AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INHIBITING THE ACCESS OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE FREE STATE

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Mamello Patience, to whom I owe the leaping delight that quickens my senses in our waking time and the rhythm that governs our everyday lives. Who thinks the same thoughts without need of speech, and babbles the same speech without need of meaning. You provided consistent support; the kind of support and stimulation that is not easily found during such an intellectual peregrination.

Secondly, a very special dedication to our son Omolemo. This is an acknowledgement of God's sovereignty not only over the child, but also over my wife and myself. The adventure is only beginning, as is testified in Scripture:

> "…for you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well. My frame wasn't hidden from you, when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them" Psalm 139:13-16.

> "…before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" Jeremiah 1:5.

My sincerest thanks go to my parents – my father, Modumedisi George Lloyd, and my mother, Mamoimang Mary, have always believed in me, offering their encouragement and support.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CARS	Creating Accessible Resources
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DEETYA	Department of Employment, Education, Training, and Youth Affairs
DoE	Department of Education
FAI	Free Attitude Interview
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee (of the CHE)
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training
NCESS	National Committee on Education Support Services
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NKR	Nasionale Kwalifikasieraamwerk
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBE	Outcomes-based education
PHE	Participation in Higher Education
RSERC	Report of the Special Education Review Committee
SAKO	Suid-Afrikaanse Kwalifikasieowerheid
SAQA	South Africa Qualification Authority
SEN	Special educational needs
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
TODA	Textual oriented discourse analysis
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

ABSTRACT

The major focus of this study is an investigation into how higher education institutions in the Free State Province could enhance access of students with special educational needs. In order to make a systematic and scientific research analysis, the thesis seeks to examine practices that inform higher education, and how students with special educational needs make sense of their experiences concerning higher education.

The purpose of the research is therefore to explore the factors that inhibit access to higher education institutions (HEIs) for the SEN students in the Free State region. Equally important, the challenges facing higher education institutions are investigated, drawing on evidence of the policy framework, i.e. the Bill of Rights (1996); the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996); the South African Qualification Authority (1995); the National Qualification Framework (2002), the Education Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (Notice 1196 of 1996); and Education White Paper No 6: Special Needs Education; Building an Inclusive and Training System (2001). These policies will be examined and the researcher identifies, defines and looks for causality and the manifestation of students with SEN in HEIs in order to propose ways for South Africa to initiate a public policy that will encourage understanding among policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in order that they might reflect upon these challenges.

Equally important, interest in inclusive education has grown substantially in the last decade in South Africa as a new paradigm in the education sector has occurred whereby the Ministry of Education has to introduce an inclusive education system at school level [see DoE Education White Paper No 6 (2001)]. However, universities do not seem to be fully geared for SEN students.

Access to higher education is used interchangeably with the concept inclusive education in this thesis because the researcher of this particular study understands them to basically mean and refer to the same process. Equally important, these concepts are central to this investigation. It is vital to provide a more in-depth and clear discussion thereof. In doing so, this thesis indicates why these concepts are so essential as well as central to this study.

Furthermore, this research interrogates different literature sources on inclusive education. The review of challenges and possibilities for broadening access to

education with focused view on (i) curriculum; (ii) assessment to promote access; (iii) access and fair chances to higher education. These are some of the issues that will be interrogated in this study. A close scrutiny and critical interrogation and/or review of possible barriers that could inhibit access to higher education for SEN students will be undertaken.

This thesis presents and interprets data from seemingly contradicting approaches, namely positivistic; critical emancipatory and textual orientated discourse analysis (TODA). Thus implying the data collection techniques includes qualitative and quantitative methods, such as the use of questionnaires, open-ended questions using the free attitude interview (FAI) technique. The reason for this thesis to adopt the triangulation model are mutual validation of results on the basis of different methods and to assist the research to obtain a more in-depth or a complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation and produce a sound explanation.

Equally important this thesis reflects on findings. It also draws various conclusions which lead to recommendations that could be followed up. These reflections are viewed against the backdrop of a situation that is unfolding in South Africa, a country that is beginning to shed some of the vestiges of the past. But contrary to popular belief, forces retarding progress towards aspired inclusivity and accessibility or democracy as well as a lack of "utopia" seem to have merely disguised themselves rather than actually retreating in shame.

Based on the data collected and analysed it seems sound that the services provided by HEIs in the Free State serve certain section of the population of students. However, departments, units, administrators and SEN students alike believe that there are numerous administrative and other issues that must be addressed to provide equal services to all.

Lastly, suggestions and recommendations that are important for the purpose of access to be realised in HEIs by students with SEN are made. This could enable future relevant research based on the theory generated in this study. The purpose of the thesis is to empower SEN students, rather than blowing the deficiencies or challenges out of proportion. The study aims to destroy the reproduction of the status quo of segregation, inequalities, exclusion and marginalisation of SEN students in HEIs.

Access to equal higher education provision will be discussed and defined through various discourses. In fact, the understanding of SEN students and access to higher education remains a social construction. Access to higher education provision has to do with how marginalised and excluded SEN students understand the barriers and what they think could be done to overcome them and what they as equal human beings feel and aspire to become.

The discourse raised challenges such as oppression, exclusion or marginalisation of students with SEN. HEIs should avoid ignoring the existence of SEN students at all costs. The vision and frame of reference of these institutions should always be conscious of those they are serving in the broad spectrum.

Research in this area could be understood as playing a role in the process of the emancipation of marginalised SEN students. Inevitably, the thesis can therefore only be judged emancipatory after SEN students themselves have made their voices heard. This study can be viewed as a forum of amplification for the voices of those who are marginalised or excluded from mainstream university culture. It might also be engaged as a tool for those who are seeking emancipation for themselves.

OPSOMMING

Die fokus van hierdie studie val op die wyse waarop hoër onderwysinstellings in die Vrystaat meer toeganklik gemaak kan word vir studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes. Om 'n sistematiese en wetenskaplike navorsingsontleding te maak, beoog die proefskrif 'n ondersoek na praktyke wat hoër onderwys beïnvloed, asook hoe studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes sin maak van hul onderwyservarings.

Die doel van die navorsing is dus om faktore te ondersoek wat toegang tot hoër onderwysinstellings in die Vrystaat bemoeilik vir leerders met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes. Die proefskrif ondersoek verder die uitdagings wat deur hoër onderwysinstellings in die gesig gestaar word en verwys na beleidsraamwerke soos die Handves vir Menseregte, 1996; die Grondwet van die RSA, 1996; die Suid-Afrikaanse Kwalifikasieowerheid (SAKO) en die Nasionale Kwalifikasieraamwerk (NKR). Hierdie raamwerke is ondersoek en die navorser poog om 'n oorsaaklike verband tesame met die uitdagings wat studente met spesiale behoeftes aan hoër onderwys instellings ervaar te identifiseer, te definieer en te ondersoek, om sodoende voorstelle aan die hand te doen sodat Suid-Afrika 'n openbare beleid kan inisieer wat begrip sal kweek by beleidmakers, praktisyns en navorsers om hierdie uitdagings aan te spreek.

Dit is voorts van ewe veel belang om daarop te let dat inklusiewe onderwys gedurende die laaste dekade in Suid-Afrika beduidend gegroei het tot 'n nuwe paradigma in die onderwyssektor, met die instelling van inklusiewe onderwys op skoolvlak deur die Departement van Onderwys (sien Witskrif op Onderwys No 6, 2001). Dit wil egter voorkom asof universiteite nog nie ten volle ingerig is om te voorsien in die behoeftes van studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes nie.

Toegang tot hoër onderwys word afwisselend met die konsep inklusiewe onderrig gebruik in die proefskrif, aangesien die navorser meen dat beide na basies dieselfde proses verwys. Hierdie konsepte staan ook sentraal in die studie. Dit is noodsaaklik dat 'n diepgaande en toeligtende bespreking daarvan hier verskaf word. In die proses word voorts ook aangedui waarom hierdie konsepte so belangrik beskou word en sentraal tot die studie staan.

Die navorsing sal verder ook verskeie literatuurbronne oor inklusiewe onderrig aanhaal. Die oorsig van die uitdagings en moontlikhede om toegang tot hoër onderwys te verbeter, fokus op: (i) kurrikulum; (ii) waardebepaling om toegang te bevorder; (iii) toegang en billike kanse vir hoër onderwys. Hierdie is slegs 'n paar van die kwessies wat in die studie toegelig word. 'n Noukeurige ondersoek en kritiese bevraagtekening en/of oorsig sal onderneem word van moontlike faktore wat toegang tot hoër onderwys kan verhinder vir studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes.

Data uit benaderings wat mekaar op die oog af weerspreek, naamlik positivistiese, krities-emansipatoriese, en tekstueel-georiënteerde diskoersanalise, word ontleed en bespreek. Dit impliseer dat die data ingesamel is met behulp van beide kwalitatiewe en kwantitatiewe metodes, soos vraelyste, oop vrae en die vryehouding-onderhoudstegniek. Die rede waarom die tesis 'n triangulasiemodel gebruik, is sodat die geldigheid van resultate gebaseer kan word op die gebruik van verskillende metodes en om die navorser te help om 'n geheelbeeld van die fenomeen wat ondersoek word, te verkry en dit afdoende te verduidelik.

Resultate asook gevolgtrekkings wat lei tot aanbevelings word bespreek. Hierdie bespreking beskou word teen die agtergrond van die huidige situasie in Suid-Afrika. Daar bestaan egter steeds faktore wat die proses van inklusiewe onderwys vertraag.

Die tesis oorweeg vervolgens 'n aantal bevindinge. Daar word gekyk na verskillende gevolgtrekkings gepaard met aanbevelings wat opgevolg kan word. Hierdie nabetragting geskied teen die agtergrond van 'n situasie wat besig is om te ontplooi in Suid-Afrika, 'n land wat sommige van die nalatenskappe van die verlede begin agterlaat. Anders as wat egter algemeen geglo wil word, wil dit voorkom of die magte wat vordering in die rigting van die ideaal van inklusiwiteit en toeganklikheid belemmer, sowel as die gebrek aan 'n "utopie", hulself bloot versteek het, eerder as om in skaamte die aftog te blaas.

Gebaseer op die data wat ingewin en ontleed is, blyk dit dat die dienste van hoër onderwysinstellings in die Vrystaat 'n sekere seksie van die studentepopulasie bedien. Departemente of eenhede, administrateurs en studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes is egter van mening dat 'n verskeidenheid administratiewe en ander kwessies aangespreek behoort te word om sodoende gelyke dienste aan almal te verskaf.

Ten slotte word voorstelle en aanbevelings gemaak wat van belang is vir die doel van toeganklike onderwys vir studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes. Verdere toepaslike navorsing kan voortspruit uit hierdie voorstelle. Die doel van die proefskrif is om studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes te bemagtig, eerder as om die tekortkominge of uitdagings uit verband te ruk. Die doel van die studie is om die status quo van segregasie, ongelykhede, uitsluiting en marginalisering van studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes by hoër onderwysinstellings uit die weg te ruim.

Die tesis beklemtoon gelyke voorsiening van hoër onderwys. Toegang tot hoër onderwys het te doen met hoe die student met spesiale behoeftes die hindernisse begryp, en hulle sieninge oor hoe om hierdie hindernisse te oorkom.

Die diskoers wat deur die tesis onder die loep geneem word, sluit die verdrukking, uitsluiting of marginalisering van studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes in. Hoër onderwysinstellings moet tot elke prys vermy dat die bestaan van studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes ontken word. Die visie en verwysingsraamwerk van hierdie instellings moet altyd diegene wat hulle oor 'n breë spektrum bedien, in gedagte hou.

Om navorsing op hierdie gebied te doen, kan gesien word as om 'n rol te speel in die emansipasie van gemarginaliseerde studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes. Die tesis kan dus eers as bevrydend beskou word wanneer studente met spesiale onderwysbehoeftes self ook hul stemme laat hoor. Die studie kan dus slegs dien as 'n forum wat die stemme versterk van hulle wat gemarginaliseer of van die hoofstroom van die universiteitskultuur uitgesluit is. Dit kan ook gebruik word as 'n werktuig vir hulle wat emansipasie vir hulself najaag.

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND

One of the most urgent challenges facing education today is the need to increase access to institutions of learning. The new legislation on Special Educational Needs and Disability Act and the policy document (RSA DoE 2001) on special needs education supports have been passed by parliament and the Department of Education respectively. This strengthens the right of learners with SEN to attend mainstream educational institutions. It places new anti-discrimination duties on bodies responsible for education, including higher education institutions (HEIs) such as colleges, universities of technology, universities and providers of adult basic education. The legislation highlights the challenges and changes that institutions of learning now need to be aware of in providing for learners with special needs and/or disabilities.

Some of the challenges facing institutions of learning are:

- A duty on HEIs providers not to treat SEN students less favourably, without justification, than non-disabled students.

- A challenge to HEIs to make reasonable adjustments to arrangements so that students with SEN are not put at a substantial disadvantage.

- A challenge to HEIs to begin to plan strategically and progress in increasing accessibility to institutions of learning (such as making physical alterations to buildings or the curriculum); and to information provided in writing to non-disabled students.

This aligns with the current practices (RSA DoE, 1997) at HEIs and considers whether all students can access some of the things an able person could consider to being obvious and simple, such as a web site or prospectus. Are HEIs' admission policies and procedures, rules, regulations or disciplinary procedures accessible to all students, including those who are blind or deaf or those with learning difficulties?

The study further aims to investigate whether HEIs have considered ways of improving the delivery to students with SEN (within reason taking into account their challenges and preferences expressed) in terms of the information that is provided to other students who are able. The major thrust of the thesis is to find out whether any

information provided to prospective students and current registered students is also accessible to SEN students. For example, could visually-impaired students access information on Braille or on tape, if it is their preferred medium?

The study aims to interrogate the crux of the SEN students within and outside these HEIs and to check as to whether reasonable steps are taken to ensure that:

- The arrangements these institutions make for determining admissions do not place SEN students at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to students who are not challenged, and
- Student's services in broad terms (i.e. lecturing, library services) are provided for, or offered to SEN students to guarantee that they are not placed at a substantial disadvantage.

The democratic dispensation in this country with its new policies and legislation on higher education in South Africa, has also placed emphasis on addressing the injustices of the past in the institutions of learning. The government has put a particular emphasis or commitment on increasing access to higher education for previously disadvantaged students; this category of disadvantaged includes the SEN students (RSA DoE, 1997). It has also been recognised that changes are needed with regard to the way in which HEIs are structured and functioning, in order to accommodate and meet the needs of SEN students of a diverse student population.

An investigation of this nature is necessary to find out how students with SEN access HEIs, how accessible these institutions are and what role the support system could play. The investigation also aims at extending the available knowledge regarding the nature of current effort to include SEN students at South African institutions of higher learning, together with the interpretation of applicable new national policy and legislation with regard to higher education and the inclusion of SEN students.

1.2   PROBLEM STATEMENT

The major purpose of the study is to investigate factors that inhibit access to HEIs in the Free State Province for students with SEN. For the purposes of this thesis, the problem manifests itself in the following postulated sequence:

- It is apparent there is a relative and/or significant misrepresentation of students with SEN at HEIs;
- Academic and support staff allegedly overlook the experiences of students with SEN;

- Lack of policies that support students with SEN;
- Lack of supporting technological devices in institutions of higher learning that could support students with SEN;
- Physical facilities that are inaccessible to many disabled students, especially those who have physical challenges;
- A curriculum that does not comply with the needs of students with SEN; and
- Negative attitudes towards their differences that result in discrimination and prejudice by the higher education society.

In order to be able to make a systematic and scientific analysis of factors that inhibit access to HEIs for students with SEN, this thesis investigates those factors mentioned above as well as other related factors.

An attempt was made to determine how students with SEN understand factors that seem to separate them from the mainstream society in HEIs, and furthermore, to analyse students' experiences in the face of academics who seem too abstracted and dissociated from the experiences of students with SEN.

1.3   CONTEXT OF PROBLEM

To address the factors that inhibit access to higher education for students with SEN, it was regarded as important to look closely into those factors that might inhibit access (i.e. physical facilities; curriculum approaches; assessment strategies; policy issues; and attitudinal problems). However, as these factors are broad, multiple and fluid in nature, the focus has been narrowed to those factors that students with SEN themselves view as more central. Such a focus scrutinises the ways HEIs have developed for meeting and addressing factors that inhibit access to students with SEN, for the following reasons:

- Equity in any institution of learning in this country is desirable, as it is a pillar of the constitution; and
- Promoting accessibility to higher education for SEN students should be made a priority at the HEIs.

The starting point for argument is that students with SEN are crossing boundaries imposed on them by others (i.e. through attitudes, institutional policies that do not favour them, a physical environment that is inaccessible, teaching and learning

material that is unfriendly). Finally, academics, support staff and institutional policies and practices sometimes impede access to equal education provision. This emerges from clashes of discourse. Access should be understood in this thesis as an ethical process for all.

This study seeks to define equal access to education provision as an approach to addressing the learning needs of all students, with a specific focus on those marginalised SEN students. Equal access to education is understood as responding to diversity by listening to unfamiliar voices and celebrating "difference" in a dignified way. Furthermore, the thesis adopts the sociological model of deconstructivism, by asking questions about differences between students labelled as having SEN, and seeks to find what is hidden and disguised by HEIs of learning in dealing with SEN students (Clough, 1998).

The answer to these questions will depend more on the values, beliefs and interests of those making the judgement than on any qualities intrinsic to the students with SEN themselves. The study gives priority to SEN students and it studies factors that have been identified as those inhibiting access to higher education.

1.4   RELATING THIS RESEARCH TO CURRENT RESEARCH THEORIES

The research is correlated with other theories such as post-structuralism and postmodernism, which view SEN as non-essentialist. Feminist theories are also concerned about such exclusion of SEN students, irrespective of gender, and their lack of participation in HEIs. Lastly, like the post-colonialists, the thesis is interested in the empowerment of SEN students who have been excluded from full participation in HEIs, because of unjust policies and practices that continue to limit these students. Overlooking the experiences of SEN students is tantamount to oppression, exploitation, marginalisation and relegation. This thesis operationalises Foucault's theory of discourse analysis which defines access as a dynamic process which is ever changing and never complete, and whereby the meaning of access is "inconclusive" and narrates the trip towards a state of settled uncertainty (Foucault, 1979).

1.5   PURPOSE OF STUDY

The major problem addressed in this research is to investigate how HEIs in the Free State could enhance access of students with SEN. In order to make a systematic and scientific research analysis, practices and policies that inform higher education have

been examined, together with an analysis of the views of the students with SEN. To concretise this reflection, the study investigates how students with SEN make sense of their experiences concerning higher education.

Moreover, the thesis explores the dynamics that impede access to higher education for students with SEN. The research problem will also inform this study by demonstrating how these dynamics can direct HEIs. Furthermore, it will a set of guiding principles that will merge the academic access and ethical dimensions of students with SEN; so providing a platform from which to foster access to HEIs for SEN students.

The objective is therefore to explore the factors that inhibit access to HEIs for students with SEN in the Free State region. Equally important, the study will investigate the challenges facing HEIs and draw upon evidence of the policy framework, i.e. the Bill of Rights; the Constitution; the White and the Green Papers on Education; the White and the Green Papers on Special Education; the White and the Green Papers on Higher Education; the Council on Higher Education (CHE); the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA); the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC); higher education managers and/or officials; and special education learners. These policies are examined and the researcher identifies, defines, and seeks causality and the manifestation of students with SEN. Subsequently, recommendations are made for South Africa to initiate public policy that could encourage understanding among policy-makers, practitioners and researchers so that they might reflect upon these challenges.

Interest in inclusive education has grown substantially in the last century in South Africa, since the Department of Education has introduced the Inclusive Education system at school level (RSA DoE, 2001). However, universities are not yet geared for this type of student.

There is also an increasing interest in investigating inclusivity at the level of higher education. Researchers on inclusive education in the higher education sector are not only confined to academic debates about theoretical or abstract issues such as ethics and human rights. It has now become clear that HEIs will witness significant changes in their practices: "... inclusion will certainly happen increasingly over the first part of the new century... The desegregationist and anti-discriminatory political

environment is now international and it seems impossible that its direction will be reversed' (Thomas, 1997:48).

In addition, this study investigates and analyses accessibility to higher education for students with SEN with a view to proposing options for the higher education sector in the Free State. Factors that inhibit access to higher education by students with SEN will be defined and identified, while strategic ways of coping with these factors will also be proposed. In order to achieve this, the following objectives should be met:

1. Investigating the theoretical framework using the policy documents identified above (see Chapter 1, subsection 1.5).

2. Making an analysis of the trends and options in the higher education with regard to access for students with SEN (i.e. individuals who are physically challenged, blind, or hearing-impaired) in Southern Africa (see Chapters 4 and 5).

3. Providing a profile of students with SEN in South African higher education with a particular emphasis on those in the Free State (see Chapter 4 subsection 4.4.2).

4. Proposing a strategic plan for the regional HEIs in the Free State to deal effectively with the needs of SEN students, or to create a new concept for higher education in relation to students with SEN (see Chapter 6, subsection 6.4).

5. To elicit the experiences of enrolled students with SEN and those who are not enrolled due to a non-accommodating institutional environment (see Chapter 5, subsection 5.2.1 and 5.2.2)

This study also endeavours to lay the foundations for further research that can be used in the formulation of an alternative policy, which could   assist HEIs in addressing factors that inhibit access to students with SEN. This policy should be seen as a modification and an adaptation of existing policies, where emphasis will be placed on the needs of students with such challenges.

Lastly, it aims to demonstrate the assumption that students with SEN do not have a place in institutions of higher learning. The study would therefore endeavour to make suggestions as to how HEIs can make themselves more accessible and how they can make provision for students with SEN.

1.6 STATEMENT OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The major focus of the thesis is to analyse factors that inhibit access to HEIs in the Free State Province. According to the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training/National Committee on Educational Support Service Report (RSA DoE, 1997), barriers can be located within students, within the centre of learning, within the education system and within the broader social, economic and political context. It is argued that these barriers manifest themselves in different ways and only become obvious when the excluded (i.e. SEN students) become more marginalised.

1.7 FOCUS OF STUDY

The focus is on how HEIs have developed in meeting and addressing factors that inhibit access for students with SEN (i.e. individual students who are physically challenged, those who are blind or partially blind, who are hearing-impaired, etc.) due to the following reasons:

Firstly, equity in any educational institution is desirable, as it is a pillar-stone of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution (1996). Secondly, promoting accessibility to HEIs for students with SEN should be made a priority in the higher education sector.

1.8 JUSTIFYING THIS FOCUS

It is necessary for this study to focus on analysing factors that may contribute to exclusion and reviewing such barriers to learning and development. Inequalities in society, lack of access to basic services, and poverty are some of the factors which place students at risk of being marginalised and excluded. In South Africa, inequalities resulting from colonialism, which was crystallised in apartheid and economic deprivation, have had a great impact on the education system, and especially on those SEN students who face barriers to learning.

1.9 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions inform and guide the study for researcher to be able to realise the objectives and goals of the investigation:

- What are the factors that inhibit access to HEIs in the Free State Province?

- Are there any barriers located within students, the institutional domain and the broader community domain?

- Do students with SEN value and benefit from the institutional policy and practice of HEIs?

- Are the HEIs reactive or pro-active in their handling of students with SEN?

- Is the policy of HEIs committed to the learning needs of students with SEN?

- What are students' experiences (i.e. the problems they face and/or stumbling blocks when enrolled in HEIs)?

- To what extent are efforts made in the HEIs in the Free State region to raise levels of special education/inclusive education awareness?

On the departmental level and/or faculty levels (i.e. Deans, Head of Departments, academics and Ministry of Education) research questions that inform this study are:

- What provision is made or what strategic thinking exists on national level (i.e. Department of Education and Council on Higher Education)?

- Which policies address the SEN students' needs (i.e. individuals who are physically challenged, blind, or hearing-impaired)?

- How responsive are the HEIs to the needs of SEN students in the Free State?

1.10 ASSUMPTION

The main assumption in this study seeks to ascertain whether or not students with SEN are marginalised, relegated or excluded from accessing HEIs. The assumption in this thesis is that there are some factors that inhibit SEN student's access to HEIs (HEIs).

1.11 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focuses on finding out what the various theories and previous findings reveal with regard to the research questions raised here. One of the subsections of the literature review, the theoretical framework, analyses the theories which inform this study's framework so as to respond to the research questions,

while the related literature subsection will look at the most recent findings concerning the identified questions.

1.11.1 Theoretical framework

The thesis is informed by the theoretical underpinnings of post-structuralism (linked to the work of the French philosophers Foucault and Derrida); post-colonial theory and postmodernism (which draw from the work of Lyotard and the sociologist Baudrillard) (Barton, 1997).

Arguments and narrations are drawn from the interpretation generated by dominant and counter-hegemonic discourses, and offering theoretical openings for educational research and policy development. In the study, a sample of the key informants and textual forms are included. The texts include policy documents excerpts, dialogues with key informants and the researcher's voice. These texts are used to construct an argument that is open to possibilities and opportunities to negotiate meaning and power, truth and politics, and addressing the needs of SEN students who are marginalised. The use of the textual oriented discourse analysis method is an attempt to interact with standpoint, difference and situated knowledge through the research process, thereby understanding SEN, inclusive and exclusive education as multiple, dynamic, fluid, ever-changing and contradictory and beyond the single "detective story" of the essentialist (Glough, 1998) of the medical, psychological and charity- based discourses.

The focus is not on making judgements as to which theoretical underpinnings may be morally superior or preferable, but rather to show different ways of seeing the broad picture. This could influence the detail of practices and provision of education at HEIs in South Africa. It is not only the interpretation of what access means that is contentious in this study, but there are also diverse and conflicting debates in which these different approaches are seen and understood to be detrimental to the effective development of SEN students (Ballard, 1995).

Access or inclusion is understood by operationalising Foucault's theory of discourse analysis. Access should be understood and interpreted as a dynamic or fluid process, which is never complete, but always in a state of motion. This contrasts with the positivistic paradigm which defines access as a static or frozen process that often

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presents access as being done to certain individuals. Inclusivity as a means of education in this study should be understood as "inconclusive" and narrates the trip, thus meaning stumbling blocks rather than the more apparent rational and coherent journey towards a state of settled uncertainty.

Foucault (1977) promised a way into understanding disability and access through discourses. The starting point is the social model of disability, whereby disability and access are socially constructed and these processes are revealed in what people say and write (both formally and informally) about them. Students with SEN are crossing boundaries imposed on them by others (i.e. through attitudes, institutional practices and policies) and are actively seeking access.

1.11.2 Theoretical framework and construction of inclusive education

A theoretical framework has been adopted that views inclusive education as a contestation of marginalisation or exclusion, which is posing a serious threat to any community in the world. The problem facing the world order today is the growing number of persons who are excluded or marginalised from meaningful participation in the educational, economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities.

Secondly the study theorises that inclusive education should be understood as an approach that seeks to address the needs of SEN students, both youth and adult, with specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. Inclusive education in this study means that institutions should accommodate students, regardless of their physical, social, emotional, learning difficulties, linguistic or other conditions.

Inclusive education should also be understood as a human rights issue as pronounced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949. Equally important is the right not to be discriminated against. A logical consequence of this right is that all learners have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on grounds of disability, ethnicity, language, gender, capabilities, and so on.

Furthermore, the thesis recognises the broad concept of inclusive education as universalising access and promoting equity, broadening the means and scope of education, enhancing the environment for learning, and focusing on teaching and learning that is more inclusive in nature.

1.11.3 Justification of theoretical framework used in study

In focusing on students with SEN, Jones (1996) discusses three prevailing theoretical frameworks for understanding SEN or disability. These are the functional limitations framework (i.e. the medical model), the minority group paradigm or what she calls "the socially constructive" (i.e. social) model. She further argues that to view SEN, as a social construction is to think inclusively. This acknowledges the power exerted over environmental, structural and cultural definitions of disabilities or SEN.

The latter model represents a sociological phenomenon where disability is rooted firmly in the social and environmental situations that segregate or restrict behaviour. It redresses the balance of responsibility, asserting that social policy must dismantle pervasive physical and psychological barriers. SEN is certainly a most personal experience, but in locating the "problem" of special needs within the individual, society denies any social responsibility in catering for the diversity of its members (Dalley, 1991). By accepting students with SEN as part of human diversity, the problem then becomes one of society itself.

Oliver (1996) observed that this paradigm shift is associated with those who have made the definition; that is, from those who do not themselves experience disability, to those who do and who thereby define disability as: "…a social creation, and a problem created by institutions, organisations and processes that constitutes society in its totality" (Oliver, 1996:65).

Legislative measures have done little to address fundamental issues highlighted by these definitions, most especially in South African HEIs. The biggest hurdle has been convincing policy makers that discrimination exists and that students with SEN have been less protected than other groups in the higher education sector. A major concern that informs this study is that policy concerning SEN is often one element of a broader policy on equal opportunities, wherein lies the risk that SEN issues will be submerged within broader disadvantaged or marginalised groups

1.11.4 Theoretical framework and positionality

The theoretical framework informing this study sees inclusion or access operationalising Foucault's theory of discourse analysis, meaning that access or inclusion is never complete, but is always in the process of evolving. This contrasts with the static picture that is often presented of inclusion or access as being done to certain individuals (the so-called disadvantaged groups). Foucault's "box of tools"

(1977:208) promised a way into understanding disability or SEN and access through discourses. The starting point is the social model of disability, which is that disability is socially constructed and these processes are revealed in what people say and write about SEN students.

For this thesis, the relevance of theoretical framework is seen as archaeology and genealogy. These are two of Foucault's methodologies of studying power and knowledge as related to SEN or disabilities. He gave individuals considerable scope to resist the power exercised upon them (Foucault, 1977).

Two positions are therefore: one reflects the dominant discourse of marginalisation and exclusion, while the other reflects counter-hegemonic discourse, the emanicipatory ideology of inclusion and the right to education that does not discriminate on grounds of disability.

