THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN A
MAINSTREAM SECONDARY SCHOOL IN NAMIBIA

by

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this dissertation - *The social inclusion of learners with visual impairment in a mainstream secondary school in Namibia -* is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete referencing.

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Signature   Date

ABSTRACT

According to Hatlen (2004), most learners with disabilities in an inclusive educational setting are socially isolated. This statement contributed to the research question of this study, how do learners with visual impairment experience the social aspects of their inclusion in a Namibian mainstream secondary school?

The aim of this study was to design a case study to analyse and describe data collected from learners with visual impairment and other participants to determine how they are socially included in a mainstream setting. A qualitative research methodology was used, which included purposive sampling to select participants. The researcher functioned in an interpretive/constructivist paradigm.

It was found that the learners with disabilities and the able-bodied learners do not truly mix, however, the learners with disabilities are content in the mainstream school and they prefer it.

Keywords: Social inclusion, inclusive education, mainstreaming, integration, special educational needs, special education, visual impairment, blindness, impairment, disability.

OPSOMMING

Om aan 'n groep te behoort en sosiaal ingesluit te voel is 'n basiese menslike behoefte – dit is net so belangrik soos die basiese behoeftes van kos en veiligheid. Sosiale inklusie kan as een van die kritiese elemente beskou word wat onderskei tussen mense wat ongesteld is en mense wat gesond is. Betekenisvolle verhoudings dra by tot self-aktualisering. Lae sosiale inklusie beteken vir leerders eensaamheid en swak aanvaarding deur portuurgroepe. Sosiale inklusie is van groot belang vir kinders se ontwikkeling.

Navorsing het bevind dat inklusiewe hoofstroomskole die effektiefste manier is om diskriminasie te beveg en sosiale insluiting te bevorder. Hatlen (2004) is van mening dat die groter meerderheid van leerders met gestremdhede in 'n hoofstroomskool sosiaal geï soleerd is.

Die doel van hierdie kwalitatiewe studie was om leerders met gestremdhede se persepsie van hulle eie sosiale aanvaarding binne 'n inklusiewe hoofstroom sekondêre skool te ondersoek. Die navorser het binne 'n interpretatiewe/konstruktivistiese paradigma gewerk. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodologie is gevolg en het die volgende ingesluit: doelbewuste seleksie om te bepaal wie die deelnemers sou wees; onderhoude, observasie, dokumente en refleksies om data te genereer; en inhoudsanalise om die data te analiseer.

Navorsingsbevindinge dui aan dat leerders met gestremdhede vir jare afgesonder was van die res van die samelewing deur hierdie leerders in spesiale skole te plaas. Dit het veroorsaak dat mense vervreemd van mekaar is en het 'n skeiding tussen 'ons' en 'hulle' veroorsaak. Die bevindinge van hierdie studie beklemtoon die belangrikheid van bewusmaking tussen leerders met gestremdhede en leerders sonder gestremdhede. Daar kom wel afknouery voor op die skoolgronde en ware vriendskappe tussen leerders met gestremdhede en leerders sonder gestremdhede vind nie in die ware sin van die woord plaas nie. Hierdie leerders is egter tevrede en verkies steeds om in 'n hoofstroomskool te wees. Inklusiewe onderwys is nog 'n nuwe konsep en in

die ontwikkelingsfase in Namibië, terwyl die leerders nog onbekend is met inklusie, asook met mekaar.

Sleutelwoorde: Sosiale inklusie, inklusiewe onderwys, hoofstroming, integrasie, spesiale onderrigbehoeftes, spesiale onderrig, visuele gestremdheid, blindheid, gestremdheid, ongeskiktheid.

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CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCING THE ENQUIRY

"The fly caught in the spider web is included, but victimized" (McCollum, 1998:184).

Hatlen (2004) states that learners in inclusive education settings who are blind or visually impaired, are socially isolated. He refers to these learners as elephants in our professional rooms for the reason that learners with visual impairment experience great difficulty with social interaction skills, which exclude them from the rest of the mainstream setting. Hatlen (2004) suggested that social interaction skills are as important as learning to read. It often may be the case that learners with disabling conditions, particularly those who are more visible and significant, though included in the classroom, may remain outsiders (Anderson, 2006). It is important not to overlook the importance of social interactions as a basis for learning. Interactions with others in the learner's environment provide a basis from which the learner learns to view the world (Grubbs & Niemeyer, 1999).

1.2   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In 1994, Namibia signed the *Salamanca Statement on Principles and Practice in Special Needs Education*. This statement argues that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (Unesco, 1994).

A mere definition will not be sufficient in conveying the actual meaning of the concept of inclusive education. However, inclusive education can be defined as a system of education that is responsive to the diverse needs of all learners (Naicker, 2001). Perhaps most important, inclusive education involves the whole person. The interaction of the physical, cognitive, social,

emotional, and moral dimensions of development must occur throughout education (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002).

Namibia developed the National Policy on Disability that indicates that the State will certify that learners with disabilities have equal opportunities and equal access to education, sports and recreation, and all other services in the community, such as health care. Boys and girls will have equal rights (Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, 1997). The National Policy on Disability reiterated the Salamanca Principles on inclusion and the policy urged the then Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture to make provision for inclusive education for all Namibian learners, including those with disabilities, and to develop the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the various needs of all children. Ndjoze-Ojo – Deputy Minister of Education in Namibia, said the following: "A national policy on Inclusive Education has been drafted and regional consultation is under way before the finalisation and adoption of the policy" (New Era, 2009:3). Having a policy in place will ensure that the learners with barriers to learning are effectively supported in the mainstream schools.

In order to start off the inclusion of learners with disabilities in Namibia, the Directorate of Programmes and Quality Assurance (PQA) has initiated a pilot phase in a local school in Windhoek, Namibia (New Era, 2009). In 2006, eight learners with visual impairment were transferred from the NISE-Blind (the special school for learners with visual impairment in Windhoek) to a mainstream secondary school. In Namibia the most frequently reported sensory problems are those of visual and hearing impairment (Zimba, Mostert, Hengari, Haihambo, Mowes, Nuugwedha & February, 2007).

As was indicated in the definition of inclusion mentioned earlier, inclusive education is concerned with the whole child – academically, physically, and socially (Dyson, 2001). Namibia has embraced inclusive education and has started with the pilot project to include learners with visual impairment. Research was recently conducted on whether these learners are truly included in the complete sense of the word. From this study, a

recommendation was made that the social inclusion aspect within this school should be further investigated (Zulch-Knouwds, 2009).

According to Hatlen (2004) most learners who are blind or visually impaired in inclusive education settings are socially isolated. This means that they are not socially included, which indicates that they are lonely and poorly accepted by their peers. Peer relations are considered as one of the most vital developmental outcomes as learners reach adolescence (Nyberg, Henricsson & Rydell, 2008). Hatlen (2004) states that blind or visually impaired learners in inclusive education settings often do not become socially integrated. A reason for this is that visual information plays a role in the refinement and acquisition of social skills that are necessary for acceptance by peers. Thus they face great challenges when initiating and maintaining interactions with others.

The above-mentioned social aspect is an important part of inclusion to consider, and with the development of a policy towards inclusion in Namibia still in the initial stage, very little is known about the social impacts of such initiatives on learners with special education needs and their mainstream peers. The aim of inclusion is to prepare all learners to become productive members of a democratic society and to be fully part of the community in which they live, not just physically, but also spiritually, emotionally, and socially (Vayrynen, 2008).

It must be kept in mind that successfully including learners with special educational needs in regular schools requires many changes with regard to attitude because the mere physical presence of learners in the classroom is no guarantee of their involvement in class and school activities, nor their sense of belonging (Grubbs & Niemeyer, 1999).

The question following from this discussion is whether the learners with visual impairment who have been 'physically' placed in the mainstream school are socially included.

1.3   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The process of including learners with visual impairment in Namibia is still in the initial stage, and very little is known about the social impacts of such initiatives on the learners with visual impairment. It cannot just be assumed that they will be socially included in the mainstream school. We are all relational beings and the absence of meaningful relationships has a negative effect on our wellbeing. A sense of belonging is a basic human need – as basic as food and shelter (Pitonyak, 2006).

Hatlen (2004) states that blindness in human beings causes significant differences, not only in how they learn, but also in how they view their world and their interaction with others. As a result of this, Rodney (2003) wrote of how learners with visual impairment often do not automatically become part of a group's social experiences. A preliminary literature review was done on this topic and has led to the formulation of the primary research question that this study aims to answer:

How do learners with visual impairment experience the social aspects of their inclusion in a Namibian mainstream secondary school?

1.4   AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research is twofold. A thorough literature study on the social inclusion of learners with visual impairment in a mainstream setting will be done to develop a conceptual framework. This literature study will focus on the contributing factors involved with the social inclusion of learners with disabilities in a mainstream setting, thereby determining whether learners with visual impairment are socially included in the mainstream setting.

