Art. #1746, 12 pages, https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n1a1746

A study to understand the inclusion of learners with and without visual impairment in a secondary school in Lesotho

Malehlanye Ralejoe
Schools Management Advisor, Ministry of Education and Training, Maseru, Lesotho
rmalehlanye@yahoo.com

The study reported on here was conducted to investigate the perceptions of 8 learners in a secondary school in the Maseru district of Lesotho about inclusive education as it relates to learners with visual impairment. This school had integrated children with visual impairment. The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach, and a case study format was adopted. Eight participants (aged 16–23; 5 girls and 3 boys) participated in the study. Two focus groups were formed: one comprised 4 learners without visual impairment, and another 4 learners with visual impairment. Focus-group discussions were followed up with individual interviews. The results reveal that learners (with and without visual impairment) had mixed opinions about the integration of learners with visual impairment in their mainstream school. On the one hand they pointed out that inadequate resources and the unwelcoming infrastructure of their school discouraged this integration. Those with visual impairment also pointed to their exclusion from sports activities by their peers, as well as the occasional use of exclusionary language by some of their teachers, as indicating that special schools were better places for them. On the other hand, the learners stated some of the benefits of including learners with visual impairment in their school. These included enabling peer tutoring, peer consultations, and a slower pace of teaching. Learners with visual impairment also stated that inclusion had improved their social life, by enabling them to learn better ways of living with people without visual impairment. Based on these benefits, learners welcomed the inclusion of those with visual impairment in mainstream schools.

Keywords: inclusive education; Lesotho; secondary school learners; teaching strategies; visual impairment

Introduction

Lesotho is a small landlocked country with a surface area of about 30,000 km^2, and is completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. It has a population of about two million people, comprising mostly Basotho people whose language is Sesotho. Inclusive/integrated education in Lesotho probably began in 1987 with King Moshoeshoe II proclaiming a charitable social organisation called Hlokomela Bana (Care for People) (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009). Two years later, policy was put in place to extend inclusive/integrated education services throughout the country. Subsequent domestic legal frameworks on the rights of children with disabilities to education, include the Education Act of 2010, the Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2011, and the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2005–2015 (Ralejoe, 2016). Lesotho's initial inclusion/integration efforts were focused mostly on primary schools, and the plan was to ultimately spread them to secondary and tertiary schools. However, progress in the latter schools has been very slow.

Khatleli, Mariga, Phachaka and Stubbs (1995) argue that the Basotho view disabilities as curses or punishment imposed by what they refer to as the gods (the spirits) for committing sins. Belay (2005) states that such beliefs and attitudes toward disability not only demoralise people with disabilities, but also remove the opportunity for them to participate in socio-economic activities such as education and the job market. Belay (2005:4) stresses that due to educational exclusion, people with disabilities continue to be subjected to "a continuous process of marginalization, which in turn contributes to their state of deepening poverty, further exclusion and vulnerability to complex health hazards and other difficulties." Inclusive education (IE) is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO], 2005:8–9) 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. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the state to educate all children.

The terms "inclusion" and "integration" are used synonymously in Lesotho, as suggested by their use in the national education policy documents. Nonetheless, the two terms represent different education philosophies. IE is rooted in the social model of disability, where a learner is viewed "as being an indivisible psycho-biological organism, whose cognitive development and learning are the outcomes of his/her constructive interaction with all natural, cultural and social contexts, by which his/her existence is defined" (Le Roux, 2004:24). Inclusive education is understood in Lesotho to be "a practice whereby students with physical, sensory, or intellectual impairments that affect learning (i.e. students with disabilities) are educated in regular schools" (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009:133). Nonetheless, very little has been done to provide the necessary support services to children with disabilities in Lesotho's regular schools (see Eriamiatoe, 2013; Mosia, 2014; Ralejoe, 2016).

"Integration" on the other hand, is based on the psycho-medical model which views a child with a disability as being a problem. Integrated education is described as a process of transferring children with disabilities and/or special educational needs to mainstream schools, without necessarily adapting the

environment in mainstream schools to suit the children's needs (Miles, 2005; Sharma, U & Deppeler, 2005). Based on this explanation of the integrated system of education, it becomes apparent that Lesotho offers integrated education.

This study has drawn from the call that any initiative that fails to involve key stakeholders at the lowest levels (in this case children with and without visual impairment [VI]) – is considered insufficient (see Cook-Sather, 2013; Polat, 2011). Thus, learners' views, opinions and experiences in relation to integration of those with VI in the regular school were sought through focus group discussions as well as individual interviews (see methodology).

Ideally, VI refers to conditions of low vision as well as total blindness. However, none of the participants in the current study was totally blind. Consequently, in this study children were considered to be visually impaired when they had varying degrees of low vision to an extent that they relied on the Braille system and enlarged print or audio tapes for reading and writing. The participants with VI claimed to have been clinically proven as having low vision that qualified them as being visually impaired, but together with their teachers, they did not have clear information relating to their actual visual acuity, as classified by the International Classification of Diseases (ICD)-10 (Buck, 2016). Although the Bureau of Statistics included questions on disabilities during the 2006 Population and Housing Census, it did not provide a database relating to the prevalence of childhood VI (blindness) in Lesotho.

Students who volunteered to participate in this study were five girls (three with VI) and three boys (one with VI) aged 16–23 (see the methodology section). The participants had varying degrees of low vision, and none was totally blind. However, it was disclosed in their discussions that some of their school mates were totally blind. There was only one secondary school in Lesotho that provided Braille and other support facilities to learners with VI, and this school was selected as a case study.

