned this:

Hlomla:

“My wish is that we can be included in sports, and as disabled persons, we have talents that we want to showcase”.

Mohale also said:

“Our sports facilities cannot accommodate us”.

Mohlanka indicates;

“Recreation and sports do not accommodate us; no sports activities and equipment are suitable for us”.

HEItwo has a sports office which oversees all sports and cultural activities in the university. This office is mandated to create a sports loving environment, with recreation, welfare and a home away from home learning environment for the student community. Presently, the sports office does not have programmes designed specifically for disabled students including the visually impaired ones. The sports officer mentioned that he is in the process of ensuring that all the students are included in sports regardless of their disability. Coach indicates:

“Not specifically; however, since being here, all I have done is create an opportunity to ensure that all types of sports are available, including the Paralympics, I made sure that sports are for all here. I say everyone should be engaged and have something to do, Sports is

for all and all must participate in sports and cultural activities, so far there are no specific programmes”.

In suggesting how support for VISs can be improved, Mokubung has this to say:

“First of all, this student must be included in sports and recreational activities, I can say that they are being ignored or forgotten. This says we must allow them to have leisure time; our sports focus only on those who have no disability”.

The sports and recreational sections in both institutions have not made a provision to accommodate VISs. It was observed that HEIone does not have a sports office such as the one at HEItwo. All the sports and recreational issues are run by the Department of Student Affairs in collaboration with the student representative council. The HEIs should consider and ensure that VISs and other disabled students are included in various sports and recreational activities and ensure that sports facilities are accessible and user-friendly.

5.3.4. Embracing diversity

Despite the multi-facet challenges encountered by VISs in the higher education system, there are things to appreciate, celebrate and embrace. The SSS could, somehow, have something good to offer regardless of the deficits and ineffectiveness in various sections. Therefore, this section discusses how VISs embrace the support that they receive and what SSS officials’ value about VISs.

5.3.4.1. Participant’s views on support services

The VISs were requested to share their views about which support service they want. At HEIone, Lekaota had similar views about the disability unit. Students have shown satisfaction with the services rendered by the disability unit and the support services officer. Lekaota has shown his gratitude by saying:

“So far I’m grateful with Mama’s office, the disability and Special education unit is still the most helpful”.

The findings from the VISs at HEItwo have shown that the disability unit is the most used support service on campus despite the complaints about old assistive devices, small rooms and broken furniture. Students are also grateful for the character, support and sacrifices offered by the disability unit officer. Dan and Jappie were able to share their views about the support rendered by the disability unit at the university.

Dan notes;

"I can say disability unit, it is much better, it's not like is the best, others are a disaster",

Jappie illustrates:

"I think disability unit is still much better up to so far. The officer is friendly and can assist when requesting any form of assistance. We are also given extra time when writing".

Fifi relates;

"Ntate Rele was very supportive, I can't lie, and there were times when we went to cry to him when some lecturers refused to assist us with our needs and concerns. He was very supportive, he was like a counsellor, a friend, support, a lecturer, and a father and he gave us space and support in his office to counsel us, he would say to us, "Don't give up guys, I understand". He is someone who can go the extra mile to support us".

While other students praised the disability units for their impact and supportive role in their academic lives, one student had a different experience. Hlomla indicated that for the previous two years, he had been studying at the university and that there was no support services that he could be proud of. He lamented:

"There is none, I'm not satisfied but I'm happy, or I'm just neutral"

The role of disability units in both institutions seems to be appreciated by the majority of students. They are the sources of the students' academic success; it is the only place where they could find assistive devices and counsel that they needed within their institutions. VISs are aware of the various challenges within these units, but they still find it in their hearts to be

grateful for the service rendered. It is in this regard that the SSS officials were requested to illustrate the things that they found interesting and valuable to support the VISs and the peak moments that they are worth sharing for them. This is how some support services officials define VISs within their context.

Mookameli illustrates:

"On my part, one of my responsibilities is to discipline the students. Let me tell you that these guys can reason and speak their mind clearly and if you don't know your story, you can be intimidated. This means that if I need to apply a disciplinary action, I should know my story against them"

As a librarian, Makhulu, indicates:

"They like to voice their concerns, especially when they are being treated unfairly."

Mda adds:

"They are conversant with many things; they are very friendly kind of people."

Stebo said;

"They are very corporative, and when you deal with people who cooperate you won't struggle, actually it's interesting because if a person does not engage with them, one may think they are complicated. They are very corporative"

These three officials undertake that VISs have a bold character to be objective regardless of disabilities. They can voice their concerns and let no one intimidate them. However, Mokubung and Rele mentioned that their interest towards supporting these students emanates from their positive attitude towards their studies.

Mokubung assets:

"I learnt from them that disability is not impairment, They came to me several times to show me their marks, Their marks are very good, higher than students without disabilities, they are very focused, and

they know what brought them here at the college I like them because they are hard workers"

Rele observes:

"They are understanding people. One thing I have observed about them is that they are hard workers, possibly because they are already challenged. They perform well in their studies, it's one thing that motivates me even though it may be difficult sometimes".

Mookameli also shared an experience that she had about one student:

"I remember one student very well. He was a law student who had several disciplinary issues in the residence, he was quite stubborn with compliance but he later participated in our social activities in the hall. He happened to be a singer, and a very good singer. He became such an entertainer! He came to the point where he released a music cd. The same student also became part of the student governing body (SRC). I think this gave me hope and light that even people with disabilities can still live their lives to the fullest. His music CD was in the market and was sold".

The challenges, lack of assistive devices, lack of expertise, poor services and infrastructure do not discourage VISs. The SSS officials appreciate the commitment, hard work and good performance of the VISs despite the various challenges that exist. Mokubung further expressed his gratitude for how these students can endure hardships. He noted:

"Almost 95% of the surrounding in the college campus is holes, step-ways, potholes and trenches, wherever they go they find steps, and barriers, but they still work hard, and perform well. Despite all these and many challenges in their academic side, they don't give up, they are motivated and humble".

Furthermore, as a counsellor, Kutlo expressed his gratitude for the way in which VISs present themselves. He commented:

"I'm grateful because they have accepted their disability. They always want to be treated like the other students. They are confident and have a positive attitude. They don't like sympathy from other people."

Despite the multiple-facet challenges within the education institutions, the VISs stand tall and keep their posture. They perceive and want others to treat them as normal. Therefore affording VISs all the necessary support may boost their confidence and self-esteem. In this regard, institutional support services must embrace diversity to create an enabling learning environment for all.

5.3.5. Creating an Enabling Learning Environment

In paving an enabling learning environment, the participants shared their views about how VISs can be supported and how support can be improved in the HEIs. Their views emanate from what is happening in their context and what they observe. Similarly, both the student and the SSS officials shared their views on critical matters that need attention and improvement in various support services departments. The students' opinion is that mobilising resources and advocacy may improve support for the disabled students within their campuses. The suggestions and recommendations, as mentioned by the participants, may be addressed immediately or they can be within the medium to long-term plans.

5.3.5.1. Aspirations of students

To establish the students' views about how the support services can be improved, multiple reactions were discovered. Many students in the HEItwo had similar concerns about the disability centre.

Jappie pointed out:

"I think we need an expanded building or room, where we can all be accommodated, with more equipment, where we don't squeeze. More learning aids must be provided with the latest technology that can be used by all VIS".

Mohale opined:

"I think the infrastructure of the disability unit needs to be developed and extended with better equipment. Walkways are not safe for us to access the other services on campus. The library does not cater for or provide any learning material based on my needs. Therefore it must be improved. There

are no audio recorded books and no braille books. Our sports facilities cannot accommodate us”.

Hlomla agreed with them;

“I believe that the disability unit needs improvement. We need new and good desktops to be installed and we need good and advanced assistive devices such as scanners because they are helpful when we are reading and studying”.

He further recommended:

“The university must purchase and provide us with good, latest assistive devices, they need to provide us with white canes which are durable and quality, the university must develop disability policy for our safety and inclusion, and they must engage us and get our opinions for the improvement and welfare of students with disabilities. We also wish to play some sports, but we’re excluded”.

Jappie, Mohale, Hlomla and others have similar suggestions about the refurbishment and expansion of the disability unit study room. The unit has three desktops and several chairs some of which are broken. The study room with its old furniture is estimated to be 2.5 meters in width by 5 meters in length. In the 2022-2023 academic year, the university enrolled seven VISs. It was observed that when those seven students wanted to use the room at the same time, it could not accommodate them. For HEIs to create an enabling learning environment, students wish to see the library providing audio-recorded books and braille books. Moreover, students state that new and advanced assistive technology devices and equipment must be procured because the ones in use are old and out-dated.

In the same manner, two VISs at HEIone also say that their institution can do better in creating an enabling learning environment where the minority of students like them are fully supported. They undertake that several improvements are essential to improve their academic, social and psychological support. They pinpointed the library, the disability unit and the assistive devices as the critical areas that require attention and improvement. When asked about which services they think need improvement, this is what Mohlanka and Lekaota said.

Mohlanka commented

“The Library services must be improved; our desktops must be improved and access and provision of the learning material must be improved”

Lekaota illustrates:

“I wish our officials or lecturers could receive training at least annually to enhance their skills about the latest technologies and teaching persons with disabilities. The library and the special education office need to provide advanced technology devices with good software such as braille, Jaws and note touch. In the library we need relevant and appropriate books with audio recordings. I wish the college management could invite an expert in disability issues to address freshers and support staff about persons with disabilities and how they can interact with them or behave towards them”.

HEIone and HEItwo have similar challenges that need attention towards improving the support of VISs. Students suggest that the library services must provide access to the learning aids and materials. In the disability units, advanced assistive devices and equipment must be procured to improve efficiency in supporting VISs. To improve support and create an enabling environment for VISs, it is suggested that various support services officers, lecturers and students should be provided with training on how to approach VISs and other students with different disabilities. Students concede that creating an enabling learning environment is a solemn responsibility of the management of the institutions.

5.3.5.2. Aspirations of students support services officials

To unpack how the various sections can enhance the support of VISs in their institutions, the participating support services officials also have inspirations. Their aspirations are triggered by the challenges that they encounter in the process of supporting VISs. At the same time, they are overwhelmed with the challenging experiences and dedication of these students. Officials imagine that enabling a learning environment would be essential to enhance the academic success of VISs. In their own words, the following is what they suggest in order to improve support in their respective departments. In the disability unit, Rele states;

“First of all is to conscientized the NUL community about how they (VISs) live, and how they can support them from all angles. These students are only assisted by their peers. Lecturers, support staff and students must all know about them and how they can contribute to their support. We need more devices, and our assistive technology is out-dated, we need good latest devices for efficiency. We also need extra staff to support them, it can be important for us to be productive and effective. There is a large room in the library, which we can use and new equipped and assistive devices assembled”.

From the librarian's point of view, Mda indicated:

“Let me indicate that there is no advocacy in the university for disabled persons. We need clear programmes because we are not aware of their challenges and concerns. Staff training is very important and the equipment used by VIS as short-term plans is also necessary”.

As a welfare officer, Stebo contends that there is more that can be done to improve the support of VISs, as she has mentioned; she notes:

“I can say that their rooms are small, they need to be expanded, their reading space must be spacious, their cooking space must be separated from the rest of the sleeping room, and the standard of their bathrooms must be improved and compatible with the disabled students. Their safety is at risk, when entering their rooms, you will find the hot plate (cooking stove), laptop and books on the same table used for reading”.

The Suggestions for enhancing support for VISs were deemed necessary in creating an enabling learning environment. Officials recommend that conscientization and advocacy to the university community could mobilise support and enhance the academic success of VISs. The above suggestions of officials correspond to the concerns of some students. As Stebo mentioned, Hlomla indicated that their rooms are small. He expounded:

“Sir, about our accommodation, the room is small and the student welfare said they cannot do anything about it”,

On the other hand, Rele and Mda agree with Molepe’s suggestions about how the awareness of disability could be promoted. Molepe suggests:

“Awareness and advocacy are essential to many students and the university community, it must be done in the orientation, and the university must ensure they consider our concerns, also some officials and lecturers must review their approach to us, they are not welcoming at all”

In responding to how both institutions could improve support of VISs Mookameli and Mokubung highlighted several issues such as attitudes towards disabled persons, assistive devices, legal framework and modelling support services.