The dominant discourse is made up of discourse that sees individuals who are challenged as being somehow "in deficit" and in turn assumes a need for "special" education for those individuals.

Counter-hegemonic discourse, on the other hand, reflects a discourse that contests the marginalisation and exclusion of students with SEN. The counter-discourse broadly represents the critique of the dominant or hegemonic discourse, and draws attention to a social construction of disability and/or SEN. Duncan (1993) uniquely captures this when he says that the dominant discourses "seldom reign without some challenge from the dominated" (cf. Mahlomaholo, 1998:19). This discourse finds what is hidden, disguised by the dominant discourse, and the structure and language inherited from earlier psychologically biased trends.

1.11.5 Implications of positionality in theoretical framework

The framework informing this study interrogates the two discourses or positions and shows how disability or SEN are also one of the tools in the box to fit in the first or second position. SEN is fluid, implying that it can be located within the dominant discourse by operationalising the psycho-medical legacy which sees individuals as being somehow in deficit and assumes that they need to be excluded from the mainstream society (Foucault, 1977).

The other side of the discourse is that the social model deconstructs the psychological model by asking questions about construction of deficit or differences

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of SEN students who are labelled as different from the rest. This theoretical positioning argues that exclusion is characterised as a mechanism for differentiating between students and allocating some categories that have stigmatised and would cripple SEN students, making them dependent and powerless.

1.11.6 Similarities between positioning

The framework discussed above could be related to the framework informing some studies by feminist and other marginalised groups who are striving for emancipation. These groups of people wish to demystify perceptions that are created about them even though these perceptions are sometimes put in a covert manner on the basis of disability, sex, gender, race, culture, creed, class and rurality. According to Alcoff (cf. Mahlomaholo, 1998), investigating the gender issues and wearing the feminist post-structuralism lenses, these could be argued strongly along the same lines as outlined above. Feminists deconstruct the notion of "woman". They see woman as *a fiction* created by misogyny to oppress and downgrade some section of humanity. This discourse strongly opposes the views of cultural feminism as it sees the latter's essentialism falling into the trap of misogyny and sexism which emphasise the "subjugated differences within a binary position: man/woman, culture, positive/negative, analytic/intuitive" (Mahlomaholo, 1998: 94).

Post-structural feminism is actually arguing that to see women as different from men is disempowering on the part of women because this justifies their second-class status in society where they are described as the fairer and weaker sex, capable only of the emotional and not intellectual, being feminine, soft and caring and not being capable of rigorous, competent and assertive conduct. The post-structural feminist regards the solution to this being to refuse to even think of the category "woman", a non-category that cannot be defined or pinned down. Feminists should avoid using the concept woman. In practice this would mean women should compete against men in those activities that have been assigned to men, thus implying that women should not see themselves as different but as the same as all other people.

In essence, this is what the framework states – how one understands oneself so that one may be empowered or disempowered. Such an approach implies that the students with SEN need re-theorising as argued by post-structural feminism. This positioning maintains that it is correct to deconstruct and de-essentialise the category or psycho-medical model as a universal model or understanding of SEN. However, this positionality of discourse sees it as problematic to refuse to acknowledge the

existences of SEN or disability because, whether rightly or wrongly, special needs students do exist. Not recognising the existence of this discourse is awkward because SEN students would not have a space or platform to stand on, from which to advocate better status and conditions for themselves (Glough, 1998).

Alcoff (cf. Mahlomaholo, 1998) argues that to recognise the existence of women as a category enables supporters and advocates of women's rights to talk about women's lack of certain rights and privileges and also talk about people who are expected to shoulder certain responsibilities, sometimes irrationally and unfairly. Alcoff (cf. Mahlomaholo, 1998) says that, for feminists to refuse to define "woman", would prove in the end to be counter-productive because men will continue to define themselves as superior, ignore women's plight and elevate themselves and their interests at the expense of women.

Therefore, the theoretical positioning that this thesis adopts is that to discuss SEN students, it is necessary to acknowledge that these students constitute a role, a space and a position in discursive practices. Students with SEN are like anybody else; the challenges that some SEN students face are not inherent or inborn, but are a result of social construction, and these challenges are revealed in what people have said and written about them.

1.12 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design and methodology employed in this study is informed by post-structural theories, which help to understand the phenomenon under discussion as fluid and dynamic.

1.12.1 Methodological (dis)position

Method or *methodology* is not used as narrated or used by essentialism or positivism: narrating of method is an orderly way to achieve (objective) knowledge or the absolute truth. Rather, this study goes along with Harding (1987) that method is the way of proceeding whereas methodology is the theory of knowledge and interpretative framework guiding a particular investigation.

The study is broadly informed by post-structural theories and narrates post-structuralism as a response to structuralism. Structuralism is constructed as the search for deep, stable, universal structures, regulated by laws, underlying any phenomenon (Miller, 1997). Cherryholmes (1988) argues that structuralist discourse

seeks rationality, linearity, progress and control by discovering, developing, and inventing meta-narratives that define rationality, linearity, progress and control by discovering. Post-structuralist discourse is sceptical and incredulous about the possibility of such meta-narratives. The post-structuralist contention is that a meta-narrative is just another narrative.

Within the post-structuralist interpretative framework, the thesis employs deconstruction as a strategy (method) for interpreting and analysing data. Derrida (1998) points out that deconstruction is not destruction because of the latter's associations with annihilation or a negative reduction. The author of this study uses the lenses of Appignanesi and Garratt (1994:79-80) who view deconstruction as particularly useful. They assert:

> "…This is deconstruction – to peel away like an onion the layers of constructed meanings. Deconstruction is a strategy for revealing the under-layers of meanings in a text that were suppressed or assumed in order for it to take its actual form – in particular the assumptions of presence (the hidden representations of guaranteed certainty). Texts are never simply unitary but include resources that run counter to their assertions and/or their author's intentions."

One of the things deconstruction does is to look at how dominant discourses couch themselves in terms of binary opposites. Lather (1991) describes a *formula* for deconstruction of this kind:

- Identify the binaries in the argument.

- Reverse/displace the dependent term from its negative position to a place that locates it as the very condition of the term.

- Transcend the binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither of the binary terms.

1.12.2 Deconstructive reading strategies

Gough (2000) states that deconstructive reading strategies include:

- Pressing the literal meanings of a metaphor until it yields unintended meanings.

- Looking for contradictions.

- Identifying gaps.

- Setting silences to speak.

- Focusing on ambiguous words or syntax.

- Demonstrating that different meanings can be produced by different readings.

- Reversing the terms of a binary pair and subverting the hierarchies.

Therefore, one would draw on some of these strategies to deconstruct the dominant discourses levelled against SEN students at higher education and create a space for the opponent of counter-hegemonic discourses.

1.12.3 Justifying the integration of quantitative and qualitative strategies

The study presents and interprets data from seemingly contradicting approaches, namely positivistic, critical emancipatory and textual orientated discourse analysis. The data collection techniques include qualitative and quantitative methods, such as the use of questionnaires, and open-ended questions using the Free Attitude Interview (FAI) technique.

The motivation for adopting a model of triangulation is that a mutual validation of results on the basis of different methods assists the researcher in obtaining a more in-depth or complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation and producing a sound explanation. Triangulation in its original trigonometrical sense, gives an indication that a combination of methods is necessary in order to gain any, but not necessarily a fuller, picture of the relevant phenomenon at play (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

Integration of qualitative and quantitative methods is seen as a means of increasing scope, depth and consistency in the methodological proceedings rather than contestation. The main reason for triangulation is to produce a more complete picture of the investigated phenomena and to produce sound explanations.

1.12.4 Quantitative strategies as Stage One

1.12.4.1   Sampling

Out of the two (2) Free State HEIs, three campuses were chosen. The intention was to have at least ten (10) students selected from each satellite campus (i.e.

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10x3=N30). Apart from students with SEN who were currently enrolled, another fifteen (15) were added from the non-governmental organisations dealing with disabled people (i.e. N=15). This gives a total of N=45 prospective, thus meaning N30 is enrolled and N=15 is prospective students selected from NGOs. Five (5) management personnel include the divisional heads and deans of the faculties from each campus (i.e. 5x3=15). The other five (5) officials working in the offices of students with disabilities (5x3=N15) and at least fifteen (15) academic staff members were selected randomly from different departments on each campus (15x3=N45). This brings the total population to one hundred and twenty (120) participants. The discourse analytical approach that this thesis has adopted, however, does not place much emphasis on numbers.

1.12.4.2   Data collection techniques

The data collection approach was a direct interaction with individuals on a one-to-one basis. The benefit of this approach is the richness of the data and a deeper insight into the phenomenon being studied. Students with SEN could be marginalised and voiceless and placed on the periphery of society. The approach enables the plight of those viewed as thrown in the dustbins of society to be heard directly. Questionnaires were not only to the students with SEN, but also those working with them directly, thus all categories listed in the sample description.

1.12.4.3   Questionnaires

Two different types of questionnaires were used. The first targeted academics and other supporting staff including the management (i.e. deans of faculties) and the other focused solely on students with SEN. For academics, management and support staff the Creating Accessible Resources (CARS) instrument was administered and this instrument was designed to investigate whether academics and other support staff understood the learning support needs of SEN students, and to find out how supporting technology was, whether specialist human support facilities for the teaching and learning of SEN students was in place and to check the effective inclusive teaching strategies employed for the SEN students.

This instrument seems to be relevant and scientific to this study, because questions used in this instrument are:

1. How experienced are you at teaching/working with SEN students?

2. How knowledgeable are you about teaching and learning support needs of SEN students?

3. Have you received general disability awareness training?

The responses present a snapshot of opinion and experience that is reliable, valid and representative. The instrument managed to show the lack and some limitations among academic and support staff. It was also able to measure the skills needed to teach and support SEN students effectively in an inclusive manner.

The second questionnaire was the Participation in Higher Education (PHE) instrument designed to investigate the participation of students in HEIs. Its application has been as diverse as determining the inclusivity and exclusivity of students with SEN. This instrument measured the participation of students with disabilities in HEIs. The questions represent dimensions of the increase of the level in campus climate, programme philosophy, awareness and support, academic adjustment, tutorial support and inclusion or exclusion of SEN students at HEIs.

1.12.4.4 Administration of quantitative instruments

All the above-mentioned positivistic instruments were issued to the respective participants (i.e. academics, support staff, management, enrolled students and external students) to respond to the questionnaires. As an indicator of factors that inhibit students with special education needs at HEIs, the researcher asked all students participants, academics and support staff, including the management team that participated in this study, to answer the appropriate questions by circling or a Likert scale choosing the block that best suited them (i.e. not satisfied, somewhat/ reasonably satisfied, very satisfied and not applicable) (see Appendixes A and B). The administration of the instrument provided data to ascertain the collective perspective of the students and all participants on a variety of disability-related "students affairs" (i.e. inclusivity and exclusivity). Furthermore, issues and their level of satisfaction with the services provided by the higher education institution in the Free State Province, academics and HEIs administration/management.

1.12.5 Qualitative strategies as stage two

1.12.5.1 Sampling

At the two (2) Free State HEIs, only 15 interviews were conducted with the population of 120 participants in the study, across different campuses that

participated. The discourse analytical approach that was adopted does not place much emphasis on numbers, as indicated previously.

The choice of the Free State as location was based on economic factors, and rather than sacrificing depth, this study also focuses on breadth. The Free State as a Province is made up of five (5) University campuses (i.e. three campuses of the University of the Free State, namely the UFS main campus, the former Bloemfontein Vista University and the former University of the North Qwaqwa campus) and the two satellite campuses of the Central University of Technology (i.e. the Bloemfontein main campus [former Free State Technikon] and the former Welkom Vista University campus). The target population in this study was students with SEN who had enrolled, together with prospective students at these campuses and the officials dealing directly with students' matters such as registration.

1.12.5.2 Interviews

Each of the groups (i.e. students with SEN, managers or heads of departments and support staff on different campuses of higher education in the Free State) were interviewed by using the FAI technique, also described as non-directive. To contextualise the interview technique as a qualitative research technique, the researcher attempted to relate to the phenomena in reality and the approach was oriented towards an insider's perspective, thus meaning the research design was open and flexible.

Open-ended questions were used which focused on the research questions underpinning the study. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then analysed in order to check for similarities and differences.

The research study therefore investigated policy documents, interrogated students with educational needs through the interview processes, as well as those of managers and/or officials of higher education. It was found that there was a lack of consistency in the practice and understanding of inclusive education at HEIs in South Africa. In addition, there seems to be a lack of empirical data in support of inclusive education in HEIs in South Africa. There is also a lack of practical evidence that can provide answers to HEIs, stakeholders and students who have SEN.

1.12.5.3 Analysis and interpretation

Fairclough's (1992) discourse analytic procedures were used to analyse all the transcripts, with the focus on the text of what the respondents said. This was interpreted in context, leading the researcher to the findings. Thus, similarities and differences in meaning were observed and noted. Finally the results were interpreted parallel with the results of the reviewed literature study, checking them against the background of gaps that exist in the area of study and/or knowledge.

The text of policy documents, as well as the views of students with SEN and the managers and officials in higher education were subjected to Fairclough's (1992) and Duncan's (1993) textually-orientated discourse analysis (TODA). As will become clear, this strategy comes from the tradition of a qualitative critical approach [see Habermas (1987) and Held (1983)] which has emancipation of the researched as its basic cognitive interest. This strategy is not about positivism quantification, external validity, objectification, prediction, the formulation of universal laws, or the establishment of causal relations. On the contrary, TODA focuses on what people say (in this research study, it was the views of students with SEN, policy documentations and the views of managers of higher education) and this text was used as evidence to substantiate the readings or interpretations of the study.

It is equally important to clarify the choice of research paradigm. The researcher does not believe in quantifying human experiences. Human experiences are dynamic and cannot be treated as if they were objects in a natural science laboratory (Harvey, 1990). Human beings should be studied through human methodologies that respected and enhance their subjectiveness.

Moreover, critical approaches restore the quality of subjectiveness to the researched as they are allowed to speak on their own behalf. Lastly, this investigation is aiming at empowerment of the researcher and the researched (i.e. students with SEN), hence the use of the critical approach.

1.13 RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

The research findings and conclusions explore the challenges of inclusive education in higher education. The findings have been reached by drawing upon the evidence and experiences of students with SEN and managers of higher education, in order to lay the foundation for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers at institutional and national level to propose a framework for South Africans with SEN. The researcher argues that if inclusive education is to find a place in South African HEIs, more

attention needs to be paid to those factors that inhibit access to higher education by students with SEN.

Finally, additional reasons may be advanced as to why this study can be considered important. These are:

- Students with SEN who have been marginalised throughout the history of South African HEIs have been allowed to speak, give their own interpretations and explanations of why they, for example, have been excluded from the mainstream education system (see Chapter 5, subsection 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

- This approach can be seen as emancipatory, unlike in the past where the actions and experiences of students with SEN were described from the outside. It will empower these students, who have been given an opportunity to intensively reflect upon themselves and factors that inhibit access to higher education (see Chapter 3, subsection 3.5 and Chapter 5, subsection 5.1).

- This study lays the basis for further research that can be conducted towards assisting students with SEN. Moreover, addressing the factors that might contribute to inhibiting and/or excluding students with SEN to access HEIs. These factors may also not be "foreign" but may be based on the experiences of students with SEN and officials in the HEIs (see chapter 6, subsection 6.5).

- Lastly, this research seeks to put together a more relevant framework and methodology for understanding issues and factors that inhibit access to higher education by SEN students in post-apartheid South Africa, where exclusion, segregation, and discrimination are not as overt as they used to be and where equality, inclusion and empowerment means much more (see Chapter 6, subsection 6.4).

1.14 DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

To fully understand the implications of the central concerns of the thesis, which focuses on SEN, inclusive education or access and higher education, it is essential to give clear and succinct operational definitions of these key concepts, which are used throughout the thesis.

1.14.1 SEN

The term "SEN" has a legal definition. Learners with SEN all have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn or access education. These learners may need extra or different help from that given to other children of the same age (Tessier and Klien, 1992).

Students or learners with SEN may need extra help because of a range of needs, such as in thinking and understanding, physical or sensory difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, or difficulties with speech and language or how they relate to and behave with other people (Rouse and Florian, 1996).

Many students will have SEN of some kind at some time during their education. Institutions of learning and other organisations can help most learners overcome their difficulties quickly and easily. But a few students will need extra help for some or all of their time in institutions of learning.

SEN could therefore mean that a student has difficulties with:

- Reading, writing, number work or understanding information

- Expressing themselves or understanding what others are saying

- Making friends or relating to others

- Behaving properly

- Organising themselves

- Sensory or physical needs which may affect them in institutions of learning (Lewis and Doorlag, 1995).

According to the American Heritage Dictionary (2004) special education is a learning environment or private instruction that involves techniques, exercises, and subject matter designed for students whose learning needs cannot be met by a standard institutional curriculum.

Special needs could also be couched in or related to disability and according to the UK Disability Discrimination Act (1995): "A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or neurological impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities." Physical or

neurological impairments can include sensory impairments and learning difficulties. The definition also covers medical conditions when they have long-term and substantial effects on students' everyday lives.

The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (RSERC, 1993) states in its definition of learners with SEN that they include all "those whose disabilities and/or circumstances prevent or hinder them from benefiting adequately from the education which is normally provided for learners of the same age, or for whom the education which can generally be provided in the ordinary classroom is not sufficiently challenging." (RSERC, 1993:18). The Report describes particular categories of learners with SEN, including learners with a mental handicap; emotional and behavioural disorders; physical and sensory disabilities; specific learning disabilities; specific speech and language disorders; and autism.

In the thesis, what is constructed as the special needs discourse is the picture portrayed of people with disabilities and/or special needs, as defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary 10th edition as particular educational requirements resulting from learning difficulties, physical disability, or emotional and behavioural difficulties (Pearsall, 1999). This implies that the particular educational requirements are treatments or interventions related to labels of difficulty and disability applied through a process of assessment and diagnosis. It is therefore argued that special needs education is the medical discourse dressed in words other than pathology, disorder or disability.

Clough, quoted by Bèlanger (2000), differentiates *disability* and *special needs,* describing the latter not as the expression of an individual's ability, but as a result of his or her interaction with a particular curriculum. This thesis argues that it is nevertheless a discourse that constructs exclusion within inclusion and proposes the medical model practices of assessment, labelling and intervention. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (1997), for example, speak of an inclusive system in which appropriate facilities, resources and *specialised help*, where needed, will be available in the mainstream and the curriculum will be flexible enough to accommodate *special needs*.

1.14.2 Inclusive education

Access to higher education is used interchangeably with the concept *inclusive education*, because the author could see the link and meaning between the two concepts. A single definition of inclusive education for incorporation in this study

would not be adequate, as it may not accurately reflect what the concept entails. Consequently, the scope of inclusive education is explored, rather than offering a watertight definition.

Inclusive education is understood to refer to that position in which students with SEN are situated in a space because they were previously disadvantaged or subjugated to marginalisation, exclusion and relegation. That position, because of the history and experiences that these students have had and continue to experience, cannot be denied, because it has to define who SEN students are. It is through inclusive education that their position, rights, privileges and interests can or should be argued, advocated and struggled for (Foucault, 1979).

Inclusive education is also the outcome of attempting to provide for all students, including those with disabilities, in regular educational institutions. Inclusion implies providing for all students within the educational programme. The emphasis is on how institutions of learning can change to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Integration is the process of introducing students with disabilities into regular educational institutions, away from a setting in which they have previously been excluded. Integration implies that students that have been excluded can be introduced into mainstream institutions. The emphasis is on how the student can fit into the existing mainstream educational institution structure (Barton, 1997).

Many definitions of inclusive education have evolved throughout the world. It ranges from "extending the scope of regular educational institutions so that they can include a greater diversity of learners" (Clark, 1995) to a "set of principles, which ensures that the students with a disability are viewed as valued and needed members of the community in every respect" (Uditsky, 1993). Some definitions focus on human interaction. Forest and Pearpoint (1997) see inclusion as a way of dealing with difference, while Ballard (1995); Clark (1995); and Rouse and Florian (1996) adopt an institutional perspective and focus on organisational arrangements and improvement.

The following two South African definitions of inclusive education are the perspectives of the reference committees and consultative bodies who were commissioned to investigate the future of special education. Inclusive education is defined as a learning environment that promotes the full personal, academic and professional development of all learners irrespective of race, class, gender, disability, religion, culture, sexual preference, learning styles and language (RSA DoE, 1997).

According to the Education White Paper No6, on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (RSA DoE, 2001:19), inclusive education is about:

- Acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support.

- Accepting and respecting that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equally valued and an ordinary part of our human experience.

- Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners.

- Acknowledging and respecting differences in learners whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, and disability or HIV status.

- Changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula and the environment to meet the needs of all learners.

- Maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curricula of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning.

- Empowering learners by developing their individual strengths and enabling them to participate critically in the process of learning.

- Acknowledging that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal modes and structures.

The inclusion of learners with special education needs or learning barriers into mainstream classes is part of a universal human rights movement. It has therefore become imperative for all countries to create "equal opportunities for all learners to learn and succeed" (RSA DoE, 2001:25). Inclusive education addresses the educational needs of all learners in a non-threatening, supportive learning environment, including learners who were formerly disadvantaged and excluded from education because of "barriers to learning".

At the heart of any higher education institution is the learning site community, comprising various stakeholders, namely, learners, educators and support staff. Stakeholders bring to the community their unique characteristics, skills and

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knowledge, as well as beliefs and values based on their cultures. They interact and participate within the context of the common task of teaching and learning. Inclusive education is the framework that aims at ensuring that all stakeholders can participate in a meaningful way in this common task, contribute in different ways, and be valued and respected as equal members of the community of the educational institution (RSA DoE, 2001:48.) As a catalyst for change, inclusive education provides not only for institutional improvement, but also for an increased awareness of human rights and a reduction in discrimination. Essentially, inclusive education involves changes in attitudes, behaviour and ways of working, and has the potential to make an effective starting point to address the rights of learners in a range of cultures and contexts.

1.14.3 Higher education

There is no simple definition of higher education. The international definition of tertiary (post school) education divides it into two halves: Type A (in this study referred to as higher education/university level) and Type B (further education training (FET) in South Africa). A higher education qualification at degree level takes a minimum of three years to complete, more typically four. It will have a theoretical underpinning, it will be at a level which would qualify someone to work in a professional field, and it will usually be taught in an environment which also includes an advanced research activity. Higher education has traditionally been founded for tripartite main "missions", vis. learning and teaching, research and community outreach (American Heritage Dictionary, 2004).

Higher education benefits everyone, not just those who go to university. Engineers, doctors, scientists, teachers, dentists, librarians, pharmacists, many business leaders and many musicians, writers and artists learnt their trade in higher education. None of us could manage without them. Higher education is an essential engine of any economy in the world, providing high-skill graduates, offering training, research and development for industry, and inventing new products and processes which can create new markets for the country's industry. Higher education is also essential to the culture of any country, offering a seedbed and a shop window for many of those who will become the creative voices of their country's future, providing a space for people to think about and discuss culture, promoting artistic achievements around the world and safeguarding the heritage of the country for future generations (American Heritage Dictionary, 2004).

Higher education is central to making South Africa a better place, informing public policy, breaking down inequality by offering a high-quality education for all, producing a generation of informed South Africans and creating an essential forum in which to discuss the social, political, environmental and economic health of South Africa (SAQA, 1995).

Widening access is also a mission of higher education. Education is the single most important factor in deciding whether a person is going to suffer poverty, and higher education is committed to ensuring that everyone has an equal chance of getting a degree, based on personal ability and not social background or income. Universities run a wide range of programmes to make sure that those who might have missed out on higher education because of their family background have the opportunity to attend university (Badat, 2003).

Higher education in South Africa and the particular higher education system was inherited: from apartheid South Africa. It was deeply divided internally and isolated from the international community of scholars. It was highly fragmented in structural and governance terms and was far from being a coherent and co-ordinated system. It was inherently inequitable, differentiated along the lines of "race" and ethnicity, and designed "to reproduce … white and male privilege and black and female subordination in all spheres of society" (Badat, 2003). Accordingly Africans, as the largest South African demographic group, had the lowest participation rate in higher education. While a number of HEIs demonstrated their own strengths and made effective educational contributions, the effectiveness of higher education could not be assessed as a whole but could only be related to the designated purposes of HEIs, whether defined by racial classification or by separate institutional functions. Institutional purposes were linked neither to the needs of the broader society nor to consistent conceptions of quality. The efficiency of the higher education system was compromised by duplications, and its sustainability was declining, as public higher education funding struggled to keep pace with growing enrolments (Badat, 2003).

The effects of a disjointed system were intensely felt at institutional level. HEIs themselves willy-nilly became implicated in perpetuating the apartheid system of privilege and penalty, of opportunity and stricture, of advantage and disadvantage. Their resources, and hence their capabilities, capacities and outcomes, were related to the social stratification of apartheid.

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In sum, the legacy of the past was a fractured system and a set of HEIs bearing the scars of their origins. As South Africa entered a process of social, economic and political reconstruction in 1994, it was clear that mere reform of certain aspects of higher education would not suffice to meet the challenges of a democratic country aiming to take its place in the world. Rather, a comprehensive transformation of higher education was required, marking a fundamental departure from the socio-political foundations of the previous regime.

Notwithstanding the considerable flux that has understandably characterised higher education because of a comprehensive transformation process and myriad policy initiatives, South African higher education in 2004 possesses considerable strengths. It also displays many positive departures from the legacy inherited in 1994, and these can be linked to the goals set out in the Education Green Paper on higher education (RSA DoE, 1996) and National Plan White Paper (RSA MoE, 2001). It is to be hoped that these achievements will become enduring features of the higher education landscape, even as key actors will have to continue to address persistent and new challenges. In some cases, there are initiatives and processes that are still unfolding. It is too early to declare their outcomes a success (or failure), and they will require careful monitoring.

Foundations have been laid for a single, co-ordinated and differentiated system of higher education encompassing universities, universities of technology (technikons), comprehensive institutions and various kinds of colleges. Progress has been effected through the development of a national higher education plan, benchmarks for higher education transformation, and the establishment of a planning dialogue between the Department of Education (DoE) and HEIs; through the implementation of restructuring strategies encompassing programme level rationalisation and co-operation, especially at regional level, and the reconfiguration of the institutional landscape; and through the implementation of common governance arrangements across the public higher education system. Progress has been limited by delays in the finalisation of a new academic policy and delays in decision-making following the review of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The impact and outcomes of institutional restructuring, which could yield unanticipated and contrary effects, require close monitoring (RSA DoE, 1996).

According to the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (RSA DoE, 1996), higher education has several related purposes:

- To meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes. Higher education equips individuals to make the best use of their talents and of the opportunities offered by society for self-fulfilment. Higher education is thus a key allocator of life chances.

- Higher education provides the labour market, in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy. It teaches and trains people to fulfil specialised social functions, enter the learned professions, or pursue vocations in administration, trade, industry and the arts.

- Higher education is responsible for the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citisens. Citisenship of this nature presupposes a commitment to the common good, but it also implies a reflective capacity and a willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas, policies and practices.

- Higher education is directly engaged in the creation, transmission and evaluation of knowledge. Its purpose is to ensure the continued pursuit of academic scholarship and intellectual inquiry in all fields of human understanding, through research and teaching.

1.15 STRUCTURE OF THESIS

This report of this thesis is divided into six major parts. The first part is mainly theoretical (Chapters 1-2). The second part (Chapter 3) discusses the methodologies employed to gather and analyse data. The third part (Chapters 4-5) analyses, discusses and interprets data and results in the context of Chapters 1-2. The last part (Chapter 6) concludes the research by way of restating the hypotheses, emphasising the major findings, clarifying some, making recommendations and suggestions on areas for possible future research.

Chapter One

- Chapter One provides an overview of the whole study: the emphasis is on the background and context of the problem. In discussing this aspect, the chapter

shows the factors that might play a role in inhibiting access to higher education for students with SEN.

- The statement of the problem is discussed next, focusing on the purpose of the research, its focus, justification and definitions of operational key concepts.

- The review of related research or findings is conducted to show the disciplines from which the study emerges. Among others, the theoretical framework informing the study is discussed,showing how it is based on the literature review. Major points from the literature that form the framework in this study are discussed. Justification for the use of the theoretical framework is then found by referring to issues such as positionality, its implications in the framework and how it is theorised.

- The research design and methodologies employed to gather and analyse data at two stages are discussed.

- The assumption is stated.

- The relative importance of the research highlighted.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two defines and discusses theories and policy documents related to special needs education and different categories of disabilities, as these are specifically central to the study. In the discussion, theories informing the framework are highlighted, together with inclusive education as a challenge for HEIs to respond to the teaching and learning needs of all learners.

Chapter Three

The research design and methodologies employed to gather and analyse data are discussed,including the stages of the research. The first stage discusses the operationalisation of quantitative research strategies, while the second discusses qualitative strategies. Reasons for using an integrated approach are also advanced, highlighting the strong points and limitations of both. The discussion includes the identification of the instruments and samples used in each stage, as well as procedures for analysis. Reasons for choosing the identified instruments as well as the nature thereof are discussed.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four presents, analyses, discusses and interprets the quantitative data gathered through the two instruments employed. Creating Accessible Resources for Disabled Students is an instrument that focused on academics and support staff. The second instrument used was Participation in Higher Education with focus on SEN students. This was administered to students with SEN. An indication is given as to how instruments were used and data gathered. The conclusions which are drawn based on statistical findings are those of the academics, support staff and SEN students themselves.