Arguably, other countries may benefit from this study, especially those that find themselves in a similar situation as Lesotho with regard to the education of children with VI. Golafshani (2003) argues that fuzzy generalisation allows for an element of uncertainty as researchers report on the possibilities of the findings being similar in another institution. Although the results of this study reflect only the opinions of Basotho learners regarding the education of visually impaired learners in mainstream schools, it is possible that learners from other countries may express similar opinions – provided they are in similar situations to the participants in this study.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following questions:

1) What are the perceptions of learners in a secondary school in the Maseru district of Lesotho about inclusive education as it relates to learners with visual impairment?
2) According to learners, what prospects have made the integration of children with VI in this school work?
3) How has this integration affected learning in the school (for example the impact on learners with and without VI)?
4) How about areas that require improvement (if any)?

This study was a follow-up on one of the seven goals of the 1989 policy statement of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Lesotho – which was to advocate the integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream school system. The study investigated the effectiveness of including children with VI in a mainstream secondary school in Lesotho from the learners' points of view. The study was intended to provide a platform for learners (with and without VI) to reveal their thoughts, feelings and experiences about the inclusion of learners with VI in their school(s).

Scholars (for example, Cook-Sather, 2013) advocate the importance of student voices, and the benefits of incorporating students' perspectives when reforming schools. Tsang (2013) revealed that students with and without disabilities in inclusive schools described how they struggled with understanding how to relate to each other. As Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Satter, Blue-Banning and Hill (2015) argue, this suggests a previously unrecognised role for teachers as social participation mediators. Pivik (2010) found that students with and without disabilities could state more architectural barriers that limited accessibility for students with physical disabilities than their teachers could do. Clearly, students can identify issues in schools that hamper smooth teaching and learning of which their teachers may not be aware.

This study was intended to enable learners (the key stakeholders in education) to give their opinions on their areas of satisfaction and discontentment, and those that required improvement. Ultimately, the study aimed to provide education stakeholders in Lesotho with learner-orientated information relating to the opportunities and benefits of including children with VI in mainstream secondary schools, and the challenges facing this initiative. The merits of this type of study are highlighted, inter alia, by Shogren et al. (2015), who indicate that students (as primary stakeholders in their own education) have unique insights that can inform IE implementation in their countries. Hopefully, this study will guide all key stakeholders, including MOET, toward improving education provision for learners with VI in Lesotho secondary schools.

Review of Relevant Literature

When the MOET developed the Policy Statement in 1989, it had discovered the need to develop resource centres to be used for assessment and preparing learners with special educational needs. Consequently, the 1989 Policy Statement sought to establish resource centres in the 10 districts of Lesotho, in order to assess learners' needs and to prepare them for integration (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009). However, the idea of resource centres did not bear fruit, as in 1996 Mittler and Platt discovered many cases of wrongful placement of learners with special educational needs in schools. For example, students who could cope with eyeglasses or enlarged print, were found to be learning Braille. There were similar findings in Malawi by Lynch, Lund and Massah (2014) on the inclusion of visually impaired children with albinism. According to Lynch et al. (2014), this practice usually stems from a misconception that people with low vision will ultimately develop total blindness as they grow up. Drawing from their (1996) findings, Mittler and Platt recommended that Lesotho should develop a system for assessing learners' needs to determine their placement and relevant resources – indicating that resource centres were never actually established. At the time of the development of the 1989 Policy Statement, special schools were considered to be very expensive and under-resourced (MOET, 1989). However, even if they had been cheap and adequately resourced, these schools could only cater for a small proportion of children with visual impairment who required educational support (Lynch & McCall, 2007).

Scholars highlight several challenges and benefits of including children with VI in mainstream schools. These challenges and benefits inevitably influence learners' perspectives about IE – so it is worth looking into those which I considered to be significant, based on the context of this study. Children with VI in mainstream schools often have fewer natural experiences as a result of not being able to observe things and to physically interact with most things (Carney, Engbretson, Scammell & Sheppard, 2003). A shy learner with VI might miss out on incidental benefits that come with ordinary school life (Agesa, 2014). They rely mostly on tactual, auditory and kinaesthetic senses, in order to build a perception of the world around them. An auditory sense helps mostly with verbal communication, movement, distance and direction, but it does not provide concrete information about the objects themselves – for example their sizes or shapes (Virginia Department of Education, 2017).

The main importance of the sense of hearing in a child with VI is to facilitate verbal communication and to help with movement. Hearing, therefore, is of very limited value in the acquisition of concrete clues about an object for a child with VI (Agesa, 2014). Hence, it becomes imperative that a child with VI is provided with touchable materials in order for them to use kinaesthetic perception. However, some materials are inaccessible to touch and manipulation – making it even more challenging for learners with VI to conceptualise them. For example, some objects might be too large (for example a mountain), others too small (for example an ant), while still others may be dangerous to touch (for example poisonous chemicals) (Virginia Department of Education, 2017).

Children with VI may also experience restrictions with regard to moving within familiar or unfamiliar surroundings (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). Thus, children with VI may find it challenging to navigate their school surroundings and secure opportunities for observation – as other children normally can do. This makes them inevitably dependent upon the assistance of their peers, and this may affect their social relationships and attitudes (Agesa, 2014). Belay (2005:3) attests that depending heavily on others for survival can be psychologically devastating to the dependent: "… a persistent one-way dependence on others… tends to exert profound and multi-dimensional negative effects that are often hard to imagine or to reverse." Consequently, learners with VI may resent and rebel against being helped in many activities they discover that their peers pursue on their own. Hence, educational approaches for children with VI should aim at developing their confidence and independence in mobility – by using aids suited to their individual needs (Olmstead, 2005).

In regular schools, children with VI may be seen as strangers by their peers, who usually lack awareness of VI. They may also be ignored by their teachers with regard to work-overload, and may be under-taught (Agesa, 2014). Consolidating this issue, Mosia (2014) established that one mainstream school teacher in Lesotho used to give a cellular phone to a learner with a disability to play with, and to keep the child busy while teaching others. Teachers are also faced with a shortage of resources such as suitable textbooks and Braille equipment (Dakwa, 2011). Because of their challenges with free movement, children with VI often do not participate well in subjects such as physical education where a lot of movement is required.