The following is what Mookameli, the dean of support services opines:

“As for me, I just want to say that the VISs have been left in the hands of other students in this university because mostly it's other students who support them, who befriend them, who volunteer to be their guides. From the strategic point of view, I think the university should mandate itself to have active pro-support towards those students. Even in the academic sector, the gadgets that are there are because we're forced by law to support them. We don't go out of our way to support them as other universities do or what we can do with our limited funds. There's this attitude which says that blind students are stubborn, whereas it may be concluded that these students are not well adjusted.”

Mokubung, the dean of student affairs at HEIone concurs:

“Yes, of course. We need a policy that must guide and protect us as an institution. Also, their desktops are few, especially now when they are enrolled. The learning aids and facilities must be increased to accommodate them as much as possible. I also recommend that they be included as ex-officio members of the SRC of the college, especially now that the SRC constitution is under review. The college needs

integrated support services to ensure that there is consistency, flow of work and centralised services".

Based on the above concerns, suggestions and recommendations of the participants, it is clear that HEIs have a long way to stabilise and improve support of the VISs in different areas. There is an urgent need to develop a disability policy in our higher education. This will be an indication of an earnest commitment to support disabled persons. Institutions must also ensure the availability and access of assistive learning material and devices which can enable effective learning and participation of VISs.

5.3.6. “Appreciating what we have”

Despite the multi-faceted challenges, shortfalls and unwelcoming services in these two HEIs, there are multiple milestones to be celebrated. Some support services have not abandoned VISs; efforts have been made to ensure that these students are supported. The findings have shown that some essential SSS do not accommodate the learning needs of VISs. However, some students are grateful and appreciative of the efforts made by various support services and their relation to the members of their institutions to ensure that their academic work is a success. The following students undertake that the little effort made is better than nothing.

Jappie:

“Actually, overall it was good. Firstly, let me start with the lecturers they are good, they provided notes, learning material, and academic advice, and all in all, we were given extra time while writing exams, disability our residences we are allowed to cook unlike other students without disability”

Mohlanka added;

“In the lecture room- I want to say that lecturers are good, they can now understand us”.

Lekaota admits:

“I can honestly say that lecturers are very good to me, I have good relations with them, I also have a study partner that I work well with, this guy we have such wonderful study relations”.

Reflecting on the above statement, students are grateful for their relationships with their lecturers. VISs can study in group discussions with non-VISs. Having a study partner helps them with reading and mobility. It guides them to access support services. During class tests and examination periods, there is a special concession provided for VISs in both institutions. These students are allocated time extension while writing class tests or examinations in the disability laboratory, examination hall or lecture room. Furthermore, in the HEI one there is a cafeteria that provides three meals a day for all the students staying on campus. HEI two students are not allowed to cook meals at students' residences on campus. However, special provision has been made for VISs to cook meals in their rooms. The findings indicate that this was done to spare them much walking to the cafeteria and outside the campus to buy food. Mookameli confirmed that the university relaxed some regulations that affect student residences.

Mookameli claims:

“We have relaxed some regulations at VISs' residences, in a sense that all our student's residences don't permit cooking, but in their residence, it is allowed considering that if someone is not mobile enough, he/she is allowed to cook since buying food is a bit challenging for them”.

The efforts made by both institutions to support VISs thus call for celebration. Availability of assistive devices such as desktops installed JAWS, Braille embosser, magnifiers and the centre shows that visually impaired institutions are appreciated and embraced despite multi-faced challenges that hindered their support. Various support services find it necessary to support VISs despite insufficient human capacity and financial deficiency.

5.3.7. Access to information

For students to know what is happening on their campuses, information is disseminated through various platforms for students' access. The announcements made are related to academic or social events. Therefore students must access such information on time. In both institutions, printed posters and institutions' online platform are used by lecturers, the DSA, SRC and other stakeholders to disseminate information to all students. However, VISs do not have access to this information. Printed material is not transcribed into braille while online

announcements are not audio recorded for VISs' consumption and accessibility. This is a concern not only for students but also for support services officials.

Stebo admits;

“When I make announcements on the students’ platform – THUTO, I only type such announcements, I so wish that our system could have voice recording so that they can receive the announcements”

Access to information is a human right. The VISs are denied the right to access information due to inefficiency within the system. Such students may receive information only if they are told or if they can hear others talk in passing. These institutions have not improvised any means to enable VISs to have access to information.

5.3.8. Capacitating support services staff

To improve the efficiency and support of VISs in HEIs, some students and SSS officials undertake that training and awareness are necessary. This is based on their concerns and recommendations on how students' support can be improved. Students suggest that critical sections such as disability units and the library services must be offered training on the use of modern technology devices. It is also suggested that lecturers, tutors and other officials be equipped with skills on how to approach, teach and support VISs. To improve efficiency and support towards VISs in HEIs, Mohlanka and Lekaota make suggestions.

Mohlanka states;

“Officials must be given training to equip them with skills to support Vis, and on how to address our needs and how we learn or study. Also, research or interviews must be conducted about our satisfaction challenges and needs”.

Lekaota added;

“I wish special education can be given more refresher courses about approaching persons with disabilities and use of the latest ICT devices”.

Students' concerns about skills upgrading of disability officers and others were triggered by their observation of the use of other assistive devices and equipment by some support services officials. Having observed that the disability officer is not conversant with modern technology, they are worried that on several occasions they experienced delays in accessing and receiving learning materials, especially during class tests and examinations. This is confirmed by Mohlanka who claims:

“Our disability officer is not familiar with technology, and this caused a delay for receive learning materials. I wish they can upgrade their skills in the use of ICT devices”

Similarly, VISs at HEItwo also recommend that various support services require up-grading of skills specifically to approach VISs. Their concerns were triggered by the attitude of the lecturers and the unavailability of assistive devices in the library. Therefore, students assume that if the management of the institution could afford support services officials training would be of great help.

Tanki states;

“The university must train more support staff on how to approach us,

Mohale also suggests:

“Librarians must be trained to use the Braille embosser and JAWS so that they can assist us in our learning needs.”

Training will equip support services officials with skills to understand the learning and social needs of VISs and other students with different learning needs. For lecturers, training will equip them with teaching skills and how to approach them. In giving the green light to Mohale's concern, the librarian indicates that the library has plans to support VISs.

Mda advises:

“Actually on our training plan there is someone whom we recommend to go and learn about supporting students with different disabilities including VIS, and the expectation is that official will soon go for training”.

From the strategic point of view, the director of students' affairs, Mookameli, also sees it necessary for support services officials to upgrade their skills in various aspects including support of students with various disabilities. The following are her views about training:

Mookameli:

“We have just recommended to the vice-chancellor that there should be staff training to that effect. This will allow staff members to be creative enough to engage with students even in the absence of funds, also from the human perspective point of view, we should be able to create good relations with them. I believe staff training will be ideal to support students”.

The findings are that the need for training is deemed necessary by students and support services officials. Training and equipping SSS officials and lecturers with skills and knowledge is regarded as a critical matter that HEIs must take into consideration. The ability and expertise to support VISs academically, socially and psychologically would have positive academic success for such students.

In paving an enabling learning environment, participants shared their views about how VISs can be supported and how support can be improved in higher education. Their views emanate from what is happening in their context and what they observe. Similarly, both student and SSS officials shared their views on critical matters that need attention and improvement in various support services departments. Students felt that mobilising resources and advocacy could improve support for disabled students within their campuses. Suggestions and recommendations as mentioned by participants could be addressed immediately or they can be medium and long-term plans.

5.4. Observation process

In the process of establishing experiences of VISs towards support services in HEIone and HEItwo, it was important to observe how they interact with such services. Three participating students were observed for three days each. Due to time and financial constraints, one student, Lekaota, from the HEIone and Dan from HEItwo were observed. The student observation was initially conducted from the time when students were interviewed. However, the one-on-one observation process was conducted a few days after the interviews were

made. Since I acted as the complete observer, the observation process was covert to allow participants to act normally. I requested class schedules of the three observed students two days before I started the observation. I requested their lecturers to allow me to observe them for ten minutes to see how they were seated and approached by classmates.

5.4.1. Lekaota

A first-year student, Lekaota became partially blind at the age of three. He said that his right eye was replaced with an artificial one after several attempts to treat it. He is a twenty-one-year-old orphan originating from the Mafeteng district. He lost his father and mother at the age of six and twelve respectively. Having been raised by his grandmother, Lekaota managed to enrol in the school for the blind in Maseru where he completed his primary and secondary school education. At the time of this study he was enrolled in the Diploma secondary education, majoring in Religion and Sesotho language. For mobility, Lekaota uses a cane most of the time. When signing the consent form he and other participating students were informed that they would be observed as they socialised around the campus, especially during the working hours.

Day one - January 17, 2023

Lekaota was not aware that he was being observed. I followed him when he left his residence to the lecturer room. In the classroom, I observed the furniture arrangement and where he sat. Lekaota was seated in the front row with some students. The classroom lights were on and he was sitting near the window as he indicated during the interview session. After the class presentation, he waited with some of his colleagues in the lecture room for the next lecturer.

Day two - January 20, 2023

At around 7:45, Lekaota was on his way to the classroom. I realised that when he walks alone Lekaota uses a longer walkway to the classroom. It is safer for him to do so because walkway does not have step-ways, trenches and holes. After a two-hour lecture, he had a group discussion with his classmates for about thirty minutes before going to the disability unit to have an individual study. He left the disability unit at 12:30 for lunch. On the same day, at 14:00 he attended another class until 16:00. After the class he walked alone exiting the main gate to buy fruit at the cafeteria. He was greeted by a few students that he came across. He did not use his white cane when walking on this day.

Day three - January 23, 2023

I paid a courtesy visit to Lekaota's residence room at around 16:30 after class attendance. In his room, the study desk, bed space, wardrobe and bookshelf were properly arranged for free movement. He had a bathroom and toilet. His room had a steel burglar proof for security. I looked around and his books were lying around the desk, while others were on a shelf. I also realised that his room was on the ground floor of a three-storey building, as Mokubung mentioned that VISs are allocated rooms on the ground floor.



Lekaota's room

Figure 14: Lekaota's room

5.4.2. Dan

A 25 years old and second year student, Dan was born blind in a family setting. He majors in Theology and Sesotho. Dan uses a white cane or receives assistance from his colleagues for mobility around the campus. Although he was informed that he would be observed, he was not told when and how. In the first and third days of observing him, Dan left his room around 08:20 am.

Day one - 25th January 2023

Dan was accompanied by one partially blind student who was his classmate. He had a class from 09:00am to 11:00am in the lecture hall. After being allowed to observe him for ten minutes, I realised that Dan sat in the front row. He was greeted by other students as he got seated. I sat in the lecture hall to observe how he interacted with the lecturer and contributed to the class proceedings. The lecturer introduced the lesson plan and allowed students to form

various discussion groups. Dan also joined one group and participated in the discussion with other students who presented their findings in the group discussion. Dan also had the opportunity to present his work to the group discussion. After the class he went to the disability unit to access the internet and to study until later in the afternoon.

Day two - 27th January 2023

On this day, I was privileged to visit Dan at his room where I was able to observe the state of his room. I realised that he had a two-burner stove on the table where his books and learning material were also lying on the same table. In fact, he used the same table for reading, cooking and dining. Some of his grocery was lying on the floor while the other was put in a small cabin near the kitchen sink.

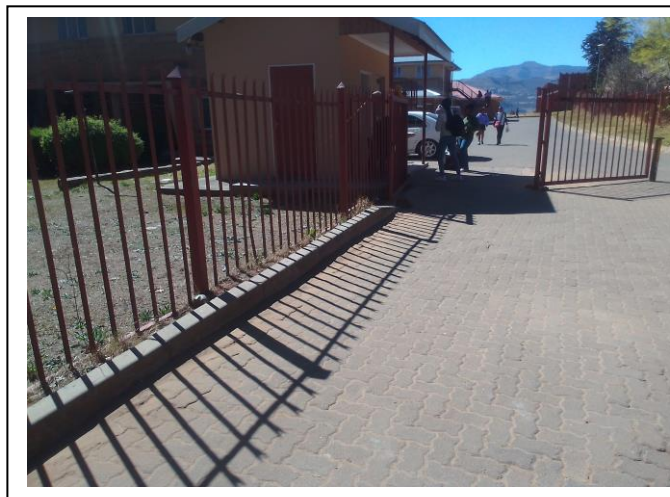
His bed and one-door wardrobe were all in the same room. I also observed that the showers and toilets were outside the VIS' rooms. Both male and female VISs shared the same toilets and showers. This says that there is no privacy and moral respect of gender. With that in mind it was observed that the wooden door to his room was tearing apart although there was a burglar door for tighter security. All VISs are placed in one student building which does not have security officials and a safety fence like the other students' buildings.