Chapter Five

In Chapter Five qualitative data is presented, analysed, discussed and interpreted. Data was collected through open-ended interviews using the TODA. The actual words and conversations (text) of the sampled participants constituted evidence to the conclusions drawn about them. At every stage of analysis, conclusions and interpretations are made which are related to the concepts developed in Chapters One and Two.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six restates the hypotheses and shows how findings in Chapters Four and Five confirm these hypotheses. Conclusions covering the whole study are made and recommendations for an inclusive and emanicipatory education are discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research are made. All these are within the emancipatory pedagogy for people who have experienced and continue to experience marginalisation and exclusion.

1.16 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Chapter One has exposed the background and context that gave rise to this thesis. The correlation is explored between the key operational concepts, namely *inclusive education* or *access.* The two concepts are understood to refer to and mean one and the same thing in the context of this study. Special needs education and higher education have been defined and highlighted.

The other salient point discussed in the chapter was the theoretical discourses alongside each other, thus meaning the dominant discourses and philosophies on

one hand, and the counter-hegemonic on the other. The two positions are shown to be among many others from which marginalisation and/or exclusion is understood. Succinct discussion on how post-structuralism or feminist theories and post-colonial theories have also been used to show the relevance of this study.

Equally important, this chapter has discussed the problem that constitutes the concerns and purpose of the thesis. The theoretical framework within which the thesis is conducted has been discussed and justified. A brief literature review in which this research is emerging is succinctly described. The research design and methodology, which show how the study was conducted, are also elaborated upon. Research questions and hypotheses are also stated including the relative importance of this study. Chapter Two presents a discussion of the theoretical basis informing the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: ACCESS TO EDUCATION

2.1   INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the factors that inhibit access to higher education by learners with SEN. "Access" to higher education is used interchangeably with the concept "inclusive education" because they are understood to mean and refer to the same process. Because these concepts are central, it is important to provide here a more in-depth and clear definition and discussion thereof. In doing so, this section of the study will indicate why these concepts are so essential and central to the research study. It will then be shown why and how "access" and inclusive education" to higher education are understood to refer to the same process in this study.

The other important aspect of the discussion of "access" and/or "inclusive education" to higher education will be to relate to and interrogate the South African policy documents with the aim of showing how the policy documents define these concepts. The purpose will be to show how the essential policy documents [for example, the Bill of Rights (RSA Constitution, 1996); the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996); the White and Green Papers on higher education (RSA DoE, 1996 and 2001); the National Commission on Special Needs in Education (NCSNET) and National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) (RSA DoE, 1997)] define these concepts.

Related literature on theories of inclusive education (i.e. psycho-medical legacy; sociological critique; and curriculum approaches) will be reviewed. The review of the challenges and possibilities for broadening access to education focuses on: (i) curriculum; (ii) assessment to promote access; (iii) academic performance in broadening access in education provision; and (iv) access and fair chances in higher education. The literature on possible barriers that could inhibit access to higher education for SEN students is discussed and includes: (i) curriculum planning for SEN students with a special focus on hearing impairments, visual impairments, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, speech and language disorders, and emotional and behavioural disorders (ii) the funding formula; (iii) inequalities in society/socio-economic barriers (e.g. lack of access to basic services and poverty and/or underdevelopment); (iv) attitudes; and (v) physical structures/environment.

2.2   DEFINING ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The study does not attempt to make judgments as to which definition may be morally superior or preferable, but rather to show how different ways of seeing "the broad picture" will influence the detail of practices and provision of education at HEIs in South Africa. It is not only the interpretation of what access means that is contentious, but there are diverse and conflicting debates in which these different approaches are seen as detrimental to the effective development of this area.

This research study will try to understand access and inclusion, operationalising Foucault's theory of discourse analysis. Thus the meaning of access is never complete, but always in process, which contrasts with the static picture that is often presented of access being imposed on certain individuals. Inclusive education in this study should rather be understood as "inconclusive" and narrates the trip (meaning stumbling blocks rather than the more apparently rational and coherent journey) towards a state of settled uncertainty.

The Foucault "box of tools" (1977, p.208) provides a way into understanding disability and access through discourses. The starting point is the social model of disability, namely that disability and access was socially constructed and that these processes are revealed in what people say and write (both formally and informally) about people with disabilities.

The relevance of archaeology and genealogy methodologies (which are two of Foucault's methodologies for studying power and knowledge) to SEN   will be reviewed. Foucault's phase of ethics, in which he gave individuals considerable scope to resist the power exercised over them, will also be reviewed.

This exercise is particularly exciting because of three phenomena, which emerge from the literature review of inclusion/access and SEN. The first is that students with SEN are crossing boundaries imposed on them by others (i.e. through attitudes, institutional policies, etc.) and are actively seeking access. Other able mainstreamed students are operating a kind of mini-governmental regime, which is supportive of equal access to education provision. Finally, the teachers and institutional practices and policies sometimes impede access to equal education provision, but this seems to arise from clashes between teachers' professional discourses of need and students' discourses of desires and seems to be open to resolution. The stance of Foucault gives an optimistic position about the process of broadening "access"

and/or inclusion, and an account of equal access as an ethical process for all of us (i.e. students with SEN, mainstream students, teachers, institutions of learning, parents and researchers) (Foucault, 1977).

The view that this study subscribes to is the one that maintains that the process of equal access to higher education for SEN students is definitely not envisaged as one of closure, but of creating openings and of sustaining access in process. Initially SEN was perceived as an individual problem. It then came to be seen as a social construction. Finally, it is beginning to be perceived as an asocial creation. Largely due to the growing power of disabled people, the definition of SEN as a social creation is now gradually being accepted as the most appropriate one. The succeeding subsections will elicit various definitions of the concept inclusion/inclusive education from different paradigms and/or schools of thoughts (Barton, 1997).

2.2.1 Access and diversity

Equal access to education provision as an approach seeks to address the learning needs of all students with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. The principle of education for all was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and was restated at the Dakar World Education Forum (2000). Education for all means:

> "…institutions of learning should accommodate all learners regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted learners, street and working learners, learners from remote or nomadic populations, learners from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and learners from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups." (UNESCO, 1994:3).

According to Barton (1997, p.234) (cf. Clough, 1998, p.5), amongst others, equal access education for all is about responding to diversity:

> "…it is about listening to unfamiliar voices, being open, empowering all members and about celebrating 'difference' in dignified ways. From this perspective, the goal is not to leave anyone out of education system. Inclusive experience is about learning to live with one another…it is about how, where, and why, and with what consequences, we educate all learners… [and] involves a serious

commitment to the task of identifying, challenging and contributing to the removal of injustices".

From the above definition by Barton, it becomes clear that "equal access to education provision" is a process. Education for all is not merely about providing access into the mainstream for learners who have previously been excluded. It is not about closing down an unacceptable system of segregated provision and dumping those learners in an unchanged mainstream system. Existing education institutions – in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles and leadership role – will have to change. This is because inclusive education is about the participation of all learners and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice.

2.2.2   Access and human rights

At the core of inclusive education is the human right to education, pronounced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949. Equally important is the right of learners not to be discriminated against, as stated in Article 2 of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Parallel to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the South African Constitution, Chapter Two: [the Bill of Rights Section 7. (1)], (RSA Constitution, 1996), which states that: "… it is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirm the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom"; and Section 9. (4), which states that: "… no person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone in terms of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, age, disability**,** religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth."

A logical consequence of this right is that all learners have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on the grounds of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities, and so on. This is further pronounced in the South African Constitution, [Chapter Two: (Section 29. (1)](RSA Constitution, 1996), which grants that:

> "…everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible".

The argument being developed is that inclusive education should be seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through

increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education (Booth, 1996). Equally important, it involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision, which cater for all learners.

Access to education is concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in formal educational settings. Rather than being a marginal theme on how some learners can be integrated in the mainstream education, inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform the education system in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims to enable both learners and academics to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment, rather than as a problem.

After mapping the above definitions of "equal educational access", (Wang & Zollers, 1990; Porter & Richler, 1991; Rioux, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; and Lipsky & Gatner, 1997) further define inclusion as an educational program wherein students with SEN learn alongside their age-appropriate peers in a mainstream educational setting with appropriate aids and services. This definition of inclusive education is important for the study because disagreements amongst scholars and practitioners over the characteristics of an inclusive educational model have complicated the meaning of inclusion, in some instances lowering the so-called "standards" implied by the above definition.

According to the White Paper No. 6 (RSA DoE, 2001: 16) inclusive education and training is:

> "…about acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support…accepting and respecting the fact that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equally valued and ordinary part of our human experience…about enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners, …acknowledge and respect differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability or HIV status,…acknowledge that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal modes and structures,…about changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula and the environment to meet the needs of all

learners,…about maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curricula of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning, and about empowering learners by developing their individual strengths and enabling them to participate critically in the process of learning".

According to the White Paper No. 6 (RSA DoE, 2001) it becomes clear that students with SEN, like other students, have a fundamental, constitutionally protected interest in education. Moreover, inclusive education will be organised in such a way that it can serve the needs of all learners at various levels. It is a legal responsibility of the institutions of learning to treat students with SEN the same as anyone else, without reservations. The institutions of higher learning should facilitate access to an environment for these students to achieve academic and social integration.

2.3   THEORIES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: DISCOURSES

The study identifies and explores a number of authors whose texts have been in different ways and at different times significant in the development of inclusive educational practices. These authors' work was interrogated in relation to "key perspectives", a loose framework for analysis developed from reading of the "Access", "Special", "Integrative" and "Inclusive" literature and, more important, from other influences that hitherto have been regarded as "mainstream" developments.

The review of literature leads to the identification of major perspectives:

(i)   ***Psycho-medical legacy –*** understood as the system of broadly medicalised ideas which essentially saw individuals as being somehow "in deficit" and in turn assumed a need for a "special" education for those individuals;

(ii)   ***Sociological response –*** this position broadly represents the critique of "psycho-medical legacy", and draws attention to a social construction of SEN; and

(iii)   ***Curricular approaches –*** which emphasise the role of curriculum in both meeting and effectively creating learning difficulties (Cough and Corbert, 2000).

However, these perspectives are never wholly exclusive of each other, nor are they strictly chronologically sequential. The literature review is intended to demonstrate three things:

- Historical influences which shape inclusive education and practices;

- Heterogeneity of inclusive ideology; and

- The ways in which researchers' ideas change and develop over a period of time.

The suggestion is not that these positions are mutually exclusive; indeed, although there is something distinct about each perspective, it will become clear that each one maps on to the others in certain respects.

2.3.1 The psycho-medical discourse

The terms "psychological" or "medical" discourse suggest both conformity of definition and an early identifiable use and practice. However, in reality, there is no such orthodoxy in either term and they have little meaning unless understood alongside the "social" or other model, which provides a critique of them. The medical model in the context of learning difficulties is to point to practices that call on pathology (i.e. the science of diseases). These are some features prevalent in the medical model. Its focus is on sickness; aetiology of the problem; subject-specific pathology-specific treatment; reactive measures *rather than* health; experience of the individual; environmental factors; holistic support; and preventative measures (Cough and Corbert, 2000).

It is evident with the understanding of a psycho-medical model that special education owes its origins and its shortcomings to the development of a pathology of difference, first through medical, and later through psychological enquiry (i.e. assessment testing). The purpose of this was to determine whether the learner requires transfer to special or segregative education of a particular category. The assumption of a direct link between the training up of individual deficits and consequent educational progress was not borne out by the evidence. The heart of this model was a view of the individual learner as somehow deficient (Cough & Corbert, 2000).

An obvious shortcoming of this model was that the deficit could be located and described by psychometric testing. Its identification was made almost exclusively

within the learner and not in the context of instruction and curriculum. There was no connection between the nature and presentation of a given task and the learner's performance of it (Cough & Corbert, 2000).

The researcher wishes to level criticism against the psycho-medical model on the basis that one of the greatest barriers to realising and/or broadening access in education is an underestimation of the potential abilities of students/learners labelled as having SEN . The model outlined above demonstrates its stance of an anti-inclusive and/or segregative type of education system. For example, in South Africa prior to the new political dispensation, a large number of students with SEN were legally regarded as ineducable. These SEN students were previously denied access to educational provision, especially in the higher education sector.

The medical discourse, or what is often referred to as the medical model, constructs disability as within the individual and constructs a process of assessment, diagnosis, prognosis and intervention as necessary to identify and manage the disability (Burden, 1996; Kriegler & Skuy, 1996; Archer & Green, 1996). Slee (1997) writes: "the defective individual … is subjected to diagnostic classification, regulation and treatment". Expanding on the construct of the defective individual, Naicker (1999) states that the medical discourse constructs disability as *an objective attribute, not a social construct* and as a *natural and irremediable characteristic of the person.* This construction – of people with impairments as *disabled* or *unable* and of this *disability* as an objective characteristic of the person – leads to exclusion because they are seen as *inadequate human beings who are unfit to be included in mainstream economic and social life* (Naicker, 1999). As Naicker (1999) points out, the medical discourse links *impairment with disability*. This can be contrasted to the construction of organisations of people with disabilities such as Disabled Peoples International who distinguish between *impairment* as lacking part of a limb, organ or mechanism of the body and *disability* as the disadvantage imposed by society's reactions (Sebba & Sachdev, 1997). Dyson and Forlin (1999) associate the medical model's construction of people with impairments with what they describe as the politicisation of disability. They argue that different cultures have historically constructed disability in different ways, but as modern states have developed, governments have found it necessary to develop social policies to guide national responses to issues believed to be associated with disability.

The medical discourse is traditionally associated with institutionalisation, differentiation, exclusion, regulation, dehumanisation (Bèlanger, 2000) and special

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education practice (Kugelmass, 2001). Lloyd (2000) describes *traditional medical, deficit models of disability* as resulting in *segregated educational provision based on notions of treatment and remediation*. However, within so-called *inclusive* education systems, the medical discourse is associated with what we could call in/exclusion or exclusion within inclusion related to the assessment of and provision for *special needs*: a discourse which is discussed later.

It seems that in South African policy, the report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) still utilises the medical discourse. Appointed by the Department of Education to investigate and make recommendations on all aspects of special needs and support services in education and training, NCSNET/NCESS proposed a move in education from *changing the person* to a *systems-change approach* (RSA DoE, 1997); thus, a move from focusing on individual deficit to systems deficit. However, one of the barriers to learning and development discussed is *disability*. The NCSNET/NCESS report states that there are some learners whose impairments may *prevent the learner from engaging continuously in structured learning and development*. Among such impairments are schizophrenia, severe autism, severe intellectual disabilities or multi-disabilities (RSA DoE, 1997). The implication is that the system cannot adapt to meet some needs and that exclusion and learning breakdown will occur because of internal, individual *barriers*, presumably diagnosed. The NCSNET/NCESS report also makes recommendations founded on a medical discourse including early identification, assessment and intervention for *at risk* learners (RSA DoE, 1997) and assessment of learners with high needs for support (RSA DoE, 1997). The medical discourse with its focus on the individual and exclusion of those pathologised, therefore seems evident in South Africa's inclusive texts. But let us turn now to a discussion of special needs discourses

The psycho-medical model is regarded as playing a central role in the development of segregative education; on the other hand, it is equally related to the apartheid policies which contributed to the segregation of education provision. Today in South Africa it is apparent that policy documents like the Bill of Rights, the Constitution and the White and Green Papers on Special Education propagate the need for change which is a clear indication that support "Access" and/or "Inclusive" educational expression of policies.

2.3.2   The sociological critique discourse

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The sociological model deconstructs the psycho-medical model by asking questions about construction of the deficit or differences of students labelled as having SEN , and searches for what is hidden, disguised by the system, viz. the structure and language inherited from earlier psychologically-biased trends. At the heart of sociological deconstruction are the ideas of the vested interests of professionals and of the institutions' reproduction of disadvantage. One of the distinctions to be made between the psychological model and sociological approach is in terms of their identification of whole interests that are served by exclusive education provision (Fairclough, 1992).

According to this approach students are the outcome of social processes, thus meaning the rationale and challenge levelled against the segregative education provision and the professional roles associated with it are seen as symptomatic of oppressive processes. The lack of access for students with SEN in institutions of learning is characterised as a mechanism for differentiating between students and allocating some lifestyle that is stigmatised. This will almost certainly be characterised to be dependence and powerlessness of SEN students (Clough *et al.*, 2000).

Furthermore, this model sees the segregation of students from mainstream education institutions as based on stigmatisation of social class, ethnicity and gender. This was the order during the apartheid era in South Africa. Segregation and exclusion was a location for the exploration of the structures and cultures of difference.

This research study wishes to align itself with the sociological critique model on the platform of issues of inequality, disadvantage, powerlessness and marginalisation of students with SEN. The institutions of higher education in South Africa have a crucial role to play by broadening access to SEN students. If these institutions fail, then they will be reproducing difference in society.

Equally important, the research study wishes to deconstruct marginalisation of SEN students at HEIs. The answer to the question "who is deficient or disabled", will depend more on the values, beliefs and interests of those making the judgment than on any qualities intrinsic to the students with SEN themselves. Hence, SEN students were interrogated to find out from them what factors inhibited access to higher education.

2.3.3 Special needs discourse

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The thesis attempts to outline the special needs discourse by viewing people with disabilities as *others* with *special needs* and as defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary 10th edition as: "…particular educational requirements resulting from learning difficulties, physical disability, or emotional and behavioural difficulties" (Pearsall, 1999). Thus the particular educational requirements are treatments or interventions related to labels of *difficulty* and *disability* applied through a process of assessment and diagnosis. This study therefore argues that a special need is the medical discourse dressed in words other than pathology, disorder or disability.

Clough, quoted by Bèlanger (2000), differentiates between *disability* and *special needs,* describing the latter not as the expression of an individual's ability, but as a result of his or her interaction with a particular curriculum. Furthermore, the researcher argues that it is nevertheless a discourse that constructs exclusion within inclusion and proposes the medical model practices of assessment, labelling and intervention. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (1997), for example, speak of an inclusive system in which appropriate facilities, resources and *specialised help*, where needed, will be available in the mainstream and that the curriculum will be flexible enough to accommodate *special needs*. But how are these special needs assessed and how excluding are curricular adaptations? Ainscow, Farrell and Tweddle (2000) raise this issue in their study of inclusive policy development and found that assessment of children perceived to have special needs created *significant barriers to the development of more inclusive arrangements*.

The researcher further argues that authors like Smith, Polloway, Patton and Dowdy (1998) who prescribe individualised education programmes and, if necessary, pullout time for learners with special needs, really illustrate how excluding inclusion can be. These learners are identified, assessed and treated differently.

2.3.4 The curriculum discourse

The development of curriculum and teaching approaches will help to foster a more inclusive education for all, thus including students with SEN. The curriculum approaches to learning difficulties have themselves developed in keeping with broadening access to institutions of learning. A highly specific and individual task-analysis programme may be seen as an intervention at the level of curriculum.

In South Africa after the new democratic dispensation there has been a change of conception from curriculum as syllabus to curriculum as cultural scheme. The history

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of an inclusive education system might be plotted in terms of this shift. The shift effectively encapsulates what is meant by "inclusivity", for inclusion is essentially about maximising participation or broadening access first in community and culture, then in institutions of learning. The medium for this is the curriculum. In institutions of learning, it is important to adapt the curriculum to meet the students' needs. The curriculum therefore cannot remain a static entity; it should be fluid to accommodate the different students. Curriculum revolution is essential because it was a conception that was to endure for many years and which powerfully maintained and reinforced the separateness of students (Clough, 1998)

A curriculum for all is a strand that owes its development more to the social movements than to psychological constructs. It is also a strand that is far more explicit about inclusivity. The focus for curricula for all has less to do with disability *per se* than with issues of disadvantage and marginalisation affecting a large minority in the education system. The conceptualisation of curricula for all brings a fresh insight into the nature and process of learning. That is, through questions of "innate" or "static" ability began to point to the vital role of learners themselves in the construction of knowledge; to indicate new ways of grouping knowledge which broke with some of the traditional subject boundaries; and to suggest changes to pedagogical organisation which had traditionally grouped learners by ability.

The researcher wishes to retheorise curriculum revolution and curricula for all as having their central identity in the understanding that what we ask an individual to do, how we ask it and when, will directly determine their success, since individuals experiences defines their background or community. The move of curriculum revolution will deconstruct the curriculum, which has always stood as secure as a "Berlin Wall", and the means of its delivery, which will be fluid and enable students to construct their own knowledge. This type of curriculum is to be understood within the theoretical framework of the non-essentialist and critical emancipatory approach as it is particularly significant for the realisation of inclusivity and broadening access for students with SEN, rather than within the predominantly quantitative approach which for long had been dominant and prohibited access to the curriculum for all (Glough, 1998).

2.3.5 Deconstructions of the medical or special needs discourse

Interrogating the policy documents, for example White Paper No 6 on Special Needs Education (RSA DoE, 2001), and the earlier discussion which constructed the

medical and special needs discourses as constituting the same objects, agents, actions and binaries, the researcher therefore unites them. A close look at Clough's differentiation of *disability* and *special needs* describing the latter *not as the expression of an individual's ability, but as a result of his or her interaction with a particular curriculum* (Bèlanger, 2000). Interrogation of readings, however, constitutes the special needs resulting from interaction with a particular curriculum as arising from both constructed differences in ability (the medical discourse) and constructed inability of the environment to accommodate those differences (the systems discourse). There remains a process of identification through assessment and labelling of those learners.

2.4   CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR INCLUSION

South Africa's transition from apartheid and minority rule to democracy requires that all the existing practices, institutions and values be viewed anew and rethought in terms of their suitability for a new era. Higher education plays a central role in the social, cultural and economic developments of modern societies. In South Africa today, the challenge is to address past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities.

HEIs must lay the foundations for the development of a learning society, which can stimulate, direct and mobilise the creative and intellectual energies of all the people. This includes students with SEN to meet the challenges and create opportunities of reconstruction, development and inclusion. The succeeding sub-themes will look closely at issues that need attention for the HEIs to respond positively to the challenges and possibilities for inclusion as a social construction (Daley, 1991).

2.4.1   The accessible curriculum

In any education system, the curriculum is either a major obstacle or one of the tools to facilitate the development of a more inclusive education system. In many contexts, the curriculum is extensive and demanding, or centrally designed and rigid, leaving little flexibility for adaptations for students with SEN and for teachers or academics to experiment and try out new approaches that could accommodate students with SEN. The content might be distant from the reality in which the students with SEN live, and therefore inaccessible and unmotivating. The curriculum might also be biased and

therefore appealing to learners who are able and degrading to those with SEN (Glough, 1998).

In every classroom, there are a large number of students who, to a greater or lesser degree, are not "getting" curriculum. This group is not limited only to those students who have been identified in this study as students with SEN, but it also includes those who are linguistically or culturally diverse or students who may understand some of the subject matter but not enough to become competent in it. As classrooms become more inclusive and more diverse, the number of students needing special attention increases, as do pressures on their lecturers to provide for their needs. Each student, regardless of disability, difference, or diversity, needs access to a curriculum that is meaningful and allows the students to use their strengths.

A flexible curriculum will then be understood, in this study, as a curriculum that has been designed to consider the needs of a diverse classroom; a curriculum that has a built-in means for the lecturer to present the subject matter so that each student can have meaningful access to it using their abilities and strengths, without first having to overcome the usual physical, affective or cognitive barriers, or without having to be stigmatised or isolated from other students. If students have physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities, they will still be able to learn some or the entire lesson as the other students (ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 2001).

For students with SEN, an inability to interact with the curriculum can be the first obstacle on the path towards competence. Access to the curriculum begins with the student's being able to interact with it to learn. For students without SEN, this sort of accessibility is generally not a problem, although some students have more difficulty than others. For SEN students, an inability to interact with the curriculum could be due to physical, sensory, or cognitive barriers, as a first stumbling block on the path toward the goal of competence. In order for these students to understand and learn, the curriculum must be delivered with an array of supports for the student. The barriers to access must be removed, but, importantly, the curriculum has to continue to challenge them (ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 2001).

An ideal flexible curriculum should be customised to meet the needs of both lecturers and students. This includes accommodations for sensory impairments such as Braille and captioning, and alternative "texts" such as software or adapted versions of textbooks that address SEN. The foundation of curriculum access for all students is the design of educational materials, which are the primary tools used to teach

curricular content. The greater the flexibility built into the materials, the greater the numbers of students who can be reached with a single curriculum (Glough, 1998).

Universal design for curriculum access, in this study, will mean the design of instructional materials and activities that allows the learning goals to be achievable by individual students with SEN or wide differences in their abilities: (for example to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand, attend, organise, engage, and remember). Universal design for learning is achieved by means of flexible curricular materials and activities that provide alternatives for students with disparities in educational needs, abilities and backgrounds (Dednam, 1996).

The design for flexible or universal curriculum design for learning should be built into the instructional design and operating systems of educational materials. It is flexible and economical if the textbooks accommodate a broad range of cognitive and sensory abilities. Lecturers should use the learning material that appeals to all students, including those with special needs regardless of their abilities.

2.4.2 The non-accessible curriculum

A curriculum has to present challenges so that students can be motivated and progress educationally, regardless of their level of abilities. The need to offer challenges in the curriculum is one of the major aspects that needs to be revisited in South African HEIs. For example, an accessible curriculum needs to be as easy to use as possible and yet it should challenge all students (ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 2001).

An accessible and/or a flexible curriculum do not mean that the instructional materials and activities accommodate students by lowering the standards. Flexible curriculum in this study is understood as not lowering the curriculum. It does not mean that the range of curriculum activity must be narrowed or that educators find the least common denominator that appeals to the broadest number of students and/or teach the same thing in the same way to everyone. In fact, accessible curriculum is not ordinarily achieved by uniformity of any kind; rather it is achieved via flexibility. It helpful to remember that when referring to curriculum flexibility, we imply instructional resources, a means for diversifying instruction to deliver education curriculum to every student, including students with SEN, and the ways students will respond to the curriculum (ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 2001).

An accessible curriculum is intended to be inclusive, not solely for students with SEN. A curriculum that incorporates inclusive features should do more than accommodate physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities; it should include students with differing abilities, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and approaches to learning. If a particular teaching and learning methodology excludes students of any kind (i.e. disabled, diverse, non-disabled, SEN), then it works against the principles of accessible and flexible curriculum. This applies to not only the content of a curriculum, but also to its goals, teaching and learning methods and the manner of assessment (Mangiari & Block, 1994).

Suggestions of some key elements for curricula that aim towards developing a more inclusive education include (UNESCO, 1999):

- Broad common goals defined for all, including the knowledge, skills and values to be acquired.

- A flexible structure to facilitate responses to the diversity and providing diverse opportunities for practice and performance in terms of content, methods and level of participation.

- Assessment based on individual progress.

- Cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of learners acknowledged.

- Content, knowledge and skills relevant to learners' context.

The study subscribes to the view that maintains that the curriculum can facilitate the development of more inclusive settings when it leaves room for the centre of learning, thus meaning the individual teacher/academic could make adaptations so that it makes better sense for the individual learner. In this case it should appeal to learners with SEN.

What is more important for inclusive education to be realised is that the curriculum is designed to suit the learning needs and skills requirements of all learners irrespective of their challenges. The design and development of curriculum should take into account the needs, interests, aspirations and uniqueness of all learners, irrespective of their disabilities.

According to White Paper No. 6 (RSA DoE, 2001:19) one of the most significant barriers to learning for learners with SEN is the curriculum. In this case, barriers to learning arise from different aspects of the curriculum, such as:

> "…the content (i.e. what is taught), the language or medium of instruction, how the classroom or lecture is organised and managed, the methods and processes used in teaching, the pace of teaching and the time available to complete the curriculum, the learning material and equipment that is used, and how learning is assessed".

To overcome these barriers arising from the curriculum it is important to make sure that the process of learning and teaching is flexible enough to accommodate different learning needs and styles. The curriculum must therefore be made more flexible across all bands to include the higher education sector, so that it is accessible to all learners, irrespective of their learning needs. There should be a greater degree of flexibility in teaching methods and in the assessment of learning. Furthermore, illustrative learning programmes, learning support materials and assessment techniques should be provided, according to White Paper No. 6 (RSA DoE, 2001).

2.4.3   Assessment in the context of OBE to promote inclusion

This study interrogates assessment at higher education level within the context of outcomes-based education (OBE). Furthermore, it explores the concepts of assessment and power relations, gives a critical perspective of the emanicipatory assessment approach, understanding participative assessment and closely looks at assessment as another instrument that could promote inclusivity at the higher education level.

The philosophy of OBE embraces the concept of setting measurable goals. When developed and stated clearly, outcomes specify what educators want students to accomplish. An outcome describes standards that students should meet or exceed. Outcomes are set within a framework of academic performance, which is measured by educators against the background of objective standards rather than in relation to the quality of thinking, or the quantity of what is thought (Rowntree, 1987).

It is not the intention to focus on standards in this discussion. Certainly, standards play a role in assessment, but standards are fluid and problematic. The intention is to focus on assessment that is more inclusive in approach, or participative assessment. Furthermore, essential suggestions on aspects relating to assessment, evaluation,

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and reporting of students' achievement in higher education are an objective of the study.

Heron (1979:13) has argued: "Assessment is the most political of all process; it is where issues of power are most at stake. If there is no educator and learner collaboration in assessment, then educators exert a stranglehold that inhibits the development of collaboration with respect to all other processes."

Assessment embodies power relations between the institution of learning and students, with the educators as custodians of the institution's rule and practices. The effects of judgments made on students' opportunities to access their tuition or their life chances, as well as the evaluation of their worth by themselves or by others, ensures that assessment is experienced by students as being of considerable significance (Rowntree, 1987).

The educators and assessors of knowledge at HEIs, whether consciously or not, play a vital role in putting into practice the ideology of social context within which assessment occurs. If the educational ideology were that of the Western Eurocentric, imperialist and colonial perspective, the assessment would reflect this bias. If the aim of the education system is to produce future citizens who are obedient, submissive and compliant with the status quo of the country, then this too could be reflected in the system of education (Mahlomaholo, 1998). Many studies, especially from the critical Marxist and neo-Marxist perspective, have also shown that the dominant ideology (as in apartheid and colonialism) used institutions of learning to reproduce themselves, especially through the educators' assessment of students and their teaching practice.