Learners with VI may also experience a certain degree of isolation. Thus, they tend to establish irregular relations and assume an inferior status to their peers. They may be more frequently ignored by other students, receive fewer inquiries, and request more information and help than others are prepared to offer. Their isolation may often be a result of a lack of information on the part of other

students – and entails a certain shyness, fear or pity, and consequently more difficult relations (Dakwa, 2014). Moreover, their isolation may be exacerbated by their parents' negligence and pessimism towards their education. Arguably, parents know their children better than anyone else, and so they can provide information about how their children function in a variety of settings. Macfarlane (2005) believes that parents should actively participate in the education of their children, for example by providing their children with guidance and information along the educational journey, in order for their children to stay focused and not to be distracted from reaching their education potential. Child neglect could have a variety of negative physical health and mental health consequences such as low self-esteem, anger and aggression, self-harm and suicidality (Oates, 2003; Read, 1998). Scholl (1986) argues that these challenges can make learners with VI lag behind in academics.

On the other hand, IE can benefit both students with and without disabilities academically and socially (Miles, 2002; Stubbs, 2002). Thus, a truly inclusive school is characterised by a sound culture of teaching and learning, where all learners are supported for success (Van Deventer & Kruger, 2003). The benefits of including children with VI in mainstream schools include:

- Peer tutoring and co-operative learning;
- Enabling children with VI to stay with their families and communities;
- Enabling those with VI to learn better ways of interacting with their peers without VI;
- Improving children's skills (e.g. leadership skills), self-empowerment and self-esteem;
- Encouraging a pace of teaching that accommodates all learners;
- Breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion among those with VI;
- Developing friendships resulting in social and psychological benefits;
- A heterogeneous school community, which improves tolerance and respect for others with diverse characteristics (see Berg, 2004; McCarty, 2006; Miles, 2005; Parents Reaching Out, 2009; Stubbs, 2002; Voltz, Brazil & Ford 2001).

Arguably, students' perceptions about IE may also be influenced by the level of support they receive from their parents. As contested by Dorfman and Fisher (2002) and Porter (2002), there is a strong positive relationship between family involvement and student academic achievement.

A study close to this one was carried out in the United States of America (USA) by Shogren et al. (2015), in which they found that almost all students (with and without disabilities) held positive opinions about IE. According to these authors, students' positive views about their learning in inclusive schools were shaped by a sound culture of teaching and learning in their schools. The students (with and without disabilities) stated that they benefited from classroom monitoring systems; strategies to promote self-determination; peer tutoring; frequent re-teaching and assessment; and multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement. However, some students reported negative opinions about inclusion, stating that some cases of bullying and inaccessible infrastructure discouraged them from attending inclusive schools. It was not stated in this study whether bullying was disability-related.

In a Malawian study it was established that learners with low vision used strategies such as "turning their head slightly to a position (the null point) to afford better gaze or focus or bending down very closely to the desk or table in order to visually locate and discriminate the different coloured materials presented to them" (Lynch et al., 2014:229). Although the Malawian study was based on inclusion of children with albinism, it was significant in our study, as it has been established that albinism is often linked with low vision. For example, in an optometric study in South Africa, Raliavhegwa (2001) found that 85% of the children with albinism had less than 30% vision – even with the best optical correction.

Methodology

In this study we adopted a case study format involving one secondary school, and was approached qualitatively. The qualitative approach enabled me to explore in detail the opportunities, perceptions and experiences of learners, and the challenges they faced in learning and participating in their schools' real-life events and their relationships (Sharma, S 2013). Data were collected using focus-group discussions and individual interviews. The interviewees were learners from a secondary school in the Maseru district of Lesotho that had integrated children with VI into classes with non-disabled peers. A purposive sample (Dawson, 2006) (n = 8) was selected from Grades B to E, comprising those with VI (n = 4; three girls and one boy, aged 17–23) and also those without VI (n = 4; two boys and two girls, aged 16–21). Two focus groups were constituted: one comprised learners with VI and the other comprised those without VI. After the focus group discussions, each participant was interviewed individually (eight interviews in total). On average, the group discussions lasted about 75 minutes each, while individual interviews 30 minutes each. Although more than 10 students seemed willing to participate in the study, parental consent resulted in the total number of eight participants. This number was considered to be acceptable based on Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge's (2007) ideal number of participants in a focus group as between four and eight. Interview dates and venues were selected by the participants

for the purpose of their convenience, and in order to ensure freedom of expression in the venues of their choice.

The focus-group discussions as well as individual interviews were guided by themes based on the students' daily experiences (academic and non-academic) in their school, the level of support they received from their peers, parents and teachers, and the areas that required improvement in their school. In the process, I could document their learning strategies and their perceptions about the benefits, opportunities and challenges of inclusion as it related to visual impairment. Follow-up individual interviews were then conducted in order to provide an environment for personal issues to be expressed. The researcher, who is an IE specialist, carried out the interviews.

Lesotho's secondary education consists of 3 years of junior secondary [Forms A through C; ages 13–16] – that leads to Junior Certificate (JC), and two years of senior secondary (high school) [Forms D and E; ages 16–18] – that leads to Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE). Both JC and LGCSE examinations are administered by MOET. Grade A learners were excluded from the sample because they were considered to be comparatively new to secondary education. Sesotho was mostly spoken in the interviews, and so the interviews were first translated into English before data could be analysed.

Then, translated data were subjected to thematic analysis and categorical indexing (Maree, 2007). I read the translated transcript several times, and in the process jotted down comments and labels in the margins – highlighting the preliminary codes. Thereafter, similar marginal labels and comments were grouped together to generate themes.