In light of the problem statement, an empirical study will analyse and describe how learners with visual impairment experience the social aspects of their inclusion in the mainstream secondary school. The findings will be presented as a discussion of the identified themes and categories as an integrated

whole, with the information gained from the participants in the case studies. The participants are the following: a learner with low vision, a learner with blindness, the principal, Life Skills teacher, coordinator of inclusive education and two able-bodied peers.

The objectives are to:
- Analyse the notion of social inclusion and portray the degree to which learners with visual impairment are included socially in a Namibian mainstream school.
- Describe the culture and context of the school community, using the opinions and experiences of the participants in the study.

1.5   CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

1.5.1   **Blindness:** It must be emphasised that in the context of the measurement of visual acuity, the figure 3/60 means that the person with a   visual acuity of 3/60 would be able to see at 3 metres what someone with normal vision would be able to see at 30 metres (International Council of Ophthalmology, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the term "blind" will be used to refer to those learners who are either totally blind, that is, having no light perception, or those who have limited light perception, but are unable to read print, even with optical or magnification devices, or when the print font is enlarged.

1.5.2 **Disability:**   The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from mainstream social activities (Oliver, 1996). For the purpose of this study the term disability refers to learners with functional   restrictions due to impairment, involving the loss of ability to perform daily activities or essential social roles.

1.5.3 **Inclusive education:**   Inclusive education is a system where all learners have the   right to attend the neighbourhood school, which is

important for social reasons. All teachers are responsible for the education of all learners and the curriculum must be adapted to cope with this diversity (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). For the purpose of this study inclusive education refers to all learners with visual impairment educated all the time with their non-disabled peers.

1.5.4 **Integration:** Integration means preparing learners for placement in ordinary mainstream schools, where the learners must be able to adapt to the school (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). It therefore implies bringing a learner back into a unified system (Renzaglia et al., 2003). For the purpose of this study it is seen as an effort to find ways of supporting diverse learning needs through additional inputs or facilities in essentially unchanged mainstream schools.

1.5.5 **Impairment:** Goodley (2001) defines impairment as the lacking of a part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb organism of the body. For the purpose of this study, impairment refers to the learners who struggle to fully participate in a mainstream classroom because of their loss of vision.

1.5.6 **Low vision:** A visual impairment, not corrected by standard glasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery, that interferes with the ability to perform everyday activities. While lost vision usually cannot be restored, many people can learn to make the most of the vision that remains (Bedinghaus, 2007).

1.5.7 **Mainstreaming:** Mainstreaming implies that individuals with disabilities have a separate placement and enter the mainstream only for the activities that they can perform at the level needed to succeed (Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow & Stoxen, 2003). For the purpose of this study, mainstreaming will refer to the learners with visual impairment being integrated into a school with sighted learners.

1.5.8 **Social inclusion:** The development of every learner's competency to participate in a diverse and increasingly interdependent society, which implies more than physical presence. A community member participates in all the activities, makes valued contributions and receives the necessary support (Hamil & Everington, 2002 in Swart, 2004). For the purpose of this study social inclusion does not only mean the physical inclusion of learners with disabilities, but also the spiritual, emotional, and social inclusion of these learners, so that they can fully participate in all the activities that the school offers.

1.5.9 **Special education:** Education of a specialised nature designed specifically to suit the needs of learners with disabilities. It can be seen as an alternative for mainstream education and can include education in special schools or classes (Swart, 2004). For the purpose of this study special education refers to the School for the Blind, where the learners with visual impairment were first taught.

1.5.10 **Special educational needs or special needs:** Learning needs that arise from intrinsic factors, such as disabilities, and extrinsic factors, such as social, systemic or financial factors (Swart, 2004). For the purpose of this study special educational needs refer to learners with visual impairment who experience special needs because of their loss of vision.

1.5.11 **Vulnerable children:** The characteristics of a child or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the proneness or impact of suffering, loss and damage (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon & Davis, 2004).

1.6 **RESEARCH PARADIGM AND DESIGN**

In the discussion of the research paradigm and design, attention will be given to the paradigm in which this study is embedded as well as the plan that will guide the researcher in conducting this study.

1.6.6 **Research paradigm**

Paradigms act as perspectives that provide a rationale for the research and commit the researcher to particular methods of data collection, observation and interpretation. Paradigms are thus central to research design, because they impact both on the nature of the research question – what is to be studied, and on the way in which the question is to be studied. In designing a research study, the principle of coherence can be preserved by ensuring that the research question and methods used fit logically within the paradigm (Delport & Fouché, 2005).

The proposed study will be following an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm. Interpretive researchers are concerned with meaning. They seek to understand social members' experience and perceptions of their situation from the standpoint of their unique contexts and backgrounds. For the interpretive researcher, causes and effects are mutually interdependent; any event or action is explainable in terms of multiple interacting factors, events and processes (Henning, 2005). The interpretive paradigm is a way of studying human experience through an empathetic identification with the individual. It is essential to understand the experience from the perception of the participant (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Being rooted in the interpretive/constructivist paradigm then, the researcher will seek to understand how learners with visual impairment experience the social aspects of inclusion in a mainstream secondary school in Namibia.

1.6.2 **Research design**

"A research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research" (Durrheim, 1999:29). Research design refers to the decisions a

researcher makes in planning the study (Fouché, 2005). Durrheim (1999) described the research design as a combination of four dimensions: the purpose of the research, the paradigm informing the research, the context within which the research is conducted and the applicable research techniques that will be in use for data collection and analysis (See Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Schematic presentation of the research design

Purpose	To explore how visually impaired learners experience social inclusion in mainstream schools in Namibia
Paradigm	interpretive/constructivist
Context	Secondary school in Windhoek, Namibia
Techniques	Purposive sampling Data collection through interviews, observation and document review Review of literature Content data analysis

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A methodology defines how the researcher will go about studying any phenomenon (Silverman, 2000). This study will be undertaken in the form of a qualitative study. Qualitative research is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. Qualitative research "implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone'" (Merriam, 1998:6).

Qualitative researchers collect data in the form of written or spoken language, or in the form of observations, and analyse the data by identifying and categorising themes. These surface differences in method mark deeper differences in orientation. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to study

selected issues in depth, openness and detail as they identify and attempt to understand the categories of information that emerge from the data. The approach and size of qualitative research means that it is not designed to be quantitatively representative of the general population (Lister, Middleton & Smith, 2001).

Table 1.2: Schematic presentation of the themes of qualitative inquiry (Durrheim, 1999:43).

1. Naturalistic	The researcher will study the data naturally, with a reluctance to impose meaning and a preference to get out to and observe the field (Silverman, 2000).
2. Holistic	The researcher seeks to understand the whole phenomenon that is more than the sum of its parts. Understanding the context is essential to a holistic perspective (Patton, 2002).
3. Inductive	The researcher is interested in the details and specifics of the data, to discover important categories and interrelationships. The study will commence by exploring with open questions rather than testing theoretically derived hypotheses. First-hand experience with the data allows the researcher to be inductive in approach (Patton, 2002).

The researcher made use of case study research as a form of the research study. A case study is selected for its very uniqueness and for what it can reveal about a phenomenon. This is knowledge we would not otherwise have

access to (Merriam, 1998). A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and meaning for those involved. This method will provide a rich and greater insight and comprehensive understanding (Maree, 2007) about the social experiences of learners with visual impairment who were placed in a Namibian mainstream secondary school. The purpose of a case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case (Norman, Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study will therefore seek to understand the unique experiences and attached meanings to social phenomena learners with visual impairment have in the mainstream school.

1.7.1 Selection of participants

This study will make use of purposive sampling. This simply means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristic that makes them the holders of the data needed for the study. Sampling decisions are therefore made for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Strydom & Delport, 2005). The researcher identify the parameters of the population and then choose the sample case accordingly. For the purpose of this study a number of participants will be used:, two participants with visual impairment, the principal, the Coordinator of inclusive education, the Life Skills teacher, and two able-bodied learners (See Chapter 3 for detailed discussion).

1.7.2 Data collection techniques

For the purpose of this research study the researcher will use the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing method. APA style is most commonly used to cite sources within social sciences and the APA style makes it easier for readers to understand a text by providing a familiar structure that they can follow (Seas & Brizee, 2010).

Researchers conducting basic qualitative studies typically and mainly use three methods for collecting data: interviews, observation, and the reviewing of documents and records. These methods will be used to collect data in this study (Greef, 2005; Merriam, 1998).

Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them (Merriam, 1998). Kavale (2000:174) defined the qualitative research interview as "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena". Collecting these descriptions can be done in several ways, of which face-to-face interviews are the most common way (Opdenakker, 2006). Participants used the interviews to tell stories about their experiences, so that every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (Greef 2005). The researcher who conducted the interviews was fully engaged in the process, willing to understand the participants' response to a question in the wider context of the interview as a whole (Greef, 2005).