Day three - 30st January 2023

It was on Monday at 07:50 when Dan left his room. He was going to the disability unit to request the disability officer to format and print his assignment which was due for submission at 09:00am on the same day. The disability officer warmly welcomed him and proceeded to rearrange and format Dan' work and print one copy for him to submit it to his lecturer. At 09:00 Dan attended the class and submitted his assignment script like other students. After a two hours lecture, Dan went back to the disability unit to study. At midday he went to his residence for a midday break and to have lunch.



Living apartment of visually impaired students without security fencing



Living apartment of students without impairments with security officers and fencing.

Figure 15: Students living apartments

5.5. Conclusion

In the quest to establish what VISs experience when they interact with the various support services in their institutions, multiple conclusions were made from the findings. The discussion of the conclusions is divided into three subsections as extracted from three super-ordinate themes namely; this is my journey, leaving no one behind; and towards a better learning environment.

Both institutions have various support services which may offer similar or different services to students. Some support services are available in both institutions while others are found in either of them. The SSS are administered and structured differently in each institution. The following are the support services available in both institutions.

Table 12: Available support services in HEIone and HEItwo

Support services	Higher education institution	
	<i>HEIone</i>	<i>HEItwo</i>
Library services	√	√
Disability unit	√	√
Special needs education	√	
Sports and recreation	√	√
Tutorial services		√
Welfare services		√
Student affairs	√	√
Health services	√	√

Computer lab	√	
Counselling and guidance services		√

5.5.1. Theme one – “Admittedly, this is my journey”

At the beginning of every academic year, both institutions conduct mainstream orientation for freshers. As a culture, various departments present their services to students. It is established that disability officers present themselves to guide and support VISs in the process. Along with that, students are acclimatised with the surroundings through mobility by the same disability officers. When choosing the field of study students are forced to choose between education, humanities and law. This is due to their foundation of primary and secondary education. In choosing the field of study, prospective students receive advice from various people in and outside the campus, while others are allocated to certain programmes on the basis of their matric results. For their mobility around the campus, blind students receive assistance from their peers, or a volunteer or walk on their own using a white cane. Normally, partially impaired students walk on their own and they rarely use white canes. Although there is lack of assistive learning devices in both institutions for studying, students use different assistive devices depending on their form of vision impairment. Partial impaired students may use magnifying glasses, braille, enlargers, audio recorders or JAWS. Blind students use JAWS, braille and audio recorders. It is not clear who is responsible for ensuring that students are provided with the necessary learning aids; either the library or the disability office. However, in both institutions SSS are classified into academic and student welfare services. Academic support services focus on how VISs are supported in their educational matters. Welfare support services focus on student’s life outside the classroom and their well-being within the campus. However, there are some services which are available in HEIone but not in HEItwo and vice versa. It is concluded that there is poor coordination between lecturers and disability officers in transcribing assignments and learning material into Braille. The lecturers’ late submission of students’ class tests and examination scripts for braille transcription compromised the disability officer’s commitment to support VISs. For studying and academic research, disability units are the most preferred services utilised by VISs. Male students rarely use health services and counselling services, while the majority of them never use the library.

5.5.2. Theme two – “Leaving no one behind”

While exploring the factors that influenced VISs to use various support services it is concluded that there are multiple reasons. Along with that, the support services officers have different perceptions regarding why students prefer not to use any institutional support services. Students decided not to use the library due to the unavailability of learning materials and old assistive devices in HEItwo. In both institutions, the VISs use disability units for studying, research and writing assignments. Students also receive their learning materials transcribed into braille. Their work is formatted for the submission of assignments and they receive academic guidance. The Department of Student Affairs oversees the welfare and safety of students including their accommodation on campus and their relationship with the college or university community. After three participating students and welfare officer had raised concern about the theft of seven laptops at student’s residences in HEItwo, it is observed and concluded that the safety and security of VISs are of great concern. It seems that students have reported incidents of crime several times. They lost hope in DSA because their concerns were not addressed.

5.5.3. Theme three - Towards a better learning environment

Governance and administration of disability issues towards student affairs, welfare and academic success is the responsibility of the management of the institutions. However, due to the unavailability of the disability policy and the disability model used to approach disability issues, it is difficult to manage and administer disability issues in both institutions. Students are aware that these institutions do not want to be obligated by law to support disabled students. Therefore, students undertake that the lack of assistive devices, negative attitude of lecturers, poor infrastructure and lack of special learning needs is due to a lack of commitment from the management of the institutions. To create an enabling learning environment, VISs and support services officials believe that their HEIs can do better. Various recommendations and suggestions such as staff training, procuring assistive devices and improved infrastructure were made. It is concluded that college and university communities consider VISs as part of them. They are embraced and appreciated while management strives to observe their rights.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

6.0. Introduction

The present study sought to explore the experiences of VISs by establishing the provisions made, determining factors and support available, and establishing the strategies that are followed in HEIs to support VISs. This chapter discusses the findings that were presented in Chapter Five, using the interpretive phenomenological analysis as well as making reflections and conclusions as deemed necessary. The similarities and differences between the SSS of the two HEIs were discussed. The discussion also sought to establish the forms of student support available in both institutions. Similarly, the participants' views on the institutional support, concerns and challenges, programmes, practices, services, policies and management of disability issues were also discussed.

Three super-ordinate themes were constructed in the data presentation and were further engaged in this discussion. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) concede that in an IPA analysis, narration of the research participants' accounts and researchers' interpretations must be followed by a discussion section that allows the researcher to relate the identified themes and sub-themes to the existing literature. Therefore this discussion enables me to make reflections and comments on the implications of the support services towards VISs, concerns and recommendations for future developments. The interpretive phenomenon thus allows the researcher to interpret and discuss each research subject and other subjects that follow accordingly until all subjects are discussed (Shinebourne, 2011).

This qualitative study adheres to the components of an appreciative inquiry and human rights-based approach principles to enhance the discussion of the analysed data and make the necessary interpretations. These two frameworks were engaged to guide and operationalize discussions and reflections that underpin the support of VISs in both HEIs. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks connect various themes and elements which influence the findings of the study to allow the researcher to record and make cross-case analyses. Daniel and Harland (2017) indicate that frameworks allow a researcher to develop study pillars, to have a deeper understanding and to assess the effects of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore the principles of AI and HRBA as mentioned in chapter two, section 2.1.1. and 2.1.2. guide the overall discussion of the findings and connect the themes to the topic under study. In this

section, both frameworks also allowed me to identify and discuss the recurring patterns, themes and categories relating to the experiences of VISs towards the support services in HEIs. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) concede that the perspectives of the theoretical frameworks are connected to the analysis of data to ensure that the topic is relevant and grounded in established ideas. Apart from that, Kivunja (2018) illustrates that the theoretical framework is the structure that a researcher uses to make the bits and pieces of the collected data come together as one body of knowledge. He further illustrates that a theoretical framework is a structure that helps a researcher to give meaning to collected data through interpretation and discussion. The background of the discussion of research findings was elevated to explore the students' experiences and to organise and synthesize super-ordinate themes to comprehend the role of SSS. I therefore affirm that the significance of this conversational chapter is in line with this overview.

6.1. Exploring experiences of visually impaired students

While synthesizing and organising data interpretation and discussion, apparently eight overlapping elements contributed to the exploration of the experiences of VISs towards the support services in the two HEIs. The synchronised elements include experiencing a higher education environment; available support services and an enabling learning environment. A detailed discussion of these three elements was engaged and supported by a literature review where necessary.

6.1.1. Experiencing higher education

The experience of VISs in higher education is a lifetime-changing endeavour for many. Each student had a story to tell, the highs and the lows of the academic journey. Croft (2020) concedes that the experiences of VISs in higher education are shaped by the application process. Therefore, the discussion in this section will unfold the encounters of VISs from the time of admission, registration, orientation and mobility, the choice of study field and support aids that they used to manipulate their learning environment.

6.1.1.1. Admission process and orientation process

A HEI application and admission form has a provision where students must disclose their disability with the understanding that certain provisions and exceptions will be made for them. However, the study finds that despite disclosing their disabilities, the students did not receive any specific support to make their registration process easier and to give them exemption on certain processes. The findings reveal that admissions officials are not

acquainted with support for VISs. However, it was noted that the disability officers are the ones who support and ensure that the registration and orientation process of each visually impaired student is well fulfilled. In Israel, the findings of the academic study conducted by Almog (2011) revealed that the orientation and mobility of new students with vision impairment is conducted at the beginning of the academic year. Nyar (2020) refers to orientation as the formal structure or programme of activities organised by HEIs to introduce and support the first-year students' positive experiences. Mobility refers to the independent movement of individuals from one location to the other with confidence and safety. This is done to familiarise and ensure adjustment to the new environment. The orientation and mobility around the campus are also done to promote the level of independence and self-confidence. Although Teskeredžić (2020) advised that orientation and mobility must be done by a professional who is skilful in approaching VISs, this exercise is also conducted to familiarise VISs with the rules and regulations of the institution. The findings of this present study reveal that these two exercises, orientation and mobility, as conducted by the disability officers, are important for VISs' who are familiarised and made comfortable to manoeuvre around the campus independently. The disability officer is entrusted as the gatekeeper. Students are introduced to different lecturers' offices and halls where they can find the various services such as the clinics, the counselling units and administration offices which include the bursar's offices, lecturers' offices and the student affairs offices. These findings resonate with the study findings conducted by Hewett et al. (2017) which reveal that the disability officers are responsible for developing the support plans and detailing adjustments which enable VISs to participate and adjust to higher education learning. The VISs cannot enrol in certain faculties or programmes due to their basic education foundation. At primary and secondary education levels they are not allowed to study any subjects with calculations, signs or arithmetic. Maindi (2018) illustrates that VISs are restricted from studying the subjects such as physics because of the use of colour, illustrations and diagrams. The findings indicate that these students can only enrol in humanities, education, law and some social sciences programmes. They are obliged to enrol for the modules without calculations or arithmetic. However, VISs can choose to enrol in the faculties of humanities, education and law. In Ghana VISs are restricted to enrol in education, social sciences and languages programmes because other programmes do not have any resources to accommodate their learning needs (Odame et al., 2021). The participants in this study were not allowed to study Phonetics and Phonology, Statistics and Information and communication technology. In Lesotho, placement of VISs in the various selected programmes is determined by the High school results (LGCSE). Although students are at liberty to choose what they want to study,

their choice is determined by the above-mentioned factors. This deprives them of the educational opportunities in other fields of study. Matsie and Stofile (2021) contend that if VISs are denied access to educational opportunities with their academic institutions, then they should not be admitted. They regard this as discrimination and such students must be given equal opportunity at all levels of their study. Fatriani (2022) suggests that educational institutions must make alterations and re-design their educational programmes and policies to allow VISs equal education opportunities and support.

6.1.1.2. Mobility

The findings in this study are that blind and partially blind students manipulate their campus life using their assistive learning devices. To move around the campus, the partially blind students rarely use their white canes. They normally use different walkways to and from their residents and to their lecture rooms. They do this depending on which walkway is convenient for them to arrive at their destination. The blind students are normally accompanied by students of goodwill or use the white canes to move around the campus. Their movements are limited because some walkways have potholes and furrows; they do not have rails for the students' safety. Agesa (2014) confirmed that the movement of a blind person is limited and makes him or her depend on others for assistance. This also restricts their ability to be exposed to the various experiences around the campus. However, the findings indicate that mobility is the only programme designed to support the VISs. A mobility programme is conducted by the disability officers to acclimatize such students to the higher education learning environment.