Research ethics were adhered to before and during data collection. Thus, the study was carried out with informed consent from participants, who were aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any personal consequences. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and they could refuse to answer any questions they did not wish to answer. They were also assured that the information collected from them would be confidential and used only for the purposes of the study. Their parents/guardians also granted permission for their participation in the study. Lastly, permission to carry out the study was granted by MOET and the principal of the school.

Results

The findings of this study were categorised under the following themes: learners' opinions about IE; relationships among learners and with their teachers; parental involvement; physical activities; the school's physical environment; and the curriculum and teaching aid materials. In the excerpts below, the following fictitious names were used to preserve learner anonymity:

Bobs – Learners with visual impairment
Tums – Learners without visual impairment

Learners' Opinions about Inclusive Education

Data indicated that learners had mixed opinions about IE. On the one hand, they stated that an inclusive school was the best placement for children with VI. They were satisfied within their current school and stated some of the benefits they had enjoyed as a result of the inclusion in their school. Those without VI stated that they assisted their peers with VI with school work. This point was stressed as follows: "[Inclusion] *enables me to assist those with visual impairment with school work – for example, reading and explaining to them. I like assisting learners who require my assistance. While explaining to them, my understanding of the subjects' contents improves*" (Tum).

On probing, it appeared that those with VI were mostly recipients of help from their peers. Even from the above excerpt, it could be surmised that Tums benefited from his/her own actions of helping Bobs, and not from Bobs' conscious efforts to assist Tums. In addition to academic benefits, a learner with VI mentioned that inclusion had also improved her social life: "*This school has offered me the real experience of living in an environment which is dominated by people without visual impairment. It has helped me to have patience with them ...*" (Bob).

It was encouraging to hear Tums stating that their peers with VI were academically competitive in their school. One of them said that: "*Given the required academic assistance, those with visual impairment also perform well academically, and sometimes even better than us*" (Tum).

The learners without VI stated that inclusion has also improved teaching in their school. They said that the presence of learners with VI has encouraged their teachers to teach at a slower pace, while often repeating what they have said – which also benefited slower learners without VI. Probing why the presence of Bobs had slowed down the teaching pace in their school, it was explained that such learners used Braille very slowly, which caused them to miss much of the teaching. Therefore, it was perceived to be a teacher's task to ensure that they understood issues in class, by keeping the teaching pace slower and repeating things until they all understood.

On the other hand, data also revealed some negative opinions. These appeared to stem from the challenges learners encountered in their learning process and in their concerns about each other. Both groups (Bobs and Tums) appeared to be

occasionally discontented in respect of each other. Bobs were worried about the jealousy of Tums in respect of the good academic performance of Bobs: "*Sometimes our classmates refuse to read their notes to us – especially when we have out-competed them in tests. In that case, only your closest friends will help you*" (Bob).

A learner with VI also shared her classroom experiences when she was studying at junior secondary level. She thought that her classmates often disrespected her opinions while working in groups – simply because she was visually impaired:

> *Some of the learners without VI in this school used to behave as if our lack of sight implies impairment in cognitive functions. When I was at secondary level, I used to get offended when my classmates disrespected my opinions during class discussions.* (Bob).

On the other hand, Tums seemed uneasy with what they referred to as the "selfishness" of Bobs. The following represents their unanimous concern about their classmates with VI: "*Sometimes they inconvenience us by impatiently demanding that we read for them – either the text books or our notes – even when we are very busy with our own school work*" (Tums).

A shortage of resources and use of discriminatory language prompted Bobs to think that special schools could be better learning centres for them:

> *I am not very happy in this school, because we lack adequate equipment. I think if it was a special school, then it would be adequately equipped with resources for us* (Bob).
>
> *Although most of our teachers try their best to include us in their lessons, there are occasions when some would use phrases such as 'this one is …' in their teaching, which discriminates against us because we can't see what they are referring to. I think that such challenges in communication would not happen in special schools, as teachers would be teaching only learners with disabilities.* (Bob)

Relationships among Learners and with Their Teachers

Despite the above challenges, Tums revealed that they generally interacted well with Bobs. One of them said that "*It is easy for us to interact with learners with VI*." The learners with VI also confirmed that their relationships with their peers were mostly good. Tums said that they even familiarised new-comer Bobs with their school environment. This is how this point was presented: "*We help new-comer learners with VI by showing them the important places in our school*" (Tum).

Furthermore, both Tums and Bobs seemed to be generally satisfied with the relationships with their teachers. However, Bobs pointed out a few areas that required improvement, such as occasional use of exclusionary phrases – such as the one quoted in the preceding theme/code (thus, learners' opinions about IE).

Another learner with VI raised a concern over teachers name-calling them. The learner argued this point, as follows: "*I often feel offended by teachers who identify us with the name of our residence (care-centre) or other names other than our real names*" (Bob).

The above challenges probably also influenced a learner's negative attitude toward IE, as argued under their opinions about IE.

Parental Contribution

The learners also talked at length about the contribution of their parents to their education. With Tums and one Bob, their parents always attended parental meetings at their school. Nevertheless, voluntary visits were very rare, they argued. The other three Bobs claimed that their parents did not follow up on their educational progress. Two stated that their homes were in districts far away from the Maseru district, and that their parents claimed not to have enough money for transport to their school. On the other hand, one Bob said in the individual interview that her parents simply did not care about her educational progress. Looking very sad, the learner said that:

> *My parents have never come to my school, not even when the school has requested them to come for parents' meetings. They seem not to care about my education at all. It looks like my VI has made them lose hope in my educational future.* (Bob)

Physical Activity

Under this theme, Tums as well as one Bob said that they participated in physical activity such as sports. All the interviewees, including those with VI who claimed not to participate in physical activities, mentioned the benefits of physical activity as, inter alia, promoting good health by relieving stress, maintaining proper body weight, and improving physical and mental capabilities. Those with VI who did not participate in physical activity stated that the types of games which were played in their school were vision-based, competitive, and could, therefore, be harmful to them. Furthermore, their peers were simply reluctant to incorporate them into their competitive teams: "*When we try to join their teams, they reject us – claiming we will make their teams lose in the games*" (Bob).