Face-to-face interviews are characterised by synchronous communication in time and place. Due to this, interviews can take advantage of social cues, such as the voice, tone and body language of the interviewee. The interviewer can get a lot of extra information from the value added by the interviewee's verbal answer. In face-to-face interviews there is no significant time delay between question and answer, thus the interviewer and interviewee can directly react on what the other says or does. Communication is more spontaneous (Opdenakker, 2006).

Interviews will be semi-structured; by this is meant a 'face-to-face' encounter between the researcher and participants' perspective on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words (Taylor & Bogdan in O' Donoghue, 2007). Semi-structured interviews allow greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection (Cohen & Manion in O' Donoghue, 2007). Semi-structured interviews allow for probing and clarification of answers (Maree, 2007). Face-to-face interviews can be tape recorded, with the consent of the interviewee. Interviews are also a good technique if the interviewee lives near the interviewer (Opdenakker, 2006).

Listening to what learners with disabilities have to say about their educational experiences is one of the best ways to determine how and if they are socially included in the mainstream schools (Corbett, Sebba & Sachdev in Curtin & Clarke, 2005). Kirby and Woodhead (2003) supported this statement, by saying that listening to the voices of students with disabilities has achieved eminence in recent times, as the issue of their participation rights has become recognised.

The purpose of observation is to enhance the understanding of the context within which interaction takes place (Patton, 2002). Observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences, without necessarily questioning or communicating with the participants. Observation will help the researcher to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the phenomenon being observed (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

The researcher will make use of unstructured observation, as described by Gorman and Clayton (2005) where the observer minutes any behaviours or events that are relevant to the research questions being investigated. This process is much more open-ended and is of particular advantage in exploratory research or when a situation is understood in part. The researcher will be the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam 1998). This means that data will be mediated through the researcher, rather than some instrument or computer, and the researcher will physically go to the people, learners, site, setting and institution in order to observe behaviour in its natural setting and be flexible in the study process. Interviewing and observing are two data collection strategies designed to gather data that specifically address the research question. The presence of documents does not intrude upon or alter the setting in ways that the presence of the researcher often does. Documents are, in fact, a ready-made source (Merriam, 1998). Documents make information which cannot be observed and will therefore be unavailable more available to the researcher (Patton, 2002).

1.7.3 **Data analysis**

The aim of data analysis is to change information into an answer to the original research question. The data analysis strategies will be carefully considered to ensure that the design is consistent, as the researcher will match the analysis to a particular type of data, to the purposes of the research and to the research paradigm (Durrheim, 1999). According to Gorman and Clayton (2005), data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the collected data. The purpose of this process is to search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. Data analysis takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and categories (Patton, 2002). The final stage of analysis involves the identification and interpretation of the dominant themes in each learner's life story, using a thematic field analysis as suggested by Wengraf (in Curtin & Clarke, 2005).

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature study is where the researcher engages critically with the literature on the specific research question he or she is researching. The researcher sets up a conversation with the literature and plays the host, letting speakers enter the conversation, changing the topic, keeping it active and critical. Then the literature review comes in useful where the researcher explains his or her data which may be significant to the findings of the study (Henning, 2005).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Laws are rules that individuals must obey for the good of the society as a whole. Just as a body of laws is a body of rules, a body of ethics is a body of principles of right, proper, or good conduct (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2005). In any qualitative study, ethical issues relating to protection of the participants are of concern. The ability to read, save, copy, document and edit volumes of information written by anonymous masses can lead a researcher to forget that these are the words of individuals. Even if the names are changed, some people are easily identified by the details of their message (Merriam, 1998).

This study not only adheres to the ethical policy of the university, but was granted ethical approval by the Principal of the school in which the research was done (See appendix E). The researcher also received the informed consent from the participants partaking in this study (See appendix C). The names of the participants, family, teachers, and peers have been changed to protect the identity of the learners involved in this study.

With human participants, the ethical questions seem to boil down to the so-called Golden Rule, namely that the researcher should treat the participants as he or she would wish to be treated. Thus physical and mental harm are avoided or minimised, confidentiality is not breached, and dishonesty and deception are not used (Elmes, Kantowitz & Roediger, 1999). (See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of further ethical considerations).

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

Following the above layout, the structure of the research report will be discussed in short.

Chapter 1: The study is contextualised and its relevance is explained. An outline of the problem statement, research aim, review of key concepts, paradigm, methodology, design and ethical issues of the study are provided.

Chapter 2: A review of literature that pertains to the social inclusion/exclusion of visually impaired learners in a mainstream school.

Chapter 3: The research paradigm, design and methodology of the study are described, while the collection, analysis and verification of data related to the study are explained.

Chapter 4: The research findings will be produced and discussed in detail.

Chapter 5: The study will be concluded. Focus will fall on the limitations and strengths of the study and recommendations for further research will be made.

1.11 **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has explained the motivation for the study and focused on the problem statement and the aim of the research project. The research design, methodology, methods of data collection and analysis and relevant key concepts were briefly discussed. The chapter concluded with an outline of the structure of the presentation. Chapter two consists of a review of literature, of which the purpose is to advance the argument of the study as conveyed in chapter one.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE THAT PERTAINS TO THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED LEARNERS IN A MAINSTREAM SCHOOL

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review is the orientation or position that the researcher brings to the study. It is the organisation, the scaffolding and the frame of the study. Every study has a literature review and all aspects of the study are affected by the literature review. The literature review, in relation to the specific research problem to be investigated, can be pictured as a set of interlocking frames. This framework indicates to the reader the topic of interest, it identifies what is known about the topic, what aspect of the topic the researcher will focus on and what is not known about the topic (Merriam, 1998). The purpose of reviewing literature relevant to this study is to advance the argument of the study as conveyed in chapter 1.

This study can further the field of giving support to and input into the practical implementation of the Namibian national policy of inclusion, by promoting social inclusion for learners with a visual impairment (See chapter 1).

2.2 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Anderson (2006) has a very unique way of explaining 'inclusion'. He states that it is fear, ignorance, superstition, arrogance and pride on the part of able-bodied people that have led to placing people with disabilities into a 'ghetto'. By physically segregating people with disabilities from able-bodied people, we are also mentally constructing an 'us' and 'them' division that discourages interaction. This 'ghettoising' is how humans divide people into categories and it reveals a socially constructed stigma assigned to people who differ from those holding positions of power.

With this mentioned, Anderson (2006) further states that inclusion draws attention to the differences of those people that led to their exclusion in the first place, and inclusion initiates the sense that 'they' are not 'one of us', but we make efforts to include 'them'. By speaking of inclusion one may actually devalue the learner, as it may accentuate the differences rather than truly bringing the learners together. Simply placing a learner with a disability into a regular classroom does not counter the 'ghettoisation'; though present in the classroom, the learner may still not be an integral part of the class (Anderson, 2006). Grove and Fisher (1999) agreed that the mere acceptance of the learner by obligation, as required by law, might lead to categorisation and labelling of the learner, as differences are then invariably not honoured, but merely tolerated.

From another perspective, Engelbrecht (2001) indicates that people are attached to their own ways of thinking and that is why dramatic changes in society will often be experienced as a catastrophe. It is therefore not surprising that the restructuring and redesigning of education, the movement away from segregated settings for learners with special needs, to the provision of education for all learners in an inclusive education system, will be received with suspicion and hesitation by some people. Swart and Pettipher (2005) strengthened their statement by arguing that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

With regard to the implementing of inclusive schools, there is broad agreement on the following critical elements (Voltz, Brazil & Ford, 2001):

- There needs to be active, significant participation in a mainstream classroom that moves beyond the mere physical placement of learners with disabilities in the classroom. The quality and quantity of interactions between learners and teachers in the school must be appropriate and individual educational and social needs must be met.
- There needs to be a sense of belonging in a classroom and school community, where learner diversity is seen as an asset rather than a

responsibility – all learners must be seen as important members of the classroom and school community.

- A shared ownership among teachers, administrators, parents and learners must be present, as well as shared responsibility for fostering the development of all learners, making sure that all needs are met and that learners and teachers are supported in reaching their goals.

Loretta Giorcelli (Giorcelli, 2009) confirmed the above in a workshop presented in Windhoek, Namibia, by stating four elements for ensuring success with inclusion:

- An environment where all learners, regardless of ability, feel included and welcome.
- An environment where all learners, staff, parents and visitors feel welcome.
- An environment committed to repairing unfair and hurtful beliefs, actions and policies from the past and showing learners how to repair their own behaviour.
- An environment where all learners can be hopeful of a future and benefit from respectful work.