6.1.1.3. Assistive devices

The study finds that several assistive technological devices are provided by the institutions or bought by individual students. Magnifying glasses, JAWS, scanners, optical devices and enlarged prints are provided to enhance the learning of the VISs. Researchers observe that assistive devices increase students' participation, achievement and independence and increase the ability of VISs to improve their academic performance (Williams, 2020; Senjam, 2019). These devices are only available in disability units and are restricted for use inside the unit. The disability officer provides enlarged prints, scanned documents and magnifiers for partially sighted students. It was discovered that partially sighted students use their spectacles for daily activities such as walking and studying. However, in the lecturer rooms, both partially sighted and blind students are allowed to audio record the lectures for reference

during their study and discussion periods. Students used audio recorders or cellular phones to record their lessons.



Magnifier in the disability unit at HEIone

Figure 16: Students living apartments

Although findings indicate that some lecturers do not favour the use of audio recorders during the lessons, such students were privileged by the institution to record lectures. The systematic literature study conducted by McNicholl, Casey, Desmond and Gallagher (2019) concludes that assistive devices are tools of empowerment and are the driving forces of psychological change; they alleviate the burden of disability to enhance inclusion and a sense of belonging in higher education.

6.2. Student support services

The two institutions have various SSS established to enhance student well-being and academic success during their higher education journey. In the United States of America (USA), SSS in HEIs were established by the Non-discriminatory Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits discrimination in academic and athletic programmes and admission, counselling, career planning and placement of disabled students. Support services are divided into two categories, namely academic and non-academic. The findings outlined that the lecturers, library services, computer labs, and disability offices offer academic support for VISs. The non-academic support services entail the Department of Student Affairs and Welfare, guidance and counselling services, sports and cultural activities, health care services and the special education office.

6.2.1. Academic Support Services

The academic support services section entails disability services, library services, lecturing and ICT services. The findings of each subsection are detailed to establish their role in support of the VISs.

6.2.1.1. Disability services

The disability office is the most favoured and utilised support service by VISs in both institutions. The reason is that the disability unit has assistive devices that are necessary for studying and research. Moreover, the approach and ability of the disability officers to support VISs gives them the courage and determination to study despite their lack of learning resources and multi-faced learning barriers. The academic support offered by the disability officers entails transcribing the learning material into Braille, scanning, enlarging printed material and coordinating with the lecturers about reproducing the learning material for VISs. Each institution has one disability officer who oversees the learning needs of VISs. The findings of the study conducted by Bhakta (2019) in Britain show that a disability officer has to provide collective pastoral support that addresses multiple levels of disability, exclusion, repercussions and diversity in higher education. Overall, the disability officers in both institutions oversee and coordinate academic matters relating to students with vision impairment. McCarthy, Quicker and Treanor (2019) illustrate that the overall role and responsibility of the disability staff is to provide reasonable accommodation and specialist support and to engage with other institutions to enable disabled students to manage their learning more independently.

6.2.1.2. Library services

It was found not all the VISs use the library services due to their inaccessibility learning material by VISs. The findings of the study conducted by Arowosaye and Bakare (2022) showed that VISs decided to stop using the library because the library environment and ICT facilities were in a bad state. The poor attitude of the library staff, lack of Braille learning material and lack of computers with screen readers and software were found to contribute to why VISs prefer not to use the library services. Librarians have confirmed that their libraries do not have specific support for students with vision impairment and that no specific programs are designed for them. A few old books were in Braille format in both libraries and there are no audio-recorded learning materials. The desktops do not have JAWS, screen reading software, magnifiers or any other software that can make learning for VISs easier and

more accessible. In this digital era, Sutar (2017) asserts that educational institutions must embrace technological advancement in library services and facilities to be offered to VISs. The participating students in this study mentioned that their libraries do not cater for their needs as students with vision impairment. The findings also revealed that the librarians do not know how to support such VISs. To support that assertion, the study conducted by Mamafha, Ngulube, Dube and Ngubane (2023) in South Africa revealed that inadequacy of assistive technology and lack of funding for libraries in South Africa pose a threat to the academic success of VISs. For this reason, the VISs' right to access learning material is hindered and their right to receive quality education and their equality to education opportunity is compromised. A study conducted by Ayoung, Baada and Baayel (2021) in Ghana recommends that library staff should have knowledge of various disabilities and must be informed on how to serve and support students with different disabilities. To access online learning material, VISs prefer to use disability units' desktops because the libraries do not have such services. In this digital era, technology has opened new ways and means by which libraries can provide advanced library facilities and services to be offered to VISs (Sutar, 2017).

6.2.1.3. Lecturers' and students' attitude

The findings in this study have revealed that lecturing to VISs is under threat. Students mentioned that the attitude and approach of many lecturers is of great concern. In the same manner, disability officers have also revealed that lecturers forget to submit class notes, class tests or examination scripts for Braille transcription. This would delay the starting time for students to write their class tests or examinations. Disability officers imply that they experience this attitude several times. They imply that this is a barrier that compromises their work to support VISs and the active participation of such students. These findings resonate with the findings of Odame et al. (2021) which revealed that frustration towards class work and examinations is brought about by the lecturers' delays in issuing examination scripts before the starting time and loss of answer sheets by some lecturers. This is regarded as carelessness and a negative attitude of lecturers towards academic work and an inability to cater for the learning needs of VISs. The study conducted by Mushome and Monobe (2018) in South Africa revealed that several factors lead to the negative attitude of the lecturers towards VISs. These factors include lack of skills and training of lecturers to approach VISs, the obligation of the institutions to enrol and include VISs and the absence of a special officer who administers and manages disability issues and learning aids and equipment for VISs.

Nonetheless, a few students shared that attitude and working relations with some lecturers are good and fulfilling. The positive attitude of the lecturers is a catalyst in enhancing the positive performance and academic success of VISs. The revelations of the study conducted by Mutanga and Walker (2017) indicate that some lecturers improvised ad hoc initiatives as alternative learning and assessment methods to cater for the needs of the VISs. Therefore a positive attitude is regarded as an enabler to academic success for VISs in the academic sphere (Simui et al., 2018). During class tests or examinations, VISs are given extra time to submit their work. This provision is made because they take a longer time to read the question papers and to type them on their answer sheets. In South Africa and the United Kingdom, the HEIs study researchers found that the VISs are granted extra time to complete their examinations, class tests and assignments on an ad-hoc basis (Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Hewett et al., 2017).

6.2.1.4. ICT support

Computer laboratories are meant to equip first-year undergraduate students with digital literacy skills because it is understood that some of them come from high schools where they did not use such skills. The use of computers and technology is regarded as essential for basic digital skills, internet use studying and research in higher education. In the first semester of their enrolment, students in both institutions enrol for credited computer literacy modules. Vojtech (2016) has shown that the inaccessibility of digital devices in higher education can result in poor-quality studies for VISs. The findings of the present are that all desktops in both institutions do not have any software, screen readers or magnifiers to be used by VISs. Secondly, laboratory assistants do not have any skills to assist them in learning and literacy skills. VISs require a range of assistive technology skills to study and for their daily activities to improve their productivity (Senjam, 2019). However, all the participating students were equipped with digital literacy skills acquired from high school. In rapidly transforming educational settings and the changing workplaces in digital literacy, Arslantas and Gul (2022) assert that it is inevitable to have prior knowledge and skills in both academic and professional digital skills. It was revealed that VISs preferred to use desktops in the disability units or their laptops. None of the students used their smart cell phones for study purposes. In Turkey, a study conducted on VISs about the use of information technology devices in their daily studying activities showed that such students prefer to use their smartphones (Arslantas & Gul, 2022). There is a significant gap and confidence in the use of smartphones over the desktops and laptops. As the rights holders, the VISs must be empowered to know their rights

to have digital literacy which will enable them to survive the academic challenges of higher education.

6.2.2. Non-academic support services

In the quest to establish how VISs were supported in their non-academic activities in the two institutions, several issues were identified. Presumably, the non-academic support services encourage students' academic success in HEIs and have various non-academic structures to address multi-faceted challenges faced by students via different processes. Although non-academic support services play such a significant role in student's experience and success in higher education, the findings are that these services have been traditionally less regarded as concomitant and are undervalued due to their non-academic nature as discussed by Dominguez-Whitehead (2018). Both institutions have non-academic support services which have similarities and differences but their primary objectives are to support students outside the classroom so that they may perform well in the classroom. The non-academic support services in the two HEIs include the Department of Student Affairs, student welfare and special needs, counselling services and health care and sports and recreational facilities.

6.2.2.1. Student Affairs

The findings of this study are that the Department of Student Affairs drives the strategic objective of the institutions, develops students' governing policy and creates an enabling learning environment for all students. It is established that the Department of Student Affairs has a mandate to ensure that the psychological, social and academic life of students is well. Student well-being includes their satisfaction in and outside the classroom and in their everyday life on campus to successfully bring the best students' higher education experience; The participating SSS officers revealed that the Department of Student Affairs is charged with the responsibility to ensure that the campus infrastructure is accessible and useable by the student community. Following their role and status in the institutions, the DSA liaises with other departments to ensure that students are successfully supported academically, socially and psychologically. In China, the study conducted by Kalim, Tran, Bibi and Khamphouvong (2022) has concluded that academic and non-academic support services contribute to student success and that satisfaction lead to improved student academic performance in HEIs.

6.2.2.2. Special needs department

The findings show that HEIone has a special needs office which advises and guides the college on disability issues. The special education needs office has experienced experts in disability issues and advises the college on how to support students with disabilities. However, disability issues in HEItwo are guided by the Dean of education under the special education office. This office oversees and coordinates all disability issues at the university. Overall, the role of the Department of Student Affairs is to oversee the welfare of students. The VISs are provided with accommodation at students' residences and are exempted from using off-campus residences.

6.2.2.3. Guidance and counselling services

It is found that HEItwo provides guidance and counselling services to the student community. Under the auspices of the director of student affairs, professional counsellors and psychologists provide one-on-one and group counselling services to students. The study reveals that all students are free to make an appointment to see the counsellor of their choice. The VISs were familiarised with the counselling services during orientation. They mention that they did not receive guidance from the counsellors to choose the courses that they liked. However, all the male VISs have never utilised counselling services at the university. They all declare that even though the service is a good initiative, they have not found any pressing issue to utilise them. These findings resonate with the findings of the study conducted in four Malaysian universities where 80 per cent of the students claimed that they had positive attitudes towards the counselling services but they did not find any reason to use them (Ahmed & Jeyakumar, 2017). Only one participating female student used the services once. It was revealed that she lost the trust of the counsellors after discovering that one person who sexually harassed her was an intern in the same department. In their study findings, Phitsoane and Matjila (2021) mentioned that the counselling services provided a safe space for students with vision impairment to share their frustrations, disappointments and options to continue with their studies.

6.2.2.4. Health services

The study findings have revealed that both institutions have healthcare centres on their campuses in order to provide primary healthcare services to students and staff. Good healthcare services provide a supportive atmosphere which can directly improve the health

and well-being of students and may indirectly improve their academic success (Pliannuom et al., 2021). In HEIone, the health care centre reports directly to the Department of Student Affairs. Recruitment and administration of staff is under the auspices of the college. The health care centre has two officers, the nursing sister and the pharmacist. The college community, students, academic and non-academic staff, receive health care services free of charge. No specific programme or special treatment is designed for the VISs in this health centre. When visiting the Centre for Health Services, the VISs normally have another student accompanying them although the accompanying student cannot be part of the consultation. On the other hand, the study finds that although the health care centre in HEItwo reports to the Department of Student Affairs, it is fully operated by the Ministry of Health in Lesotho. It serves the university community including students, non-academic and academic staff. More than five staff members, including two nursing sisters, nursing assistants, pharmacists, clerks, ambulance drivers and cleaners, work for the centre.

The health centre has an ambulance that operates 24 hours. Some participating students never visit the health centre for medical attention. Some visited the centre to receive the COVID-19 jab. The study finds that education and awareness material excludes the VISs. It is not accessible to blind and partially blind students. The World Bank (2020) report on COVID-19 indicates that messaging on the prevention of COVID-19 could not reach people with vision impairment because there was no Braille or large print; there was no accessible web content for screen reader users.