School's Physical Environment

All the interviewees were concerned about the physical environment of their school not accommodating Bobs. Areas of concern included rocky paths, trees in the walk areas, and unprotected furrows. Some improvements in the physical environment of the school were proposed.

One of them said that: "*Our school environment must be made accommodative for them* [those with VI], *by for example paving and removing trees in the walking area*" (Tum).

One Bob also raised concern about the toilet floor sometimes being wet and slippery. The learner said that "[t]*he toilet's floor is sometimes wet and slippery, which is dangerous for us*."

Some findings appeared to be related to the curriculum and teaching aid materials, and these are presented next.

Curriculum and Teaching Aid Materials

The learners with VI revealed that they took all the subjects offered in their school, except physical science. They could only speculate that their exemption from physical science probably stemmed from their teachers' belief that most of the experiments in physical science could be dangerous for people with VI. Indeed, one Bob showed that she struggled to cope during biology experiments: "*Sometimes I struggle to cope during biology experiments. My classmates, as well as biology teachers, often explain to us, but sometimes I fail to understand, despite their efforts*" (Bob).

Nonetheless, Bobs seemed confident about taking physical science, as is reflected in what one of them pleaded: "[W]*e must be allowed to take all the subjects which are offered in our school*" (Bob).

Although the learners without VI seemed to benefit from the slower pace of teaching, which was mostly intended for those with VI, they also raised concerns about syllabus coverage in preparation for final examinations. One of them stated this concern as follows: "*The slower pace of teaching makes it difficult for our teachers to prepare us for the final examinations*" (Tum).

Inadequate teaching aid materials for Bobs appeared to be a major concern for both groups of learners. The braille textbooks, magnifying machines, Perkins (Braille machines), drawing machines and computers with Job Access With Speech (JAWS) software were considered, by the participants, to be extremely limited in number. This forced Bobs to join long queues to access them. Some representative excerpts are:

> *They have a shortage of equipment, for example braille textbooks, magnifying machines and Perkins – so these must be increased in quantity* (Tum).
>
> *The equipment suitable for us is very scarce. In particular, we lack enough Perkins, computers with JAWS software, drawing equipment, and braille textbooks. We queue for two magnifying machines, which inconveniences us by slowing down our learning pace* (Bob).

One Tum suggested that the Perkins be replaced with noiseless typing machines, in order to avoid disturbing the class: "*The Perkins makes a disturbing noise when used in class. They must be provided with typing machines that do not make a disturbing noise, when used in class*" (Tum).

Discussion and Conclusion

Prior to interpreting the findings of this study, certain study limitations must be considered in interpreting the results. The small sample size and the fact that the study was conducted only at one school limited this study, as the conclusions were quite far reaching but were based on only one particular context. Furthermore, while the results had relevance for all students (Bobs and Tums), students who were totally blind were not represented in the sample, as none of them volunteered to take part in the interviews. Further research is needed with regard to this group of students.

This study revealed that learners (Bobs and Tums) have mixed opinions about inclusion of those with VI in their mainstream school. Inclusionary benefits that they enjoyed in their school probably prompted them to think that inclusive schools were the best options for children with VI. They stated that their inclusive school has enabled those without VI to help their peers with VI with school work, and by familiarising them with their school environment. It appeared that those without VI voluntarily assisted their peers with VI to be academically on a par with others. Learners with VI also stated that inclusion has improved them socially – by enabling them to learn better ways of interacting with people without VI.

The benefits of IE to learners, with and without disabilities, are well documented. Organisations such as Parents Reaching Out (2009) believe that peer tutoring and co-operative learning are a benchmark for IE. McCarty (2006) and Voltz et al. (2001) concur in respect of the benefits of IE to learners with and without disabilities – in terms of improving their skills (e.g. leadership skills), increasing abilities to help and teach others, mentoring, tutoring, self-empowerment and self-esteem. Nonetheless, it is maintained in this study that this help should be reciprocal. According to McCarty (2006), inclusion also sensitises learners with and without disabilities to natural diversity, by enabling learners to get a small taste of the diversity of society within the classroom. This might help them build tolerance and respect for others.

In addition, learners without VI revealed that the inclusion of visually impaired learners in their school has helped to slow down the teaching pace – also enabling slow learners without VI to understand the subjects better. This corroborates Lamichhane's (2017) findings in Nepal, where teachers used to go nearer to students who seemed to struggle to understand – individually teaching them, teaching at a low pace, and having

consideration for those with VI who required longer time to write in Braille. Nonetheless, the fact that Bobs relied on Tums to read their notes in order for them to Braille, implies that the time given to them to Braille the notes in class was insufficient. Perhaps this assumption is validated by Tums' concern that a slower pace of teaching compromised their preparations for final examinations. Thus, teachers could have prioritised their preparation of learners for final examinations over an effective teaching of Bobs. Several scholars have highlighted the dangers of the examination-orientated curriculum in terms of compromising inclusion initiatives (see, for example McConkey & Bradley, 2007; Rahaman, 2011). Thus, the education system in Lesotho should take an inclusionary approach by providing a broader range of opportunities for learners in terms of curriculum and assessment adaptations.

