# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE  
**BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION TO THE PROBLEM**

1. **INTRODUCTION**  
   - 1

2. **AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM**  
   - 2

3. **PRELIMINARY LITERATURE STUDY**  
   - 2
   1.3.1 *The impact of having a child with learning impairments*  
      - 2
   1.3.2 *The need for psycho-educational support*  
      - 3
   1.3.3 *Support services for parents of children with learning impairments*  
      - 4

4. **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**  
   - 4

5. **AIMS OF RESEARCH**  
   - 5
   - *Primary aim*  
      - 5
   - *Secondary aim*  
      - 5

6. **RESEARCH METHOD**  
   - 6
   1.6.1 *Literature study*  
      - 6
   1.6.2 *Empirical investigation*  
      - 6

7. **DEMARICATION OF THE STUDY**  
   - 6

8. **DEFINITION OF TERMS**  
   - 7
   1.8.1 *Need*  
      - 7
   1.8.2 *Support*  
      - 7
   1.8.3 *Parent*  
      - 8
   1.8.4 *Psycho-educational support*  
      - 8
CHAPTER TWO

AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS: A NEURO-PHYSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.2 THE HUMAN BRAIN: ITS DEVELOPMENT, STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING

2.2.1 Introduction

2.2.2 Development of the brain

2.2.2.1 Formation

2.2.2.2 Migration

2.2.2.3 Synapse formation

2.2.2.4 Myelination

2.2.2.5 Maturation

2.2.3 BRAIN STRUCTURES AND BRAIN FUNCTIONING

2.2.3.1 The localisation theory

a. The forebrain

b. The midbrain

c. The hindbrain

d. Anterior and posterior association areas

2.2.3.2 The functional systems theory

a. The arousal unit

b. The sensory input unit

c. The programming/output unit

2.3 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

2.3.1 The theory of Jean Piaget

2.3.1.1 Introduction

2.3.1.2 Processes of development

2.3.1.3 Concrete operations stage
2.3.1.4  *The stage of formal operations*  27

2.3.2  Cognitive information processing theory  28
  2.3.2.1  *Introduction*  28
  2.3.2.2  *Memory processes*  29

2.4  DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS:
    A NEURO-PHYSIOLOGICAL APPROACH  32
  2.4.1  *Introduction*  32
  2.4.2  Factors contributing to the development of learning impairments  33
    2.4.2.1  *Structural damage*  33
    2.4.2.2  *Malfunctioning of some brain parts*  33
    2.4.2.3  *Delayed maturation*  34
    2.4.2.4  *Chromosomal abnormalities*  34

2.5  FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO NERVOUS SYSTEM ABNORMALITIES  34

2.6  TYPES OF LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS  36
  2.6.1  *Language problems*  36
  2.6.2  *Attention problems*  37
  2.6.3  *Reading problems*  37
  2.6.4  *Writing problems*  39
  2.6.5  *Spelling problems*  40
  2.6.6  *Arithmetic/mathematics problems*  41

2.7  SECONDARY PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY CHILDREN WITH LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS  42
  2.7.1  *Negative self-concept*  43
  2.7.2  *Impulsivity, distractibility, over- or under-activity*  43
  2.7.3  *Deficient social skills*  43
CHAPTER THREE

FOCUS ON PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.2 THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

3.3 FEELINGS EXPERIENCED BY THE FAMILY OF THE CHILD WITH LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS

3.3.1 Sadness and pain

3.3.2 Frustration

3.3.3 Shame and feelings of inadequacy

3.3.4 Feelings of disappointment and deprivation

3.3.5 Envy

3.3.6 Fear

3.3.7 Denial and anger

3.3.8 Self-blame

3.3.9 Confusion

3.3.10 Feeling of contentment

3.3.11 Jealousy
3.4 PARENTS’ BEHAVIOURS EMANATING FROM THEIR FEELINGS 52
3.4.1 Introduction 52
3.4.2 Fathers 53
3.4.3 Mothers 53
3.4.4 Parents as a couple 54