The study further finds that lectures were held online using Google Meet and other platforms. Research shows that during the COVID-19 lockdown, Hungary, 65.9% of 179 participating students with vision impairment were forced to switch to online education and their main source of success was peer support (Gombas & Csakvari, 2022). However, it was difficult for many to use on-line education because they were not used to it. The visually impaired female students visited the health care centre several times. The findings show that one female visually impaired student decided to stop using the university health centre for medical attention because her confidentiality as a patient was bridged after falling pregnant. Her falling pregnant was trending on the campus.

6.2.2.5. Sport and recreational services

The findings revealed that there is no provision in sports being catered for the VISs. These students are not accommodated in any form of leisure, sports or mutual activities in their institutions. The HEItwo has an officer responsible for sports and cultural activities. However, it was found that no sports are available at the university that cater for the recreational needs of the VISs. At the time of data collection, the university had the intention to establish the Paralympics to accommodate students with different disabilities. The participating students in this study reported that sports in their institutions exclude them because sports facilities do not accommodate their needs. The findings of the study conducted by Alcaraz-Rodrigues, et al. (2021) are that inaccessible of the facilities, activities and sports programmes makes visually impaired persons feel belittled and rejected. In addition, inaccessible sports facilities make visually impaired persons feel less accepted and adapted only because they cannot function like other contestants.

6.2.2.6. Student welfare and residences

The revelations about the administrative stand of non-academic support services were made by VISs in HEItwo. The findings revealed that students were dismayed by the poor support that they received from SSS. Although provision is made to allow them to cook in their residence unlike non-visually impaired students, it was found that each visually impaired student is allocated a room of about 3 meters x 2 meters for sleeping, crockery storage, cooking and dish-washing, reading, book-shelving and wardrobe. Students lodged their complaints to the welfare office about the safety and standards of their rooms but no assistance was received. Secondly, the security of the VISs is of great concern. The doors of their rooms and locking system can be easily intruded. In Zambia, a study conducted by Simui, et al. (2018) revealed that students' resident facilities were in a poor state, and VISs were affected by poor hygiene in sanitary facilities. The present study finds that seven students' laptops and other personal belongings were stolen in a period of four years. The VISs indicate that they reported all these incidents but no investigations were made by the Department of Student Affairs or the security services. The findings of this study are in line with Coetzee's (2016) findings which found that in one South African HEI students were complaining about their living conditions in the student's hostels. The living space is not ideal for students. Several of them have shown dissatisfaction about the threatening situations to the management of the institution. The welfare, safety and security of female students were also found to be in jeopardy. The findings are also that females shared the same bathroom and toilets with male students. The female student also experienced sexual harassment which

was reported to the department of student affairs. However, no measures have been taken to address sexual harassment to date. The study finds that instead of addressing her complaint the office mocked her as an attention seeker and a manipulator. It was also revealed by students that no specific support was designed to address disability issues within non-academic support parameters of the Department of Student Affairs. Undoubtedly, the HEI must act against the violation of human rights in education, accessibility, support, learning and completion of their studies. Although HEI two students have revealed disastrous experiences that they had, students in HEI one experienced a different journey. The study finds that the VISs are satisfied with the accommodation provided by the college. The findings made on the observations reveal that safety and security in their residents are satisfactory. Students expressed their gratitude and appreciation for how the department addresses their concerns and how it tries to create an enabling environment for them. These entail a positive attitude, a positive approach and appreciation shown by the VISs towards the support that they receive.

6.3. Attitude and perceptions

Visually impaired student had different perceptions about the support services which were influenced by their individual experiences. The study findings that the perceptions of each student were triggered by the nature of support that one received and its usefulness towards their academic and social needs. Secondly, the attitude received from the support services officials played a great role in determining the perceptions of students. The VISs mentioned that disability units are the most useful support services that need improvements to enhance their academic success. The support received from the disability units allows them to perform their academic work with minimal challenges. More importantly, despite the lack of other assistive ICT devices, disability officers are compassionate. They apprehend and accommodate their needs and shortfalls. For this reason, the attitude and perceptions of VISs towards disability officers created a parent-child relationship. On the other hand, the attitude of non-visually impaired students was found to be twofold. The study finds that some students befriend the VISs in order to gain something that can help them. After such students get what they want, they disappear without giving such VISs any notice. Secondly, some non-visually impaired students behave negatively towards the VISs either in or outside the classroom. These findings resonate with the findings of the study that was conducted by Amamoah et al. (2018) in Ghana which was interested in the perceptions of the VISs towards inclusive education. Findings show that non-visually impaired students have negative

attitudes towards VISs that could negatively impact how relate with other peers. The study conducted by Otyola, Kibanja and Mugagga (2017) found that VISs at Makerere University face several challenges such as negative attitudes from non-visually impaired students. This negative attitude makes it difficult for them to receive support or assistance from other fellow students. Nonetheless, some non-visually impaired students were supportive, having a good relationship with the VISs. Their support was experienced during group discussions when they were guiding and accompanying a blind student who was walking to different destinations and to the classrooms.

While still focusing on attitude, the findings indicated that the attitude of the lecturers influenced the students' academic success. The lecturers' attitude was recognised when, on several occasions, the lecturers either intentionally or mistakably failed to issue the learning materials to the disability officers to transcribe to Braille. Such a tendency would delay class tests or examination writing or compromised class participation of the VISs. The study conducted by Agesa (2014) indicated that 99% of the participants acknowledged that visually impaired students did not receive their examination scripts on time because the institution had only one Braille and large print transcription. This delayed their examination starting time. Sometimes the lecturers used visuals during their presentations and did not bother to explain such visuals thoroughly for the VISs to understand what was presented. This attitude excluded students and compromised their active participation in the classroom. The study conducted by Tom, Mpekoa and Swart (2018) in one South African university showed that the negative attitudes of the lecturers, non-disabled students and education institutions are regarded as one barrier to effective learning for VISs. This results in the limited support offered by the lecturers and their capability to support and teach VISs. Emphasis made in the study findings conducted by Simui et al. (2018) showed that a negative attitude is likely to limit support which can compromise the VISs' realisation of their potential.

6.4. Enabling learning environment

To manage and guide disability issues in HEIs, the participants raised various suggestions on how VISs can be supported. Such suggestions were meant to improve the learning environment, the well-being and the academic and non-academic support of the VISs in HEIs. These suggestions were made to safeguard the rights of VISs to access quality education like their non-visually impaired counterparts, to have access to assistive learning aids for effective participation and to access appropriate support regardless of their physical

status. These suggestions are also meant to embrace and appreciate diversity in higher education, human values and the dignity of VISs.

6.4.1. Legal guidance

The study finds that both HEIs are obliged by the Higher Education Policy (2013) section 8.3.5 to enrol and ensure equitable access for all students. The policy also stipulates that institutions must provide and facilitate applications to decentralise HEIs, to remove restrictions and barriers to accessibility for people living with disabilities and to introduce flexible regulations and programmes. The Education Act of 2010, section II protects persons living with disabilities by ordering academic institutions to give them specified treatment, education and care, based on individual conditions. The Persons with Disabilities Equity Act of 2021 also directs that twenty-four hours per day, care must be provided for persons with disabilities where the need arises. These two legal documents have one thing in common, to support students with disabilities in their academic institutions. However, these documents failed to mention how institutions should support students with diverse disabilities. They do not clarify how institutions should address disability issues and forms of support based on individual disabilities. The study conducted in Lesotho by Mosia (2017) suggested that HEIs should have disability policies to avoid conducting their operations that are based on national legal frameworks that protect and advocate for the rights of students with disabilities. It is a common understanding that respective education institutions should develop legal documents tailor-made to address, manage and guide disability issues.

Congruently, the findings of this study indicate that neither of the two institutions has the guiding principles, policies or any legal frameworks to manage disability issues. The directors of student affairs and SSS officials confess that their institutions have no disability policies to manage disability issues. The VISs encounter discrimination in accessing the learning material, assistive technology and support from the librarians due to lack of knowledge to address disability issues. The VISs mention that they have decided to stop visiting the library because the books and other learning materials are not accessible in Braille or audio format. Secondly, librarians cannot assist them with their learning needs. In a study conducted by Simui et al. (2019), the VISs in Zambia were disappointed to realise that the learning material in the library university is not accessible and user-friendly. To achieve and ensure inclusion, equity, success and social justice for students with disabilities, Salmi and D'Addio (2020) suggest that HEIs should develop some policies to promote effective equity and to overcome the barriers encountered by students with disabilities. The VISs

lodged several complaints to the dean of education and management of the HEItwo regarding the poor state and security of their residences, poor and old assistive learning devices in disability units and the negative attitude of lecturers. The study finds that no assistance or effort was made to address their concerns. They are not protected by law to claim their right to access support tailored to their learning needs. In education, the human rights-based approach undertakes that rights holders must be empowered and capacitated to know their rights and to hold right bearers accountable to ensure they create an enabling learning environment for all students. The unavailability of a disability policy leaves the academic success of the VISs in despair, as their right to quality and equity education is violated, leading to increased disparity and lack of accountability by institutional management.

6.4.2. Modelling disability approach

The discussion in this subsection is based on the findings of the study on how disability issues are administered in two HEIs. The findings indicate mixed reactions towards how institutions administer disability. Out of the thirteen participating officials, three understood the concept "disability model" and its role in guiding disability issues within the institution. The ten participants, including the director, were not familiar with the concept "disability model". As a researcher, my explanation was associated with Dirth and Branscombe's (2017) explanation that the disability model is an analytical framework that institutions or communities use to direct particular elements of disability to shape psychological, political and economic issues associated with disability. The HEIone adopted a social disability model, as mentioned by the special education officer. The welfare officer at HEItwo revealed that the absence of a disability policy implies that there is no disability model used to administer disability issues. The special education officer at HEIone mentioned that the institution is guided by the social model to address disability issues. Both disability officers are not familiar with any disability model that exists. However, the study conducted by Dirth and Branscombe (2017) on the awareness of structural discrimination revealed that there is a relationship between the disability model and support of disability policy. This study further concludes that there are disability models that can be a significant tool to combat the marginalisation of disabled people while rehabilitating disability in the public domain. Although HEIone does not have a disability policy in place, the social model of disability is considered a strategy to remove any barriers, to create equality, independence, choice and control and to combat discriminatory acts against the VISs. To uphold the support of VISs,

the human rights model values the need to develop a disability policy that will acknowledge human dignity in higher education.

6.4.3. Encounters of support services officials

In the process of providing assistance and guidance to VISs, the study finds multiple challenges and concerns, as mentioned by the support services officials in their respective departments. It was found that each section may have one or multiple challenges that may hinder their willingness to afford effective support to the student community. However, some concerns were mentioned by students as the beneficiaries of the support services in higher education. In the process of establishing the concerns of the support services officials, the study finds that a needs assessment was conducted to identify the concerns of both students and support services officials. Secondly, the institutions do not formally keep the records of VISs to distribute to the relevant departments for planning and support purposes. The support services officials mentioned that the statistics of the enrolled students with various disabilities are kept by the office of the registrar. Any form of support provided to the VISs by the support services officials is not based on professional assessment. Mulloy et al. (2014) find that the quality of assessment is critical to determine the long-term implementation plans and to comprehensively document the support needed for VISs. A needs assessment of the VISs entails visual acuity, visual field, functional use of vision and the preferred learning media and support.

The study conducted by Malik, et al. (2018) concludes that the assessment tools may distinguish the needs of VISs to make objective judgments and perceptions. The needs assessment can determine the form of learning materials (such as large print, audio, Braille and digital text) which is based on the conditions of the eyes and assistive devices that they should use. The needs assessment study conducted by Karthika and Selvam (2018) in India has revealed that the multiple challenges encountered by the VISs were identified through a needs assessment. In conducting a needs assessment, institutions may determine the form of support required for efficiency and effective learning. The integrated SSS practitioners undertake that needs an assessment of the form of support services and programmes requires a measurement of the effectiveness of the support which was offers and identifies service gaps.