A re-evaluation of assessment methods in higher education in South Africa might therefore be appropriate as it is expected to be a prominent feature of a critically based education program, particularly one that aims for pedagogical emancipation of the African students and for less power relations. When these Eurocentric, imperialist and colonial ideologies of the education system are replaced with democratic ones, even the methods of assessment have to change to accommodate participative assessment, multiplicity of views, understanding and interpretation.

Nowadays educators tend to focus on emanicipatory assessment approaches and discovery as a mode of teaching. Educators need to allow students to go beyond the presented trends, to investigate, to question and to formulate their knowledge. No

one form of knowledge is privileged. All diverse perspectives are accepted as long as both educators and students can justify these. In HEIs in South Africa today, especially after the demise of colonialism as crystallised in apartheid and segregation, new assessment approaches geared towards self-discovery, learner-centred approaches, driven by a philosophy of constructivism, critical emancipatory and postmodernism approaches and a more Africanised OBE in one form or the other, have emerged.

Many studies (Brophy & Good, 1974; Mahlomaholo, 1998) have shown how power relations elicited corresponding academic performance in learners. That is, for those learners for whom the teacher showed greater concern, acceptance and appreciation, academic performance was enhanced. For learners who did not receive the same interest, academic performance declined. The above statement is a reflection of how power relations might have an impact on assessment of a learner's work.

There have been proposals for more emancipatory participative approaches to assessment, whether peer (carried out by fellow learner), collaborative (jointly assessed by students and educator), or consultative (collectively between self, peers and educators, but with ultimate responsibility with the educator). Among advocates of a learner-centred approach, this interest has been prompted by the concern that conventional assessment practices are not consistent with such goals of "developing independent learners and critical thinkers" and promoting inclusion (Boud, 1986).

An inclusive assessment practice helps to encourage critical thinking. Rowntree (1987) argues that traditional assessment processes are in themselves contradictory. The notion of the assessor as an all-knowing, all-powerful entity is fundamentally flawed, because it fails to take sufficient account of the biases and of the potential nature of the process. Some models used for assessing students in higher education are too authoritarian, in that educators exercised unilateral, intellectual authority by holding the power to make decisions.

Educators in the past determined what students should learn; regardless of their abilities; they designed the programmes of learning, curriculum and the criteria for assessment, and carried out the assessment of each student. Students had no power in this process and did not participate in decision-making about their learning experiences at all. This exercise is political. It has to do with power relations, and

power is concerned with who makes decisions about whom. It affirms the marginalisation and exclusion of students with or without SEN.

In the post-colonial or post-apartheid era in South Africa the focus is on self, peer, inclusive and emancipatory assessment, albeit often in the context of otherwise traditional approaches. In the 21st century, which is the so-called African century, the focus is on self, peer and collaborative assessments, which are seen as emancipatory in nature.

Recent influences from radical or emancipatory pedagogy (Giroux, 1992), feminist pedagogy (Weiler, 1991) and critical theory (French & Grey, 1996) have given fresh impulse to the development of more participative, less dominant approaches to teaching and learning, to the expression of an emancipatory perspective in both content and assessment. In such a context, some form of participative assessment might be expected as a prerequisite for the HEIs. It is the pivotal role of assessment, in students' opportunities for accessing their tuition. Inclusive assessment is crucial, because it ensures that assessment tasks are used "to test the quality of thinking, not the quantity of what is thought" (French and Grey, 1996:104). It advocates that students should be involved in dialogue with educators over "the criteria function, and results of the system of evaluation" (Giroux, 1988:39).

2.4.3.1 Understanding inclusive assessment in OBE

The question of power and authority is confined to traditional assessment approaches, and they are problematic in an inclusive assessment approach. In this study, inclusive assessment is understood as a process in which students and educators share to some degree the responsibility for evaluation and making judgements about students' written work, gaining insight into how such judgements are made and finding appropriate ways to communicate them. The traditional assessment approaches marginalise and exclude the voices of students.

If students know that the educator will intervene if they think the marking is unsatisfactory, the procedure cannot be claimed to be either inclusive or empowering. For the inclusive assessment to realise in practice what it promises in principle, therefore, it is important to be alert to the tendencies for power relations to persist in the shape of disciplines that students impose upon themselves and on each other. This, it could be argued, is a form of governmentality (Foucault, 1979) exercised through the action of "being one's own policeman" or managing one's own

practices. Applying Foucault's development of the concept of the panopticon as the embodiment of the principle of surveillance, unfacilitated, inclusive assessment could be seen as a shift from the darkened cells of the traditional prison to the well-lit panopticon cell, a device which, though seemingly more humane, has the more subtle effect of creating self-disciplining inmates. The power is continuous and anonymous. If the prisoners are never sure when they are being observed, they become their own guardians (Foucault, 1979).

In a participative and/or inclusive assessment approach all students would take responsibility for critically examining each other's work; participative assessment might then reasonably be considered a success, confirming the observation that peer assessment is as likely to result in tough as in generous grading (Heron, 1979).

Ball (1990) argues that confessional techniques used in educational practices, which encourages learners to view the procedures of appraisal as part of the process of self-understanding, self-betterment and professional development, are simply more complex mechanisms of monitoring and control.

2.4.3.2 Re-positioning assessment

Assessment should be based on the premises that are more consistent with the aims and principles of an emancipatory pedagogy rather than the top-down approach, which is unilateral. If assessment procedures are informed by the emancipatory approach, the procedures should reflect assessment tasks and critique of power relations, not just in the abstract, but also in the practical reality of the classroom. If assessment still shows a manifestation of power within the political ideology of Western Eurocentrism and the imperialist perspective, and the approach is unchanged with acceptance of the educator's authority unquestioned, claims for the emancipatory educational philosophy or OBE are limited and misplaced in the higher education institutions in South Africa.

If assessment approaches in the classroom change, but the power relations remain the same, that is, seeing the educator as the only person who is informed, the involvement of students can amount to a subtle exercise in control. All students should have a greater measure of control over their learning, but, while this may extend to operational processes, the nature of the underlying power relations remains unaffected. In this case, how much control do they really have over their learning, as well as its evaluation? (Giroux, 1992)

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Another point that needs to be noted is the difference, other than the distinctions, between educator and students. Students have different experiences resulting from the social processes that are generated from differences of values and beliefs, and this affects the dynamics of learning relationships. Competitiveness, a sense of intellectual superiority over others, or a lack of strong belief in other students' opinions, can affect the assessment they make of each other's work.

Students' success in higher education is often believed to be primarily a function of their intellectual aptitudes. In the case of learners who come from deprived environments, their living conditions may reduce their motivation and opportunities to learn, whatever their intellectual ability might be. Furthermore, the language of instruction may put learners at a disadvantage, thus creating difficulties in understanding.

Knowledge-based examinations are recognised to have their own limitations in terms of both validity and reliability. Formal standardised tests may also have adverse effects, such as encouraging the accumulation and recall of fragmented and decontextualised facts and skills (Supovitz & Brennan, 1997).

In this study, the view adopted is that an inclusive education demands a flexible, success-oriented means of assessment, evaluation and examination. The assessment of learners should be related to the aims of the curriculum, the culture, the ability and the experience biography of the learner.

In an outcomes-based curriculum, which is the philosophy behind the education system in South Africa, learners' progress is measured against the broad results expected at the end of each learning process, such as general skills, abilities and values. It can be on-going assessment to obtain feedback from learners' learning and teachers' success in selecting appropriate teaching methods, as well as the need to adjust to the pace or style of teaching. In this way, learners can be evaluated against their own achievements instead of being compared with other learners. Assessment could be achieved in a flexible manner and time when the learner has acquired new knowledge, a new skill or competency, even new attitudes and values, when the teacher has finished teaching particular content (Supovitz & Brennan, 1997).

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analysing,

and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. When it is embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education (Angelo, 1995). Astin (1993:2) further defines assessment for excellence in this way:

> "I shall consider assessment to include the gathering of information concerning the functioning of students, staff, and institutions of higher education. The information may or may not be in numerical form, but the basic motive for gathering it is to improve the functioning of the institution and its people. I used functioning to refer to the broad social purposes of a college or university: to facilitate student learning and development, to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and to contribute to the community, and the society."

Assessment is defined as "the systematic basis for making inferences about the learning and development of students. More specifically, assessment is the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analysing, interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development" (Jossey-Bass, 1991:14).

2.4.3.3 Assessment in context

Broadly defined, assessment is about determining how much learning has taken place since the learner was exposed to the *processes* of learning (Da Costa, 1994; Landsmann, 1991; Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999). Having defined learning from the OBE perspective, it becomes clear that the process of assessment cannot be easy, because unlike in a pure behaviouristic sense, we could just be looking at the products of learning. If we are to look at processes that entail self-awareness, owning meaning, multi-perspectivity and so on, *products* become mere pointers and not the focus of assessment. To put this differently: even if a person demonstrates superior memory capability, this does not necessarily mean that they are more self-aware, more able to own meaning and therefore have more critical skills. If our intention is to access and assess the level of learning from an OBE perspective then it means traditional assessment tasks as we know them are very inadequate. New and better ways of assessment, which are compatible with an OBE definition of learning, are needed. Before going into that detail one needs to understand why it has been

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necessary to assess students (Mahlomaholo, Khabanyane, Ramabenyane & Nkoane, 2001).

Owen van den Berg (1999) advances a compelling argument to demonstrate that assessment in particular and learning in general are functions of socio-economic and political arrangements in the country or in the world. Assessment serves the purpose of a filter in society in assigning people to social classes. Assessment, especially in grade 12 in South Africa, has served this purpose more than any other has, which is why the country has few students with SEN at HEIs. It is only because of performance in grade 12 that learners could find placement at tertiary institutions or "meaningful" places of work.

Linked to the above is Mathonsi's (1988) (cf. Mahlomaholo, 1998) observation that grade 12 examinations in particular serve as means of social control. It constitutes the basis for conformity in a rationalised manner. People are made to understand that those learners who could not make it, are justifiably excluded from lucrative employment, higher education and fulfilling job opportunities because they could not obtain a grade12 qualification. Anybody who does not conform to the "norms" as ultimately authored by what is considered appropriate performance at this level, is justifiably thrown into the social dustbin. Assessment has therefore become a gate-keeping mechanism that will determine behaviour of human beings as prescribed by the status quo and the dominant discourses (Mahlomaholo *et al.*, 2001).

2.4.4   Academic performance in broadening access in education

Subsection 2.4.4 interrogates and discusses academic performance that could promote inclusive education. The factors that might have an impact on academic performance are also studied, conceptualised and discussed. The discussion centres on the definition of academic performance and how it could enhance inclusive education. The focus is related to the discussions in Subsection 2.4.3 on assessment procedures, and issues that relate to inclusive education learning that might affect academic performance.

According to Piaget (1968), Meadows (1993), Mangiari and Block (1994) (as quoted by Mahlomaholo, 1998:125) there are different issues at play when coming to academic performance. However, at least two paradigms of academic performance will be located. One of these paradigms tends to adopt a positivistic view of the

phenomenon. This maintains that academic performance can be affected by environmental factors.

Another paradigm views academic performance as social construction. This view maintains that academic performance should be seen as "emergent" and constantly in the state of construction as individuals interact with the world. In order to understand academic performance, this view suggests that one should not be blind to other confounding social-structural and individual-psychological factors. Thus, the scores that one could come up with, irrespective of how objective, standardised, carefully designed, reliable and valid the assessment procedures and instruments might have been, will always be subjective values because academic performance cannot be absolute and static.

Performance will always fluctuate and vary depending on factors such as; (i) the testee's ability, motivation, inclination and interests, sometimes due to their physical or psychological challenge or due to socialisation as well as acquired skills; (ii) the ideology permeating education theory and practice; (iii) the nature of a given task(s) and subject material; and (iv) the idiosyncrasies of the tester and testee (Mahlomaholo, 1998).

In this study, it is understood that for inclusive education to succeed, many factors that play a role in academic performance should be taken into consideration. Thus the scores that learners arrive at are not definite; they are only diagnostic and arrived at within the limitations of the two identified factors (i.e. learner factor and educator factor).

For the learner factor Van der Stoep and Van der Stoep (1968) used the concepts endogenic and exogenic (i.e. inequalities in society, physical facilities, psycho-social disturbances, mental, neurological and developmental) factors to describe those issues that might affect learners' performance from one's intra-psychic world and one's interpersonal contexts respectively. These authors believe that academic performance is a function of factors, both internal and external to the learner. They count inequalities in society as part of the external factors. Thus, learners coming from a significantly disadvantaged socio-economic environment are very likely to perform significantly differently. In contrast to this those from enriched environments, where there is an availability of educational resources or supporting material and an educative culture, might do well as compared to those who come from a deprived and disadvantaged socio-economic background. However, Mahlomaholo (1998)

maintains that the intervention of the mediator in the learning of the latter group can assist in the enrichment and enhancement of their learning irrespective of their educational needs. Equally important, he also notes that even in the case of learners from higher socio-economic backgrounds, if the mediator does not intervene to interpret and further enrich the stimuli in their context, they could still underachieve academically.

For the study it now becomes clear that in order for inclusive education to succeed and for learners with SEN to perform well academically, it is not just a question of accepting the given score of learners in the tasks as an average. What is more important is also to understand the role of factors that impinge directly and indirectly on learners' cognitive functioning. To talk of learners' academic performance in an inclusive educational setting is to talk about a combination of inequalities in society; physical facilities or educative resources available; psychosocial disturbances; mental factors; neurological and developmental factors; including the learners' philosophy, inclinations, interests, socialisation, level of motivation; and also how good one feels about oneself. It can be concluded that academic performance in an inclusive education setting should be seen as multifaceted.

2.4.5   Access and fair chance in higher education

The White Paper No.3 (RSA DoE, 2001:14) states that a major goal of inclusive education is to: "promote equity of access and fair chances for success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for the past inequalities".

The achievement of equity in relation to the composition of the student in higher education is one of the White Paper's central goals for the transformation of the higher education system. The goal of equity in the White Paper is linked to the imperative to address the inequalities of the past and to eradicate all forms of unfair discrimination in relation to access and equality of opportunity within higher education for historically and socially disadvantaged groups. As the Council on Higher Education states, the "…extent to which equity and access are actively promoted or frustrated will determine the nature and extent of social and class stratification and have a direct bearing on the nature of South Africa's democracy, labour market and social stability" (CHE, 2000:27).

According to the National Plan for Higher Education (RSA DoE, 2001) there is very little data available on access of disabled students and employment of the disabled in HEIs. However, the information submitted by institutions as part of their "rolling" plans indicates that, in total, there are about one thousand disabled students in HEIs. These figures are unacceptable, according to the Ministry of Education. Institutions of higher learning need to prioritise access for students with SEN.

Furthermore, the Department of Education recognises that it may not be possible for every institution to provide the full array of infrastructure needed to service the specific educational needs of disabled students. This provides an ideal opportunity for institutions within each region to develop regional strategies, which could ensure that disabled students are catered for within the region. However, at a minimum, all institutions should have the basic infrastructure to allow access to the campus for students with SEN and members of the community more generally (RSA DoE, 2001).

However, in this research study (as discussed elsewhere in this chapter), the view is adopted that access in higher education is understood as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increased participation in learning, culture and communities, and reducing exclusion within the institutions of learning (Booth, 1996). Equally important, access should involve changes and modifications to content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision, which covers all learners of the educational level and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the institution of learning to educate all learners (UNESCO, 1994).

Access and fair chance in HEIs are concerned with providing an appropriate response to the broad spectrum of learning needs in education settings. Increasing access in higher education is a process that looks into how to transform the education system in order to respond better to the diversity of learners. It also aims at enabling educational providers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and to view it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment, rather than as a problem (UNESCO, 1994).

The White Paper No. 6 (RSA DoE, 2001) describes inclusive education and training (see Subsection 2.1.2 on access and human rights). These policy imperatives have created several access challenges for HEIs, and have been re-emphasised in the National Plan for Higher Education (RSA DoE, 2001) which proposes the following priorities:

- Increase the participation rate in higher education to meet the demand of high-level skills through a balanced production of graduates in different fields of study taking into account labour market trends.

- Increase the number of graduates through improving the efficiency of higher education.

- Link improvements in efficiency to improvements in quality.

- Broaden the social base of higher education by increasing access to higher education of workers and professionals in pursuit of multi-skilling and re-skilling, and of adult learners who were denied access in the past.

- Produce graduates with the skills and competencies required for participation in the modern world in the 21st century.

The argument developed in this study is that in the South African context, increasing participation and access to higher education has been part of every higher education policy document since transition to the new democratic South Africa. The recurring imperatives in various policy documents since 1994 with regard to access are as follows:

- The need to increase academic access to higher education cannot be overemphasised.

- The quality of academic access can be improved if access initiatives are in harmony with notions of equity and redress.

- Academic access for historically disadvantaged learners should not culminate in a revolving door syndrome, but should be structured to achieve the desired throughput rates.

- Human rights issues are earmarked as one of the priorities in the academic access debate.

- The issue of student admission and selection is still complicated by lack of clarity surrounding the criteria used to admit students in a way that would recognise their disabilities and prior learning.

2.5   POSSIBLE BARRIERS TO ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SEN STUDENTS

The barriers to learning can be located within the student, within the centre of learning, within the education system and within the broader social economic and political context. These barriers manifest themselves in different ways and only become obvious when learning breakdown occurs, when learners drop out from the system or when the excluded become visible. Sometimes it is possible to identify permanent barriers in the student or the system, which can be addressed through enabling mechanisms and processes. However, barriers may also arise during the learning process and these are seen as transitory. They may require different interventions or strategies to prevent them from causing learning breakdown or excluding learners from the system. The key to preventing barriers from occurring is the effective monitoring and meeting of the different needs among the student population and within the system as a whole (RSA DoE, 1997).

The means for reducing the difficulties of students with SEN to access HEIs is seen in this research study to be the transformation of HEIs through the development of inclusive education. This idea is in line with the national policies that could assist in minimising learning difficulties and finding ways to overcome the barriers to learning within the HEIs that are distinctively South African, rooted in the full range of realities of present day-South Africa (RSA DoE, 1997).

Students with SEN who experience barriers to learning are seen to include: students with disabilities, both those within the education system and thousands currently excluded from education provision because they are regarded as ineducable or because of lack of goodwill or provision; those who do not receive a curriculum matched to their abilities, knowledge and interest or experience of their own world (this group also encompasses many students whose first language is not the same as the language of instruction in HEIs); students excluded from the higher education sector because of a lack of resources; and students with chronic health problems.

South African HEIs need to be in tune and remove the barriers that will imply a radical restructuring of HEI practices and policies and address the following barriers:

- Curriculum planning for SEN students (i.e. hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disabled, learning disabilities, speech and language disorder, emotional and behavioural disorder);

- Funding formula;

- Inequalities in society (i.e. lack of access to basic services, poverty and underdevelopment);

- Attitudes; and

- Inaccessible physical structures/environment, all of these geared to responding to a narrower view of students with SEN (RSA DoE, 1997).

This study acknowledges that the process of inclusive education as a social construction is not new at HEIs. Institutions of learning in South Africa have been serving a wide diversity of students. What this research study sees as new is the attempt to develop a nation-wide policy to revitalise education by HEIs who could work effectively with student diversity and enable the excluded and marginalised students to participate as fully as possible in HEIs.

The South African Constitution requires the process of inclusion in education provision as the RSA Constitution, 1996, and the Bill of Rights in Chapter Two, Section 7 (1), grants:

> "…the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom" furthermore, in (Section 9. (1-5) of Equality states that: "…everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit" (2) "…equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken" (3) "…no unfair discrimination directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth". (4) "…no person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (iii)….legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination". (5) "…discrimination on one or more of the grounds listed in subsection (iii) is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair.

Equally important to inclusive educational provision is Section 10 of the RSA Constitution, 1996, that touches on human dignity: "…everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected".

The above points are relevant to this study. The conclusion that the researcher of this study wishes to draw is that principles of upholding human dignity and equalising opportunity may not be compromised. Provision of inclusive education is seen as part of building a human rights culture in our country and education is regarded as the key to granting equalisation of opportunity. HEIs should provide an education that enhances the dignity of everyone to fulfil the human rights of each individual.

Equally important to this study is a commitment to uphold human rights and restore human dignity to those students who are excluded from HEIs. This study subscribes to the ideal of including all "outcasts" from educational provision in South Africa.

The absence of resources should not be seen as a reason to perpetuate discrimination and marginalisation of students with SEN, preventing them from benefiting from opportunities in education in South African HEIs. The development of inclusive processes and policies was as much about a change in mindset as about the redeployment of resources. South African policies that address human rights and inclusion and that speak clearly against marginalisation and discrimination, all involve redress from the injustices of the past which made education provision in this country skewed or disproportionate.

Institutions of Higher Education could start to make rapid progress in facilitating the inclusion process of students with SEN if they conformed to clear non-discriminatory standards and carried out an audit of factors that inhibit access for SEN students through the courses offered, the teaching strategies/arrangements, curriculum, and the extent of the need for human support and assistive devices. Training is needed for HEIs' professional staff and academic personnel to remove barriers that inhibit access or impair provision of inclusive education. However, it is also recognised that SEN students would continue to be severely under-represented in HEIs until discriminatory practices throughout the education system are rectified.

In adopting this stance whereby HEIs actively participate in increasing access, this study is deeply indebted to those SEN students who were previously restricted from educational opportunities and now being provided with foundation courses and permitted open access to higher education. This could be realised by providing

adequate redress for past inequalities of opportunity. The HEIs need to accept a supporting role in becoming a more accessible resource to South African communities. The abovementioned points that the study sees as barriers that inhibit access for SEN students to HEIs (RSA DoE, 1996), will now be discussed in greater detail.

2.5.1 Curriculum planning for SEN students

The point being made in this study is that curricula on their own have been unable to meet the needs of a wide range of different students at institutions of higher learning due to their inflexible nature. When students are unable to access the curriculum, breakdown of learning occurs. One of the most serious barriers inhibiting students from accessing the curriculum is inadequate provision of material or equipment that they may need for learning to take place.

These barriers often affect students with SEN. They do not receive the necessary assistive devices, which would equip them to better participate in the learning process. For example, blind learners are unable to access the curriculum effectively if appropriate Braille facilities and equipment are not available and if educators are not skilled in teaching Braille or using audio equipment. Lack of provision of assistive devices for SEN students may impair not only the learning process but also their functional independence, preventing them from interacting with others and participating independently in the learning environment (RSA DoE, 1997).

In South Africa, the introduction of OBE paves the way for accepting all students, despite their diverse needs, into the institutions of learning. Educators must be willing to adapt and modify their teaching strategies, their classroom management and aid devices to accommodate students with SEN. Lerner (1987) outlines some of the main principles of curriculum planning as follows:

- *Plan for teaching all students as whole persons:* The curriculum should be balanced and take into account the students' physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language characteristics.

- *Meet students' special needs:* The curriculum should take into account students' individual needs, limitations and competencies.

- *Sequence the units of information:* Curriculum planning requires careful ordering of instructional units into teachable steps. This may mean breaking skills

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which students are required to learn into sub-skills or steps, ensuring that students acquire each step before proceeding to the next one. Modifications may be necessary along the way.

- *Pace teaching according to students' needs and competencies:* Plan the day so that the activities are varied and the pace of teaching is neither so fast that the students are overburdened nor so slow that they are not challenged. Use a variety of teaching styles and approaches.

- *Reward students' effort:* The curriculum should include plans for encouraging and reinforcing students' efforts, even when only partial success is achieved. Many kinds of recognition and rewards for the efforts can be used, ranging from verbal praise to concrete rewards.

- *Work with the students' families:* Establish a good working relationship with students' parents. Establish a trusting relationship so as to encourage the transfer of learning between home and educational institution.

2.5.1.1 Hearing impairment

Students with hearing impairment fall into two major categories: the hard of hearing and the deaf. With the help of sound amplification devices, the student who is hard of hearing can understand speech; deaf students, on the other hand, must be educated through their other senses (Lewis and Doorlag, 1995). Hard-of-hearing and deaf students, however, would have a choice regarding the medium of teaching and learning, viz. South African Sign Language or spoken language (RSA DoE, 1997).

Hearing-impaired students generally have difficulty in making themselves understood and in comprehending others. They are likely to experience frustration, emotional instability, temper tantrums, or withdrawal. These students may appear to be unintelligent, to lack concentration or to be daydreaming. Their lack of responsiveness may be wrongly interpreted as stubbornness. Therefore, such students should be seated where they can see the educator's lip movements easily. The acceptance of South African Sign Language as a twelfth language of instruction will counter some of these problems. Educators should not speak too loudly, especially if the student is wearing a hearing aid. Educators should familiarise themselves with the working of hearing aids, but should leave it to the students to assume responsibility for their care.

2.5.1.2 Visual impairment

With the redress policies of including students who were marginalised and/or excluded, there may be blind students as well as partially sighted students in HEIs. Braille and appropriate print, as well as other aid devices such as computers, tape recorders, a slate and stylus for printing in Braille by hand, and so on, should be available to them. Since some of this equipment takes more time to use than ordinary typing and writing, educators at HEIs must allow for extra time whenever it is needed (RSA DoE, 1997)

Blind and partially sighted students need to become familiar with the centre of learning, the classroom/lecture rooms, as well as with regular and emergency routes and procedures, preferably before the term begins (Cook, Tessier & Klein, 1992). Visually impaired students should be encouraged to use whatever sight they have together with their other senses.

One of the consequences of restricted mobility and limited experience can be learned helplessness. To counter this, students should be exposed to as many practical experiences as possible and should be encouraged to become independent. As far as possible, they must experience what sighted students experience and should not be overprotected (RSA DoE, 1997).

2.5.1.3 Physical disabilities

Physical disabilities include disorders of the skeleton, joints and muscles, or health conditions that interfere with the student's educational progress. Some physical disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and epilepsy, are due to neurological impairments. Cerebral palsy is caused by damage to certain parts of the brain before the brain is fully grown. It manifests in muscle problems such as stiffness and rigidity of certain muscles, which inhibit fluent movement (Dedman, 1996).

Epilepsy is a condition that periodically causes abnormal amounts of electrical activity in the brain, resulting in seizures. Some seizures last only a few seconds, others may last for several minutes. Some students with epilepsy have seizures every few minutes; others have them only once a year. The most intensive seizures involve major convulsions (e.g. tonic-conic seizures) which can be frightening to an observer. Minor seizures (e.g. absence seizures), commonly indicated by rapid eye blinking, sometimes go unnoticed. The seizures can usually be controlled with

medication, but some drugs may have undesirable effects (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994).

Skeletal or muscular disabilities, such as muscular dystrophy and arthritis, can limit a student's movement and limit participation in some activities. This study suggests that educators and educational institutions arm themselves with the necessary knowledge, skills and disposition needed in an inclusive approach to education. This is viewed as vitally important, and will further enable educators to design a curriculum that will suit the needs of SEN students (Cook, Tessier & Klein, 1992).

2.5.1.4 Learning disabilities

This study seeks to move away from labelling students as being learning disabled and will instead adopt a definition of the American Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities (2000):

> "…learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorder manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the lifespan. Problems in self-regulatory behaviours, social perception and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability".

It is important to note that "although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, emotional disturbances) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction) they are not the result of those conditions or influences" (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994:127).

This does not always mean that all students who demonstrate such manifestations have neurological dysfunctions. Many students with emotional and behavioural problems, problems at home or at the institution of learning, disadvantaged students or students being taught in their second language, may show the same manifestations (Dednam, 1996).

There are several approaches to educating learning-disabled students. Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) discuss seven of these, namely process training, multi-sensory

approaches, reduction of structure and stimulus in the learning environment, medication, cognitive behaviour modification, behaviour modification and direct instruction. In practice, two or more of these approaches are usually combined.

Another manifestation of learning disability is attention deficit disorder (ADD). The symptoms include distractibility, forgetfulness, poor organisation, impulsiveness, restlessness, poor social skills, learning difficulties and defiant behaviour. In addition, these students may lose feelings of self-worth. Behaviour associated with poor self-esteem includes clowning, lying, cheating, quitting, and assignment avoidance.

This research study maintains that when addressing these behaviours the focus should be on maintaining the student's self-esteem. Educators can play a major role in assisting students with ADD. The student should be seated in front of the lecture-room near the educator. In addition, students who serve as good role models should be seated on either side and, whenever possible, the educator should keep the student with ADD away from distracting stimuli. Rewards should be given as soon as possible after desirable behaviour has been observed (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994).

2.5.1.5 Speech and language disorders

Educators who are involved with students with SEN can encounter speech and language problems in several forms:

▪ Articulation disorder causes students to omit, substitute, or mix up certain sounds, giving their speech an immature character. For example, they may say "a vewy fwisky wabbit" instead of, "a very frisky rabbit". Although such errors are mainly found in younger children, they can sometimes persist into adolescence.

▪ Voice disorder involves inappropriate or abnormal quality, loudness or pitch of voice.

▪ Fluency disorder influences the normal rhythm or flow of speech, for example, stuttering.

▪ Language disorders include both expressive and receptive difficulties (Gearheart and Weishahn, 1984).

With regard to articulation problems, (Gearheart and Weishahn, 1984) offer the following guidelines:

- Make certain the learner hears the error.

- Reduce known causal or contributing factors.

- Assist and encourage the learner to make the correct sound.

- Plan so that newly learned, accurately articulated sounds are incorporated into familiar words and use in regular academic work.

Stuttering consists of abnormal repetitions, hesitations, or a prolonging of speech sounds required for articulation. The causes of stuttering are unknown. Gearheart and Weishahn (1984) advise that specific assistance to learners who stutter should be left to the specialist. However, they offer the following guidelines:

- Try to overlook the stuttering.

- Minimise all types of conflict.