In fact, the issue of Bobs receiving support from Tums can be regarded as encouraging and positive, but cannot be used to justify the successful implementation of inclusive education (Lamichhane, 2017). Perhaps Bobs' over-reliance on Tums to help them with school work could affect their friendships. Tums mentioned cases of Bobs demanding more help with school work than they were ready to offer. Bobs also stated that Tums excluded them from sports activities. This probably compromised their friendships, resulting in Bobs feeling isolated. Considering the benefits of physical activity (Zwald, 2008), which all the participants in this study seemed to know, it is imperative that Bobs be familiarised with safe ways of engaging in physical activities – such as weight lifting, using the skipping rope, muscle stretching, and participating in aerobics. The side-lining of Bobs by Tums in the sporting activities implies that awareness raising is still needed in order to bridge the gap between these two groups of learners in terms of how they should relate to each other. According to Berg (2004), as they develop friendship with others, those with disabilities become empowered and their self-esteem is boosted. As Berg (2004:28) stresses, those with disabilities will then begin "to feel a sense of self-worth, and they also begin to see themselves as individuals who can share some of the same experiences and opportunities with their non-disabled peers." Consequently, it is proposed in this study that teachers nurture and monitor friendships among learners.

In their USA study, (which is a different context from the current study) Shogren et al. (2015) also found that learners without VI enjoyed helping their peers with VI with academic work. Nonetheless, the findings of the current study could not provide enough evidence of the helping efforts being reciprocal. Rather, Bobs were mostly stated as recipients of help from Tums. Furthermore, data provided no evidence of teachers nurturing this process in their school for mutual benefit. Therefore, the teachers should devise strategies to empower Bobs to also be helpful to others. It could also be drawn from these findings that teachers had inadequate skills to effectively teach Bobs – hence these learners' reliance on their peers to catch up with school work. Indeed, I established that the school was under-staffed with support teachers. The few support teachers that they had also taught specific subjects. To make matters worse, some of the support teachers had no formal training in special education, and rather learned some special education skills (such as Braille) on the job. This challenge could be addressed by providing the school with more qualified support teachers who do not have specific classes to teach – but rather act as mediators between class teachers and learners who require more assistance than others. Alternatively, teachers might adopt the Tanzanian strategy where teachers may teach the same lesson several times, as well as doing revision at the beginning of a new lesson to provide those who were unable to understand in the previous class a second chance to catch up with others (Westbrook & Croft, 2015).

On the other hand, Bobs believed that the resource challenges they faced in their school would be less in special schools. The participants in this study considered that the teaching aid materials in their school could not meet the needs of Bobs. In particular, they referred to the shortage of Perkins, braille textbooks and magnifying machines. They also raised concerns about a lack of drawing equipment and computers with JAWS software. Consequently, they appealed to education authorities in Lesotho to address material shortages of teaching aids. Resource challenges, coupled with exclusion from sports activities and the exclusionary language that was occasionally used by some teachers, prompted Bobs to think that special schools could be better places for them. I found that the Bobs had attended special primary schools, so I understood that these challenges were probably new to them. Despite these challenges, Bobs seemed to have developed resilience strategies to cope with fewer resources at their school. They stated that during the examination period they worked during the night because of long queues to access the magnifiers. They also had very close friends who would help them when everybody else did not want to help. Nonetheless, Kristensen, Loican-Omagor and Onen (2003) state that appropriate policies that include sufficient funding for teaching materials, are critical for the successful implementation of IE.

Teachers' inadequate skills in adapting the curriculum was also reflected in learners' disclosure that Bobs were denied the opportunity to learn physical science, simply because it was assumed that they would not cope with its practical

component. IE scholars – for example Maguvhe (2006) and Westwood (2007) – advocate curriculum adaptations in order to facilitate individual learner's educational needs. This implies balancing priorities according to the strengths, needs and circumstances of the particular student, taking into consideration the degree of their VI. Clearly, physical science must be adapted to meet the needs of Bobs and this can happen when teachers are adequately equipped with skills to adapt the curriculum. Hence, resource challenges and teachers' inadequate skills in effectively teaching inclusive classes requires argent attention, as they appear to have equally frustrated Tums and Bobs.

Johnstone and Chapman (2009) established that Lesotho teachers struggled with large class sizes. The possibility of the negative impacts of large classes on the teaching of visually impaired learners in this school could require further research. Indeed, it was found in Nepal that large class size and teachers' inadequate skills in handling inclusive classes compromised teachers' efforts to effectively teach learners with VI (Lamichhane, 2017).

Parental involvement is considered to be crucial for the success of IE. For example, Porter (2002) has shown that parents should be involved at all stages of planning and implementing IE, because this will help their wishes with regard to their children's education to be respected. It is also believed that parental involvement in the education of their children contributes to the positive attitudes of children in relation to learning (Porter, 2002).

In my study, some students stated that their parents visited their school only when they were called for meetings. Some (mostly Bobs) revealed that their parents never visited their school – even when they were specifically invited to meetings. No voluntary visits were reported by the learners. While some learners reported fiscal constraints and their distant homes as preventing their parents from visiting their school, one learner with VI thought that her parents had simply neglected her. When she stated this, it was clear that this had affected her emotionally. Considering that disability is perceived negatively in Lesotho (Khatleli et al., 1995), further research is required in order to establish the magnitude of parental neglect of children with disabilities in Lesotho schools, and the impacts thereof.

Lazenbatt (2010) considers child neglect to be a maltreatment that has a variety of negative physical health and mental health consequences. The immediate and longer-term impact of this type of maltreatment can include mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, substance misuse, eating disorders, self-injurious behaviour, anger and aggression, age-inappropriate sexual behaviour, self-harming and suicidality (Oates, 2003; Read, 1998). Indeed, one of the objectives of nationwide IE is to help children with disabilities to attend the schools closest to their homes (Porter, 2002) so that they can stay with their parents. Past research has revealed instances of poor parental contribution to the education of their children. Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) state that teachers in their study reported difficulties in working with parents (even parents of learners without disabilities). Based on this study I recommend that inclusive schools devise means to encourage parents to regularly visit their children's schools in order to follow up on the educational progress of their children. According to Macfarlane (2005) this could be achieved by teachers establishing a system where they can spend time with parents, talk to them about their children's weaknesses and strengths, and plan effective ways to help such children.