6.4.4. Capacitating support services officials

The study finds that the VISs and support services officials are concerned about the competence of the support services officials and lecturers to approach the disabled students in both institutions. Students indicated that support services officials must be trained to identify the learning needs of and how to approach the VISs. To appropriately support VISs, various members of the academic and non-academic services must be equipped with skills to approach VISs. The study conducted by Agesa (2014), which investigated the challenges of VISs in education institutions found that lack of teacher training and poor approach is a source of the challenges experienced by VISs. The study found that 81.25% of 210 participants emphasised that teacher training is crucial because supporting the VISs is a task that needs technical knowledge to effectively execute their support mandate. This is because mastering Braille and other assistive learning tools affects other senses and is apparent to meet the learning needs of VISs (Kapur, 2017). The participating students also mentioned that the disability officers and other support services officials should be trained to use assistive technological devices. It was revealed that in HEIone the disability officer struggles to operate some devices due lack of technology know-how. The study participants indicated that it is essential to be computer literate because all their learning is surrounded by technology. The findings of the study by Johnson-Jones (2017) found that, to respond to the barriers and stressors of supporting students, training is an essential strategy to provide appropriate support. Students also mentioned that some delays to such a response are caused by the slow pace of the disability officers to operate Braille embossers or to use the Braille programme on the desktop. Asamoah et al. (2018) recommend that to use assistive technology devices, teachers should be offered adequate learning and teaching resources and training to develop their capacities to support the VISs.

The disability units are regarded as the core of disability support in both institutions. The findings of this study are that in each institution there is one officer assigned to support all the VISs. The officer is responsible for facilitating class work, tests and examinations as well as to transcribe classwork and notes from the lecturers. When the academic year starts, the disability officers' conduct orientation and mobility for the VISs while at the same time ensuring that they are registered and allocated rooms at the student residences. These and many other assignments are the responsibilities of disability officers in their respective institutions. The findings indicate that disability officers lodged complaints to the head of the department to engage at least one person but nothing has been done. The systematic literature

review study conducted by Pérez-Esteban, Carrión-Martínez and Jiménez (2023) concludes that disability officers are the key elements towards supporting students with disabilities and guiding the lecturers towards academics, organisation and provision of information about disability. Therefore, lack of staff to execute such assignments can compromise consolidating academic and non-academic support services to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education.

6.4.5. Access to information

In this era of the fourth industrial revolution, students must have access to information to make sound decisions. The findings in this study reveal that VISs do not have access to information. This information includes the announcements made on institutional student platforms, the social media or the printed material. Lecturers post learning material on the institution's website for all students to access. However, it was discovered that the nature of vision impairment has the impact of selecting the source of acquiring information. The partially sighted students can access some information although they may struggle to access some. The blind students have no choice but to rely on non-visually impaired students to know what is happening around their campuses. Consequently, the participants in the study conducted by Ahmed and Naveed (2020) were asked to identify the barriers that they encountered in accessing information in their institution. The participating students in that study revealed that the format used to disseminate information was unfavourable for them and they implied that their right to access information was violated. The learning material is not accessible for the VISs, especially the blind, because it is not posted in either audio or Braille format. This makes it difficult for the VISs to access such learning materials or announcements. The VISs cannot access or read printed announcements as posted on notice boards by the institutions' management, faculties or individual lecturers. It has been observed that for the visually impaired to access information relating to their academic or non-academic engagement, they rely on word-of-mouth information which can be distorted when they receive it. The study conducted by Arowosaye and Bakare (2020) revealed that VISs cannot obtain the required information through most of the available means because information is not provided through specialised formats such as Braille, large print, audio recordings or radio reading books which are convenient for them. The lecturers, departments of student affairs and the library services frequently post announcements on the institution's website. The DSA is aware that VISs cannot access such information due to the inaccessible formats. On the other hand, information provided by the library services is of no use to VISs

because it does not accommodate them at any levels. Ahmed and Naveed (2020) found that the library services have limitations as the sources of information due to non-supportive staff behaviour and the non-availability of specialised study resources. Access to information is not only a privilege but it is a fundamental human right regardless of one's socio-economic status, religion, physical condition or ethnicity. Denying VISs access to information is a direct violation of their human rights as declared by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 19 which says "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers". The UNCRPD article 9 also stipulates that persons with disabilities should have access to information, communications and information and communication technologies and other relevant systems.

6.4.6. Token of appreciation

Despite the multi-faced challenges experienced by VISs, the findings have shown that there are various things to be celebrated. Students have mentioned that their institutions have made efforts to support them. The efforts made by some officials to support the VISs the positive attitude of some lecturers and other officials, the availability of some assistive learning and technology devices and the support received from and relationship with other students and other members of the campus community. Students are also grateful for the spirit of humanity towards them as it is portrayed by some support staff and students. The study finds that students appreciated the efforts made by disability officers to address their academic challenges and how they impacted positively on their academic success. Both institutions have taken into consideration the housing and placement of VISs as a matter of great importance. In HEIone the findings show that students are placed on the ground floor to minimise the distance that they walk and to climb the step-ways. Secondly, one student colleague without a disability is assigned to support one visually impaired student where one may need help. In addition, the disability officer always ensures that their learning material is in an accessible format and strives to ensure that class tests and examination scripts are delivered on time despite the delays from some lecturers. In HEItwo, each student is assigned a tutor to support him/her academically and to ensure that they receive their examination result slips. The study finds that VISs are placed in a special and accessible student building for easier movement. They are grateful that the institution has designated a disability unit for them to easily study and conduct their research. Students appreciate the efforts made by the disability officers to resolve some of their academic and non-academic challenges. During the

examination period, the disability officer ensures that each student receives his or her examination script in an accessible format and rearranges their answer sheets for easy access by lecturers for marking. All the students residing on campus are not allowed to cook in the students' residences. However, the institution relaxed this regulation by allowing the VISs to cook in their residences.

6.5. Conclusion

A synthesis of the findings of this study emanates from exploring the experiences of VISs as they interact with the various support services in their institutions. The VISs have academic and non-academic experiences which either acted as enablers or disablers to their academic success. Notably, the journey of each student is uniquely portrayed by the support and attitude of the support services officials and the services received from the various departments. The availability of support programmes, assistive technology devices and skilful personnel can bring lifetime-changing experiences for many VISs. It is the solemn responsibility of education institutions as the rights holders to observe the rights of students with disabilities. It is only when education institutions have developed disability policies and adopted the relevant disability models that students with disabilities can be embraced and appreciated as rights holders in higher education. The SSS officials must be capacitated with skills because supporting the VISs is a technical exercise that needs special skills. The VISs have a right to access information about their academic endeavours. Such information must be in an accessible format and using user-friendly media platforms. I therefore conclude that creating an enabling learning environment, supporting and offering assistive learning devices signifies that HEIs appreciate and embrace diversity that calls for a celebration in advancing the local legislation as well as the regional and international organisations call to direct professional education to be accessible for the full human development.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was found that interaction with the various support services has brought both favourable and unfavourable results for the VISs. These results were influenced by a) the availability of assistive technological devices and learning material, b) the need to use support services, c) the attitude and competence of the SSS officers, d) lack of legal guidance and administration of disability issues, e) and the form of the available support services. This final chapter presents the summary and reflections on the explored experiences of the VISs. Reflections on the support offered by the SSS officers to create an enabling learning environment in higher education were also made. This chapter provides the concluding remarks, limitations and recommendations that can make the academic experience of VISs more constructive.

7.1. Reflections on students' experiences

Reflections are made on some of the overarching themes and discussions emerging from this qualitative research. This entails experiences and encounters of VISs in search of support from various services in two higher education institutions (HEIs). As a crucial cognitive practice in qualitative research, Mortari (2015) purports that from the Interpretivist standpoint, reflectivity is generally and legitimately used to validate research processes and findings. Reflecting on the findings and procedures of this qualitative research study also entails questions and explanations of how the findings were constructed. Reflections on students' experiences and their interactions with the support services are discussed in this section.

7.1.1. Students' experiences

The Lesotho higher education policy of 2013 clarifies that HEIs are supposed to enable students to make a successful transition from secondary to higher education to minimise the drop-out rate and failure. This may allow every Mosotho willing to obtain higher education to have an equal opportunity to participate and succeed in higher education regardless of his or her socio-economic circumstance or other characteristics. The policy contends that access and opportunity given to students with disabilities is guaranteed and their enrolment in higher

education is safe. Therefore, VISs expect that their enrolment will be safe and fulfilling. During the three to four years of their journey in higher education, many VISs have fulfilling experiences while some have heart-breaking ones. Whether a student is severely or partially blind, each of them has a story to tell or a fairy tale to share for many generations to come and memories not to be erased. This is because the wide challenges, barriers and concerns forced them either to halt or to be determined in their pursuit and goal.

The attitude portrayed by support services officers from the first day brought mixed feelings. The willingness and determination of some officials to support all students fairly, considering their personal needs and characteristics brought confidence to many students. Students visualised a fulfilling academic journey that guarantees a brighter future. The heartfelt support shown by the support services officers prompted VISs to envisage and imagine a brighter future and possibilities. As a result, their visions and strengths were critical in co-creating their desired future. Nonetheless, some VISs experienced unfavourable attitudes from some support services officials which continued to haunt them throughout their enrolment in their institutions. These students thought it would be better to withdraw from their studies and think of committing their energy to something different. However, I want to imagine that they preferred to stay to pursue and appreciate what gives life and energy to their institutions and to focus on the best that is offered by the support services.

Studying for the VISs cannot be fully achieved if the provision of assistive devices is taken into consideration. It can be concluded that VISs can benefit from assistive learning and technology devices. Such devices give full access to content and discussions within and outside the classroom. These devices also helped the SISs to keep up with their non-impaired peers in the classroom while also achieving independence and self-efficacy. They were also enabled to live a dignified, productive life and to participate in academic and non-academic initiatives in their institutions. I have observed that VISs use their smartphones not only for communication but also for numerous tasks such as audiobook reading, searching for learning material and audio-recording. Assistive technology devices reduce the need for formal support and the work of caregivers. Although these assistive technology devices are available only in the disability units, libraries should also have such devices as the sources of research and access to information in higher education. Unequipped libraries bring about exclusion and discrimination on many VISs and compromise their studying. It is identified

that the attitude of staff, technophobia⁹ and lack of skills and attitude towards technology use can compromise support and availability of assistive technology in higher education. However, inadequacy and unavailability of assistive technology devices in HEIs compromises the learning, researching, participation and communication of VISs. The old and out-dated devices pose delays for students to access information and to submit their assignments. These setbacks also pose a threat to access quality education which all students, regardless of their socio-economic or disability status, must have.

The support services officers lack the skills to approach the VISs while the lecturers fail to apply teaching methods that accommodate such students. When working with VISs, the support services officials should have several skills and attributes necessary to provide exceptional support. Some attributes include organizational skills, patience, flexibility and adaptability, resourcefulness, problem-solving skills, active listening and empathy. More importantly, the inclusive approach is crucial to the support of VISs. The teaching methods must be inclusive to allow equal participation and access to the same information as their non-disabled peers. The support services officials have a responsibility to ensure that VISs enjoy the privileges and mainstream education setting as sighted students. Due to their learning style and pace, VISs are given extra time to process information and to write their class tests and examinations. Their typed work is modified by the disability officer to enable the lecturers to use it.

Lecturers should consider how they can enrich the teaching process. The VISs need a rich learning environment due to their vision status, they may miss out on visual clues such as colours, shapes, people and landscapes. Lecturers must give a wealth of information and reduce incidental learning. They need to consider using a multi-sensory learning approach in the classrooms. They also fail to consider that spatial and visual concepts need more explanation because VISs can neither see nor understand such concepts. The assistive technological devices used by some lecturers exclude some VISs. Presentations do not utilise audio-visual devices or software to allow participation and inclusion in the classroom. Where lecturers embrace assistive technology appropriately, students can take charge of their learning and increase their self-confidence. Access to information and availability of learning materials for the VISs in the libraries took centre stage during the data collection process.

⁹ Technophobia, also known as techno fear, is the overwhelming fear or dislike of advanced technology. It is most common in older adults and people who are anxious about the future. It causes unreasonable and excessive fear that produces anxiety response leads to avoidance behaviour and creates limits in a person's ability to function in everyday life.