- Encourage the learner when they are speaking fluently.

- Reduce the demands, as unobtrusively as possible, when stuttering becomes worse.

Most voice problems require therapy or perhaps medical intervention. The educator should refer students with suspected voice problems to a speech specialist/therapist.

2.5.1.6 Emotional and behavioural disorder

There is a wide variety of emotional and behavioural disorders. Emotionally disturbed students have problems that may affect their ability to learn, as well as their quality of life. Unlike students with other disabilities, these students are often blamed for their condition. This affects their interactions with those around them (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994).

A broad group of disordered behaviour is referred to as externalising. Conduct disorder is one type of externalising. It includes acting out in the form of classroom disruption (showing off, temper tantrums, etc.). Most students display disordered behaviour at least occasionally. However, those who are truly emotionally disturbed show these signs more often and more intensely. No matter how supportive and warm their educators and classmates may be, these students may still be anxious or

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may still burst into an angry rage for no apparent reason. Acting out that occurs in the company of others is called socialised aggression (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994).

Another broad category of disordered behaviour is referred to as internalising and includes behaviour that reflects emotional problems such as depression and withdrawal. It may also include embarrassment, self-consciousness, sadness and anxiety (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994).

Emotional disturbances originate from a combination of factors, most of which are beyond the control of educators. Heredity, broken families, conflict at home, improper discipline, peer influence, poverty, and stress are some factors that contribute to behaviour disorders. Institutions of learning have long been criticised as an alien culture for a large proportion of South Africa's learners. The curriculum, along with the other values and standards associated with institutions of learning, is said to have little that really interests these learners (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994).

The extent to which access of students with SEN to higher education could succeed in South African HEIs will largely depend on the educators who have to implement inclusive curriculum practices. If these educators or academics are motivated and creative, students will reap the benefits that the HEIs have the potential for providing. However, it should be emphasised that students with SEN are not the sole responsibility of educators alone. Parents and the wider community should support educators. Inclusivity is a process that calls for teamwork and joint responsibility. This approach, more than anything else, will encourage a person to become a lifelong learner (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994).

2.5.2   Funding formula

It was noted in the preceding subsection that the South African Constitution clearly makes provision for education as a fundamental right for all citizens. Additionally, the equality clause in the Constitution provides that all learners have the right to the provision of equal education and that in exercising this right, they should be free from all forms of discrimination. Most important, this clause in the South African Constitution further recognises the need for redress in overcoming past inequities and addressing previous disadvantage (see Subsections 2.2.1 and 2.4.5)

The inadequacy of resources available to meet the basic needs of SEN students in higher education provision could be one the main of reasons for the marginalisation

and exclusion of SEN students. It seems that resources are always lacking in relation to demand. Hence, the supply of adequate resources should be viewed as a priority.

According to the Chapter 4 Funding section 4.1 (RSA Government Gazette, 1997) the transformation of the higher education system to meet the growth, equity and quality objectives will involve additional costs. The obvious question is: how are these costs to be met when the significant real increase in public expenditure on higher education is unlikely to greatly exceed the real rate of economic growth?

The Ministry of Education explicitly states that financial need should not be an insuperable barrier to access and success in higher education. The financing of higher education must increase equity in access and outcomes, improve quality and efficiency, and link higher education activities and national and regional development needs more purposefully. Diversity of clientele, mission and programmes are essential features of a thriving and integrated system (RSA Government Gazette, 1997).

In Section 4.14 (RSA Government Gazette, 1997) it is further stated that goal-oriented public funding of HEIs is intended to result in:

> "(i) more equitable students access; (ii) improve quality of teaching and research; (iii) increased student progression and graduation rates; and (iv) greater responsiveness to social and economic needs".

The mechanism of earmarked funding for institutional redress according to Section 4.34 (RSA Government Gazette, 1997) grants that:

> "…there will be a programme of targeted funding to redress inequalities and deficiencies…The function of the redress programme 'is to target specific needs related to access and capacity' which derive from educational deficits and other forms of deliberate disadvantage suffered by learners or institutions as a result of past government policies".

Equally important in this gazette is Section 4.35 (RSA Government Gazette, 1997), which states that:

> "…funding under the redress programme will be regained to document the specific needs for which will provide relief or a remedy, and the planned outcomes…institutions will need to indicate the measures they will use to evaluate their success in applying the funds to achieve stated outcomes".

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The above quotations from the RSA Government Gazette (1997) fully commit the Ministry of Education to redressing the inequalities of the past. This is intended to ensure that no student will be marginalised or excluded from accessing education at a higher education level because of poverty, SEN or other factors that might disadvantage a student to participate fully in higher education.

It is noticeable that the Department of Education regards equity and redress as a fundamental principle that should guide the process of transformation in the spirit of an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom. This principle requires fair opportunities for both access to and success in higher education. Applying the principle requires a critical identification of inequalities, which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on disability, racial, gender and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage. Transformation will involve not only abolishing existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, that include financial support in order to bring about opportunity for individuals and institutions.

2.5.3   Inequalities in society or socio-economic barriers

The relationship between education provision and socio-economic conditions in any society must be recognised as a factor in bringing about effective learning. Effective learning is fundamentally influenced by the availability of educational resources to meet the needs of any society. In South Africa, there is an inadequate number of centres of learning and other facilities to meet the educational needs of the population. Inadequacies in educational provision are linked to other inequalities in the society such as urban/rural disparities, as well as inequalities arising from discrimination on grounds of disability, race and gender. Barriers result not only from inadequacy of educational provision, but also from policies and practices, which are designed to perpetuate these inequalities (RSA DoE, 1997).

2.5.3.1 Lack of access to basic services

One of the most significant barriers to learning remains the inability of students to access educational institutions and their inability to access other services that contribute to the learning process. In most instances the inability to gain access to educational provision results from inadequate or non-existent services and facilities, which are the key to participation in higher education. In general, the existing transport system is inaccessible to SEN students, particularly those who are

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physically challenged or those who use wheelchairs. Hence, students with disabilities who should be attending HEIs are unable to attend due to the inadequate public transport system. In this way, these students are excluded and marginalised from participating in educational provision (RSA DoE, 1997).

Lack of access to other services, such as communication services, treatment for chronic illness, will also affect the learning process and this leads to learning breakdown or exclusion. The lack of Sign Language interpreters in HEIs means that these students are marginalised and learning therefore becomes inaccessible to deaf students.

2.5.3.2 Poverty and underdevelopment

For SEN students, the most obvious result of poverty, often caused by unemployment and other economic inequalities, is the inability of families to meet the basic needs of nutrition and shelter. Students living under such conditions are subject to increased emotional stress, which adversely affects their learning and intellectual development. Undernourishment leads to a lack of concentration and a range of other symptoms, which affect the ability of students to engage effectively in the learning process (RSA DoE, 1997).

In considering the effects of poverty on the learning process and access to education, it is also important to recognise the link between poverty and disability. People with disabilities are often those most easily excluded from the education system and from the labour market and are therefore the most poverty stricken in any population.

2.5.4   Negative attitudes towards differences

It is argued that negative attitudes towards differences will result in discrimination and prejudice in society. This could manifest itself as a serious barrier to learning. The discriminatory attitudes resulting from prejudice against people on the basis of race, class, gender, culture, disability, religion, ability, sexual preference and other features manifest themselves as barriers to learning when such attitudes are directed towards students in the education system (RSA DoE, 1997).

The negative attitude towards students with SEN manifests itself in the labelling of students. These labels are negative associations between the students and the system, such as "slow learners", "dropouts" or "repeaters". This labelling could have

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an impact on student's self-esteem; the most serious result of such labelling could be placement or exclusion. This perpetuates the failure of the education system to change or adapt to meet the needs of students with SEN. Labelling sometimes goes so far as to categorise students, particularly those with SEN as being ineducable. Such a label fails to consider what is needed from institutions of learning in order to meet the needs of students with SEN, whatever their capabilities and capacity (RSA DoE, 1997).

The negative attitudes and labelling are regarded as the result of fear and lack of awareness about particular needs of students or the potential barriers that they may face. For students with SEN, fear and lack of awareness about disability among some parents and educators remains a significant barrier to their learning. Other able students who further alienate the disabled students sometimes pick up negative attitudes towards disability. Many of the negative attitudes towards disability result from some traditional and religious beliefs, which denigrate disability.

2.5.5   Inaccessible physical structures or environment

The vast majority of HEIs are physically inaccessible to many students, especially those with physical disabilities. Inaccessibility is particularly evident where centres are physically inaccessible to those who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices. Such inaccessibility often also renders institutions of learning unsafe for blind and deaf students (RSA DoE, 1997).

This study suggests that the physical environment of HEIs should meet the needs of disabled students; those who have spinal/joint problems, who are paraplegic, who suffer from Friedreich's ataxia, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, or rheumatoid arthritis, or who have lost a limb and those students with SEN who seek a university education. The public ignorance of physical factors can affect the learning of students with SEN directly. The SEN students should not be denied easy access to the common areas of the universities (i.e. library facilities, toilets, lecture rooms, and laboratories).

Equally vital, the view is endorsed that no matter how much physical access is improved, if there is no change in the ideology of the institution, its staff and its curriculum, then the problem will remain. Furthermore, the SEN students can only be actively integrated in the process of inclusion when a barrier-free environment has been created where learning take place.

2.6 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

It is important to recognise the nature and extent of the problems and/or barriers that exist in HEIs in South Africa. It is equally important to recognise the strengths of the education system in this country. Such strengths, which is visible throughout the system as stipulated in various policy documents, need to be harnessed and supported in order to facilitate the transformation and restructuring which is seen as necessary. The strength should be critically evaluated and further analysed so that South African institutions of higher learning can begin to engage in a constant process of re-evaluation and further ongoing transformation, while at the same time realising that these processes are fluid and never complete.

The strengths in the higher education sector in South Africa need to develop and respond to the exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation experienced by SEN students. These strengths have come about through a long process of struggle by learners, parents, educators, policy makers and advocates to minimise, overcome and prevent barriers, to realise equal access to education provision and possible education for all. The most significant outcome of these struggles has been the implementation of democracy in South Africa and commitment and change emanating from this process of change.

The NCSNET/NCESS report (RSA DoE, 1997) and the White Paper on Education and Training (RSA DoE, 2001) provide a comprehensive framework for the transformation process, which is needed to change the education provision into one which will meet the needs of all learners. They also clearly integrate the notions of education and training and further argue that both are the key to human resource development of skills in order to sustain effective economic development.

The values and principles that inform this research study come from the views that are stated in the White Paper on Education and Training (RSA DoE, 2001), which notes four key areas of concern. These are: (i) The goal of an education and training policy should be to ensure that all learners, adults and children, have equal access to a lifelong learning process; (ii) to recognise that in South Africa massive inequalities have existed in the past in the provision of education and that central to policy development and planning is the need to redress these inequalities; (iii) that all state resources must be provided according to the principle of equality so that all learners have access to equal education opportunities; and (iv) to ensure that the provision of education of education is of good quality to all.

The Green Paper (RSA Integrated National Disability Strategy, 1995) shows that people with disabilities in this country have been severely marginalised in the past and have further been denied fundamental rights such as education.

The Paper emphasises the need for a shift from a "welfare" model of disability to a developmental model premised on fundamental human rights. It further argues that people with disabilities are entitled to an environment in which they should have equal access to all facets of society available to the rest of the population. In this regard, further attention needs to be paid to breaking down those barriers, which have marginalised people with disabilities and resulted in massive inequalities (RSA DoE, 1997).

The researcher is of the opinion that it is time for HEIs to commit themselves to increased observance of the human rights and development of SEN students. The study views these students as equal members of society and HEIs should recognise and accommodate diversity.

In the study, therefore, access to equal educational provision has been discussed and defined through various discourses. In fact, the understanding of disabilities and access to equal education provision remains a social construction. Equal access to education provision has to do with how the marginalised and/or excluded SEN students understand the barriers and what they think could be done to overcome them and what they as equal human beings feel and aspire to become.

Equally important is the primary challenge that faces HEIs, that is to actively seek broader access for SEN students who have historically been marginalised at this level. These institutions need to provide opportunities for SEN students to receive an education to enable them to better access to the job market. Alongside this challenge is the need to develop the institution's capacity to address diverse needs and barriers to learning. It should include all persons, especially those previously excluded, and will require that an adequate enabling mechanism be put in place to ensure that all possible barriers are overcome and that the process evolves and progresses. The initiatives of both the excluded and/or marginalised and the institutions of higher education should be supported and appropriately developed.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Three discusses the research approaches operationalised in the study. It includes the procedures used for sampling and the various research instruments, the reasons for deciding to use them, a description of how the data was collected, coded and collated and finally the conclusion.

Chapter Three will also demonstrate the integration of qualitative and quantitative research methods, thus implying triangulation. The limitations and strengths of both approaches are highlighted, and the conclusion is reached that triangulation reduces the risk of systematic distortions inherent in the use of only one method. Thus, the combination of methods may add breadth or depth to the analysis. Triangulation is understood as a means to increase scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings, so that the three methodological approaches employed will be combined to produce sound explanations.

3.2 APPROACHES TO RESEARCH

The approaches to research paradigms are examined. This is to demonstrate the rationale for this particular methodology. The focus is on the strengths and limitations of these approaches, which are the positivistic and critical emancipatory research paradigms.

The features of qualitative research and how it differs from quantitative research are listed below:

- Qualitative research is concerned with the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals producing subjective data.

- Qualitative research describes social phenomena as they occur naturally. No attempt is made to manipulate the situation under study, as is the case with experimental quantitative research.

- Understanding of a situation is gained through a holistic perspective. Quantitative research depends on the ability to identify a set of variables.

- Data is used to develop concepts and theories that help us to understand the social world. This is an inductive approach to the development of theory. Quantitative research is deductive in that it tests theories that have already been proposed.

- Qualitative data is collected through direct encounters with individuals, through one-to-one interviews or group interviews or by observation.

- Data collection is time-consuming and intensive, and necessitates the use of small samples.

- Different sampling techniques are used. In quantitative research, sampling seeks to demonstrate representativeness of findings through random selection of subjects. Qualitative sampling techniques are concerned with seeking information from specific groups and subgroups in the population.

- Criteria used to assess reliability and validity differ from those used in quantitative research (Hancock, 1998).

Each of the various features of both research approaches listed above may be viewed as strengths or as weaknesses, depending on the purpose of the study. For example, one common criticism levelled against qualitative research is that the results of a study may not be generalisable to a larger population because the sample group might have been small and the subjects not randomly chosen. However, the original research question may have sought insight into a specific subgroup of the population, not the general population because the subgroup is "special" or different from the general population "Specialness" is the focus of the research. The small sample may have been necessary because very few subjects were available, as in this case with students with SEN at higher education. In this study, generalisability of the findings to a wider, more diverse population is not an aim (Lather, 1991).

3.2.1 Positivism

Research may be conducted within at least three paradigms. These are the positivistic, the phenomenological and the critical paradigms. According to Ivey (1986), each of the research approaches reflects a particular perspective of reality. A positivistic research approach is actually an attempt by both the social and human

sciences to use methods of research usually applied in the natural sciences. The focus of this research approach is on the quantification of results.

Positivists believe that there is an objective real world beyond the individual's body, which can be known and described. All conclusions about reality are based on empirical observations that can be publicly verified (seen, heard, touched, smelt and measured). The aim of research is to collect evidence to formulate a generalisation or laws that govern human behaviour. Thus, human behaviour can be predicted and controlled. Validity of findings is determined by the specific procedures of the method – in other words, by the fact that the researcher is an objective outsider and that large samples represent the features of certain populations (Ivey, 1986).

According to positivism, we can understand the nature of reality by studying the researcher's empirical findings and their interpretations. A picture of reality is portrayed by means of linguistic, mathematical and graphic descriptions, which can be generalised to groups similar to the sample involved in the research project (Schulze, 2003).

Positivists generally assume that reality is objectively given and can be described by measurable properties, which are independent of the observer (researcher) and his/her instruments. Positivist researchers generally attempt to test theory in an attempt to increase the predictive understanding of phenomena. In this research approach, the focus is on formal propositions, quantifiable measures of variables, hypothesis testing, and the drawing of inferences about a phenomenon from the sample to a stated population (Yin, 1994).

Mahlomaholo (1998) states that in a positivistic approach, there is a belief that for objectivity to be attained the methods of research must be valid and reliable; and if these two requisites can be achieved, then the results obtained will reveal 'the truth'. Lather 1986, Harvey 1990 and Berg 1995 maintain that positivistic research believes in formulating general or universal laws. These laws are formulated based on quantitative empirical findings, which are in turn used for predicting the outcomes of known causes. If facts or outcomes are known, according to this approach, causes could be inferred using positivistic research methodologies.

3.2.2 Post-positivism

Criticism against positivism includes: Research results do not lead to an improved understanding of social problems; research is disconnected from the context in which

it was carried out; and there is a failure to accommodate human subjectivity in inquiry or the role of meaning in behaviour, development or social life. The critics of positivism, labelled post-positivists, therefore revised positivism (Schulze, 2003).

Post-positivists believe, as do positivists, that a picture of reality can be portrayed by means of linguistic, mathematical and graphic descriptions, which can be generalised to similar groups,. However, individual differences are also portrayed. In addition, the researcher does not assume objectivity, but acknowledges personal biases in the selection of places and people to study, the questions that are chosen for interviews or questionnaires and the theory which is adopted and which necessarily influences the interpretation of results (Schulze, 2003).

3.2.3   Postmodernism

Dissatisfaction with positivism led not only to post-positivism, but also to postmodernism with all its variants in the different disciplines. Broadly speaking, a mild and a radical version can be distinguished (Harvey, 1990).

The positivist's belief that there is an objective, real world out there is questioned or denied. Researchers' own needs, cultural traditions, training and biases filter into their experiences. According to the radical version, people continually express their experiences in languages and this linguistic interpretation becomes their reality. These realities are described differently by different people, which serve to confirm that there is no objective reality out there (Berg, 1995).

For postmodernism, the aim of research is political (Schulze, 2003), viz. to correct society's wrongs (e.g. in this study the marginalisation of students with SEN in the higher education sector). Hence, the purpose of research is to address the injustices that are inflicted on the disadvantaged. Regarding validity of the research endeavour, there are no fixed criteria for evaluation, other than respect for subjectivity and feeling. For the results, there are no generalisations drawn or applications recommended (Schulze, 2003).

3.2.4   Critical emancipatory qualitative approach

The critical emancipatory qualitative research approach is viewed as a more humane and a particularly human approach to knowledge production. In positivistic research, the basis is objectivity, validity, reliability and so on. However, the critical emancipatory research approach had come to note that human experience was

dynamic, multiple and fluid. It therefore could not be held constant as with objects in a natural science laboratory (Mahlomaholo and Nkoane, 2002).

A critical emancipatory research approach emphasises that if research were to be conducted on people they have to be allowed to speak and their words should constitute data and bases for drawing findings about them (Held, 1983 and Ivey, 1986 in Mahlomaholo & Nkoane, 2002); while positivism relies heavily on quantitative methodologies, calculations and statistical analysis. The critical emancipatory approach focuses more on words and their interpretation as spoken by the researched.

However, there is an epistemological confusion with regard to a critical emancipatory research approach in that even though the researched are allowed to speak, the researcher still focuses on coding and calculating the number of words uttered by a particular speaker as a basis for drawing research conclusions and thereby making findings. While words are spoken in truly qualitative research, those are later quantified as in quantitative and positivistic research. Even the manner of accessing and assessing quality follows the same quantitative rhetoric of positivism where quality in research is checked mainly based on objectivity, reliability and validity (Mahlomaholo & Nkoane, 2002).

The major approach in the operationalisation of a critical emancipatory approach is to describe the researched and their experiences from outside, from the researcher's perspective. The participant's utterances matter only as far as the researcher is able to allow them and understand them. This constitutes the bulk of qualitative research, where the question of quality has to conform to external standards or the gold standards (Thorne, 1998 cf. Mahlomaholo & Nkoane, 2003), which are nothing other than the positivist's criteria of quality.

This kind of qualitative research has its origins in the likes of Habermas, Adorno and the Frankfurt School (Held, 1983; Ivey, 1986). The school of thought is organised from the gradual rejection of the positivist view of social research, viewed as the pursuit of absolute knowledge through the scientific method and the gradual disillusionment with the interpretive view. Such research is viewed as the generation of socially useful knowledge within particular historical and social contexts. The emanicipatory paradigm, as the name implies, is about the facilitation of the politics of the possible by confronting social oppression at whatever levels it occurs (Oliver, 1996).

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In this study, when critical emancipatory qualitative research is described, research methodology is meant that is sensitive to the plight of students with SEN who have been disadvantaged, oppressed, excluded and marginalised in the higher education sector. This approach wishes to do something about the subaltern status of these marginalised students.

The critical emancipatory research approach assumes that social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced and reproduced by people. Although people can consciously act to change their social and economic circumstances, critical researchers recognise that their ability to do so is constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination. The main task of this approach is seen as being one of social criticism, whereby the restrictive and alienating conditions of the status quo are brought to light. This research approach focuses on the oppositions, conflicts and contradictions in society, and seeks to be emanicipatory, i.e. it should help to eliminate the cause of alienation and domination. Therefore, in this study, the focus is on the marginalisation of the students with SEN (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

The critical researchers do not believe in quantifying human experiences. They strongly argue that human beings are dynamic and that their experiences cannot be treated in the same way as if they were objects in a natural science laboratory (Harvey, 1990). Human beings should be studied through particular human methodologies that would respect and enhance their subjectiveness.

The aim of employing this methodology is to transform society by bringing respectability to the downtrodden, by restoring full human status to students with SEN at higher institution of learning. The critical emancipatory qualitative research approach emphasises liberation and emancipation of the researched and the researcher, because it proposes that the act of research should be about becoming more human. The researcher becomes an important research instrument, who comes closer to the researched – to the extent of even becoming one with them. The researcher elevates the researched to the status of equals and then looks at the world, including the researched problem, through their eyes (Can & Kemmis, 1986; Creswell, 1988; Eisner, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Masson, 1996; Reason, 1994; Smalling, 1995; cf. Mahlomaholo & Nkoane, 2002).

This study is aimed at empowering the researcher and the researched (i.e. students with SEN) – hence the inclusion of the critical emancipatory, approach. Nevertheless, positivistic approaches are also operationalised because if coupled with the critical

strategies, the power of analysis is enhanced without necessarily falling into the trap of pure positivism.

3.2.5 Limitations and strengths of quantitative and qualitative research

According to Hathaway (1995), quantitative research systematically overlooks critical features of human phenomena in the analysis of empirical results; the results are often of limited value. Such features include the definition of human action in specific settings, the human interest, and the historical context of the situation. Hence, the quantitative approach has often been criticised as being dehumanising. The other criticism levelled against the quantitative approach is that it restricts the views of human beings because they concentrate on repetitive and predictable aspects of human behaviour.

Ivey (1986) asserts that quantitative methodology involves controlling of variables so that the effect of the treatment factor can become clear and un-confounded in the research, if the research is not a knowledge accident. However, it is a deliberate and if the aim of the investigator is to control the subjects of his/her investigation on behalf of the dominant status quo, thus meaning subjects in the investigation are treated like objects in the natural science laboratory. The critical theories of Ivey (1986), Habermas (1987) and Lather (1986) have objected to the use of these methodologies in research against this background.

In quantitative research, the researcher is the only "subject" while the researched are treated as quantifiable objects. Held (1983) critically argued that this approach misses the point because it can never be absolutely objective, especially when studying human beings as they too interpret the fluidity of human experiences in a particular way, which is not neutral.

Whilst this approach has yielded a diverse and colourful variety of descriptions of everyday life, it poses a number of problems or limitations when viewed from the perspective of critical social research. First, no attempt is made to place the beliefs and behaviour of the researched into a historical or structural context; it is considered sufficient simply to describe different forms of consciousness without trying to explain how and why they developed. This leads to a second problem, the tendency to adopt an uncritical attitude to the beliefs and consciousness of the researched, without considering their epistemological adequacy or their emanicipatory potential (Hancock, 1998).

While this approach is arguably more precise, the response would be that with people, it is not possible to be so precise. People change and the social situation is too complex for numerical description. Quantifiable evidence seems to be very powerful but it can also hide a great deal about people, especially their understanding and world experiences (Hancock, 1998).

Equally important, quantitative research methodology remains more interested in what the researched "do" without a comprehensive understanding of those actions. It tends, therefore, to be concerned with behaviour as an end in itself without paying sufficient attention to understanding that behaviour. The positivistic approach could also be coined as behaviourism. Even where "attitudes" are explored, it is usually through pre-structured questionnaires which do not allow the researched to provide their own agenda. The researcher using this approach decides on the important questions (Held, 1983).

One common criticism levelled at a quantitative positivistic research approach is that questionnaires are not a good strategy to uncover the voices of the marginalised, voiceless people who are at the periphery of society. Questionnaires in their search for "objectivity" are pre-structured according to an agenda of interests closer to that of the researcher than the researched (Hancock, 1998).

On the other hand, interpretive (qualitative) research may appear to be fraught with subjectivism and questionable precision, rigour and credibility. It has also been stated that although behaviour patterns may be the result of the meanings individuals attach to situations, these individuals may be falsely conscious that there may be an objective perspective, which is different from that of the individuals themselves (Schulze, 2003).

Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and/or the researched and the social and cultural context within which they live. Kaplan and Maxwell (1994) argue that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data is quantified.

The critical emanicipatory research paradigm offers an important link to some of the main concerns and addresses questions of power, ideology and subjective meaning. This research methodology can be characterised as an attempt to obtain an in-depth understanding of the meanings and "definitions of the situation" presented by the

researched, rather than the production of quantitative "measurement" of their behaviour. In the critical emanicipatory methodology, then, the subjective beliefs of the researched are revealed (Held, 1983). Thus for this study of students with SEN , the methodology required detailed observation and interaction by the researcher in order to see the world "through the eyes" of the researched.

The research approach will enable the researcher to get beneath the surface of everyday "common sense" assumptions in order to arrive at a deeper level of understanding that will not only be of academic interest to the researcher, but will also contribute to the development of critical consciousness amongst the oppressed groups in this study.

It should be clear from the above that critical emanicipatory qualitative research methodology does not avoid the complexity of social life. Instead, greater efforts are made to illuminate and understand social situations and human feelings through immersion and detailed, in-depth exploration (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

Hammersley (1991) asserts that the critical emanicipatory research approach seeks to articulate the view of people studied or researched and researchers employing the methodology often analyse the data in ways that are likely to be alien to those studied.

In this approach, the researcher seeks to understand and to relate the subjective understanding and the actions of those being researched. Moreover, in some cases, the relationship between the researcher and the researched can be very close, even to the point of collaboration.

3.3   APPROACH AND JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY

The study presents and interprets data from three seemingly contradictory approaches, namely positivistic, critical emancipatory and textual orientated discourse analysis. Data collection techniques include qualitative and quantitative methods, such as questionnaires, open-ended questions and structured interviews.

The triangulation model is used because a mutual validation of results on the basis of different methods can be achieved, to obtain a larger and a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study; and further, triangulation in its original trigonometrical sense gives an indication that a combination of methods is necessary in order to gain any, but not necessarily a fuller, picture of the relevant phenomenon (Schulze, 2003).

This thesis looks at integration of qualitative and quantitative methods as a means of increasing scope, depth and consistency in the methodological proceedings rather than contestation. The main reason for triangulation is to produce a more complete picture of the investigated phenomena and to produce sound explanations. Analysis of factors that inhibit access to higher education by students with SEN, which is the focus of this study, then demonstrates clearly why triangulation is necessary.

The following sections therefore discuss the operationalisation of triangulation as a methodology adopted in this study respectively.

3.4   STAGE ONE: QUANTITATIVE OPERATIONALISATION

This section of the study describes measurable research properties used in this investigation. The rational behind illustration of the research methodology employed is to demonstrate the validity and reliability, and how these two requisitions can be achieved. It also includes the identification of the instruments, as well as procedures for analysis, reasons for choosing the identified instruments as well as the nature thereof are discussed.

3.4.1   Sampling

In the following subsections the discussions on the geographic location of the sample and the size of the sample. The reasons as to why particular size and geographic location were decided upon are given.

3.4.1.1 Geographic location of sample

It was decided to choose one out of the nine provinces in the country, namely the Free State. The choice of the location was based on economic reasons and so that the study should be more focused, rather than sacrificing the depth of the study with breadth. The Free State Province was chosen also because it is the most central province in the Republic of South Africa. The intention to conduct research in one province instead of nine in the country was because the study wished to strive towards an in-depth analysis and understanding of the phenomenon investigated. Hence, it was decided to choose one province in which the researcher has good access to HEIs.

The Free State as a Province boasts two (2) institutions of higher education with five satellite campuses (i.e. two campuses of the Central University of Technology and

three campuses of the University of the Free State). The target population in this study included the offices for services for students with disabilities or management on each campus; programme coordinators and academics in different academic departments; students with SEN currently enrolled, or those who had previously received services from these institutions; and students with SEN who were not registered with these institutions. However, some of the findings may apply equally to students with SEN in other institutions of higher learning beyond the boundaries of the Free State and the country.

3.4.1.2 Sizes of sample(s)

Out of two HEIs in the Free State Province, only one institution was selected for the study. However, the sample was drawn from three different satellite campuses of the same institution and other participants were from outside the institution. Thus it included people with SEN and those students who previously registered with the institution. Sampling in this study was randomly selected.

The satellite campuses are identified only as "A campus", "B campus" and "C campus" for ethical and confidentiality reasons and will constitute the sample in this research. The total number of students with SEN differs from one campus to the other depending on their registration. An attempt was made to achieve an equal representation of management, personnel in offices for students and academics across different campuses in order to have an equal proportional representation. An Equal gender representivity (i.e. male and female) was another objective of the sampling.