3.5 THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES IN SUPPORTING PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS 55

3.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF COUNSELLING FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS 57

3.7 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS 58

3.8 CONCLUSION 60

CHAPTER FOUR 61
RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION 61
4.2 GENERAL PROBLEM STATEMENTS 61
4.3 SPECIFIC RESEARCH PROBLEMS 62
4.4 HYPOTHESES 62

4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN 64
4.5.1 Respondents 64
4.5.2 Instrument 65
4.5.3 Procedures 66
4.5.4 Pilot study 67

4.6 VALIDITY 67
4.6.1 Content validity 68
4.5.2 Face validity 68

4.6 RELIABILITY 68
4.7 CONCLUSION 69

CHAPTER FIVE 70

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION 70
5.2 ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE 70

5.3 RESULTS 74
5.3.1 Respondents’ biographical information 74
5.3.2 Feelings experienced by parents of children with learning impairments 78

5.3.3 Parents’ needs and expectations when their children are registered at a school for children with learning impairments 83
5.3.3.1 General interpretation 83
5.3.3.2 Hypothesis one 88
5.3.3.3 Hypothesis two 90
5.3.3.4 Hypothesis three 91
5.3.3.5 Hypothesis four 95
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

6.2 FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE STUDY
   6.2.1 The impact of having a child with learning impairments on the family
   6.2.2 The needs of parents of children with learning impairments
   6.2.3 Knowledge and skills required by parents of children with learning impairments
   6.2.4 Psycho-educational support to parents of children with learning impairments

6.3 FINDINGS FROM EMPIRICAL STUDY
   6.3.1 Feelings experienced by parents of children with learning impairments
6.3.2 The needs of parents of children with learning impairments 114
6.3.3 Knowledge and skills required by parents of children with learning impairments 115
6.3.4 Psycho-educational support to parents of children with learning impairments 115

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS 116
6.4.1 Issues to be addressed with parents of children with learning impairments 117
6.4.2 Factors to be considered when supporting parents of children with learning impairments 117
6.4.3 Support strategies for parents of children with learning impairments 119
6.4.4 Suggestions for further research 120

6.5 CONCLUSION 120

BIBLIOGRAPHY 122
# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Biographical information of respondents 72
Table 2: Feelings experienced by parents of children with learning impairments 76
Table 3a: Parents’ needs and expectations when their children are registered at a special school 80
Table 3b.i: Hypothesis One p-value 87
Table 3b.ii: Hypothesis One Means table 87
Table 3c.i: Hypothesis Two p-value 90
Table 3c.ii: Hypothesis Two Means table 91
Table 3d.i: Hypothesis Three p-value 91
Table 3d.ii: Hypothesis Three Means table 92
Table 3e.i: Hypothesis Four p-value 95
Table 3e.ii: Hypothesis Four Means table 95
Table 4a: Knowledge and skills required by parents of children with learning impairments 98
Table 4b.i: Hypothesis Five p-value 100
Table 4b.ii: Hypothesis Five Means table 101
Table 5a: Attendance of parent guidance sessions 103
Table 5b: Setting for parent guidance sessions 103
Table 5c: Strategies for parent guidance 103
Table 5d: Strategies for parent counseling/psychotherapy 104
Table 5e.i: Hypothesis Six p-value 105
Table 5e.ii: Hypothesis Six Means table 105
LIST OF GRAPHS

(Box and Whisker plots)

Box plot 1: Hypothesis One medians graph 88
Box plot 2: Hypothesis Three medians graph 93
Box plot 3: Hypothesis Four medians graph 96
Box plot 4: Hypothesis Five medians graph 102
Box plot 5: Hypothesis Six medians graph 106

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaires
Appendix B: Request for permission to conduct research
Appendix C: Approval in respect of request to conduct research