Library services are entitled to provide learning material either electronically or in hard copies for the student community. Students failed to find Braille–books, talking books and articles, large printed materials and electronic texts. Access to information and knowledge has never been more critical than at the present time of information age. A lack of access to essential information is an exclusion from actively participating in education. The VISs have been marginalised by the library services due to a dearth of learning materials and assistive technology devices. The library services take advantage of information communication technologies (ICT) to increase access to information for VISs in basic and HEIs. These include assistive technology devices and software that provide access to information and the internet, allowing VISs equal opportunities as their sighted peers. However, Lesotho's HEIs are not taking advantage of using ICTs to advance equal teaching and learning opportunities for the benefit of VISs. This community of students has been marginalised in higher education and denied access to printed material, audio material and online learning material. This ripped off their right to information, access to quality education and the privilege to suitable support, as it is articulated in local and international human rights frameworks.

Disability services are regarded as the breadth and depth of academic success of VISs in higher education. Although both institutions have not achieved full inclusion of students with disabilities, establishing disability units with determined disability officers show that they are striving to reach that goal. Each institution has a disability officer assigned to support VISs from the first day of their enrolment in the university or college. Their support entails registration and placement in the faculties of their choice, a mobility programme to acclimatise them to the higher education environment and liaison with the student welfare centres toward the allocation of residence rooms on campus. Vision impairment is the dominating disability in both institutions among students with various disabilities. Students with other disabilities such as hearing and physical disability are known and recognised by giving them the support that they need. In the same spirit, institutions allocated one officer to provide advice and guide them on the support required and essential for VISs. The same officers coordinate with the lecturers to transcribe the learning material, class tests or examination scripts into Braille. In HEItwo, while all the nine (n=9) students are writing class tests or examinations, the disability officer has to collect scripts from the lecturers and emboss them into Braille without assistance. It is concerning to realise that each disability officer is in charge of the daily operations of disability units in their institutions. Disability units have limited desktops installed with JAWS and assembled with screen magnifiers. The furniture is old and broken. It poses danger to students as they move in and out of the unit.

The HEI two disability unit has no student toilets, demanding students to walk about seventy metres to use the toilets. Despite the limited and sluggish desktops, VISs still believe in and persist to use the disability unit because of the unwavering support from the disability officers.

Both institutions enrol VISs, classifying them as blind and partially sighted (being short-sighted and long-sighted). Based on their form of vision impairment, it is a fact that their learning needs differ. The needs of the partially sighted students differ from the needs of the blind students. It may be expected that the partially impaired students are provided with magnifiers, enlarged prints and enlarged screens. In the classroom, blind students are supposed to be approached differently from the partially sighted students. However, due to lack of skills on how to approach VISs, it is difficult for the lecturers, the library services and the disability units to provide suitable assistive equipment. In the same manner, blind students need braille keyboards and transcripts, audio-recorded books, learning materials, and talking laptops or desktops with JAWS screen readers. When VISs are admitted and enrolled, both institutions conduct needs assessment and screening to establish the form of vision impairment for each student and the form of support that may be suitable for each student. The approach used by both institutions to support students with vision impairment is one-size-fits-all. This practice means that the learning material, class and examination assessment and lecturing conducted are similar for both partial and blind-sighted students. This implies an imbalance in offering suitable support and responding to the learning needs of students with vision impairment in the HEIs.

7.2. Conclusions

The aim of this study was based on four research objectives as stipulated in chapter one. To recap, this study aimed to explore the experiences of VISs with the support services in HEIs of Lesotho. Although this study sought to address four objectives, this section discusses three objectives of this study. The last part of the discussion presents the recommendations of the study. The conclusion on the influence of the theoretical frameworks of this study is also discussed.

- i) The first objective of this study was to explore the provisions made by the SSS to enhance the academic success of the VISs in HEIs in Lesotho.

To enhance the academic success of VISs, it is concluded that HEIs make provisions for VISs to ensure that they succeed academically. Both institutions offer mobility

and orientation programmes with an effort to familiarise the VISs with the higher education environment. The library services and computer laboratories fail to provide the necessary learning aids and assistive technology devices due to lack of funds and poor planning. The Departments of Student Affairs ensures that the VISs are allocated specific student residences on campus. The two institutions fail to design programmes that may be essential in supporting the VISs in their daily engagement with the various support services within the campus. Moreover, the institutions fail to clarify whether they are using a proactive, interactive or integrated model of student services to support the general student community. Therefore, the study concludes that the two institutions do not have a specific procedure or model to address the academic and non-academic challenges of students with disabilities. Secondly, the VISs have unfavourable experiences because institutions do not conduct the needs assessments survey to establish their academic and non-academic needs. The disability unit has the most favoured and utilised support services by the VISs in both institutions due to the approach of the disability officers and the availability of assistive devices in the units. These devices seem to be critical in enhancing the VISs' academic success. Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that SSS have not made specific provisions based on the individuals' academic needs and aspirations.

- ii) The second of this study was to determine the factors that influence the VISs to make use of the support services in HEIs in Lesotho.

The findings of the study are that several factors influence the VISs to use available support services on their campuses. Each student is unique and his/her needs are also unique. In any higher education environment with a diverse student population there may be individual or group factors that demand one to use support services. The VISs are bound to use disability units because these are the only places on their campuses with assistive technology devices and skilful personnel to assist students. These students use disability units to search for online learning material and to access embossers to transcribe their learning material into Braille. More importantly, desktops have magnifiers for the partially impaired students and the JAWS for blind students. The VISs find it difficult to use the library services because they do not accommodate their learning needs. Libraries do not provide assistive devices, the learning materials or knowledgeable personnel to address the needs of the VISs. This situation suggests that VISs do not have access to the library

services and academic support as the need for every student. The only reason why some male VISs decided to use the health centres are only when they were sick. Some students with four years in HEItwo have not used any health services. The two female students who participated in this study used the health centre several times despite the challenges that they encountered along the process. It is found that VISs do not find the need to use the counselling services since they are enrolled in these institutions. As it oversees the social and welfare of students on the campus, the department of student affairs provides the VISs with the services that they need. They lodge complaints and concerns with the expectation that they will be assisted. The inability of the DSA to address security and safety issues in students' residences brings many unanswered questions to students. The DSA complains about the lack of finance to upgrade security features in this student's residence. Based on the interpretations of the VISs, it is concluded that the security and safety of the VISs is not a priority in HEItwo. All student residences have security officers and fencing except those of the VISs. However, the VISs in HEIone are satisfied with security in their residences because no trespassing or theft has been reported.

- ii) The third objective of this study was to determine the forms of support that are available to the VISs in HEIs in Lesotho.

Experiencing higher education can be devastating for many students despite their socio-economic status, or the faculty that they are enrolled in (Tompsett & Knoester, 2023). For this reason, HEIs have established various support services not only for academic success but also for the social well-being of the student community. The establishment of various support services in HEIs is intended to drive the strategic objective of such institutions. Their role is to partner with students until they complete their journey of higher education with minimal setbacks. Available SSS may be academic and non-academic. Academic support services have a direct impact on the academic success of students. These services include the library, tutorials, computer laboratories and disability services. The non-academic support services entail counselling, student affairs and welfare, health, sports and recreation. However, it is found that there are support services available in both institutions while others are not available. For instance, the counselling, tutorial, student welfare and sports

and recreation services departments are not available in HEIone. In HEItwo the computer laboratory is merged with the Department of Computer Sciences, while the special education needs services are merged with the Department of Education. As these SSS drive the strategic objective of education institutions, it is concluded that the VISs can survive higher education without them. Many students never use the counselling services in HEItwo while those services are not available in HEIone. Although not all the students use the health services, they cannot survive without them because they are an essential part of students' daily survival. The library services address the students' basic learning needs in order for the students to survive in higher education. The study concludes that the VISs are willing to use the library services but learning materials are not accessible and assistive devices do not accommodate their needs. The disability unit is regarded as the main source of academic support for many VISs in both institutions. Disability units are regarded as a castle for the academic concerns, personal guidance, access to the learning aids and material and research for VISs.

7.3. Limitations

This thesis had several methodological limitations which include a) the qualitative vs mixed methods approach, b) the participants and sample size; c) data collection instruments d) the theoretical perspective and e) the related literature. The following discussion focuses on these limitations and their effect on the study.

a) Qualitative vs. Mixed methods

The limitation of this study is that only a qualitative approach was used to conduct this research study. The use of a qualitative approach may make it difficult for a research study to generalise the findings, mainly because of the number of the research participants. Qualitative methods only look at the participants' views and interpretations of their experiences in a particular context. The generalizability of the qualitative study cannot be judged to the extent to which the findings in one study can be generalised to a single study being judged by the similarities such as the participants, time, place and other factors (Leung, 2015).

This study is descriptive and focused on understanding and interpreting the collected data as opposed to quantitative research which uses statistics or numerical findings with the cause-and-effect relationship between the variables. Therefore, the use of a mixed methods

approach may bring a better understanding of the views, interpretations and statistics of VISs in higher education. The overall goal of mixed methods is to provide a deeper understanding by providing a full picture that can describe and understand the phenomenon (Wasti et al., 2022). Mixed method research may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon rather than use only qualitative methods. This implies that by using the mixed methods, the findings may also be based on the numbers and interpretations.

b) Participants and Sample Size

The student participants were all visually impaired. I concede that students with other disabilities could have been included to establish their perceptions and experiences towards the support services. Including students with other disabilities might have given a general picture of the concerns, challenges and success of the homogeneous groups in HEIs. Although qualitative research recommends small sample sizes, the number was too small to generalise the findings that may need to be used by the policymakers. Only nine (n=9) students and thirteen SSS officials participated from two HEIs in Lesotho where there are fifteen (n=15) HEIs. This means that VISs and/or students with other disabilities could be invited from the various institutions which enrolled such students.

c) Data collection

Pretto (2017) disputes that when investigating a phenomenon in disability issues, the problem does not lie in the impairment being investigated but a problem can arise from the approach and instruments used to investigate such a phenomenon. When investigating disability issues, interviews are commonly used to encourage interviewees to talk, describe and interpret the world around them. In that regard, the interviewer listens to how interviewees perceive the world around them. Although an interview guide was used to collect data, semi-structured interviews were used to allow adequate flexibility for the interviewee to make clarifications where necessary. The challenge is that the interview guide can limit the participants in their answers mainly because the interviewer must abide by orderly prepared questions.

The observation guide was also used to observe VISs around their campuses. Although observation can increase the reliability of the gathered data from other research techniques, they also create an intimate relationship and trust with the subjects under study and this may influence the bias of the researcher. As the VISs were observed in their classrooms, my presence may have altered the natural norms and practices of the class. Therefore, observations may inhibit the behaviour of the person being investigated and the researcher

may fail to keep the objective detachment of the scientific research study. The setback of using observation in a qualitative study is that two researchers can observe and have different interpretations of the observed subject. Another limitation is the number of days and students being observed due to time constraints. Observing only two students out of nine may not bring realistic results.

d) Theoretical perspective

This study engaged an Appreciative Inquiry and a Human rights-based approach to explore the experiences of VISs in HEIs. These frameworks were not used to identify or solve problems of VISs in higher education but they were used to find out what can work to enhance the academic success of VISs, what improvements can be made and the best that can be done with the structures that exist in supporting VISs. In addition, HRBA was adopted to emphasise the importance of human rights in education. This study could have used the disability theories to establish the challenges and concerns of VISs in higher education. Such theories may also guide the researcher on the approach and strategies that are appropriate to eliminate the barriers towards the support of the visually impaired.

e) Review of related literature

Writing a literature review in any scientific study is an important step because it helps other researchers determine the scope of current work and research. A literature review is an important element in a research study which allows a researcher to gain and understand the theoretical and empirical debates (Terry and Terry, 2013). When appropriately conducted, Pare, Trudel, Jaana and Kitsiou (2015) concede that reviewed literature must represent information sources for practitioners for the state-of-the-art evidence that can guide them in decision-making and professional practices. A thematic literature review was adopted to structure the literature review of this thesis. The aim of a thematic literature review is to identify and synthesise the main themes and perspectives as explored in the literature (Pagliarussi, 2020). Although a thematic literature review was used in this study, other literature review approaches could have been used to convey the related literature. Thematic literature review is used to identify the status of a particular research domain and highlight the need for further research however it cannot develop a conceptual framework or model like the theoretical review (Pare et al., 2015). Thematic literature review cannot critique and summarize articles and textbooks about a particular topic like a narrative literature review; it cannot correlate patterns of the existing literature review which provides quantified reports in the form of frequency analysis like descriptive literature review (Yang and Tate, 2012).