There is controversy about the value and effectiveness of inclusive education, but issues such as participation, belonging, as well as feeling welcome and included are questioned in support for the learners. These issues add to the social inclusion of learners with visual impairments into the mainstream schools.

2.3 SOCIAL INCLUSION AS A GOAL OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The basic didactic and psychological belief underlying inclusive education is that there is no difference between the educational needs of the learner with a disability and the other learners. They all have common goals, of which social inclusion is one (Rodney, 2003). Inclusive education, therefore, must be based on 'social education', which at the same time must be able to embrace both psychological and curricular aspects. In the inclusive school the social-

psychological aspects are included as specific goals for the educational effort (Rodney, 2003).

The politically-influential sociologist, Anthony Giddens (1998:102-103), defined social inclusion in the following way: The new politics defines equality as inclusion and inequality as exclusion. Inclusion refers in its broadest sense to citizenship, to the social and political rights and obligations that all members of a society should have, not just formally, but as a certainty of their lives. It also refers to opportunities and to participation in community space. In a society where work remains central to self-esteem and standard of living, access to work is a main content of opportunity. As Giddens makes it clear, the value of education is not simply in the access it gives to employment opportunities (Dyson, 2001).

Dyson (2001) spoke of a variety of inclusion that extends the unease with whether and where learners are educated to a concern with how fully they participate in educational processes. He mentions a notion of 'belonging' – the sense that the school constitutes a community within which all learners participate. Inclusive education often seems to fall short of establishing belonging in many classes. A few important issues for social inclusion must be addressed to fully understand its broadness, and that is why this study emphasises that learners should be seen as active, independent and competent subjects, not simply as subsumed within families as passive recipients of adult influence (Banks, Cogan, Deeley, Hill, Riddell & Tisdall, 2001). Learners with disabilities are individuals who have their own diverse views and opinions and this is why listening to learners with disabilities is the only way the issue of their participation rights can become recognised (Curtin & Clarke, 2005). Llewellyn (2000) investigated the experiences of learners with physical disabilities in a mainstream school. The findings indicated that the school was not able to meet the psychological and social needs of the learners who participated in the study. Llewellyn concluded that for these learners their mainstream education was discriminatory. Llewellyn's findings were supported by Hemmingson and Borell's (2001) study with learners with physical disabilities that found that the majority of the learners had

experienced barriers to their participation in the classroom, because of both the physical and the social environments. Honig and McCarron (1988) states that learners with disabilities placed in regular schools tended to be more socially rejected by peers, displayed more social isolation, placed more demands on teacher time, were less attentive and were more often the recipients of negative behaviour from the other able-bodied learners.

2.3.1 The perception of 'belonging' by learners with disabilities:

The physical presence of learners with disabilities in the classroom (physical integration) does not by itself ensure a learner's progress and development, unless functional and social integration are also provided (Schmidt & Čagran, 2008). Whether or not a learner feels truly included is reliant on their participation beyond physically being included in activity, school, work or relationships. There must be a reciprocity that makes it possible for the individual to be involved (Wager & Bailey, 2005). Learners with physical disabilities have limited opportunities to interact with their able-bodied classmates, which could result in lower social acceptance (Mpofu, 2003). Unfortunately, learners with disabilities are half as likely to report a sense of belonging, feeling safe or accepted, than are learners without disabilities. They are also half as likely to view other learners as kind (Hogan, McLennan & Bauman, 2000).

2.3.2 Learners with disabilities' perception of friendships

Learners with disabilities report greater levels of loneliness, isolation and interpersonal conflict at school. They rely less on peers for social support when dealing with an academic or interpersonal problem than learners without disabilities (Geisthardt & Munsch, 1996). Acceptance of adolescents with disabilities by their peers without disabilities is considered to be of primary importance to their successful integration in high school. Transition from elementary to high school is a major transition for learners with disabilities (Fisher, Pumpian, Sax, Martin, 1998).

Learners cannot really be counted as included if they do not acquire the skills they will need to participate in society and employment and/or if the skills gap

between them and their peers grows too wide (Dyson, 2001). Socially competent learners use successful strategies in dealing with conflict by avoiding events or subjects that will create it. They explain their perspective when they disagree with their peers and suggest other activities (Kekelis, 1992). Learners who are socially competent have access to a wider range of strategies to gain group entry. Successful strategies include: observing the non-verbal behaviour of the group; identifying the interests of the group; and establishing these interests as their own and behaving (non-verbally) like the group they want to be part of (Kekelis, 1992). The learner who tries to gain entry to a group by asking direct questions or trying to direct the group's interests to those of their own, is using less successful strategies. In order to be socially competent, learners need to read situations and understand others' feelings, interests and points of view. Access to visual information is a strong advantage, as many of these behaviours are very subtle. Learners with limited vision may use other clues – such as tone of voice – to read other people's feelings, but there is a range of very subtle non-verbal behaviours and facial expressions which may be more difficult to access.

Wright (in Konarska 2005) emphasises the fact that, in the case of physical disability when the appearance and function of a learner's body influence his or her self-esteem, the acceptance of his or her deformed body is essential to achieve self-acceptance. However, self-esteem is connected with the system of values that a learner has adopted. If the learner is able to find values that give sense to life, then life becomes sensible.

It is widely accepted that social-emotional development plays a crucial role in children's development, and for learners to develop and be successful in many contexts, they require both social emotional and academic achievement. There is a forceful interaction between social-emotional and academic achievement. Improving social-emotional competences not only has a positive impact on interpersonal skills and the quality of interactions learners establish, but also on their academic achievement (Aviles, Anderson & Davila, 2006). Parents express the importance of friendships and belonging by at

times compromising on academics to help their children become accepted and included (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart, Kitching, Eloff, 2005).

Learners with disabilities are twice as likely as their peers to be bullied, and most bullying takes place in settings that are not monitored by teachers (Dunn, 2004). Some factors that are often linked to learners being bullied are: being alone at playtime, having less than two good friends and having extra help in school. Friendship can protect learners from bullying to a certain degree, but this depends on the quality of the friendship and the characteristics of the friend. If the learner's friend is an anxious child, this is likely to increase the risk of victimization, whilst if the learner's friend sticks up for them, then that reduces the risk of victimisation (Dunn, 2004).

In the case of disabled learners it is necessary to include their parents' experience of social inclusion for their children, as the learner's opportunities and experiences are so bound up in their familial relationship (Clarke, 2006).

2.3.3 Parents' perception of social inclusion

Still, the most evident motivation for parents for including a child with a disability into mainstream education is the fact that they want their child to be socially included. It is considered to be more important than academic achievement. In a pilot study completed by Engelbrecht et al., (2005) a parent stated in all honesty that their child's placement is more social than academic. Parents are even prepared to give academic support at home and let their children take extra lessons to enable them to stay in the mainstream school, because this can aid successful inclusion into a broader society after leaving school. Social inclusion of their child also encompasses an acknowledgement of the fact that the child has the right to stay within the community in which the family lives. The acceptance of friends who have grown up with the child also plays an important role in the placement decision, as it offers emotional security for the child (Engelbrecht et al., 2005). In order to give children with visual impairment opportunities to develop their social competence, more is needed than merely interacting with others. They need to engage in the type of social interaction that maximises social development. It is important that

parents' view of good interaction is not based on a lack of physical or verbal abuse, but rather on the presence of positive social interaction (Landsberg, 2005). Social competence needs to be developed from a very early age, as children with visual impairments are likely to require more time to learn skills which rely so heavily on visual information. Parents must remember that what may be an acceptable behaviour for a young child, very soon becomes unacceptable as the child grows up (Roe, 2008).

Research done with parents' perceptions of their non-disabled childrens' participation in a classroom in which learners with disabilities were enrolled full time, indicated that parents' perceptions were generally positive. They reported that their children's acceptance of differences amongst people in terms of behaviour and appearance increased. They also indicated that their children developed more positive feelings about themselves since participating in an inclusive classroom (Peck, Staub, Gallucci & Schwartz, 2004).

"Learners with disabilities" is a term inclusive of all learners with disabilities who face the challenges of social inclusion. For the purpose of this research study finer consideration is given to the specific disability of visual impairment.

2.3.4 Visually impaired learners' perception of social inclusion

The perception of social inclusion is the learner's personal satisfaction with his/her situation with peers – whether he or she feels lonely, or expresses fulfilment in everyday school activities (Nyberg et al., 2008).

Accessing visual information is a significant advantage for developing social understanding and many learners with visual impairments (particularly those with a severe visual impairment) present difficulties in this area. Self-identity and the understanding of other people are often assumed to depend on vision. Young learners use visual behaviours like eye contact, gaze following and joint attention to set up and sustain social interaction and learn about the behaviour and intentions of others. These early visual behaviours and associated interactions appear to lay the foundation for developing

emotionally secure attachments, developing social communication and language and achieving knowledge about self and others. Learners with visual impairment experience obstruction to social encounters with other learners (Dale & Salt, 2008).