The intention was to have at least ten (10) enrolled students selected from each of the three campuses (3X10=30.). Another fifteen (15) selected from the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) around the campuses included those who had previously enrolled or had never had access to these institutions. Five (5) management personnel at each campus (5x3=15), another five (5) officials working in the offices of students with disabilities (5x3=15) and at least fifteen (15) academics were selected randomly from different departments (15x3=45). This brought the total population to one hundred and twenty (120) participants.

3.4.2   Research instruments

Two instruments were used. The one was the Creating Accessible Resources for Staff (CARS) Project Team Survey Instrument (2003-5) for the management, officials

in the offices of disabled students and the academic staff members. This instrument was selected to measure the skills needed to teach and support disabled students effectively and in an inclusive way. The other instrument was the Participation in Higher Education (PHE) Survey Instrument (see Appendix B) and this was designed for internal and external students to obtain information on students with SEN and on those who were currently enrolled, who had previously enrolled or who had never had a chance to access an HEI.

3.4.2.1 CARS instrument

The CARS instrument was designed during a project team survey commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England as part of a major programme for improving disability education provision at HEIs during the period 2003-05. The Open University's Student Support Research Group provided this and the instrument was designed to enable teachers or lecturers and support staff to:

- Understand the learning support needs of disabled students.

- Find out how assistive technology and specialist human support facilitates the teaching and learning of disabled students.

- Develop effective, inclusive teaching strategies for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind/partially sighted, or who have specific learning or mental health difficulties.

The instrument had five sections named "Personal details", "Previous experience", "Previous training", "Needs" and "Other comments" with regard to the teaching and learning of disabled students. The instrument was constructed with the following aims and/or criteria in mind:

- That tutors need practical advice on how to teach students with specific disabilities.

- To identify the resources needed by higher education staff to teach particularly groups of disabled students effectively.

- To develop new resources where there are gaps in provision (CARS Project, 2003-2005).

3.4.2.2 Theoretical background of CARS instrument

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The Open University developed the CARS Instrument in its first year of a three-year (2003-05) project for developing multimedia and codes of good practices for teaching students with SEN in higher education. It was directed at those who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or partially sighted or who have specific learning or mental health difficulties. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded the project through its strand to "Improve Provision for Disabled Students". The instrument seems to be scientific and relevant to this study, because some of the questions are appropriate, as in the following examples: "How experienced are you at teaching disabled students?", "How knowledgeable are you about the learning and teaching support needs of the disabled?", "Have you received general disability awareness training?, "To what extent have you previously experienced difficulties teaching disabled students?" (CARS Project, 2003-2005).

The Open University research has demonstrated the usefulness and value of this instrument in showing some limitations or even the lack of training and exposure of academics and support staff working directly with students with SEN. The instrument was sent to about 1500 Open University lecturers in December 2002 to collect data that would form the basis of a project that could assist academics and support staff. The instrument was also used on a small group of lecturing staff at the University of Sussex and published on the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) home page (CARS Project, 2003-2005).   .

Altogether,616 completed questionnaires were received. It may be natural to assume that because 95% of responses were from the Open University associate lecturers, the research findings might not be relevant to the teaching staff and/or support staff across the higher education sector. This could be wrong. Most teaching activities carried out by Open University lecturers and support staff are the same as those undertaken by teaching staff and support staff in other HEIs. The responses should therefore present a snapshot of opinion and experience that is reliable, valid and representative of the whole higher education sector (CARS Project, 2003-2005).

The only limitation was that this instrument has not been used extensively in South African HEIs. However, this instrument has demonstrated its scientific accuracy by indicating the problems and limitations of lecturing and support staff at certain European higher educations. It was also able to measure the skills needed to teach and support the SEN students effectively and in an inclusive way. Based on these factors, the CARS instrument is viewed as a scientific instrument whose findings can be relied on.

3.4.2.3 PHE survey instrument

The PHE Survey Instrument for students was designed in Australia (1997) for research that was conducted in October to November of that year. It was a project commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) aimed at developing new measures to identify students excluded from the university but also to make the university more welcoming and supportive of students with disabilities. This information was to be used by the University of Queensland research team to improve the current method of measuring participation of students with disabilities in tertiary education (DEETYA, 1999).

The questions represent dimensions of increase level, campus climate, programme philosophy, awareness and support, academic adjustments, tutorial support and inclusion or exclusion of students at HEIs. This had been identified by prior research and discussions with equity officers and support staff working with disabled students and it suggested that these questions were relevant in the higher education context. A comprehensive set of questions on the PHE instrument was included to allow for the development and validation of various measures ranging from self-assessed disadvantage to composite scores, which take into account the characteristics of students (DEETYA, 1999).

The PHE instrument was designed in two versions, for internal students and external students respectively. The versions are very similar, except for questions relating to reasons for non-participation in the higher education sector.

3.4.2.4 Improvement of PHE instrument

The PHE instrument has over time undergone a number of significant transformations, as it was designed and developed at the University of Queensland (1997) and has been used at the Virginia Commonwealth University, and at the Rehabilitation Research and Training Centre on Workplace Support (2000). Its focus was to measure the post-secondary education students with disabilities, post-secondary transition, higher education access, academic adjustments, services for students with disabilities, and employment outcomes (DEETYA, 1999)..

The researcher also adapted the instrument by omitting some of the questions that would not be significant in this study. Only those questions that seemed to be relevant or questions that measured the inclusivity and exclusivity of students with

SEN were left in the instrument. The instrument has been adapted to suit the context of African students with SEN.

The instrument consists of four (4) subscales named: "Student demographic"; "primary disability classification"; "Academic profile"; "Service utilisation and need"; and "Satisfaction with services". Subscale two presents the distribution of the students' primary disability category: Students, who identified specific learning disabilities, including Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD); Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); Chronic health problem; Head injury; Hearing impairment; Neurological impairment; Physical impairment; Visual impairment; and Speech or language impairment. Subscale four requested information regarding the utilisation of services in seven broad categories: (1) Physical Accessibility Assistance; (2) Special Media or Adaptive Equipment; (3) Registration; Curriculum or Instructional Modifications; (4) Personal Assistance; (5) Specialised Support Services; (6) Generic Services; and (7) Students Services. In this subscale, students are asked which specific services were needed and which were most utilised (DEETYA, 1999).

3.4.2.5 Validity of PHE instrument

The PHE instrument has been used at the University of Queensland and with minor changes at the Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Support (see *Journal of vocational rehabilitation* No 14 2000:1-13). This is a significant indication of its validity and reliability. The range of its application has been as diverse as determining the inclusivity and exclusivity of students with SEN (Inge, Strobel,Wehman, Todd and Target, 2000).

Another point of note is that of the construct validity of this instrument based on the relatively high level between variables. This instrument has been normed and standardised as reported in the Virginia Commonwealth University research studies (*Journal of vocational rehabilitation* No 14 2000:1-13). The only adaptation necessary was to make it more relevant to the South African higher education sector. However, the instrument still measures what it was designed, seems to be a scientific instrument whose findings can be relied upon (Inge *et.al.* 2000).

3.4.2.6 Administration of instruments

Both the CARS and PHE quantitative instruments were issued to the respective participants (i.e. academics, support staff, management, enrolled students and

external students) to respond to the questionnaires. The researcher and the research assistant administered them. As an indicator of factors that inhibit students with special education needs at HEIs, the researcher asked all student participants, academics and support staff, including the participating members of the management teams, to answer the appropriate questions either by circling or to choose the block that best suited them (i.e. not satisfied, somewhat/reasonably satisfied, very satisfied and not applicable).. The objective was to provide data to ascertain SEN students' and participants' collective perspective on a variety of disability-related "student affairs" (i.e. inclusivity and exclusivity) issues and their level of satisfaction with the services provided by the HEI in the Free State Province, academics and the HEI's administration/management. A total of 92% of questionnaires distributed were returned.

3.5   STAGE TWO: QUALITATIVE OPERATIONALISATION

This section of the study demonstrates how the data was collected, presented, and analysed using the textual orientated discourse analysis and operationalising the qualitative research methodology. The reasons as to why qualitative research paradigms are operationalised in this study are also discussed.

3.5.1   Discourse analytic procedures

The thesis employs the deconstruction discourse analytic procedures as a strategy for interpreting and analysing data. These discourses assist the study to reveal the underlayers of meaning in a text that were suppressed in order for it to take its actual form.

3.5.1.1 Sampling

Only fifteen interviews were conducted out of the total population of 120. The interviewees were selected randomly from the campuses that participated in the study, from: (1) students who were enrolled; (2) others from NGOs; (3) management personnel or divisional heads; (4) officials working in the offices for students with disabilities; and (5) academics in different departments. The discourse analytical approach that this thesis has adopted does not put much emphasis on numbers.

3.5.1.2 Data collation

The data collection approach was a direct interaction with individuals on a one-to-one basis. The benefit of the approach is the richness of data and the deeper insight produced by the phenomena under investigation. In this manner the researcher heard the voices of the voiceless and the marginalised students with SEN that had been pushed to the periphery of society.

FAI Techniques (FAI) were used, informed by open-ended questions (sometimes referred to as "depth" or "in depth" interviews). Such questions may have very little structure at all. One or two topics would be discussed and they could be covered in extensive detail. Questions would depend on how the interviewee responded. The researcher wanted to find out about factors that inhibited access to higher education by students with SEN. However, there was no structure or preconceived plan or expectation as to how the interviewees could deal with the topic. The choice of the unstructured interviews was based on the premise that this might enable the phenomena under investigation to be explored in terms of depth (Meulenburg-Buskens, 1997).

The open-ended interview questioning technique allowed the researched to structure the research instead of the researcher imposing his own definition of the situation and/or the phenomena under investigation – the reason why this approach is called emancipatory research (see Subsection 3.2.4). The approach was not necessarily trying to empower the researched but to allow the researched to empower themselves. The aim of this approach was to facilitate the process of empowerment.

In using interviews, the researcher represented the voices of others and not replacing their voices with his own. The researcher tried not to contribute to the social construction of their silence, their voicelessness in society. This technique created a data record that truly represented the voices of the researched without censorship, without reinforcing the structures of power which continually deny a means of expression to their voices (McBride and Schostak, 2000).

The questions asked of the researched were similar across all sets of five groups identified above. Thus, the academics were asked similar questions across different departments, faculties and campuses, and likewise students with SEN and management and/or officials from offices for disabled students. The questions concerned the description of experiences that academics faced, for example, how experiences can be distorted when dealing with students with SEN.

This study has adopted two approaches in interpreting the qualitative data, namely the critical emancipatory research approach and the interpretive approach. The main task of using the critical emancipatory approach in this study is seen as being one of social critique, whereby the alienating conditions of the status quo are brought to light (see Subsections 3.2.2; 3.2.3 and 3.2.4). The alienation conditions in the study are factors that hinder students with SEN from access to institutions of higher education. The SEN students were seen in this thesis as disadvantaged, oppressed, excluded and marginalised in HEIs. The critical emancipatory research approach could assist in achieving something about the subaltern status of the researched. This research approach could allow the researcher to collate data for it to be an important research instrument; drawing closer to the researched to the extent of even becoming one with them. The researcher could elevate the researched to the status of equals and then look at the world, including the research problem, through the eyes of the researched (Can & Kemmis, 1986; Creswell, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Mahlomaholo & Nkoane, 2002; Masson, 1996; Reason, 1994; Smalling, 1995).

Collating data using the critical emanicipatory qualitative approach made the thesis empathetic to the plight of students with SEN who to date have been viewed as being excluded, underrepresented, disadvantaged and marginalised in HEIs. In the process it could be seen how SEN students understood those hindering factors that marginalised them from accessing higher education. That is why the FAI Technique (Meulenburg-Buskens, 1997) was employed to collate data. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim and later analysed using Fairclough's (1992) textual orientated discourse analysis (TODA). The technique is explained more fully in the following subsections. It focuses on text and how text was produced, disseminated and interpreted by the researcher. Then the meaning would be analysed in the context of discursive practices of students with SEN.

Furthermore, the data were interpreted using an interpretive research approach that started with the assumption that access to reality (i.e. exclusion of SEN students is socially constructed) was only through social construction such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. An interpretive approach understands the investigated phenomena through the meanings that the investigated assigned to them (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). The interpretive approach in this thesis was "aimed at producing an understanding of the exclusion and marginalisation of students with SEN and the process whereby these students and other role players influences the institutions of higher education". This approach assisted this study to avoid

predefinition of the dependent and independent variables, and focused on the full complexity of human sense-making as the situation emerged (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).

The interviews were tape-recorded, a preference which enabled the interviewer to concentrate on listening and responding to the interviewee. Hence, no interruption would be caused by trying to write down what had been said. Recording ensured that the whole interview was captured and provided complete data for analysis so that cues that were missed the first time, could be recognised when listening to the recordings. These could later be transcribed verbatim with the focus being more on content rather than on form (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997).

The tape analysis was used as a means of taking notes from playback of the tape-recorded interviews. The researcher would listen to the tape and make notes of the sections that contained particularly useful information and key quotations and return to these sections of the tape for further analysis. When transcribing, the researcher of this study would consider how the feelings and meanings could be communicated on paper (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

3.5.1.3 Analysis of data

The content analysis of the underlayers of meaning in a text was used. This is a procedure for the categorisation of verbal or behavioural data, for purposes of classification, summarisation and tabulation. The content was analysed on two levels. The basic level of analysis s a descriptive account of the data: this is what was actually said with nothing read into it and nothing assumed about it. Furthermore, the higher level of analysis was interpretative: it was concerned with what was meant by the researched, what was inferred or implied. It is sometimes called the latent level of analysis (see Chapter 5, section 5.2).

In the content analysis, all data was coded and classified. This was to identify from the transcripts the extracts of data that were informative in some way and to sort out the important messages hidden in the mass of each interview. The process of content analysis involved continually revisiting the data and reviewing the categorisation of data until the researcher was sure that the themes and categories used to summarise and describe the findings were a truthful and accurate reflection of the data.

Harvey (1990) suggests that the critical emancipatory research approach differs from traditional forms of qualitative data analysis by bringing the broader critique of social relations to bear on the structuring of analytical themes. In this manner, meaning goes beyond the concepts and understandings of the respondent's world of experience.

The data analysis procedure was also informed by the approach of Fairclough (1992) and is defined as textual oriented discourse analysis (TODA). Fairclough focuses on the actual text of what the researched state in the interviews in order to make statements about the discursive practices informing these discourses. This technique of interrogating the conversations of the researched is useful as it uses what the researched say as evidence. This implies listening and reading the actual words they say as "text". Reading the text exposes the underlying "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1979), or ideological positioning or even those deep meanings and understandings that inform any construction, dissemination and consumption of discourse. The argument is that words or language are a reflection of one's inner feelings which in turn are a reflection of the discursive practices within which an individual person's meaning construction is generated and created. The discursive practices themselves tend to mirror the social structural processes encapsulating the "speaking person's" (i.e. in this thesis, the SEN students) understanding of their exclusion from higher education (Duncan, 1993; Fairclough, 1992; Mahlomaholo, 1998).

What the researcher has done was to listen to what the researched said, understanding their words as text, then contextualising their experiences and understanding thereof in terms of discursive practices and then relating that to social structural factors to discover patterns that result in a particular meaning being created by the researched. The researcher then compared and contrasted the content of the students with SEN against those of the management, academics and staff in the offices for the disabled at institutions of higher education in the Free State. The differences and similarities were then highlighted by way of understanding the extent to which there is a contestation conceptualisation of issues at play in as far as access to higher education by SEN students is concerned (see Chapter 5 Subsections 5.2.1.1; 5.2.2.1; 5.2.3; 5.2.4 1 and 5.2.5).

All role players in higher education identified above (i.e. academic, management personnel, and officials in the offices of the disabled students) were also analysed The discourses of the students with special education needs were then compared and contrasted with those mentioned above. In any permutation of comparison and

contrast, the researcher wished to demonstrate that there were factors that inhibited access to higher education for students with SEN (Guba and Lincoln, 1998).

This comparison furthermore demonstrated the differences in terms of positioning in discursive practices and spaces of domination, which in turn would reveal how society is organised (social practices) especially from the perspective of marginalised, excluded and disadvantaged students with SEN who were the researched in this thesis.

Conclusions were drawn based on findings about what factors could inhibit access for students with SEN in higher education. Evidence to verify the findings was supplied on the basis of the actual words of the researched.

3.5.1.4 Critique and justification

Fairclough (1992), Duncan (1993) and Mahlomaholo (1998) have shown how modern research in the Social and Human Sciences is increasingly using discourse analysis as a research strategy. The researcher supports this because in discourse analytic research, the status of human beings as dynamic and/or fluid subjects is recognised. The voices of the voiceless or the researched are then given a hearing and amplification. The researcher does not speak on behalf of the researched as if they are objects in the natural science laboratory. What is even more interesting about this strategy is that the disempowered are being given a chance to empower themselves. This strategy allows the researcher to put the knowledge and skills of the researched at their disposal, for them to use in whatever ways they choose. Thus, what made this strategy emancipatory was the changing of social relations of research production by placing control in the hands of the researched and not the researcher (Fairclough, 1992).

The critique that is levelled against this strategy is that no research strategy exists that does not involve and include the opinion of the researcher in one way or the other. The researcher always decides as to which research problem to research, which methodologies of data collection and analysis are most appropriate, and most important, what interpretation can be given to the data and findings irrespective of whether the investigation is positivistic or emancipatory (cf. Chapter 6 of Mahlomaholo, 1998).

The findings that were arrived at in this thesis need not be generalised beyond the researched because the theoretical positioning this methodology strives for does not

posit establishment of general laws in order to predict human behaviour. Instead, it argues for sensitivity to human subjectiveness.

3.6 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Chapter Three has indicated how triangulation of positivistic and emanicipatory research was employed in this thesis. Furthermore, the traditional strength of quantitative research, namely objectivity, has been shown to reflect the subjective knowledge of the researcher and hence revealed the false dichotomisation of objectivity and subjectivity and of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The chapter has also shown that the use of triangulation of research methods, and the application of triangulation in this thesis, has reduced the risk of systematic distortions inherent in using only one methodology. Thus, the combination of methods would add breadth or depth to the analysis, without necessarily leading to more valid results. The researcher of this study understands triangulation not as a strategy for validating results and procedures, but as one to increase the scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings and the understanding of investigated phenomena at play.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four analyses and presents findings of data from samples drawn from the HEIs in the Free State Province and other organisations for persons with challenges or special needs. The participants were selected from different satellite campuses in the Province. Two different types of questionnaires were used; one targeted academics and supporting staff including the management (i.e. deans of faculties and heads of departments), and the other instrument targeted students only.

For academic, management and support staff the CARS instrument was administered (see Chapter 4, Subsection 4.4.1; 4.4.1.1; and 4.4.1.2). This instrument was designed to investigate whether academics and other supporting staff understand the learning support needs of SEN students, to find out how assistive technology, if in place, could support their needs; how specialist human support facilitated the teaching and learning of SEN students; and also to check the effective inclusive teaching strategies for SEN students.

This instrument seemed to be relevant and scientific to this thesis, because some of the main questions used in this instrument were: "How experienced are you at teaching or working with SEN students?"; "How knowledgeable are you about teaching and learning support needs of SEN students?" and "Have you received general disability awareness?"

The responses presented in Chapter Four present a snapshot of opinions and experiences that can be regarded as reliable, valid and representative. The CARS instrument managed to elucidate or highlight the lack of supportive services and some limitations among academic and support staff. It was also able to measure the skills needed to assist students with SEN and to indicate what support services were needed for the teaching and learning of SEN students in an inclusive way.

The second questionnaire employed was the PHE instrument. It was designed to investigate the participation or accessibility of SEN students in HEIs. The application of the PHE instrument has been as diverse as determining the inclusivity and

exclusivity of students with SEN. It measures the participation or accessibility of HEIs for students with challenges or special needs in HEIs. The questions represent dimensions of increase level of campus climate, programme philosophy, awareness and support, academic adjustments, tutorial support, environmental accessibility and inclusion or exclusion of SEN students in HEIs.

Lastly, Chapter Four interprets the findings from the CARS and PHE instruments in terms of the research questions and hypotheses in Chapter One as well as the theory discussed in the subsequent chapters. This interpretation clearly located the exclusion of SEN students within a position constructed negatively by the dominant discourse and ideology, while their voices, experiences and the factors they highlighted as barriers to access to HEIs were located within the counter-hegemonic and emancipatory framework.

4.2   SUBJECTS, PROCEDURES AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS (QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS)

4.2.1   Major CARS questionnaire for academics and support staff on accessible resources for disabled students

The CARS instrument elicited demographic information as well as previous experience, training, challenges and further additional comments. The instruments were mailed to all respondents. It consisted of a four-page questionnaire containing five sections. In most cases, one person took responsibility for completing the questionnaire.

The initial stage of the study had a two-fold purpose. First, it planned to gather data about the numbers and features of students with SEN and how they were supported in the HEIs in the Free State Province. The second purpose was to compare the views obtained from CARS instruments across the different campuses in which it was administered; and to study the views of another sector of the academic community and the support staff involved directly or indirectly with students with SEN.

The first page of the questionnaire contained an invitation to participate and a brief working instruction on how to complete the questionnaire. The institutions and respondents were identified as to whether the researched belonged to academic or support staff. The information gathered on the first page was demographic detail. On subsequent pages data was gathered on previous experience at teaching or working with disabled students, previous training received, challenges experienced in working

with teaching disabled students, types of assistance offered in institutions, and support used and required by SEN students, as well as how academics and support staff dealt with these students. Heads of departments were asked to suggest people at their departments who might be interested in the study. General comments were invited in the final open-ended question.

4.2.2 The supplementary (PHE) questionnaire on participation in higher education for disabled students

The PHE instrument was used with the express purpose of gathering data from the SEN students themselves. This instrument provided information about the nature of special educational needs, how it affected students, and demonstrated some of the assistive technology available

The four-page questionnaire comprising four sections was distributed and introduced to the researched. Only SEN students enrolled and those at disability centres wishing to enrol for higher education were encouraged to (anonymously) complete and return these questionnaires.

4.3   DATA ANALYSIS

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were used. The research questionnaires contained closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions elicited "Yes" and "No" answers, numbers or proportions. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively. Open-ended questions were analysed thematically using standard inductive techniques. In some cases, further information about statements made in the questionnaire was sought from respondents.

The qualitative emancipatory approach was more orientated towards the perspective of the researched and how they contextualised the process of knowledge construction. This qualitative research approach was applied in a more open and flexible manner. The qualitative and quantitative research discourses were used in this study to check that the findings would not be generalised beyond the researched and, moreover, to establish pointers that could be used to elaborate further beyond the researched. The main purpose of using triangulation was to crosscheck the findings made using the quantitative and the qualitative methodology.

4.4   RESULTS

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After a preliminary comment about the major (CARS) questionnaire, its results will be reviewed in terms of four subsections: Demographic data, previous experience, previous training, challenges and open-ended questions. In addition, insights from the study of SEN students themselves were also considered.

4.4.1 Response to CARS instrument

Responses were received from participants in the Free State Province and 92% of questionnaires distributed were returned. To ascertain that the respondents in higher institutions were representative of all Free State HEIs, all campuses were ranked in size. Representation was checked from each of the four categories: Support staff, Academics, Heads of departments and/or Deans of Faculties.

In tabulating data, an N value has been used to indicate the number of Academic staff, Heads of Departments, Deans of Faculties and Support Staff responding to a particular question.

4.4.1.1 Academic staff training in general disability

Responses from the data gathered using the CARS instrument indicated that academic staff received very limited training in teaching students with SEN. Only seven percent (7%) of respondents indicated that they had been provided with training, the others did not. When asked for details, twelve percent (12%) indicated that training was essentially reactive and informal. A typical response from academic staff was: "…if any lecturer requires any help or assistance, the disability and/or support unit will provide help and only if such a unit exists".

Only one campus in the Free State Province gave a description of what could be called proactive training programmes. Comments from some academic staff members included:

> "…training is offered to all academic staff provided they seek such assistance. As academic staff don't know if they have SEN students in their classes, most especially at HEIs, emphasis is on teaching inclusively. This is because many SEN students do not identify themselves as having disabilities and/or may seek support. If practices are inclusive they may not need any support."

4.4.1.2 Academics' understanding of dealing with SEN students

Findings from this section are compared with the views of academic staff who deal with SEN students. Respondents were asked to state what they thought were the most critical barriers faced by students with SEN.

The responses were allocated to categories based on the nature of the barriers identified. If different academic staff members made more than one comment related to the same category, only the one mentioned was recorded in that category. Thus, these comments are not weighted by a particular focus of academic staff and/or support staff reporting several similar barriers.

Responses were grouped under ten categories. The first three related to barriers within the personal domain, the next seven categories to the institution and the last item related to the community. An indication of the nature of comments in each section is given below.

(a) **Personal domain**

Confidence and personal skills: students' failure to identify early; poor social skills among students with SEN; low confidence and self-esteem; male students' reluctance to seek help; and inability to come to terms with unsatisfactory marks/scores.

Specific academic skills related to SEN: keeping focused for long periods of time; doing the required reading; and moderating poor written expression. Academic staff would have to bear the need for these academic skills in mind when dealing with SEN students, in particular seeking mechanisms to intervene and assist these students.

Time management: SEN students' needing extra time for assignments and tests or examinations; personal time organisation; and completing tasks on time. Some academic staff tended to treat all students in the same way irrespective of their differences.

(b) **Institutional domain**

Awareness and understanding of SEN among academic staff: students not participating in the planning of academic programmes; academics' lack of empathy; ignorance of staff about the institutional support available; and poor understanding of students.

Early diagnosis: unavailability of effective and diagnostic measures.

Resources and funding: access to learning materials; difficulty in designing and resourcing appropriate teaching and learning materials; lack of adequate trained staff; lack of opportunities created by institutions to empower staff; and lack of time to deal with SEN students on a one-to-one basis.

Skills and knowledge of academic staff: lack of knowledge or understanding of how to handle and teach SEN students; and limited recognition of and poor support for developing individual learning styles.

Support services: finding the appropriate and successful support system; and difficulties in working with support staff, if there is such a structure within the institution.

Assistive technology: lack of computers and inadequate access; lack of technology resources on campuses; and low awareness among IT staff because of non-existence of policies within institutions.

(c)   Community domain

External constraints: difficulty for SEN students to access higher education after their grade 12 and/or secondary schooling; lack of community knowledge of SEN; the unidentified nature of SEN; and financial pressures to find work after schooling at the expense of time to study.

The most notable barriers to accessing higher education by SEN students as identified by staff were related to low awareness about SEN within the institutions of higher education and the lack of policy that informed these institutions for creating access. About seventy percent (70%) of academic and support staff suggested poor understanding of policy issues informing them about students with SEN or awareness among both staff and students as being the major barrier.

Other respondents identified issues related directly to students, such as low self-esteem, reluctance to acknowledge their disabilities, and particular difficulties with academic skills. Lack of resources and effective investigative processes put in place by institutions were also seen as serious institutional barriers. The barriers are set out in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Barriers for students with SEN as perceived by academic and support staff (expressed as number and percentage)

Domain	Barriers	Mentions	Percentage %
Personal	Confidence and personal skills	14	41
	Specific academic skills related to SEN	10	29
	Time management	3	9
Institutional	Awareness and understanding of SEN among students and staff	20	59
	Assessment and early diagnosis	9	26
	Resources and funding	7	21
	Skills and knowledge of academic staff	5	15
	Services and support	4	12
	Assistive technology	2	6
Community	External constraints	6	18

* N= 75 Academic and support staff responded

4.4.1.3 Overcoming barriers

Having identified what academic and support staff considered were significant barriers, respondents were asked what could be done to overcome such barriers. In categorising these responses, it seemed logical to follow the pattern dictated by academic and support staff personnel in relation to their responses in the category above. Thus, this section used the same headings, in the same order as the previous one. An additional category was provided to include comments addressing policy and institutional culture in this particular section. These categories are summarised below:

(a)   Personal domain

Confidence and personal skills: students with SEN to recognise their strengths and weaknesses; promoting self-awareness and building confidence.

Specific academic skills related to SEN: promoting more flexible assessment practices.

Time management: ensuring adequate time and extending time frames.

(b)   Institutional domain

Awareness and understanding of SEN students and staff: reducing stigmatisation; holding information sessions; promoting attitude change; educating people and acknowledging the problem. These comments formed a collection of general attitudes that were common to the different satellite campuses and general community. Respondents' comments were relevant to the institutions of learning in respect of factors that they saw as inhibiting access for SEN students.

Resources and funding: allocating more money for learning support material; providing better support materials; creating more resources for academic staff and teaching or training staff to work with students with SEN.

Skills and knowledge of academic staff: training staff in inclusive education; professional development to staff to develop an understanding of all issues related to students with SEN; and sensitising staff to problems related to SEN students.

Support services: arrange alternative assignments; tests and examination arrangements; establishing standards of curriculum delivery and assessment and allowing self-paced assignments.

Assistive technology: informing and/or making available assistive technology to SEN students; training staff about assistive technology; using text-to-voice note-scanning labs; and identifying where technological assistance can be used.

Policy and culture: establishing a discrimination-free environment which is informed by the South African Constitution; introducing and/or implementing policies that will protect students with SEN; and liaising with secondary schools and other centres that work closely with disabled people).

(c) Community domain

The CARS (creating accessible resources for disabled students) instrument showed an awareness of the many ways of reducing the effects of perceived barriers. The strongest way to overcome barriers and to improve accessibility to students with SEN, according to 48% of respondents, was through improving training and support for academic staff. The second most salient point was students' academic skills with special emphasis on individual attention to students with SEN.

Several other categories were rated as equally important. These were developing and changing policies and culture, raising general awareness within the institutions of higher learning; improving support services and teaching strategies, and

assessment. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the barriers as rated by academic and support staff.