Finally, infrastructural barriers seemed to be a big concern for all the participants. Participants stated that these included rocky paths, trees planted in walking areas, and unprotected furrows. Jha (2002) found that children with visual impairment were often disadvantaged when buildings were constructed without consideration of their mobility needs. Mpya (2007) concurs that in order to be truly inclusive, school buildings and teaching and recreational areas should be accessible to all kinds of learners. Thus, infrastructural barriers should be addressed by the authorities in order to create a physical environment that is safe and welcoming to all learners in the school.

Notes

ii. DATES: Received: 13 August 2018; Revised: 30 September 2019; Accepted: 16 February 2020; Published: 28 February 2021.

References

Agesa L 2014. Challenges faced by learners with visual impairments in inclusive setting in Trans-Nzoia County. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(29):185–193. Available at https://core.ac.uk/reader/234636400. Accessed 14 February 2021.

Belay TE 2005. *African perspective on visual impairments. ICT's and policies: A personal experience, a variety of perspectives and technological solution.* Paper presented to UNESCO at the World Summit on the Information Society Workshop on ICT and Persons with Disabilities, Tunis, Tunisia, 16 November. Available at http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/wsis_tunis_disabilities_tamru.pdf. Accessed 28 February 2021.

Berg SL 2004. The advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms. MEd thesis. Menomonie, WI: University of Wisconsin-Stout. Available at https://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/

41561/2005bergs.pdf?sequence=1. Accessed 31 January 2021.
Buck CJ 2016. *2016 ICD-10-CM*. St. Louis, MO: Elsevier.
Carney S, Engbretson C, Scammell K & Sheppard V 2003. *Teaching students with visual impairments: A guide for the support team*. Regina, Canada: Saskatchewan Learning. Available at http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/40209-Vision.pdf. Accessed 20 September 2018.
Cook-Sather A 2013. Translating learners, researchers, and qualitative approaches through investigations of students' experiences in school. *Qualitative Research*, 13(3):352–367. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1468794112451022
Dakwa FE 2011. A reflection of teacher's perceptions on the inclusion of children with visual impairment in ordinary schools. *Zimbabwe International Journal of Open & Distance Learning*, 1(1):56–60. Available at http://lis.zou.ac.zw:8080/dspace/bitstream/0/80/1/Francis%20Emison%20Dakwa%20.pdf. Accessed 8 February 2021.
Dakwa FE 2014. Inclusion of children with visual impairments in regular schools – A Zimbabwean perspective. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 3(1):89–97. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v3-i1/680
Dawson C 2006. *A practical guide to research methods: A user-friendly manual for mastering research techniques and projects* (2nd ed). Oxford, England: How to Books.
Dorfman D & Fisher A 2002. *Building relationship for student success; School-family-community partnership and student achievement in the Northwest*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Available at https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED474379.pdf. Accessed 15 February 2021.
Eriamiatoe P 2013. Realising inclusive education for children with disabilities in Lesotho. *AfricLaw*, 15 July. Available at https://africlaw.com/2013/07/15/realising-inclusive-education-for-children-with-disabilities-in-lesotho/. Accessed 15 February 2021.
Golafshani N 2003. Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4):597–607.
Hancock B, Ockleford E & Windridge K 2007. *An introduction to qualitative research*. Nottingham, England: The NIHR for the East Midlands. Available at https://www.rds-yh.nihr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/5_Introduction-to-qualitative-research-2009.pdf. Accessed 18 February 2021.
Jha MM 2002. *Barriers to access and success: Is inclusive education an answer*? Paper presented at the Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, Durban, South Africa, 29 July - 2 August. Available at http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.431.6785&rep=rep1&type=pdf. Accessed 19 February 2021.
Johnstone CJ & Chapman DW 2009. Contributions and constraints to the implementation of inclusive education in Lesotho. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 56(2):131–148. https://doi.org/10.1080/10349120902868582
Khatleli P, Mariga L, Phachaka L & Stubbs S 1995. Schools for all: National planning in Lesotho. In B O'Toole & R McConkey (eds). *Innovations in developing countries for people with disabilities*. Chorley, England: Lisieux Hall Publications. Available at http://www.aifoeng.it/archives/disability/books/1995_innovations_book.pdf. Accessed 19 February 2021.
Kristensen K, Loican-Omagor M & Onen N 2003. The inclusion of learners with barriers to learning and development into ordinary school settings: A challenge for Uganda. *British Journal of Special Education*, 30(4):194–201. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0952-3383.2003.00310.x
Lamichhane K 2017. Teaching students with visual impairments in an inclusive educational setting: A case from Nepal. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(1):1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1184323
Lazenbatt A 2010. *The impact of abuse and neglect on the health and mental health of children and young people*. London, England: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anne_Lazenbatt/publication/238772406_The_impact_of_abuse_and_neglect_on_the_health_and_mental_health_of_children_and_young_people/links/540859550cf23d9765b0cc85/The-impact-of-abuse-and-neglect-on-the-health-and-mental-health-of-children-and-young-people.pdf. Accessed 3 November 2019.
Le Roux N 2004. *Inclusion*. Johannesburg, South Africa: STEPPS Educational Services.
Lynch P, Lund P & Massah B 2014. Identifying strategies to enhance the educational inclusion of visually impaired children with albinism in Malawi. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 39:216–224. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.07.002
Lynch P & McCall S 2007. The role of the itinerant teachers. *Community Eye Health Journal*, 20(62):26–27. Available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1906922/pdf/jceh_20_62_026.pdf. Accessed 7 February 2021.
Macfarlane A 2005. Inclusion and Mäori ecologies: An educultural approach. In D Fraser, R Moltzen & K Ryba (eds). *Learners with special needs in Aotearoa New Zealand* (3rd ed). Melbourne, Australia: Dunmore Press.
Maguvhe MO 2006. *Curriculum adaptations: A means to accommodate all learners in an inclusive education system*. Pretoria, South Africa: Government of South Africa Press.
Maree K (ed.) 2007. *First steps in research*. Pretoria: South Africa: Van Schaik.
McCarty K 2006. *Full inclusion: The benefits and disadvantages of inclusive schooling. An overview*. Azusa, CA: Azusa Pacific University. Available at https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496074.pdf. Accessed 20 January 2021.