Sacks, Lueck, Com and Erin (1996) remembered observing the isolation and emotional pain that many blind and visually impaired learners experienced in regular public school classrooms. These learners lacked the social skills to start and carry on conversations, to play games effectively, and to join and feel part of a group. The acquisition of competent social skills in a sighted environment is an ongoing process. These skills are not easily learned and must be fine-tuned throughout one's life. Although this is not true for all learners with visual impairment, it is important to recognise the challenge for many learners of acquiring the necessary skills to be socially competent in a complex environment.

Learners with visual impairment experience challenges in school such as locating their friends on the playground (particularly when they are all wearing uniforms), or having to compete at the same level as other learners, despite lacking access to visual information to enable them to compare their own performance to that of their peers. There is also the challenge of trying to finish work on time to join in other activities, thus reducing the learner's opportunities to socialise or have a chat whilst waiting for the next activity (MacCuspie in Roe, 2008). More specific difficulties are in the domains of social interaction, language, communication and behaviour. These include social avoidance, lack of social approach, rejection of social contact and social tactile defensiveness, anxiety during social overtures, poor communicative use of language and a weak response to communication by others (Dale & Salt, 2008).

It is through interaction with others that humans learn and make sense of their world. For learners with visual impairment, relations with others are crucial to overcome some of the visual access limits they experience and to help them make associations and develop their understanding of the world. From the

literature there are no easy answers on how to promote social interaction and friendships between visually impaired and non-visually impaired learners (Roe, 2008). The social experiences available through inclusion are thought to enable young learners with disabilities to be far more socially competent than their peers attending segregated special schools. Overall mainstreaming is likely to benefit learners with disabilities (Fisher et el., 1998).

Parents can, however, provide a facilitating atmosphere with opportunities for children to learn about themselves and others. Thus they can develop social skills, become socially competent and be socially included (Roe, 2008). To promote social interaction and inclusion, learners with visual impairments need to develop their awareness of themselves and a range of social skills through a variety of experiences. Opportunities to interact with others need to be embedded in everyday, whole-class activities and also need to be taken as and when they emerge (Roe, 2008).

To promote positive social interaction in the everyday activities of learners with visual impairment, it is important to consider the following aspects:

- Physical layout

The layout of a room can have an impact on the learner's opportunities to interact with others and to be as independent as possible. They need specific support in the classroom regarding the best seating, lighting and sound. Curtains in front of the windows can regulate the incoming light, and doors should be kept either open or closed, because they can be a potential safety hazard to the learners. The classroom should be managed according to the needs of learners with visual impairments (Landsberg, 2005).

- Social context

Learners with visual impairment need opportunities to interact with a wide range of peers, including those with very good social and communication skills. All learners need to have opportunities to choose peers for some activities. It is important to provide these opportunities to learners with visual

impairment, even if adults do not agree with their choice. It is necessary to understand why a child may choose a particular peer, and to extend their interests and opportunities to develop positive interaction and friendships (Roe, 2008).

- Learning activities

One of the most important findings in a study by Vassilios, Argyropoulos, Sideridis, Kouroupetroglou and Xydas (2009), is the high levels of hearing performance of learners who are blind, even higher compared to their sighted peers. Blind learners learn mainly through their sense of hearing in a group situation. Teachers need to be creative and take the role of the learner's eyes by giving them the knowledge of objects, sounds, smells and taste (Landsberg, 2005). The use of pre-recorded study materials is a good way for learners with visual impairment to learn.

Another conclusion drawn from a study by Goudiras, Papadopoulos, Koutsoklenis, Papageorgiou and Stergiou (2009) was that learners with visual impairment who frequently used screen-reading of magnifier software, were more satisfied that their daily, educational and professional needs were met. Braille is still the basic and unique reading and written medium of communication and learning for learners who are visually impaired or blind. Therefore they must learn to read and write Braille at the same time as sighted learners begin to read and write (Landsberg, 2005). Opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities, school clubs and consultation about issues that are relevant to the individual child, also need to be considered (Roe, 2008).

- Support

As part of everyday practice it is necessary to monitor friendships and social interaction, and to praise positive social interaction. This requires a good level of understanding and sensitivity from those supporting the learner. In a way, the teachers and parents play an important role in mediating situations to promote the learner's participation and development, but often the most

effective way of providing this support is in an indirect manner. The ability to stand back whilst occasionally supporting and extending the potential of an activity is an important skill for adults who know the learner well (Roe, 2008). Teachers and parents should support learners who are visually impaired and help them to accept their problems (Landsberg, 2005).

Buultjens, Stead and Dallas (2002) compiled a project to identify the range of school-based strategies and initiatives that promote social inclusion for learners who have a visual impairment, and to describe the experiences of social inclusion/exclusion for learners with visual impairment in mainstream primary and secondary schools. They acknowledged that with small numbers interviewed, they could not make generalisable statements, but this did not reduce the importance of what they said for evaluating educational responses to the needs of learners with visual impairment. The interviews were designed to be illuminative, to provide reflection on current practices and policies and to stimulate constructive responses from education authorities and schools where the researchers found room for improvement.

Three issues stand out from the interviews with the learners:

- **The importance of knowledgeable and available support from teachers.** Although learners did not readily talk about staff providing direct emotional support, there were several comments about the importance of knowing that staff, who understood you, were around if you needed them.
- **The importance of friends, both for self-esteem and protection from bullying.** Friends could provide support and contribute to self-esteem in many ways, but it was openly recognised by a number of those interviewed that having friends also offered them some standing and protection against being bullied. Bullying and/or name-calling was (or had been) an issue for almost half of the learners interviewed. Although the reasons for bullying are complex, several of those interviewed felt it was directly related to their visual impairment.

- **The need for better communication between teachers to promote inclusion in the classroom.** Some schools had information booklets and formalised meetings to provide staff with information about the needs of some learners. But, this was not always successful and sometimes basic information about a learner's visual impairment was not passed on to class teachers, or had been forgotten.

Issues raised by parents:

- **The importance of knowledgeable and supportive staff.** For many parents it was important to be able to trust staff to be 'up-to-date' about learning aids and techniques that would support their child in school.
- **Sensitive support.** Parents were aware of the complicated line that teachers and support staff had to walk in order to provide support that allowed their child to fully engage with the curriculum, in a way that was not stigmatising.
- **Friendships and social inclusion** were acknowledged by parents as an important part of school life, and they appreciated schools that offered more than practical help and support to their children.

Issues raised by teachers.

- **An inclusive culture** in a school was a valuable support for many teachers in their attempts to fully include learners in all aspects of school life.
- **Support teachers** in the classroom could limit teacher-learner relationships forming in a natural way.
- **School development plans, staff development and the role of the senior management** were important in promoting the full implementation of inclusive policies. Many teachers felt more able to support learners with a visual impairment if there were inclusive structures in place in the school, and effective communication and exchange of information between staff and parents.

There are multiple issues in achieving social integration for blind and visually impaired learners, including a need for intensive instruction, that may be unavailable. It can also be perceived that the differences between learners who are blind and sighted are so significant that it is nearly impossible to bring these two groups together in a mutually enjoyable social experience. Environmental information is different for the groups, as is spatial knowledge and nonverbal communication. The educational modifications necessary for learners who are blind or visually impaired to access learning experiences may, in themselves, be barriers to social interaction. Braille writers, Braille books, Braille note-takers, and other special equipment emphasise social differences. Learners with visual impairment have acknowledged that the best social experiences they have, are the time they spend with other blind peers (Hatlen, 2004). Still, including learners with disabilities in sports and other recreational activities fosters a spirit of inclusion throughout the community and helps families see inclusive education as natural. It is well recognised that ensuring all learners develop good levels of social competency in their school years, has the potential to be a very powerful strategy for promoting lifelong social inclusion (Stivers, Cropper & Straus, 2008).

2.4 THE SOCIAL MODEL OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

At first, the interest was primarily in the education of blind, deaf and mentally handicapped learners. However, the remarkable developments in the fields of medicine and clinical psychology during the twentieth century have led to more and more categories of handicap being identified, and in each case separate or special schools were established for such groups. It was accepted that each group of disabled learners had their own particular characteristics and that their learning difficulties were directly related to their specific defects. The aim of education was, therefore, to remove or lighten the particular deficiencies of such learners (Du Toit, 1999).

Learners who experienced learning difficulties or disabilities were referred to multidisciplinary teams that tested the learners and diagnosed or labelled their

problems. The education system used clinically described admission criteria based on categories of disability – for example, schools for learners with cerebral palsy, the deaf and hard-of-hearing, the blind and partially-sighted – for placement in special education (Swart, 2004).