Consequently thematic literature review brought comprehension and insights that enabled the researcher to identify research gaps, trends and patterns across themes.

7.4. Recommendations

This thesis has several recommendations which emanate from the research findings while others are drawn from administering the support services.

7.4.1. Recommendations from research findings

Every system, all institutions, any department and every individual need upgrading or improvement sometime in their lifetime. Like many other departments in higher education, various support services may need backing to enhance their mandate to improve academic and non-academic support of their students. The VISs and SSS listed several recommendations to improve the support offered to the VISs. The main strategic approach recommended by VISs is the development of a disability policy. The policy is a binding document for institutions and support services officers to provide appropriate support, assistive learning aids and material. The policy guides and informs mainstream support services for students with disabilities. It also guides the management of the institution in addressing the social barriers that exclude students with disabilities. With the disability policy, the rights of students with disabilities are respected, appreciated and embraced in and outside the classroom. Developing a disability policy signifies a commitment of the HEIs to guarantee academic success for the marginalised community. This study concludes that multi-faced barriers and challenges encountered by VISs and the community of disabled students can be eliminated by developing a disability policy. Moreover, the policy may guide the institutions to manage and address the disability issues without discriminating against others because of their impairment.

The findings from the SSS officers stipulate that the officers need training. Training which can capacitate the officers with skills to approach and to support the VISs and enable them to address the barriers in teaching and learning. Training on disability issues can promote awareness, knowledge and practical skills to provide accessibility to the learning material, aids and support for VISs. Training may enable the support services officers to strike a balance in offering support to the student community based on their learning and social needs. This may also eliminate discrimination and any potential claims associated with it. Training may promote diversity and inclusion which may improve the relationships and remove negative attitudes towards students with vision impairment. I also assume that training can bring about awareness, remove the sub-conscious bias towards supporting the

VISs. It can bring an understanding of the issues and challenges that are faced by such students.

7.4.2. Assistive technology devices

Learning in the 21st century cannot be complete and efficient without the use of technology. Research has concluded that VISs are attracted to using new technology (Osiceanu & Popa, 2015) in their everyday lives and in studying. The use of assistive technology promotes functionality in the learning environment towards autonomy, independence, confidence, social inclusion and improved quality of life. The use and access of assistive devices is a main concern for the VISs. The library services and disability units cannot be complete without access to and availability of assistive technology in their infrastructure. Assistive technology can enable the VISs to have the same educational opportunities as their peers with vision impairment. Availability and accessibility of assistive technology includes magnifying equipment, word processors, audio-books, braille note-takers, optical character recognition that involves scanning a printed document into to computer and converting it to text and words, and screen reading the software which uses synthetic speech to read the content aloud as it appears on the screen. The disability unit in collaboration with the ICT department can assist the visually impaired to have the software installed on their laptops. JAWS, WindowsEyes and VoiceOver are some famous software available software that is recommended by students. As indicated in the conclusions section, some support services officials are technophobic. This makes it difficult for institutions to procure and migrate to the full use of assistive technology for the support of VISs. Therefore training for the support services officials is not only essential in understanding disability issues but is also in the use of technology to support the student community.

7.4.3. Administering student support

The findings confirm that the VISs' unique challenges in the higher education environment have an impact on how they are supported and on their academic success. The challenges are not only about the lecturers' attitudes, lack of assistive technology and access to information and learning material but they need full participation in instructional learning enriched with visual content.

7.4.3.1. Planning

Planning should be done by all related departments within the institutions. It entails a needs assessment which is an element of the Integrated Support Services model. Gathering all the

necessary information on academic and non-academic needs and concerns and screening the students to identify the status and intensity of their vision impairment may facilitate integration within the institutions and can enable the coordination of various support services sections to provide wrap-around support. Planning revolves around accommodation and adjustments as well as the form of assistive learning aids and technology devices required. For the classroom environment, planning is essential for safety, free movement around the classroom, the lighting conditions and the sitting arrangement.

7.4.3.2. Student support services model

This study finds that the support services in the two HEIs are not aligned with any model of support. The support services models are an essential part of student support. They draw the support services to be autonomous towards confronting academic and non-academic challenges experienced by the student community. The model of support services provides distinct management, approach and guidelines to address student's concerns. Managing diversity in higher education can be guided by the application of a suitable support services model for higher education environments and the clientele served. I therefore concur that the HEIs must adopt one or a combination of the support services models for easy management of students with disabilities and the student community in general.

7.4.3.3. Disability models

In the quest to manage disability issues in HEIs, disability models are seen as an essential approach and basis to support students with disabilities. Disability models can provide an insight into the attitudes, conceptions and prejudices of the support services officials in higher education and their impact on the community of the disabled students. The disability model can identify the barriers to inclusion and access to the support for students with disabilities. Models reveal the strategies in which institutions provide or limit access to the support services, teaching and learning material and their effect on participation and academic success. In adopting the disability model, lecturers, librarians and the disability officers can curate discussion, learning material and lessons which acknowledge the multi-faceted challenges and experiences of VISs towards the support services in higher education. As HEIs seek to observe equal opportunities for education and access to support services, it will be essential to consider embracing one or multiple models of disability. Although researchers and activists of disability issues tend to favour one model as superior to others, each model has its benefits and potentials since there are no well-established measures of each model.

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Ethical clearance



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

02-Sep-2022

Dear Mr Retselisitsoe Kojana

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

EXPLORING EXPERIENCES OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS ON SUPPORT SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN LESOTHO

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2022/0728/22

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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Interview guide for visually impaired students

When did you become visually impaired?

How did you become visually impaired?

Which assistive or optical device/s do you use

Year of study:

When did you first enrol in this institution?

Programme/ Faculty:

Major subject:

Your residence is on-campus off-campus

Section 1: Experiences of visually impaired students.

- What does disability means?
- What does impairment mean to you?
- Describe what it means to have visual impairment?
- Do you perceive yourself having visual impairment?
- Which student support services do you know in this institution?
- Which support services do you use more often
- Please rate the reception of personnel when you request support from the following?

<i>Support service</i>	<i>Reception</i>			
	excellent	Good	Average	Bad
Library				
Teaching/learning assistance				
Computer lab				
Health /clinic				
Counselling/guidance				
Recreation/sports				
Students accommodation/residence				
Special learning needs/Disability services				
Security and safety				
Financial aid				
Transport/mobility				
Students' residence				
Retail/cafeteria				
Others				

- Were your concerns addressed by respective support services?

Section 2: Impact of support services

- Please classify the form/s of support you received in this institution
 Academic Psychological social
- Were you given guidance when choosing the field you are studying now?
- Are you happy with what you are studying now?
- How does the support you received impact on your academic success?
- How do you move from one place to the other in the campus?
- How did these services respond to your psychological needs to participate effectively in learning? explain
- How did these services respond to your social needs to study effectively? Explain

- h) Do you think your rights were observed or considered when offered support by different support services officials or college community?

Section 3: Reasons for utilising support services

- a) Explain the form of support you requested in the following support services?

<i>Support service</i>	<i>Form of support</i>
Library	
Teaching/learning assistance	
Computer lab	
Health	
Counselling/guidance	
Recreation/sports	
Students accommodation/residence	
Special learning needs/Disability services	
Security and safety	
Financial aid	
Transport/mobility	
Students' residence	
Retail/cafeteria	
Others	

- b) Who advised you to use support services?

Myself	Classmate	Friend	Lecturer	Staff member	Others

- c) Are you given opportunity to express your opinions and thoughts about matters that affect your learning in this institution?
- d) What do you do to ensure that you succeed in your studies?
- e) Are you satisfied with the assistance you received from personnel of support services? explain
- f) What learning aids are provided specifically for you as a visually impaired student
- g) Are there any support services tailor-made for you as a visually impaired student? Explain
- h) Rate the efficiency of support services you used in this institution.

Support service	Excellent	Good	better	Bad
Library				
Teaching/learning				
Computer lab				
Health				
Counselling/guidance				
Recreation/sports				
Student accommodation/residence				
Special learning needs/disability services				
Security/safety				
Financial aid				
Transport/mobility				
Retail/cafeteria				
Others				

Section 4: Strategies to improve support services

- a) Which services do you think need improvement in supporting visually impaired students in this institution?

- b) What is the attitude of fellow students towards you?
- c) How is your interaction with the college community?
- d) Please define your relationship with different lectures

- e) Please relate how you are sited in the classroom

- f) What strategies can be adopted to improve support services for visually impaired students in this institution?
- g) Define your experience about your interaction with different support services in this institution?
- h) Please share your views about support services in your institution

Interview guide for student support services officials

- a) What is the responsibility of your office in this institution?
- b) How long have you been working in this institution?
- c) Please relate the functions of your department/section..
- d) Does the institution have a policy or guidelines that inform disability issues and protection of disabled students?
- e) Which model of disability informs this institution?
- f) How does your department support students with disabilities?
- g) How students with impairment are familiarised about services your department/section offer in this institution?
- h) Does your department have any programs that support students with various learning needs?
- i) Which programs are designed to address the needs of visually impaired students?
- j) What form of support is available to accommodate needs of visually impaired students in this department?
- k) What are the grievances brought to your office by visually impaired students?
- l) What are the barriers to the provision of suitable support for visually impaired students?
- m) How do these barriers impact on your work to support students with visual impairment?
- n) What do you like about visually impaired students?
- o) How does your department observe the rights of visually impaired students to receive support?
- p) What do you find interesting in providing suitable support for visually impaired students?
- q) Based on your experience, are you satisfied with how the institution accommodate the needs of visually impaired students? explain
- r) What can be done to improve support of visually impaired students in you department?

Observation guide

	worse	Bad	Better	Good	Excellent
Sections of support services					
Reception and assistance in the library services					
Teaching/learning approach					
Assistance using electronic devices in the computer lab					
Sitting arrangement in the classroom					
Participation and inclusion in the classroom					
Lecturer's engagement					
Reception and assistance in the health services					
Counselling/guidance services					
Acceptance in recreational/sports activities					
Reception and assistance in special learning needs/disability services					
Student accommodation					
Assistance received from security/safety services					
Financial services availability					
Accessibility of transport/mobility services					
Professional assistance in Retail/cafeteria/print shop					
Others					

Braille consent form

[Faint Braille text, mostly illegible due to low contrast and bleed-through]



Consent letter from HEItwo

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

22nd August, 2022

REF: REG/ADM-1.37
LML/hymf

Mr Retselisitsoe Kojana
P.O. Box 8660
Maseru 100
Lesotho

Kojana_r@yahoo.co.uk

Dear Mr Kojana

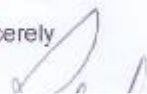
Re: Request to conduct research at the _____

The National University of Lesotho (_____) is in receipt of your application to conduct research at this institution. The title of the **Study is Exploring Experiences of Visually Impaired Students on Support Services on Higher Education Institutions in Lesotho**".

After careful consideration of all relevant facts, the University has agreed to allow you to continue with your research as requested. It is hoped that the research outcome will be beneficial to both the institution of Higher learning and the country at large.

By copy of this letter the _____ staff and students are requested to assist you to carry out your assignment.

Yours sincerely



Cc: Dean Faculty of Education
Head EDF

Proof of language editing letter

The National University of Lesotho
Department of English

Prof. Francina L. Moloi
PO Roma 180
Lesotho
Africa



cell: +26658460369

E-mail: moloifrancina@gmail.com

10 November 2023

P

Dr Kananga R. Mukuna
School of Education Studies
University of the Free State
Bloemfontein
RSA

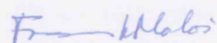
Dear Dr Mukuna,

Re: Language Editing of Retselisitsoe Kitima Kojana's (2015190362) PhD Thesis

I hereby confirm that I have edited **Retselisitsoe Kitima Kojana's PhD Thesis** titled:

EXPERIENCES OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS ON SUPPORT SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN LESOTHO

Sincerely,



Francina L. Moloi (Professor)

Turnitin Report

Kojana

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