Table 4.2 Overcoming barriers and broadening access for students with SEN as perceived by academic and support staff

Domain	Barriers	Mentions	Percentage %
Personal	Confidence and personal skills	2	6
	Specific academic skills related to SEN	9	26
	Time management	2	6
Institutional	Awareness and understanding of SEN among students and staff	7	21
	Assessment and early diagnosis	7	21
	Resources and funding	6	18
	Skills and knowledge of academic staff	16	47
	Services and support	7	21
	Assistive technology	4	12
	Policy and culture	7	21
Community	External constraints	2	6

* N= 75 Academic and support staff responded

4.4.2   Response to PHE instrument by SEN students

4.4.2.1 Demographic data

The target number for this study was thirty (30) students, that is at least ten (10X3=N30) from each campus; plus a further fifteen (15) prospective students from the organisations/NGOs dealing with special needs cases (in and around campuses).

These figures may be extrapolated to give an indication of the figure for all institutions participating by multiplying it by a factor of 1.10553. The extrapolated figures are of only forty-five students with SEN who responded while the overall average of students with disabilities who responded per campus was close to two percent (2%) of all students. The percentages for individual institutions ranged from over five percent (5%) to less than 0.5%. Campuses with a smaller total student population tended to report higher figures for students with SEN .

Expressed as a percentage, 13,3% of students with SEN in Free State institutions had primary disabilities. The distribution of students with SEN is illustrated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Students with SEN in HEIs in the Free State

	Number of students responding at HEIs (N= 45)	Number of students at all HEIs (N=256)	Percentage of all students (%)
Student population	652,51	721,377	–
Students with SEN	12,694	14,034*	1,95
Students with primary disabilities	1,694	1,873*	0,26

 * Extrapolated from numbers given for responding HEIs

The study found that the numbers of students accessing higher education across the HEIs in the Free State Province had risen when checked against the records of the participating institutions. The numbers of SEN students were analysed in terms of gender, level of study/academic classification, admission status and academic majors. As there were variations in the numbers of participants from different institutions providing data for each section, the results are presented as percentages in the explanatory tables.

4.4.2.2 Gender

In the study, there was a slightly higher number of males than females reported with SEN. This contrasted with the overall figures of students registered at the Free State HEIs, which showed more females than males registered at various institutions of learning in the Province. Gender distribution is shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Gender of all students and those students with SEN

	Percentage of all students	Percentage of students with SEN
Male students	44,3	52,8
Female students	55,7	47,2

4.4.2.3 Academic classification

Over 90% of students with SEN were undergraduates, compared to only 77,4% of all students studying undergraduate programmes. Only 10,3% of SEN students were receiving academic access and/or services, thus implying that they were not experiencing problems (with physical accessibility to campus transportation; handicapped access parking spaces; and special media or adaptive equipment, including computer adaptations and special equipment for learning disabled students).

However, a variation may exist in these figures as some postgraduate students may have suitable accommodation in place, or may have no need for extras (such as personal skills training, study training, support groups and typing or word processing assistance). These postgraduate students do not rely much on the support of disability units. Table 4.5 shows the academic classification or level distribution of students.

Table 4.5 Academic classification or level of all students across institutions and SEN students

	Percentage of all students	Percentage of SEN students
Postgraduate students	22,6	8,2
Undergraduate students	77,4	91,8

4.4.2.4 Admission status

Nearly two-thirds of students with SEN studied full-time. Their course load or academic status is shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Course load or academic status of all students and students with SEN

N = 4	Percentage of all students	Percentage of SEN students
Full-time	68,4	65,3
Part-time	31,6	34,7

 *N= Responding institutions

4.4.2.5 Age groups

More than half of students with SEN in the Free State HEIs were under 25 years of age. Because of variability between estimated and actual figures, numbers from the participating HEIs who provided data were used and compared to the figures of all students. This comparison as shown in Table 4.7 indicated that the age distribution of students with SEN was similar to the distribution for all students.

Table 4.7 Age of all students and students with SEN

	Percentage of all students	Percentage of students with SEN
Less than 20 years	27,2	24,6
20-24 years	33,5	30,2
25-29 years	13,5	14,7
30-39 years	14,9	18,2
40 and over	10,8	12,4

* Percentages calculated from the responding institutions

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4.4.3   Specialised support services

Only one of the three campuses that participated in this study offered professional specialised support to students with SEN. Although there was no policy that informed the institution, it was only done on the basis of students who were referred by either their lecturers or students (voluntarily) to consult the unit dealing with the SEN. Support staffs or officials from disability units usually administered a range of appropriate tests, assessing students with SEN. A report was produced, specifying the nature of the educational needs, and the student's strengths and weaknesses.

The study found a considerable range in practice when it came to support services of students with SEN. The SEN students were asked how effective they thought their current system was. Ten percent (10%) of SEN students felt that it was favourable; seven percent (7%) were positively disposed to their system but noted some reservations, whilst eighty-three percent (83%) felt that their system was not working well. Their strongest concern was about the institutions not having any policies that dealt with their educational needs. One campus provided no assistance to students with SEN.

4.4.4   Support for students with SEN

In the study, student support services at institutions were listed and SEN students asked which of these services their institutions offered. Nil responses and "no" answers were treated as negatives. Smaller campuses had a higher proportion of students with SEN, but possibly because of lower overall numbers, they also tended to have a reduced range of support services. Some support services, such as special support groups or clubs, typing or word processing assistance, a resource library, personal counselling and personal skills training, are near universal. Support services also frequently provided advocacy support for SEN students. Because many support services and the provision of a wide range of services could benefit many SEN students, these need not be seen as a basic provision for SEN students.

Some respondents also mentioned support services not found on the instrument list. These included large font text; material on CD-ROM; ongoing training and assistance in adaptive technology; texts printed on coloured paper; and a list of commonly used words (without meanings) allowed in their lectures, assignments and examinations.

Assistive technology used by only one institution includes software such as voice activated software and text readers, for example a dictate, text help or read and write and other hardware.

4.4.5 Barriers for students with SEN as perceived by staff and SEN students

Both groups laid emphasis on poor awareness and understanding of their condition as a major barrier. Confidence and personal skills as a factor rated more commonly among the staff members. SEN students placed emphasis on the lack of skills and knowledge of academic staff as a barrier. Although both staff (i.e. academic and support) and SEN students were concerned about the demands of academic tasks, academic staff were most concerned.

Support service was viewed as a serious concern among staff and SEN students. Assessment and diagnosis was a concern amongst staff. However, this was considered relatively unimportant by students. Both staff and SEN students seemed aware of institutional barriers and issues related to assistive technology and policy and culture. The barriers are set out in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Barriers for SEN students perceived by staff and SEN students

Barriers	Staff (N= 75) (%)	SEN students (N=45) (%)
Confidence and personal skills	41	22
Specific academic skills related to SEN	29	22
Time management	9	22
Awareness and understanding of SEN students and staff	59	48
Resources and funding	21	39
Skills and knowledge of academic staff	15	39
Support services	12	22
Assistive technology	6	26
Policy and culture	26	30
External constraints	18	4

4.4.5.1 Overcoming barriers

Having identified what they considered significant barriers, respondents were asked what could be done to overcome these barriers and which factors inhibited access to higher education for students with SEN. In categorising their responses, it seemed logical to follow the pattern dictated by factors perceived by students and staff in relation to their responses to the category above. Thus, this section used the same

headings in the same order as the previous section. These categories are summarised below.

(a)   Personal domain

Confidence and personal skills: educating students with SEN to recognise their strengths; promoting self-awareness;, and building confidence.

Specific academic skills related to students with SEN: promoting more flexible assessment practice; doing an individual skills development and developing skills that would appeal to individual students with specific educational needs.

Time management: developing time management strategies, and ensuring adequate time for an individual student.

(b)   Institutional domain

Awareness and understanding of special educational needs amongst students and staff: reducing stigmatisation; holding information sessions; promoting attitude change; and attempting to educate people. Comments here could apply to both institutions of learning and the broader community.

Resources and funding: if institutions could allocate more money for supporting all students; providing better support and/or assistive materials; creating more resources for academic and support staff; and employing more support staff to work with individual students with SEN.

Skills and knowledge of academic staff: training academic staff in inclusive teaching; giving professional development for staff on identifying and making referrals; making staff aware of problems facing students with SEN; and providing professional development for academics.

Support services: educating both academics and support staff; making alternative arrangements for students with SEN; and allowing self-paced assignments.

Assistive technology: informing SEN students about assistive technology; making assistive technology available; using text-to-voice note scanning in the library; and identifying all areas in the institution where technological assistance could be used and needed by both staff and students themselves.

Policy and culture: establishing policies at institutions that do not seem to have policy for students with SEN; and supporting students with SEN and liaising more closely with the Department of Education.

(c)   The community domain

External constraints: developing a public special educational needs awareness campaign; and liaising with the community to promote community education.

The PHE and CARS instruments revealed an awareness of many ways of reducing the effects of perceived barriers. The strongest way in which to overcome the barriers that faced students, according to the CARS instrument's respondents (47%), was through improving support for academic staff. The second most favoured category was improving individual attention to SEN students. Then a further four categories were rated equally: raising awareness, developing and changing policy and culture. Table 4.9 gives an indication of how respondents rated ways of overcoming such barriers.

Table 4.9 Overcoming barriers for SEN students perceived by staff and SEN students

Barriers	Staff (N= 48) (%)	SEN students (N=256) (%)
Confidence and personal skills	6	8
Specific academic skills related to SEN	26	26
Time management	6	9
Awareness and understanding of SEN students and staff	21	30
Resources and funding	18	17
Skills and knowledge of academic staff	47	39
Support services	21	4
Assistive technology	12	17
Policy and culture	25	34
External constraints	6	4

4.5   DISCUSSION

The quantitative results provided different sources of information that formed the basis of the following discussion. The tables above provide a broad overview on the views and practices of key stakeholders involved in the provision of education and support services for students with SEN and provide a basis for the development of policies and resources that might assist in reducing the factors that inhibit access to higher education.

4.5.1   Discussion of academic staff results

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The small percentage of respondents or subjects implies that the findings cannot be interpreted as an accurate representation of the views of all higher education institutions academics. Therefore, the large number of participants in the study does not mean that the results can be generalised. While most respondents generally seemed to support creating more accessible institutions of higher learning for students with special educational needs, there was also a considerable number of academic staff who did not want to adopt more flexible methods of presenting their courses (for example, giving extra or flexible time in writing examinations or assignments for SEN students). It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that there is at least a range of views on a number of issues represented in these results. The results also provided a range of opinions on questions that allow the development of resources that could provide support to SEN students.

The majority of academic staff reported that they would like to increase and/or make their course delivery more accessible and inclusive to all students, thus including the SEN students. This does not mean that this view is representative of higher education institutions across the Free State Province. The academics who supported the eradication of factors that inhibited access to higher education institutions for students with SEN gave an impression that they wished to move further in this direction. The barriers to accessing higher education were resource factors such as the lack of assistive technology, the lack of support services, lack of or non-existent policies in place for accommodating SEN students, and a lack of skills and knowledge of teaching or working with SEN students.

The responses of participants to a number of statements on how their teaching methods impacted on students with SEN provided some very interesting information. The large majority of respondents acknowledged that they had an important role to play in creating a place for the needs of students with SEN and they felt that their teaching methods catered effectively for these students. However, some of the academic staff also felt unsure about how their teaching methods might impact on students who were physically challenged. It is also interesting to note that almost three quarters of respondents would change their pedagogical approach if they were provided with information on how students might benefit from a more accessible approach to teaching and learning.

4.5.2 Discussion of inhibiting factors

The main inhibiting factors for increasing access for SEN students in institutions of higher learning amongst teaching staff were the constraints on time available to create flexible supportive materials, lack of necessary assistive technological gadgets or resources, lack of funding to implement some strategies and unavailability of policies in their respective institutions.

Respondents were not concerned about the philosophical issues or attitudinal factors that inhibited students with SEN. Rather; they were more concerned about pragmatic issues such as funding, physical environment, support services, assistive technology and other resources that could make these institutions more accessible.

4.6 CONCLUDING SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

4.6.1 Previous experience of teaching disabled students

- Respondents were fairly evenly divided in terms of previous experience of teaching disabled students. A majority (54.8%) had little or no previous experience, but a large number (44.5%) regarded themselves as fairly experienced.

- Three times as many respondents had no previous experience as those who claimed to be very experienced (12.4% and 4.2% respectively)

4.6.2 Knowledge of learning and teaching support needs of SEN students

- Almost half of the respondents (48.4%) declared themselves fairly knowledgeable about the learning and teaching support needs of SEN students.

- More than a third of the respondents (37.8%) said they were not very knowledgeable.

- One might have expected a closer correlation between the responses to these seemingly related questions. Although 54.8% of respondents had little or no previous experience of teaching SEN students, a similar-sized majority (52.9%) said they were fairly or very knowledgeable about the needs of SEN students. This knowledge was presumably acquired in other ways.

- The main areas where it was felt that knowledge needed to be improved were access to resources to support specific types of SEN students (e.g. an information database), how to support students with dyslexia and mental health difficulties and the uses of assistive technology for different groups of disabled students.

4.6.3 Disability awareness training

- Most respondents had not received disability awareness training.

4.6.4 Training in skills needed for teaching SEN students

- Far fewer respondents had been trained specifically to teach SEN students than had received general disability awareness raising training.

- Only about 1 in 5 had been trained specifically to teach SEN students whereas over three quarters (78.7%) had not.

4.6.5 Usefulness of training in skills for teaching SEN students

- Respondents who had received such training, all found the training useful to a greater or lesser extent. None felt it was not at all useful.

- The main reason given for not finding the training very useful was that it was too general and did not deal with the needs of particular groups of SEN students.

4.6.6 Preferred training methods

- The most favoured method by far was a face-to-face group activity of some kind (64%) followed by self-training with third party provided materials such as printed material, cassettes and CDs (18.5%).
- 10.4% preferred an activity involving an online element.

4.6.7 Difficulties experienced in teaching SEN students

- 73.3% of academic staff had experienced difficulties teaching disabled students to a greater or lesser extent. Just over a half of these assessed the difficulties as minor.

- 18% had not experienced any difficulties.

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- A small number (2.1%) said that the difficulties were considerable.

- The main difficulties mentioned were:

  - Issues relating to the integration of disabled students (especially those who were deaf or hard of hearing) in tutorial groups. The effective use of technological and human communication support facilities was cited as a particular problem.

  - Lack of training in supporting students with mental health difficulties – a matter of considerable concern.

  - Problems in physically accommodating wheelchair users in a classroom – space to move around, fitting under tables and workbenches.

  - Students requiring support who had not disclosed a disability and those with unrealistic expectations.

4.6.8 Possession of skills needed for teaching SEN students

- Somewhat surprisingly, well over a half of respondents (58.3%) felt they had some of the skills needed for teaching disabled students.

- About a third (34.2%) said they had no or few skills.

4.6.9 Development of own successful solutions and strategies for teaching SEN students

- About half (50%) said they had not developed their own strategies but a significant proportion (40.7%) had managed to do so to some or a considerable extent.

- Examples of successful strategies and practices cited by respondents included:

  - A common two-stage approach consisting of first developing a good relationship with the student; and second, working with the student to identify their needs and to determine an appropriate strategy acceptable to them both.

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- Various practical actions including large print hand-outs and overhead projectors, additional one-to-one support at the beginning and end of tutorials, provision of printed course information for dyslexic students in small, manageable chunks, encouraging the use of mind-mapping, and ensuring accessible tutorial facilities.

- The need to consult students and other staff about what has previously worked well and to keep in regular contact with students.

4.6.10 Difficulties encountered in teaching different types of SEN students

- The greatest difficulties encountered were in relation to students with mental health difficulties (twice as many respondents reported a lot of or considerable difficulties for this group as for any other single group).

- Significant numbers of respondents reported that they had not previously taught disabled students (32.6% deaf and hard of hearing, 44.5% blind and partially sighted, 30.8% mental health difficulties and 20.9% dyslexia)

- The response in relation to dyslexia was rather mixed. It had the largest number of respondents reporting no or few difficulties of the four specified categories, but the second largest reporting a lot or considerable difficulty.

4.6.11 Involvement in curriculum development

- Just over two thirds (68.5%) had been involved in developing learning resources of some kind, though few had done so. However, these resources mostly did not appeal to students with SEN

4.7 CONCLUSION

The study has indicated that there are increasing numbers of students with SEN at higher education institutions in the Free State and that there is a lack of support and/or assistive technology available to them. A useful picture of factors and/or barriers facing students with special educational needs and some suggestions that might be useful in addressing these inhibiting factors, were obtained. It should, however, be emphasised that the sample was small and findings cannot be generalised nor can they be statistically validated.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF QUALITATIVE DATA

5.1 INTRODUCTION TO STAGE 2

Chapter Five presents the data gathered, analysed and interpreted through qualitative strategies in the second stage of the study. The strategy is to relate and interpret the findings in the context of argument and theory as they inform this study. Discourse analysis procedures were followed in the analysis and the interpretations of the findings. This implies that each of the transcripts of the interviews was read closely, more than once, by the researcher. The researcher carefully reviewed the content issues as revealed in the interviews.

In order to better inform the study, a number of interviews were undertaken with a range of key informants likely to be knowledgeable about the essential issues surrounding students with special educational needs (SEN) in higher education. This included students themselves and those who wished to enrol at these institutions. Chapter Five focuses on the analysis and interpretation of data from these interviews.

The key informants comprised representatives from the participating campuses in the Free State; thus academic staff, support staff and dean/or head of departments and students with SEN enrolled and those intending to enrol. Fifteen (15) interviews were conducted. Some were panel interviews and these explored the following salient points: factors that inhibit access to higher education; policies in place to widen access at these institutions; teaching and learning practice; relationship with SEN students; assistive technology, and support services available for SEN students; and funding issues. To ensure anonymity, key respondents who were interviewed were identified only by the broad area in which they worked. This level of anonymity was discussed and agreed on with the interviewees prior to each interview.

In this second stage of qualitative data analysis and interpretation, the researcher became a power research instrument, being interested in understanding the discourses generated and constructed by the researched. The FAI Technique was employed as a non-directive depth interview technique. The FAI is a qualitative interview technique and is oriented towards an insider's perspective; the

contextualisation of the process of knowledge is emphasised; and the research design is open and flexible.

It was important for the research to use these interview techniques in order to understand the discourses generated. The FAI technique assisted in opening the space for the researched to intervene and for the researcher to be sensitive when seeking clarification of questions in the process.

The actual analysis was based on the TODA procedures formulated by Fairclough (1992), which is a technique of interrogating the conversations of the researched and is useful as it uses what the researched says as evidence. TODA implies listening and reading the actual words as "text". Reading the text exposes the underlying "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1979), or ideological positioning, or even those deep meanings and understandings informing any construction, dissemination and consumption of discourse. The argument is that words or language are a reflection of one's inner feelings, which in turn is a reflection of discursive practices within which an individual person's meaning construction is generated and created. These discursive practices themselves tend to mirror the social structural processes encapsulating the "speaking person" (see Riceour, 1987; Fairclough, 1992; Duncan, 1993; and Mahlomaholo, 1998).

The researcher attempted to listen to what students with special educational needs said about themselves, implying what their experiences were concerning the factors that inhibited their access to higher education.

The researcher could utilise their words as text, contextualise the understanding thereof in terms of discursive practices; and relate that to social structural factors to "discover" patterns that result in a particular meaning being created by the researched.

Furthermore, this study compared and contrasted the corpuses of university staff with those of the SEN students. The differences and similarities are highlighted by way of understanding the extent to which there is a contestational conception of issues at play in far as the factors that inhibit access to higher education institutions are concerned.

The researcher visited offices and units of academic development officers; academic deans of different faculties; units of students with disabilities and prospective students together with enrolled SEN students themselves at different campuses and

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organisational sites. Before the interviews, the interviewees were given some information about the interviews and a brief frame of reference. The first and substantive question was formulated in an open and vague manner. The question was formulated in such a manner that it could be exploratory without containing any suggestions.

All groups of academics, support staff and management were asked virtually similar questions and their responses then compared, together with the feelings they expressed when asked these specific questions.

These benchmark questions have been identified as the major themes running through all the relevant discourses as the respondents constructed their understanding of issues that inhibited access to students with SEN at HEIs.

5.2   ANALYSIS

5.2.1   Teaching and learning

One of the key difficulties reported by the interviewees in this area was the marginalisation of students with SEN from both institutional policies and the teaching and learning policies that were exclusive in nature. This distinction was very clear, not only in the absence of policies at some institutions of higher learning in the Free State, but also within the different faculties or departments in these institutions.

In general, participants in the study were in agreement that further and significant progress for students with SEN in the Free State HEIs could only be realised through a greater emphasis on developing policies that are more inclusive for SEN students and procedures within different academic departments. The point was made that there was a need for academic staff to be accountable and proactive in developing policies that are inclusive in order to eradicate the marginalisation of SEN students. This could help them in terms of teaching and learning.

When asked what factors could inhibit access to SEN students, with a special focus on policies and practice, respondents remarked:

E1: …the support of all students is part of our responsibility…it is reasonable to indicate that "Oh you've a department within the university that is responsible for students with special educational needs".

A programme of action and/or policies that could also assist the different departments in terms of eradicating, broadening and redressing the inequalities of the past and enabling all students to benefit in the process needs to be implemented. Some of the heads of departments suggested that such redress could be achieved:

E2: "*…I think the support and assistance that could benefit the special educational needs students in a learning situation is good teaching and learning practice that is flexible … So you know that is a way of being inclusive. I also think that where there is policies and good teaching practices all students would benefit*".

E3: "*…it is not easy for us* [academics] *to respond to individual students in our classes, … eh that I mean, attend to their special educational needs…our teaching methods are along the lines of universal … one size fit all … in our teaching styles we actually saving work not generating more. I mean, if I've to give each and every student individual attention, how am I going to cover the whole curriculum*".

E4: "*…I'm thinking the past years attention of students with special educational needs was a baby. I mean the responsibility of support department for disabled people not academics…the problem with students with special educational needs is that there is no uniformity in their disabilities and this creates a serious problem for us* [academics] *as to which teaching method will meet their needs in a uniform way.*"

E5: "*…It may be that some head of departments and deans in some institution demonstrate a clear line between disability and teaching and learning … for inclusive education to succeed we need management that could be responsible for both educational needs and teaching and learning*".

The data gathered from the researched at this stage tends to further confirm the findings in Chapter Four, namely that there is fairly little knowledge about the teaching and learning and also the support structure of students with special educational needs. This implies that, at some campuses, there are no policies in place that provide a teaching and learning support framework. It could also be deduced that some of the respondents had little or no experience in teaching and/or working with students with special educational needs.

From these extracts quoted above, the absence of self-reflection in terms of staff and the institutions could be noted. Checking the existing structures of these institutions in terms of provision of academic support for individual students was described as either not existing or ineffective and inefficient. The move towards developing teaching and learning practices that could be more inclusive and accommodating was presented as an issue that needed to be revisited.

However, there was also an indication among some participants as to how effective teaching and learning could be in responding to the needs of students with SEN. Some of the participants indicated that emphasis on supporting SEN students had developed some fundamental flaws.

Academics expressed concern that there were considerable difficulties to overcome in terms of introducing disability policies within a mainstream teaching and learning support framework. It was reported that in those institutions that have the support service for students with SEN, the officers or support staff found it difficult because, in most instances, they worked in isolation within the institutions and this made their work difficult. is the problems were exacerbated if they had to effect changes within teaching and learning practice within academic departments.

One other factor aggravating this situation was the lack of policy that informed them and their academic colleagues. A number of reasons were given for this, including the difficulties that the support staff had in communicating with academic staff and the time required for repeated interventions on behalf of individual SEN students. However, the heads of departments and deans and/or management of the institution were also cited as a significant factor that inhibited access for SEN students to higher education institutions.

Clearly, in the view of this thesis and in terms of teaching and learning and the lack of policies in some institutions, relegates or SEN students tended to be marginalised. This conclusion is drawn on the basis that some staff members, academics and support staff alike seemed to indicate their limited knowledge in relation to working and teaching special educational needs students (SEN) at this level in education.

5.2.2   Access to higher education

Students with SEN were generally perceived by participants to be an under-represented group within HEIs and as such, were seen as a target group within broader access policies.

E1: "*…now the government* [department of education] *is concentrating on inclusive education at schools…my understanding is participation rate could increase in future".*

E2: "*…universities when recruiting students they need also to target and raise the aspirations of students with disabilities … you need to raise the aspiration of disabled students as much as you do for other prospective students if you want to get them to higher education".*

E3: "*…our institution is viewing students with special educational needs as a problem to deal with … I mean some universities have policies that state disabled students are very welcome and … in our university no one has actually recruited disabled students".*

E4: "*…government is preaching inclusive education, and this is not about recruiting students, it's about giving them support".*

E5: "*…we have been held in totally inaccessible venues, look at the library of this institution … it is inaccessible, one cannot go upstairs and use books there … there is no interpreter in this university …   think if there were students who are hard of hearing what's going to happen".*

These comments were triggered by the question that required the participants to share their interpretation of how institutions could broaden access to students with special educational needs. Because of this emphasis by the Ministry of Education, broadening access programmes could follow a similar pattern by encouraging students with SEN to enrol and become part of higher education. However, little emphasis has been placed on the recruitment of SEN students in the HEI sector because most institutions do not have policies on issues relating to special educational needs that could inform them.

The only evidence of universities being active in recruiting students with special educational needs, comes from some of the institutions aimed at encouraging SEN students to apply. However, this does not cover all the institutions of learning, as most of them do not have any policies in place to attract or even cater for SEN students. These were some of the views from an officer in a support service in one institution.

One participant had a strong feeling that recruitment of students with special educational needs was something that needed to be given priority by each and every institution of higher learning in the Free State Province.

One key informant was sceptical of the notion of broadening access to SEN students. This informant pointed out that some of the access initiative had actively excluded SEN students through being held in inaccessible venues and with a lack of suitable support structures or facilities. These were some of the views of reiterated by students with SEN themselves as seen in their responses in the interview.

The lack of recruiting students with special educational needs was seen as being due to the financial implications of recruitment and then further having to support these SEN students with costly assistive learning resources. Furthermore, several key informants cited evidence that many students with SEN did not consider applying to institutions of higher learning as they felt that their support needs could not be adequately met. Most participants suggested that there was no recruitment campaign for students with SEN into higher education. At institutions with draft policies on SEN admission, these were geared towards dealing with students as and when they were already situated in universities.

5.2.3 Physical accessibility

On the overall state of physical access to different campuses of higher education institutions in the Free State, 60% of the respondents felt that this was either "not so good" or "poor" but 40% thought they were "good". At some campuses, steps at the main entrance to buildings were a problem and once inside, these students with SEN also experienced some degree of difficulty in travelling quickly enough between lecture venues. Some students with physical disabilities who were wheelchair-bound remarked that:

E1: "*…fellow students have to lift me and that's myself and fellow students going up two levels up. My contention is that this is dangerous; if one person fell, we'd all fall".*

E2: "*… the way the building is structured in the … department, it is impossible for me to go to the lecturers offices for consultations; apart from one or more lecturers on the ground floor level-all the lecturers' offices are upstairs".*

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E3: "*…well I think the most and serious point to specifically start with ... Think our structures in this campus make it difficult for students with physical disability to access the lecture rooms at … because there is no physical support system to give out that, being also em ... em. well these are things we need to discuss prior to incorporation …"*

E4: *"… if you talk about students with … physical disability and you look at the kind of infrastructure the library services has … I mean it is clear … is not friendly to those who are physical disabled?"*

E5: "*… since I came here to be very honest, I have never come across a wheelchair bound student ... I have not seen one. But people who … deal with disabilities all come across them, since I don't deal with them in the classroom. That's what I would be able to say, so far"* (okay).

E6: *"… nothing has been done (**I:** Okay) nothing has been done because the facilities are still the same, the infrastructure but (eh …) I do not know, the only facility that is accessible to the students with wheelchair is our library, but the students cannot go upstairs but there is a way to the library from the gate… the students can access the library. Wheelchair but (eh.) apart from that (eh ...) no gate can be access (**I:** It's only the library?) … (eh …) library is only a place here … the way to the library there is the way the wheelchair road to a library, next to the stairs …. next to the stair that's the only one that they use (**I:**. and, then classes nothing?) Yes …. in classes there is nothing".*

What was interesting for the researcher was that access was not consistent across different campuses and faculties. Access was deemed most unsatisfactory in those areas most integral to student life. Because it was on a different level, the library proved to be a difficult area on most campuses with some students being forced to endure embarrassing explanations, with no lifts to access certain levels of the library section and hence limited movement ability.

Some students with limited mobility, either because of muscular dystrophy and other related physical or medical conditions, seem to experience the lack of access to lecture buildings as a serious barrier. They referred not only to lecture theatres, but also to the library facilities which could not be accessed with ease. To further highlight the subjugation and marginalisation of students with special educational

needs is to become aware that some of the offices of lecturers could not be accessed at all by students using wheelchairs.

Students with special educational needs also tended to see a clear exclusion from facilities because of physical environmental arrangements; they have had to negotiate individual arrangements for access. Accessing information from the library proved to be particularly time-consuming and stressful for SEN students. For those with limited mobility, this was particularly problematic, as it required additional visits to negotiate basic mobility arrangements. What was most pertinent was the students' experience of having to renegotiate and re-explain their needs each time they used the library.

5.2.4   Policy initiatives for departments or an institution in general

The manner in which this research views initiatives for inclusion in different units of the institutions is that it is the cornerstone or pillar for any institution to realise inclusivity or to address issues of exclusion and marginalisation of SEN students. The following responses of students with SEN demonstrated the significance of this issue.