The above described state of affairs was an era characterised by a predominantly clinical or medical perspective. Towards the middle of the twentieth century, this medical perspective to specialised education gave way to a social perspective. It was realised that disabled learners should be equipped to live within a social context, and also that environments could have an effect on disabled learners' problems – positively by diminishing their handicaps, or negatively by intensifying their handicaps (Du Toit, 1999).

The core definition of the Social Model appears in the UPIAS document, *Fundamental Principles of Disability*, an edited version of which is reprinted in Shakespeare and Watson (2002:3), and which we quote here at length:

> "In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. To understand this it is necessary to grasp the distinction between the physical impairment and the social situation, called 'disability', of people with such impairment. Thus we define impairment as lacking all or part of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body, and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities."

The Social Model therefore contains several key elements. It claims that disabled people are an outcast social group. It distinguishes between the impairments that people have, and the oppression which they experience. Most importantly, it defines 'disability' as the social oppression, not the form of impairment (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). Swain and French (2000)

opposed the above statement by saying that the divide between two groups cannot be sustained on the basis that one is oppressed while the other is not. Non-disabled people can be oppressed through poverty, racism, sexism and sexual preference, as indeed are many disabled people. Oppressed people can also be oppressors. Disabled people can, for instance, be racist. Whatever definition of oppression is taken, it will apply to some non-disabled, as well as disabled people. More central criticisms of the Social Model that are presented, focus on the issue of impairment; the impairment/disability dualism; and the issue of identity.

Shakespeare and Watson (2002) argued that the very success of the Social Model has now become its main weakness. Feminist commentators dispute that the Social Model has traditionally either avoided or excluded the issue of impairment. It sounds much better to say 'people are disabled by society, not by their bodies' than to say 'people are disabled by society as well as by their bodies'. But the result is that impairment is completely bracketed. They argue that the denial of difference is as big a problem for disability studies. Disabled feminists have stated that impairment is part of their daily personal experience, and cannot be ignored in their social theory or our political strategy. Politically, if the analysis does not include impairment, disabled people may be reluctant to identify with the disability movement, and commentators may reject the arguments as being 'idealistic' and mystified. Disabled feminists say that they are not just disabled people, they are also people with impairments, and to pretend otherwise is to ignore a major part of their biographies (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). Other disabled people have criticised the Social Model for its supposed denial of 'the pain of impairment', both physical and psychological (Oliver, 1996).

It is notable that 'pain and chronic illness' are the recurring examples of impairment not addressed by the Social Model (Swain & French, 2000). Still, Oliver (1996) stated that the tendency within the Social Model of disability to deny the experiences of disabled bodies has not, in reality, been a denial at all. Rather it has been a pragmatic attempt to identify and address issues that

can be changed through collective action rather than medical or other professional treatment.

Inclusion in Namibia is grounded on the 'Social Model' of disability which proposes that barriers, prejudice and exclusion by society (purposely or inadvertently) are the ultimate factors defining who is disabled and who is not in a particular society. It recognises that while some people have physical, intellectual, or psychological differences from a statistical mean, which may sometimes be impairments, these do not have to lead to disability. Disability is seen as a complex collection of conditions, many of which are created by the social environment. Therefore, the management of the problem requires social action, and it is the collective responsibility of the society to make the environmental modifications necessary for full participation. This requires an attitudinal or ideological social change, which at the political level becomes a question of human rights (Vayrynen, 2008).

2.5 THE WEIGHT OF DIFFERENT ROLE-PLAYERS' ATTITUDES ON THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

Sullivan (2001) stated that making architectural changes to promote inclusion delivers a strong message that each learner is important and has status. Everyone needs to feel that he or she belongs. But, making architectural changes is easy compared to changes in the organisational structure, because the latter involves changing people.

According to Antonak and Livneh (2000) full acceptance of learners with disabilities by learners without disabilities will not occur until subtle barriers can be eliminated. Antonak and Livneh (2000) agreed that one of the factors inherent in the subtle barrier is the attitudes of teachers, parents, peers and persons with disabilities themselves. Negative attitudes towards learners with disabilities create real obstacles to the fulfilment of their roles and the attainment of their life goals. Knowledge of the attitudes of persons and learners without disabilities towards learners with disabilities helps us to understand the nature of the interaction between the two groups.

The past decade has seen significant changes in attitudes towards disabled people. The implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the creation of the Disability Rights Commission in 2002 challenged all services to think proactively about the rights and needs of disabled people. The quality of education, health and social care has generally improved. There is general recognition that disabled learners are entitled to be valued and have the same chances to succeed and participate in society as their non-disabled peers. However, there is a compelling body of evidence from research and inspection reports that many disabled learners and their families continue to face multiple discrimination, low expectations and many physical and social barriers to full participation in society (Russell, 2003).

Pivik, McComas and La Flamme (2002) identified two types of attitudinal barriers, named intentional barriers and unintentional barriers. Intentional barriers include instances of isolation, physical bullying, emotional bullying (like name-calling) and condescending attitudes of teachers. Unintentional barriers relate to a lack of knowledge and understanding of teachers and learners. It relates to a poor effort on the part of the teacher, a failed curriculum, or a lack of appreciation for either the limitations or the capabilities of the learners.

Inclusionists believe that words simultaneously reflect and reinforce attitudes and perceptions. Many 'disability labels' bring to mind images and feelings that maintain negative stereotypical perceptions. These perceptions, in turn, create powerful attitudinal barriers to inclusion. One dramatic change has been the development of people-first language. For example, it is more respectful to say 'a person with a disability' than 'an autistic child'. The reason is that we should recognise the person first and acknowledge that disability is simply one aspect of the person (Swart, 2004).

Before inclusive education can be truly successful, there should first be a radical change in attitudes regarding people with disabilities. An attitude can be defined as a favourable or unfavourable evaluative reaction toward something or someone, exhibited in one's beliefs, feelings or intended

behaviour (Meyers in Shapiro, 2000). If the attitudes of people towards people with disabilities are positive, their behaviour towards these people will also be positive, and if their attitudes are negative, their behaviours will also be negative (Yuker in Shapiro, 2000). Learners with disabilities come to see themselves as the people around them see them. The attitudes of the general public, rehabilitation professionals and especially the "significant others" (parents, teachers, family and peers) towards an individual with a disability, become internalised within that individual (Shapiro, 2000). Schools are often responsible for the negative attitudes. They separate and label learners with disabilities, causing them to feel insignificant, worthless, and full of shame. As Shapiro (2000) stated, one's self-concept is both learned and changeable with each new experience.

Inclusive education speaks of equal rights and acceptance for all. Therefore, in order for its implementation to be successful, attitudes must change from resentment to acceptance, from discriminatory attitudes to respect and recognition. Schools have the responsibility to teach these positive attitudes, while teachers are often role models to learners. By changing their attitudes towards people with disabilities, the learners' attitudes are bound to change as well (Shapiro, 2000).

Loretta Giorcelli (2009) said in a workshop presented in Windhoek that schools should work with the people who wanted to gain knowledge about inclusion and leave the other people alone. She said the world should focus on the people who were willing to give inclusion a chance. When a learner was asked during an interview what was good about school, he replied briefly: '*The best things about this school are It's got nice people'*, and therefore it is not surprising that the attitudes, empathy, knowledge and understanding of peers and teachers are the vital ingredients to feeling happy, safe and included in school (Buultjens et al., 2002). Many attitude problems occur through human interaction in the school community. This includes relations between teachers, relations between teachers and learners, between teachers and parents, and between learners themselves (Lazarus, Daniels & Engelbrecht, 2001).

2.5.1 Teachers' attitudes towards learners with disabilities in a mainstream secondary school `

Many teachers have an understanding of equality based on the notion that 'everyone gets the same thing', which can result in denial or disregard of diversity in order to promote uniformity, but a more mature understanding of fairness would be the idea that everyone gets what he or she needs (Anderson, 2006). The attitudes, negative as well as positive, of teachers have a profound influence on the learner's performance. Parents experience teachers with positive attitudes as supportive and encouraging (Engelbrecht et al., 2005).

One element necessary for the development of successful, inclusive educational practices is the commitment of teachers to this goal of inclusion, since teachers are the people who make learning possible. Their own attitudes, beliefs and feelings with regard to what is happening in the school and in the classroom are of fundamental importance. It is accepted that change is challenging and may be perceived as either a threat or an opportunity (Cuskelly, 2000). If there are strong attitudes within a school regarding integration, teachers are more likely to rearrange their beliefs to fall in line with the prevailing attitudes of others (Dupoux, Wolman & Estrada, 2005).

Dupoux et al., (2005) said that teachers play one of the most important roles in implementing and successfully maintaining inclusive education in schools. The reason for this is that they are in direct contact with the learners and interact closely with them on a daily basis. Lomofsky (2001) supported that teachers of learners with special educational needs have to be sensitive, not only to the particular needs of individual learners, but also to their own attitudes and feelings. Teachers need to develop a critical understanding of stereotypes and prejudices related to disability and reflect on how these have influenced their own attitudes. Inclusion requires that these learners are not simply thought of with pity, but are viewed more positively, in terms of their abilities rather than their disabilities.