McConkey R & Bradley A 2007. *Inclusive education: Rights, responsibilities and realities*. Newtownabbey, Ireland: Ulster University.

Miles S 2002. *Family action for inclusion in education*. London, England: Save the Children.

Miles S 2005. *Inclusive education. Key issues and debates: Mainstreaming disability in development – The example of inclusive education*. London, England: Save the Children.

Ministry of Education and Training 1989. *Operations plan: Clarification of Lesotho's education policies and priorities, part II*. Maseru, Lesotho: Ministry of Education.

Mittler P & Platt P 1996. *Inclusive education in Lesotho: Evaluation of a pilot project in ten primary schools* (Manchester: Report commissioned by Ministry of Education, Lesotho and Save the Children Fund (UK)).

Mosia AP 2014. Threats to inclusive education in Lesotho: An overview of policy and implementation challenges. *Africa Education Review*, 11(3):292–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2014.934989

Mpya GN 2007. Managing inclusive education in the classroom with reference to the Nkangala Region in Mpumalanga. MEd dissertation. Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa. Available at http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/2294/dissertation.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Accessed 7 February 2021.

Oates M 2003. Suicide: The leading cause of maternal death. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 183(4):279–281. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.183.4.279

Olmstead D 2005. The age of autism: Concerned in Tennessee. *Talk About Curing Autism*. Available at https://tacanow.org/enewsletters_archive/2005/December_2005_1.htm#3d. Accessed 26 February 2021.

Parents Reaching Out 2009. *Improving outcomes for all students by creating schools where all students belong*. Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico Public State Department of Education - Special Education Office.

Pivik JR 2010. The perspective of children and youth: How different stakeholders identify architectural barriers for inclusion in schools. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(4):510–517. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2010.02.005

Polat F 2011. Inclusion in education: A step towards social justice. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31(1):50–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.06.009

Porter L 2002. *Educating young children with special needs*. London, England: Sage.

Rahaman MM 2011. Inclusive education practice for secondary school students with disabilities in Bangladesh. MEd thesis. Christchurch, New Zealand: University of Canterbury. https://doi.org/10.26021/9869

Ralejoe MC 2016. The perceptions of Lesotho secondary schools' teachers about the inclusion of students with disabilities. PhD dissertation. Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa. Available at https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/159131337.pdf. Accessed 4 February 2021.

Raliavhegwa M 2001. Vision problems among children with oculo-cutaneous albinism attending special education schools in the Northern Province of South Africa. MOpt thesis. Polokwane, South Africa: University of the North. Available at http://ulspace.ul.ac.za/handle/10386/2149. Accessed 3 February 2021.

Read J 1998. Child abuse and the severity of disturbance among adult psychiatric inpatients. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 22(5):359–368. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(98)00009-X

Scholl GT (ed.) 1986. *Foundation of education for blind and visually handicapped children and youth: Theory and practice*. New York, NY: American Foundation for The Blind.

Sharma S 2013. Qualitative approaches in mathematics education research: Challenges and possible solutions. *Education Journal*, 2(2):50–57. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.edu.20130202.14

Sharma U & Deppeler J 2005. Integrated education in India: Challenges and prospects. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 25(1). Available at https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/524/701,%20accessed%209th%20September%202011. Accessed 6 February 2013.

Shogren KA, Gross JMS, Forber-Pratt AJ, Francis GL, Satter AL, Blue-Banning M & Hill C 2015. The perspectives of students with and without disabilities on inclusive schools. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 40(4):243–260. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1540796915583493

Stubbs S 2002. *Inclusive education: Where there are few resources*. Oslo, Norway: Atlas Alliance.

Tsang KLV 2013. Secondary pupils' perceptions and experiences toward studying in an inclusive classroom. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 9(2):39–60. Available at https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1016793.pdf. Accessed 28 January 2021.

Turnbull AP & Turnbull HR 2001. *Families, professionals, and exceptionality: Collaborating for empowerment* (4th ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2005. *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all.* Paris, France: Author. Available at https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496105.pdf. Accessed 28 February 2021.

Van Deventer I & Kruger AG (eds.) 2003. *An educator's guide to school management skills*. Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Virginia Department of Education 2017. *Guidelines for working with students who are blind or visually impaired in Virginia public schools*. Available at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/disabilities/sensory_disabilities/visually_impaired_blind/visually_impaired_guidelines.pdf. Accessed 31 January 2017.

Voltz DL, Brazil N & Ford A 2001. What matters most in inclusive education: A practical guide for moving forward. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 37(1):23–30. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F105345120103700105

Westbrook J & Croft A 2015. Beginning to teach

inclusively: An analysis of newly-qualified teacher pedagogy in lower primary classes in Tanzania. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 51:38–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.05.003

Westwood P 2007. *Commonsense methods for children with special educational needs* (5th ed). London, England: Routledge.

Zwald KJ 2008. Perceptions of teachers of students with visual impairments on the importance of physical activity and its effect on their students' academic success and social interactions. PhD dissertation. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona. Available at https://repository.arizona.edu/bitstream/handle/10150/195328/azu_etd_2794_sip1_m.pdf?sequence=1. Accessed 27 February 2021.