E1: *"… No policy, I remember that when I came here for the first time, I propose that …. there should be a form of or sort of lift to help them…..just as that* [Here we were talking about policy initiative] *Yeh ... there isn't, I just remember I even told them that the level is….and should be some sort of lecture, we want to perceive this [okay] we have to have policy".*

E2: *"… Yes, I don't know of any policy …. the central office maybe they have it already and knew the policy so (Yes) …. To be really honest. Not that I know of and I said that I know nothing about policy for disabled students (Yes, okay, laughed)".*

E3: "… *Well ... you know I don't think there is any policy that deal specifically with a unique SEN as such, not that I know of or it might be or (Yes)… em ... but on our campus I don't think there was much of assistance It was just a person thing (Okay) … prior in-corporation"* [*em ... Yes*].

E4: "*… Once again I will say yes they definitely need some policies … whether it's financially and understanding fully their problems (Okay) also in*

terms of providing for support in whatever financially and then they are getting some bursary … very depressing" [Okay].

E5: *"… We don't really have (eh...) standing policy or special way of treating (eh …) students … in fact we don't have (eh …) I don't, whether because of facilities or whether the student themselves compare to come to come to our institution (okay) we never had" [Okay].*

E6: *"… No… (eh)… you mean for accommodating disabled students? In fact let me say … (eh...) … I cannot deny that … Policy or not but it is decided by the institution and it is silent when it comes to and deciding about disabled students".*

From these extracts from the interviews, it was difficult to be convinced by some of the participants' discourses that the lack of policy initiatives within their respective unit or departments could be blamed upon the entire university. The institution was aware that something needed to be implemented; yet they seemed not to take any appropriate actions or initiate policies to remedy such situations. The conclusion that the researcher is bound to draw is that the discourse that permeates the lack of policy initiatives within the higher education institutions also tend to suffuse the conversations of SEN students, as they see the lack of policies as a act to marginalise them from fully participating within the institutions.

One of the respondents indicated that it was the duty of the central office to initiate the policy, while another said the matter would only be addressed after incorporation or mergers of institutions. This is an indication that no one is prepared to take the responsibility for the situation. This perpetuates subjugation and the violation of these students' human rights, thus implying that SEN students would continue to find it difficult to access the HEIs.

It is also possible to see that special educational needs students continue to find themselves battered from several angles, from the lack of initiative on the side of managers of institutions or faculties, their lecturer, support staff and library personnel. The combination of all these contesting factors from the attitudes of the general university staff members, who did not take the initiative and responsibility for policy development, seemed to be the root cause of the problems that SEN students faced.

The preliminary conclusion that can be drawn from this situation and from the participants' discourses, whereby students with SEN saw themselves as

marginalised, where the university staff members saw the responsibility of initiating policy as someone else's job, suggests that two ideological positions become clear. SEN students have the human right to claim access to education. This entitlement enables them to voice their frustrations and highlight factors that seem to inhibit them from having equal access to higher education. This position, as seen in the discourses, also enables SEN students to contribute to what Foucault (1977) says is the journey that is never complete, but is always in process. This means that inclusivity could be understood in this study as "inconclusive", and the journey is never complete.

This position also enabled the SEN students to move from a state of helplessness to an empowered state. The position that students with SEN adopted was clearly counter-hegemonic and emancipatory as it negated the dominant discourse that seemed to be operationalised by university staff members who lacked initiative and shifted the blame from themselves onto others.

5.2.5   Efforts made by institutions to raise access to HEIs by SEN

The following extracts raised some concerns as to the efforts made by higher education institutions in the region to raise awareness and increase access for special educational needs students. The perceived lack of effort or consideration of special needs by HEIs directly impacted upon the capability of SEN students to fully participate and become actively involved in campus life. SEN students who participated in the study revealed during the interviews that they felt that there was little or no effort by institutions regarding their special needs. These needs of SEN students could hinder them from accessing and even from participating in the full range of student activities offered by universities.

E1: *"… At this moment, well, taken a greater effort there is little that is made for us. (Okay) … to come and register here, it was my own initiative not because of the initiatives from this university …*

E2: *"… we still don't have facilities [Okay] and then think of any blind student in this campus …   we still have certain problems or issues that need to be sorted out … also is a problem with slow learner".*

E3: *"… The library problem may not be able to be solved now (Okay)… some of the problems the university knows them … Yes we can identify them but unless the management of the university does something or they come*

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forward and it is up to lectures if they are impressed [Yes]… if these things
are not addressed, so we not see any increase in access" [Yes, Okay].

The students with SEN tended to view themselves as victims of circumstances. This is not surprising, given the fact that in some of the institutions little had been done to raise or increase access to higher education. Student's feelings were that, in terms of planning and in matters affecting them, they should be given consideration by these institutions in all matters of interest that affected them. The SEN students saw their institutions as stationary, that they were not amenable to change and that some transformation was necessary.

From these extracts above it is clear that SEN students theorised about the practices of their institutions in the same manner as dominant and dominating ideology conceptualises these. This position in discourse enabled the SEN students to engage in "passionate research" in search of "discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us" (Hall, 1994:393). In reality, students with SEN cannot be wished away. It is important to see their existence and respond to needs of these students as a matter of some urgency.

The discourse of students with SEN is an empowering one. It defines their existence and deconstructs the barriers that they are faced with in their daily lives. Their lives are seen as a trap where the dominant forces appear to devalue their existence. The solution out of this trap is for SEN students understand their positioning within the post-structuralism discourse. This means that SEN students should refuse to even think of themselves as non-existent, or to permit the institutions of higher learning to pin them down. In practice, the SEN students should raise their voices against the dominant discourse. SEN students should not see themselves as nonentities but as the same as all other students who are termed to be able.

This dominant discourse has positioned students with SEN in a particular manner because of huddles in place in some of the HEIs. The students seemed to sound in counter-hegemonic with the discourse and they contested the power relations produced by this discourse. This becames clear when they positioned themselves as not waiting to find about out the efforts of the institutions to raise access to higher education.

The preliminary conclusion that can be drawn from the outline above is that the discourse of students indicated and described how power creates discourse and how discourse then creates positionality. These students had a particular knowledge of "the other" (i.e. of the socio-economic-historic-cultural-political context), which is a positioning achieved through discursive spaces and practices. The state of a dominant discourse that is treating the SEN students as if they are nonentities, implies that these students could rise above forces of marginalisation and become the counter-hegemonic power force to raise their existence and to fight for inclusion.

In analysing the discourses of SEN students, it was clear that they were subjugated by a force of power to positions as subaltern classes and that they experienced discomfort within their position in institutions of higher education. In practice, they did not enjoy the same benefits, privileges and rights as the dominant classes. This created dissatisfaction amongst SEN students. This positioning in discursive space and practices tended to position them on the counter-side where they opposed the hegemonic interests.

The dominant discursive spaces and practices, as SEN students indicated in these above extracts, in turn produced spaces and practices that were both diabolical and antagonistic by depriving SEN students of access to HEIs and as such opponents of the hegemonic discourse became visible and known.

5.3   CONCLUSION

In looking at all the salient points discussed above, the following major themes have emerged from this data: Students strongly believed that without the full co-operation and support of the entire institutional community, they had little chance of succeeding academically. In addition, students with SEN perceived the different faculties or departments as generally lacking in sensitivity and awareness with regard to their challenges. Irrespective of how the support staff worked to create a supportive environment, the level of co-operation from various departments or faculties was perceived as the final determination of success of SEN students.

Coordination of services of the institutions of higher education was perceived as important by participants in the study. Most of the students with special educational needs demonstrated their willingness and eagerness to participate in various phases of planning services and policy-making exercises in order to contribute towards improving services for themselves. Furthermore, students indicated that there was no

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adequate representation of SEN students on the bodies that are involved in planning and policy-making in the universities (see Subsection 5.2.2.1).

Academics and some support personnel also felt that the universities (or institutions of higher learning) did not seem to create sufficient space for them in terms of the provision of relevant training, information and resources necessary to facilitate successful interaction with students with SEN. With a few exceptions, the academics interviewed had in the past and were currently teaching courses in which only one or more students with SEN were enrolled. Academics and other support staff generally reported having limited knowledge of any disability policy that governed their units or departments. Some were not even aware of the national legislation related to SEN.

CHAPTER SIX – SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, CRITIQUE, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1   SUMMARY

Chapter Six summarises and highlights the major findings of the research. Furthermore, the study is criticised, the focus being on its limitations. Finally, the chapter makes suggestions and recommendations for future research.

6.1.1   Aims and goals of study reiterated

The aim of this thesis was to find out what factors play a major role in inhibiting access to higher education institutions in the Free State Province. The analysis was undertaken by interrogating the possible barriers. It is argued that these barriers manifest themselves in different ways, which only become obvious when the SEN students who are both marginalised and excluded, need to be heard and also become more visible.

6.1.2   Research questions restated

Reflecting on the research questions underlying this study (see Chapter 1, Paragraph 1.9), an analysis shows that considerable problems still exist.

1. *Do students with special educational needs value and benefit from the institutional policies and practices of higher education institutions?*

Based on the evidence gathered, in spite of what the institutions under scrutiny claim for themselves as organisations, their SEN students with mobility problems do not value or benefit from their existing policy and practices. Action remains limited unless efforts are made to formulate coherent policies that can be realistically implemented as part of a development process. Some institutions or campuses do not have policies in place; it is only after the merger and incorporation of institutions of higher learning that it seems as if they will begin to align or adopt and construct policies with the merging partner institutions. Actions always remain limited, unless efforts are made to formulate coherent policies that can be realistically implemented as part of a developmental process.

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2. Are the higher education institutions reactive or proactive in their handling of students with special educational needs?

On the evidence of SEN students themselves, the responses of the institutions are reactive rather than pre-emptive. The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative research data indicate the shortcomings of national policy, institutional policies and subsequent practice. If HEIs are to proactively support the course of struggle faced by SEN students, developmental initiatives must become an inherent feature of the corporate infrastructure (see Chapter 4, Subsection 4.4.1, 4.4.2; Chapter 5, 5.2.2 and 5.2.3). As part of an overall projected strategy, these initiatives should remain integral to the long-term design and should guarantee that specific needs of students with special educational needs remain one of the fundamental considerations of any future planning. If the participation rate of students with SEN is to increase in the institutions of higher learning, an increased level of funding is essential.

3. Are there any barriers located with students; institutional domain and broader community domain?

Some of the policies of different institutions of higher learning in the Free State province are not sufficiently committed to the learning of SEN students. Institutional policies regarding disability are still ambiguous enough to be open to wide interpretation, whilst others are not yet in existence. The standards of provision for SEN students are therefore at the discretion of individual institutions and the situation varies from one campus to another.

Commitment requires that national legislation (RSA DoE, 2001) should not only be adopted, but should be followed up, that it should be actively used as the basis for additional progress, and further that lines of communication should be established between different parts of the university.

4. What are the factors that inhibit access to higher education institutions in the Free State Province? and What are the students' experiences (i.e. the problems they face and/or stumbling blocks when enrolled in higher education institutions?

In the Free State, the physical environment of higher education institutions does not meet the needs of SEN students sufficiently; those who have spinal or joint problems, are paraplegic, suffer from Friedreich's ataxia, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis,

rheumatoid arthritis or who have lost a limb and who seek university education, still have unnecessary mobility problems related to access.

The most disturbing finding of this study is that ignorance of physical factors seems to affect the learning of special educational needs students directly. In some institutions, improvements and implementations to date are seemingly based on a system where priority, cost effectiveness and budget are the determining forces. Where physical improvements have been carried out in these institutions, these are isolated cases, fragmented and erratic, and SEN students are denied easy access to several common areas of the university.

6.1.3   Assumption restated

As mentioned in Chapter One, the major assumption in this study was to critically examine and ascertain whether or not students with special educational needs were marginalised, relegated or excluded from accessing higher education institutions. The assumption was that there were some factors that inhibit SEN students from access to the HEIs.

The main assumption specifically tested in the thesis was: There are no factors that inhibit access to higher education for students with SEN and students with special educational needs are not marginalised; they are treated humanely.

That position was identified as critical-emancipatory and counter-hegemonic. The students with SEN tend to see themselves as victims of circumstances. This is not surprising, given the fact that in some of the institutions little has been done to raise and increase access to higher education (see Chapter 5, Paragraph 5.3).

Furthermore, the discourses of SEN students clearly indicated that they were subjugated by power to the position of subaltern classes, and that they experienced discomfort within their position in institutions of higher education. SEN students should raise their voices against the dominant discourses.

6.1.4   Quantitative operationalisation revisited

To conduct the research, both qualitative (i.e. discourse analysis) and quantitative paradigms were operationalised. The motivation for adopting an integrated approach was a mutual validation of results based on different methods to assist the research to obtain a more in-depth or complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation and to produce a sound explanation. An integrated approach increases the scope,

depth and consistency in the methodological proceedings, rather than one of contestation. Triangulation was necessary in this thesis to authenticate it and to give greater credibility to the findings.

Two quantitative research instruments were used in this study; one targeted academics and other supporting staff including the management of faculties; the other focusd solely on students. For academics, management and supporting staff, the CARS instrument was administered. It could also be used to identify how assistive technology and specialist human support facilities could assist with the teaching and learning of SEN students. This instrument further checked to see how effective the inclusive teaching strategies for these students were.

The second quantitative questionnaire was the PHE instrument: this was designed to investigate the participation of SEN students in HEIs. Its application has been as diverse as determining the inclusivity and exclusivity of SEN students (see Chapter 4, 4.4.2).

6.1.5   Quantitative findings revisited

The results produced confirmed the assumption that there were some factors that inhibited access for SEN students to the HEIs in the Free State Province.

The findings in Chapter Four revealed that most respondents seemed to be generally in support of creating more accessible institutions of higher learning for students with SEN. Also, a considerable number of academic staff wanted to adopt more flexible methods of presenting their courses, for example giving extra or flexible time for writing examinations or assignments for SEN students. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that there is at least a range of views on a number of issues represented in these results. The results also provided a range of opinions on questions that allowed for the development of resources that could provide support to SEN students (see Chapter 4, 4.4).

The majority of academic staff reported that they would like to increase and make their course delivery more accessible and inclusive to all students, thus including the SEN students. This does not mean that this view is representative of higher education institutions across the Free State Province. Of those academics that supported the eradication of factors that inhibited access to higher education institutions for students with SEN, these gave an impression that they wished to move further in this direction. The barriers to accessing higher education were

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resource factors such as the lack of assistive technology, the lack of support services, lack of or no policies in place for accommodating SEN students, and a lack of skills and knowledge of teaching or working with SEN students (see Chapter 4, 4.4.1.2 and 4.4.1.3: (a); (b) and (c)).

The responses of participants to a number of statements on how their teaching methods impacted on students with SEN provided some very interesting information. The large majority of respondents acknowledged that they had an important role to play in creating a place for the needs of students with SEN. They felt that their teaching methods catered well for these students. However, some of the academic staff also felt unsure about how their teaching methods might impact on those students who were physically challenged. It is also interesting to note that almost three quarters of respondents would change their pedagogical approach if they were provided with information on how students might benefit from a more accessible approach to teaching and learning (see Chapter 4, 4.6.4; 4.6.5; 4.6.6 and 4.6.7).

Almost the same findings as these above were confirmed through the use of the quantitative instrument, where there were some main inhibiting factors for increasing access for SEN students in institutions of higher learning. Amongst perceptions of teaching staff were the constraints on time to create flexible supportive materials, the lack of the necessary assistive technological gadgets or resources, lack of funding to implement some strategies, unavailability of policies in their respective institutions. Respondents were not concerned about the philosophical issues or attitudinal factors that inhibited students with SEN. Rather, they were more concerned about pragmatic issues such as funding, physical environment, support services, assistive technology and other resources that could make these institutions more accessible (see Chapter 4,. 4.4.1 (a); (b) and (c)).

The same patterns were revealed by two quantitative instruments which showed an awareness of many ways for reducing the effects of perceived barriers. The strongest way suggested for overcoming barriers facing students, according to the CARS instrument, with a response of some 47%, was through improving support for academic staff. The second most favoured category was improving individual attention to SEN students. Then four categories were rated equally: to raise awareness, developing and changing policy and culture.

6.1.6   Qualitative procedures highlighted

The FAI Technique was employed as a non-directive in-depth interview. It is a qualitative interview technique oriented towards an insider's perspective. The contextualisation of the process of knowledge construction is emphasised. The qualitative procedures adopted in the thesis were both flexible and open.

The researcher visited various offices and units of academics, support staff, academic deans, head of departments, units of students with disabilities at different campuses and individual students with SEN. Before the interviews could be conducted, the interviewees were given some information about the interviewer and a brief frame of reference for the interview. The very first question in all the interview sessions was formulated in an open and vague manner. This was dealt with in the form of an exploratory question

All groups of participants were basically asked similar questions and then responses to similar questions were compared, together with the feelings they depicted when asked a particular question.

6.1.7   Summary of qualitative findings

The data gathered from the participants further confirmed the quantitative findings from Chapter 4, namely that there was fairly scant knowledge about the teaching, learning and the support structure (see Chapter 4, 4.6). This implies that there were no policies in place to provide a teaching and learning support framework. The following are some of the reflections from the qualitative findings:

- There has been little emphasis in the higher education sector when it comes to recruitment of students because most institutions do not have policies on issues relating to special educational needs to inform them.

- The only evidence of Free State universities being active in recruiting students with special educational needs comes from some of the institutions themselves aimed at encouraging SEN students to apply. However, this does not cover all the institutions of learning, as most of them do not have any policies in place to attract or cater for SEN students. These were some of the views from an officer in a support service in one institution.

- Access is deemed most unsatisfactory in those areas integral to student life. Because it was on a different level, the library proved to be a difficult area on most campuses with some students being forced to endure embarrassing

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explanations, with no lifts to access certain levels of the library section and hence limited movement (Chapter 4, 4.4.4; 4.4.5; and Chapter 5, 5.2.3).

- Students with special educational needs also tended to see themselves as excluded, because of physical environmental arrangements; they had to negotiate individual arrangements concerning mobility arrangement (see Chapter 5, 5.2.2.1)

- Students with SEN viewed themselves as marginalised and the university staff members saw the responsibility of initiating policy as someone else's job. Two ideological positions become clear, viz. the dominant and counter-hegemonic discourses (see Chapter 5, 5.2).

- The students with SEN tended to view themselves as victims of circumstances. This is not surprising due to the fact that in some of the institutions little had been done to raise and increase access to HEIs in the Free State Province (see Chapter 5, 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.2.1).

- Special educational needs students theorised about the practices of their institutions in the same manner as dominant and dominating ideology conceptualise them.

- Dominant discourse has positioned students with SEN in a particular manner because of structures and practices in place in some of the institutions of higher education. The students seemed to sound in counter-hegemonic with the discourse and they contest the power relations produced by this discourse.

- These findings that located and gave a positioning in discursive space and practices tended to position SEN students on the counter or as opposing hegemonic interests.

6.2   CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to provide an overview of the critical findings on HEIs in the Free State, with the intent of making some recommendations for these institutions to be come more accessible and supportive to SEN students. Based on the data collected, it seems that the services provided previously served a certain section of the population of students. However, departments/units, administrators

and SEN students alike believed that there were numerous administrative and other issues that must be addressed to provide equal service to all.

It is important to recognise the nature and extent of the problems and/or factors that inhibit access which exist in HEIs in South Africa. It is equally important to recognise the strength of the education system in this country. The strengths in the higher education sector need to develop in response to the exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation of SEN students. The most significant outcome of the struggle has been the realisation of democracy in South Africa and the commitment and changes emanating from this process.

This study argues that students with SEN are entitled to an environment in which they should have equal access to all facets of society that are available to the rest of the population. This study wishes to propose that attention needs to be paid to breaking down all those factors that inhibit access to higher education; those which have relegated marginalised students with special educational needs; and that have resulted in massive inequalities in the higher education sector.

In the study, access to equal higher education provision has been discussed and defined through various discourses. The understanding of SEN students and access remains a social construction. Equal access to higher education provision has to do with how the marginalised, relegated and excluded students understand these barriers and what they think could be done to overcome them. This includes what they say as equal human beings, how they see and what they aspire to become.

6.3 CRITIQUE AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This thesis has a number of limitations. The first is that only two institutions of higher learning were involved in this study. This minimises the generalisation of findings. The findings cannot be generalised to all South African higher education institutions because only two institutions were used with different satellite campuses.

The research has furthermore presented and interpreted the data from seemingly contradictory approaches (i.e. positivistic and critical-emancipatory discourse analysis). The data collection techniques included qualitative and quantitative methods. In commenting on the positivistic approach, it could seem as if there has been an undue manipulation of data and findings. Using the positivistic approach, the researcher speaks on behalf of the researched as if they are objects in the natural science laboratory. On the other hand, through the application of qualitative research

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methods, the researcher always decides as to which research problem to research and what interpretation can be given to the data and findings, irrespective of whether the investigation is positivistic or emancipatory.

Another point of limitation is that the thesis has included contestational paradigms ranging from essentialist to non-essentialist paradigms. Though the researcher has tried to match the two contradicting theoretical paradigms, the bottom line remains that the research has a blend of the flavour of logical positivistic approach and the critical emancipatory approach. This study has further chosen to explain factors inhibiting access to higher education by SEN students in statistics and give the voices of the researched an audible note.

The researcher also wishes to acknowledge the limitation that this thesis has used two quantitative instruments (i.e. CARS and PHE) to collect data. However, the instruments did not fit well in to the local South African context and conditions. They were therefore improved or upgraded to suit the specific South African context.

The researcher wishes to acknowledge that it is possible to produce interpretations other than the ones presented in the thesis. This would depend on the approach the researcher employed. The last criticism of this research is that there is tension within the theoretical framework on which the study is grounded and the multidisciplinary paradigms in terms of which the literature and sources were used. Literature or a range of sources consulted ranged from psychology, law, sociology, and anthropology to political science studies. Even though the approach has enriched the thesis, it has also made it difficult to locate this study in terms of conventional subject or disciplinary boundaries.

6.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are provided based on findings emerging from the following major themes of this thesis:

6.4.1   Coordination of academics, management, support personnel and SEN students

There is a need to establish an advisory council in the Free State to assist in the strategic planning and monitoring of special educational needs. The process could include planning, developing, constructing and implementing new policies on special

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educational needs. This process should involve all university stakeholders, thus including SEN students themselves.

The continuous meetings and interactions between university staff personnel, academics, heads or deans of departments, support staff should be encouraged with other stakeholders involved in the process of inclusion. However, a formal university advisory council should be established to serve as support in advocating and supporting special educational needs. For this council to be representative and demonstrate the characteristics of a democracy, it should include the so-called normal university students, students with special educational needs, faculty academics, support staff and administrative staff, as well as members of community-based stakeholders.

Students with SEN should be incorporated more actively on student-affairs related activities. They should be more actively involved in issues such as planning and policy formulation. Some of the students' informant participants have indicated their willingness to be active on policy formulation processes. This kind of empowerment could enable SEN students to gain adequate representation and also greater visibility in the university community. All other students have representation on different university structures, and students with special educational needs have indicated their feelings that they could bring a new perspective onto students' needs and interests that might not otherwise be considered or be addressed in any other way

It is further recommended that the services of units or departments that deal with students with special educational needs be encouraged to work very closely with academic departments and other units. This would enable the entire university community to collaborate in order to facilitate delivery of services to students with special educational needs. The current practice of offices that deals with cases or special educational needs students perpetuates the unnecessary administrative bureaucracy and reduces the services they are capable of rendering. Again, some students with SEN are deterred from seeking the support and services that certain units or departments could offer because they are fearful of stigmatisation and possible labelling.

The HEIs in the Free State should reconsider employing full-time professional personnel on each campus at which this investigation was conducted. They could deal solely with issues related to SEN and could also assist in the implementation of policies that respond to the needs of SEN students. It is apparent that with the

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services of such personnel, institutions could benefit programmatically. The services of such staff could assist in direct service provision for students with SEN.

Equally important, the service of such a professional person could also make it easier for HEIs to evaluate service demands; to identify services needs; to make long-term projections; and to help the institution in identifying the needs of SEN students.

6.4.2 Evaluation of programmes and training of SEN students and staff

It is recommended that the development and implementation of academic programmes be placed under serious review or an assessment plan. This plan could include a formal process for assessing the entire academic programme offered by the institutions of higher learning to check and cross-check to see whether these programmes really catered for the entire university student community. The implication here would be to identify whether students with SEN are able to engage and interrogate the programmes and material without any difficulty. The assessment plan could also check the overall programme effectiveness, including student satisfaction with the services these HEIs offer. In addition, provision could be made for the CHE to come in for the assessment before any academic programme could be accredited.

For academic staff, management of department/university and administrators, this study recommends that HEIs should develop special educational needs modules for their entire staff in order to enable them to work effectively and efficiently with SEN students. It is recommended that a comprehensive training programme be implemented in the HEIs that could provide all stakeholders with adequate baseline information to deal with students with SEN. Some avenues of training might be the existing faculty developmental programmes, departmental in-service training and the SETA programmes. From these different campuses, Schools or Departments of Psychology and/or Educational Psychology, have staff that are equipped to serve as potential trainers.

Furthermore, it is recommended that units or departments that deal with special educational needs students be encouraged to take ongoing professional training courses that deal with special educational needs. It is imperative that as they continue to offer support and services to students with SEN, and serve as a resource for relevant special educational needs related information, they need to be aware of

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national developments such as the policy and legislation trends constructed and developed by the National Government or the Ministry of Education.

6.4.3   Information dissemination and marketing strategies

It is important for the HEIs to develop new marketing strategies and information dissemination processes directed towards academic staff, management, administrative personnel, community-based stakeholders and SEN students. Currently, broad service descriptions are only available on one campus of the institutions of higher learning under investigation. However, no materials exist that provide a comprehensive description of services available for accessing the services that universities offer.

It is recommended that there should be materials developed and disseminated that provide detailed information regarding: (i) the scope and nature of services available to students with SEN; (ii) the process whereby SEN students could access these services; (iii) SEN students' rights and responsibilities should be recognised and respected as articulated in the Republic of South Africa's Constitution; and (iv) departmental or faculties' responsibilities.

To realise this particular dream, it is in the HEIs' interests to disseminate information through the following means: (i) the university web site, (ii) departmental or faculty and students' orientation materials; (iii) community awareness activities; (iv) direct student mailing and/or via students' structures.

The HEIs should seriously consider a formalised way of co-operating with the NGOs, on campus and with community-based collaborators that could participate in the delivery of services geared towards meeting the needs of SEN students. There should be a myriad HEIs and community-based organisations in service delivery that cater broadly for SEN students. If the HEIs could have either formal or informal agreements with NGOs, there could be little confusion regarding specific roles, responsibilities and expectations with regard to how best SEN students could be serviced.

It is recommended that there should be a structure or a model that could work meticulously for the HEIs in catering for the specific needs as well as marketing their services for SEN students. As a result of this investigation, the following model that incorporates these broad categories of services is recommended: (i) a clearly articulated admission policy; (ii) a professional academic counselling and support

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programme; (iii) SEN-related counselling, assessment and evaluation; (iv) vocal and rigorous advocacy and liaison services; (v) clearly spelled out information and referral services; and (vi) data collection and programme evaluation processes. To a lesser degree, some of the recommended services in certain campuses are currently being addressed. However, the lack of coordination of services category and collaborative HEIs stakeholders could serve a pivotal role in service delivery and marketing.

6.5   SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In order to achieve the aims of a future study of this nature more accurately, it is suggested that all researchers interested in a similar study could try to increase the scope of population and sample, implying that the study should not confine itself to only two institutions of higher learning. Further research should be conducted that could help all stakeholders in developing programmes and policies that would assist SEN students. Further research could also deal with more practical issues, such as how to implement policies geared towards inclusivity.

It is also suggested that further investigation be conducted to find out whether similar findings as obtained in this thesis could be repeated. This could be conducted by using: (i) entirely different research methodologies (e.g. either purely positivistic research paradigms or critical emancipatory qualitative research); (ii) different instruments; (iii) a different sample; (iv) different interpretation strategies; (v) another geographical setting; and (vi) different theoretical framework(s).

Equally important, it is also suggested that other variables could also be looked into more closely and independently. The rationale and objective would be to find out which of these variables influence the factors that inhibit access to higher education institutions by SEN students.

Other researchers could also design their own research instruments that are more South African oriented rather than adapting the cited instruments and trying to change them to suit the South African context. Another point for further investigation could be to follow up the sample of SEN students examined in this thesis to check to see if their experiences are still the same as indicated in this thesis and if there are any changes and also to investigate the reasons for such changes.

The emancipatory research data also seems to be a very rich reservoir of data that could be further extrapolated beyond the boundaries of the research paradigm that this thesis adopted. This could be done through other variations of discourse

analysis. Further findings could also be reported, as further research based on this current thesis is undertaken.

Furthermore, variables could be studied more closely and independently (i.e. gender, socio-economic, type of disability, and so on). The objectives would be to find out which of these variables could influence the exclusion of SEN students at higher education institutions.

6.6   A FINAL WORD

The discourse that this thesis is challenging is oppression, exclusion or marginalisation of students with SEN. HEIs should at all costs avoid ignoring the existence of SEN students. The vision and frame of reference of these institutions should always be conscious of those they are servicing in the broad spectrum. The service that HEIs render, should demonstrate a commitment to the total community.

This study has also tried to identify the extent to which the findings could empower SEN students. However, the author of this thesis has come to realise that empowerment is not the gift of the powerful; whether they are institutions of higher learning, academics, policy makers or researchers. Empowerment in this thesis is understood as something that the marginalised, oppressed, excluded and dominated collectively provide for themselves. Students with SEN have decided to empower themselves. Therefore, the question that needs to be asked is whether this thesis could contribute to this process. The appropriate question that could also be asked in a negative way; could this thesis contribute to the disempowerment of SEN students?

Undertaking research in this area could be understood as playing a role in the process of emancipation of marginalised SEN students. Inevitably, this means that this thesis can only be judged emanicipatory after SEN students themselves have made their voices heard. This work can only be viewed as a forum of amplification for the voices of those who are marginalised or excluded from mainstream university culture. It might also be engaged as a tool for those who are seeking emancipation for themselves.

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