From a survey of Buell, Hallam and Gamel-McCormick (1999), empirical evidence supported the construct of efficiency as being vital to teachers' acceptance of learners with disabilities in regular education classrooms. The researchers found that teachers' attitudes impacted on their ability to provide inclusive services. One of the promising results of their study was the strong positive relationship between understanding inclusion and the belief that teachers could influence learners with disabilities. There was also a negative relationship for general education teachers between understanding inclusion and the belief that one could not counteract home environment. Results of this study confirmed a strong negative relationship between teachers believing that they could influence learners, and their belief that not much could be done to counteract the home environment.

All of the above-mentioned additional expectations from teachers resulted in frustration and discouragement among teachers of learners with visual impairments who already had more work than they could cope with. If the teacher of learners with visual impairments does not have the time to either teach or coordinate the teaching of social skills, how will learners who are blind learn them (Hatlen, 2004)?

Before independence teacher education in Namibia was characterised by fragmentation and deep disparities. The result is that the majority of Namibian teachers have been disadvantaged by the poor quality of the training they received. Furthermore, approaches in training have been separated into general and specialised education, with the system for learners with special needs focusing on learners with disabilities. Teachers working at all levels within the general system were not required, and therefore not trained, to respond to learners with disabilities. There appears to be a lack of awareness and skills among existing teachers to deal with diversity among learners and to identify needs in learners and within the system. The need for changes in teacher training should, therefore, be organised around a curriculum that confronts issues of inclusive education and accommodation of diversity in the classroom (Mowes, 2007).

Teachers need to focus on the following five points when trying to change their attitudes towards disabilities (Shapiro, 2000):

- Being different is not abnormal
- Self-esteem of learners is important and should be boosted
- A relaxed, natural, positive class atmosphere is important
- It is always fitting to offer your help
- Students are individuals, not labels.

In a study compiled by Davis and Watson (2001), they were constantly told by teachers how different the learners with disabilities were to them. These differences were based on value judgements. They also found a constant tension between the notions of difference imposed by the staff and their wish that learners should be 'normal'. The learners were constantly reminded that they were essentially different from their non-disabled peers, but they were also compelled to conform to specified ways of speaking, walking, table manners and so on. From the above it is evident that the training of educators in Namibia, especially, will need to change in order to make inclusive education a reality (Mowes, 2007).

2.5.2 Parents' attitudes towards learners with disabilities in a mainstream school

Thirty or forty years ago the stigma of disability was so manifested that relatives were positively encouraged to abandon their children in a hospital: "Go on, don't look back, we are the experts, we will look after her". It is perhaps too easily assumed that parents leaving their children in such institutions were heartless and unloving. Custodial care offered parents the relief of day-to-day care and removed the stigma of having a disabled family member. Parents taking this choice had to leave their child in the hands of the experts, trusting that they were doing the best thing for their child, as there was little contact between the home and the hospital (Murray, 2000). Parents were allowed limited contact with their child and knew little or nothing about the hospital in general. Confrontation of this power by parents was unheard of; they knew the arrangement and accepted it (Dyer in Murray, 2000). It is clear

that parents did not have the right to know what was going on with their child, nor to have a say in their child's treatment or daily life. The widespread view was that the professionals knew best (Murray, 2000).

Parents are one of the key elements in inclusive education. The contribution they can make to successfully implement and maintain inclusive education, is precious. Parents make major contributions to the political movement for inclusive education. An example of this is the activities of the national Education Task Team that have mainly been driven by the parent representatives on the task team. Involved and concerned parents have contributed to legislation that compels teachers to work in partnership and seek advice from parents in decision-making processes in relation to their children (Belknap, Roberts & Nyewe, 2001).

Unfortunately Belknap et al., (2001) also explained that in spite of the valuable input parents can give to inclusive education, many of them still feel disempowered and insignificant. They are unacquainted with their rights in the education of their child and feel that the experts know best. They have been trained and encouraged to hand over complete responsibility of their children's education to the schools. Teachers often judge parents as dysfunctional and the origin of their children's problems. This creates hostile attitudes in the parents towards the educators. They then avoid the school and teachers as best they can.

Engelbrecht et al., (2005) identified three types of parent behaviours: First are the parents who see it as their right to be involved in their child's education and see themselves in a collaborative partnership with teachers and professionals: they take an active role in the schooling process of their children. They also participate as far as possible in the adaptation of the curriculum, and give clear guidelines on how to deal with their children in the classroom situation. They also set clear expectations for the role of the educator. They insist that teachers inform and guide other learners to deal with their children with a disability. Furthermore, they expect teachers to take responsibility for teaching their children and identifying problems in time. One

parent responded that they work till five o' clock, so they rely on the educator to do the work.

Secondly Engelbrecht et al., (2005), identified parents who view the inclusion of their children into mainstream education as a privilege rather than a right. They tend to compromise and take sole responsibility for doing their duty to support teachers and other professionals.

And, thirdly, there are the parents who keep their distance, as they do not want to be labelled as interfering parents. They accept that the school will let them know if there is a problem with the child. Some parents withdraw, because they doubt whether their children will do well. These parents feel that the school has already accommodated their children by reducing class sizes, and they do not want to interfere.

2.5.3 Peer groups' and friends' attitudes towards learners with disabilities in a mainstream school

Wager and Bailey (2005) described a friend as someone you have a significant mutual relationship with, someone you want to spend time and share experiences with. The majority of young people, together with those with disabilities, reported that friendships were a key aspect of school life and that negative peer attitudes were generally recognised as being a major barrier to full social inclusion at school for learners with disabilities (Cook, Swain & French, 2001).

On this point of social inclusion, Llewellyn (2000) argue that mainstream schools are not always the best option because, in their current state, they are discriminatory and do not allow full access to the curriculum, resources and, perhaps most importantly, friendship networks. Research indicates that learners with disabilities are likely to be perceived as different, they are more likely to be ostracised, to lack friends, and to be bullied when compared with their classmates (Llewellyn, 2000).

There is also evidence that the positive effects on the attitudes of non-disabled learners will last over time (Westling & Fox, 2005). Peck et al. in Westling and Fox (2005) interviewed 21 adolescents who had contact with learners with moderate and severe disabilities in their school programmes. The researchers found that the high school learners perceived the following six benefits to their social relationships with peers who had severe disabilities:

- Self-concept: growth in their understanding and appreciation of their own personal characteristics.
- Social cognition: growth in their understanding of the feelings and beliefs underlying the behaviour of other learners.
- Reduced fear of human differences: reduced anxiety and fear of learners who look different or behave in an unusual fashion and/or increased confidence in their ability to respond appropriately and effectively in interpersonal interactions with such learners.
- Tolerance of other learners: increased acceptance of the feelings, behaviour, and personal limitations of other non-disabled people, including family and friends.
- Development of personal principles: relationships with learners with disabilities contribute to reflection and/or action toward the further formation, clarification, or commitment to personal, moral or ethical principles.
- Experiencing relaxed and accepting friendships.

Bruce, Harrow and Obolenskaya (2007) made an analysis of visually impaired learners' perceptions of social inclusion by family and friends. They argue that, in relation to developing inclusive social practices, informal support from friends is as valid as more formal ideas of citizenship and participation, and as such deserves greater policy development.

Certain environmental factors have been identified as well: family environmental factors, including parental attitudes toward persons with disabilities, socio-economic status, and ethnicity have been indicated to play a

major role influencing learners' attitudes toward their peers with disabilities (McDougall, De Wit, King, Miller and Killip, 2004). Earlier research identified alienation and anxiety as important correlates of negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

In most of their studies, Nowicki and Sandieson (2002) found that learners' attitudes toward peers with disabilities were negatively biased and in need of improvement. Regardless of the degree of difference by type of disability, attitudes do not vary qualitatively, with learners holding negative attitudes toward their peers with any type of disability.

Davis and Watson (2001) interviewed teachers at a school and asked their opinion about a girl named Becky, at the time enrolled there. The teachers responded (20/11/98): "Becky, well we are not sure about Becky's behaviour, 'em like whether it's appropriate, if you know what I mean. She gets bullied, but we are not sure if it really is bullying, because she seems to like getting attention, eh so she does things to the boys and they don't like it, so they react, so last week she got coke poured on her to calm her down". Following their conversation, Davis and Watson (2001) learned that Becky was now spending her morning break and lunch times in the learning support base, so that she would not get bullied and was given individual training on conflict avoidance strategies. Many of the learners' opportunities to be fully included in the same social spaces as other learners were restricted, because the staff only articulated the rhetoric of inclusion, they only appeared to have strategies for changing individuals rather than those which address group cultures. This means that when Becky was on her own with other learners, she became a target for bullying. In interviews conducted with learners with disabilities the fact emerged that learners with disabilities, biggest concern was social isolation and bullying by peers without disabilities. Verbal intimidation was present in four of the six learners interviewed in the study (Llewellyn, 2000).

2.6 THE ROLE OF SCHOOL CULTURE IN THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

All schools care about academic performance, but schools that are caring communities go beyond core content to the psychological and social well-being of their learners (Doyle & Doyle, 2003).

The psychosocial atmosphere of schools and classrooms may either impede or promote successful learning. The inclusive classroom fosters acceptance, tolerance and caring in all learners (Lomofsky, 2001). This includes the general culture and ethos of the school (Lazarus et al., 2001).

School cultures are shared images of what their members believe themselves to be, of the school's self-concept. School cultures are therefore complex networks of behaviours and traditions that have developed over time. These networks are deep-seated and dynamic, and have powerful effects on people's thinking, feelings and acting in everyday life. This makes culture unique to every school (Swart & Pettipher, 2006). Inclusive education is about responding to diversity and not just focusing on the needs of learners with disabilities. It is the opinion of Swart and Pettipher (2006) that inclusive school cultures value diversity. For this reason the values and beliefs inherent in inclusion need to become the shared values and meanings of the whole school as well as those of each individual.

Engelbrecht et al., (2005) states that placement options for learners with disabilities are limited, because not all schools as yet really accept a learner with a disability. Acceptance of the basic rights of learners with disabilities is at the heart of placement issues and the formation of inclusive school communities, but the mere acceptance of the learner by obligation as required by law does not assure a culture of inclusion.

According to parents, strong leadership is needed to successfully facilitate inclusive education in the schools and the whole culture of the school should reflect values enhancing inclusive education. One parent said that it was more than merely accepting learners with disabilities; it had to do with the whole

culture of the school. The accommodating attitudes of principals seem to be important for the process of inclusion in the school. Their willingness to discuss the learner's situation with the parents regardless of the time it takes, and to follow up on the conversation with interest in the learner's progress, create a sense of care and trust necessary for effective collaboration. Parents identify the culture of the school towards inclusive education and learners with disabilities as a critical factor in successfully including learners in mainstream classrooms (Engelbrecht et al., 2005).

According to Simeonsson, Carlson, Huntington, McMillen and Brent (2001), learners' participating in school activities leads to a greater likelihood of success experiences, which in turn lead to a greater sense of identification and belonging in school. Participation in school activities can be viewed as the essential condition for learning to occur. If learners are not actively involved in school activities, they are not in a position to take advantage of the educational and social benefits those activities have to offer. Developmental theories, such as those of Piaget and Vygotsky, give emphasis to active participation as a vital condition for learning and development. Learners who actively participate in educational environments are more likely to experience positive, successful social interactions with learners, teachers and others. These experiences serve as the basis for cognitive and social growth (Simeonsson et al., 2001).

The level of a learner's participation in a given environment is likely to vary as a function of features of the environment and personal factors, including the nature and severity of the disability. Accessibility may be defined by physical, social and/or psychological elements of the environment (Simeonsson et al., 2001).

2.7 HEALTH-PROMOTING SCHOOLS AS INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

A truly inclusive school will of necessity be health-promoting, and a truly health-promoting school will be inclusive (Johnson & Green, 2006). Education support will always have curative and palliative dimensions, but there is a strong emphasis in inclusive education on the prevention of barriers to

learning and the promotion of wellbeing as a precondition for learning success (Johnson & Green, 2006). The World Health Organization's definition of a health-promoting school is a place where all members of the school community work together to provide learners with integrated and positive experiences and structures that promote and protect their health (Johnson & Green, 2006). The health-promoting school aims at achieving healthy lifestyles for the total school population by developing supportive environments conducive to the promotion of health.

The health-promoting schools depend on the implementation of factors that could impact upon the wellbeing of learners in the classroom. These include:

- Physical aspects: building facilities, noise, lighting, ventilation, temperature, displays, seating class size.
- Social aspects: interpersonal relations between teacher and students and between students themselves.
- Instructional aspects: how the teaching/learning process is structured and how materials are used in the process (Donald et al. 2002).

Learners' negative, insecure thoughts are more likely to be triggered when insecurity, judgement, anger and other negative feelings are present in their environment. That is why creating an optimal environment holds many advantages for the teacher and the learners (Johnson & Green, 2006).

2.7.1.1   The importance of Life Skills education for the social inclusion of learners with disabilities

Inclusive schools need to be caring communities. Learners long for care. The only way schools will be successful is if learners believe they are cared for and learn to care for others. This entails making caring an integral part of the curriculum (Life Skills) and using meta-cognitive strategies so that learners not only act as if they care, but also understand and reflect on issues of caring. Learners need to think, plan, implement and reflect about how they can be involved in a caring community (Doyle & Doyle, 2003).

Life skills are essential for preparing learners for the future and building resilience (Johnson & Green, 2006). Life Skills educators in South Africa have noted the impact of life skills education on community resilience. Resilient learners have a positive response to long-term challenges. According to Loretta Giorcelli (2009), resilience includes four critical factors for our learners:

- Future orientation: to anticipate, plan and hope.
- Capacity for gratitude and forgiveness.
- Capacity to love and have empathy with others, despite differing world views.
- Capacity to interact and connect with people.

An essential part of curriculum development is how relevant dimensions of Life Skills education are built into the process. Regarding the general area of disability, difficulties, and difference, the most important and general principle is perhaps developing consideration for the needs of others. Learners with disabilities often have rather obvious needs, for example a learner who cannot get up or down stairs on his own, or a learner who cannot see from the back of the class and wears heavy glasses. The teachers' own sensitive response to needs like these, and how they encourage learners to be considerate and helpful without intruding on the independence and sense of coping of the students concerned, can help the development of really important social skills (Donald et al., 2002).

2.7.2 The use of para-professionals and their influence on the social inclusion of learners with disabilities

Para-professionals in education are known by many titles, including para-educators, educational assistants, instructional aides and teacher assistants. Their job is to assist learners with disabilities under the supervision of a trained teacher. In the field of visual impairment and blindness, assigning a para-professional to work directly with a learner with a visual impairment has become common practice and in some instances, habitual for learners placed in general education classrooms (Conroy, 2007).

Two types of para-professionals have emerged in the field of visual impairment. The first type is trained by the teacher of learners with visual impairment and is considered part of the vision services team for the school district. These para-professionals are frequently called teacher assistants and travel from school to school providing direct services to learners who are visually impaired. The second type of para-professional is based at a learner's school and stays with the learner who is visually impaired throughout a large portion of the day. These para-professionals accompany learners with disabilities to the general education classroom and other activities such as therapy, lunch and recess. Their responsibility includes adapting and modifying activities to help learners who are visually impaired to have access to all activities and materials available to the other children in the general educational classroom (Conroy, 2007).

Still, there are concerns with increasing the number of para-professionals in the classrooms. Conroy (2007) is alarmed that the responsibility for teaching the most unique and complex learners to the least trained and lowest paid workers has shifted. Cushing and Kennedy in Conroy (2007), found that having an adult at a learner's side for all or most of the day can interfere with a learner's being included as part of the classroom or community. The para-professional and the learner with visual impairment are often seated together in the back or on the side of the classroom, physically separated from the class. The para-professional can create physical barriers that interfere with interactions between a learner with a visual impairment and classmates. Peers begin to address the adult rather than the learner. There is also the risk that the emotional attachment between the visually impaired learner and the para-professional may interfere with the visually impaired learner's motivation to interact with peers (Conroy, 2007).

2.8 BARRIERS TO SOCIAL INCLUSION

When learners with disabilities are accommodated in the mainstream schools, there are several important barriers which prevent these learners from

achieving full social inclusion, belonging and participation in a mainstream school.

2.8.1 Academic performance and social inclusion

It was found that the academic performance of learners with disabilities has an influence on their social status. Mpofu (2003) found that high-achieving learners with disabilities are more socially accepted than those who are low-achieving.

2.8.2 Stereotyping and social inclusion

The large-scale definition of disabled people as 'sub-human' is to be found early on in the twentieth century in the great interest of scientists throughout America and Europe to eliminate genetic 'defects'. The strength of attitudes growing out of this definition was nowhere more cruelly displayed than in Germany in the 1930s, where the Nazis, in their desire to create a pure master race, organised a mass euthanasia programme for disabled adults and children (Murray, 2000). According to Savolainen, the following four phases of stereotyping about people with disabilities can be identified (Vayrynen, 2008).

In the *'traditional beliefs'* phase, disability was understood within the realm of divine supernatural powers. A child with disabilities was perceived as a punishment for an offence a parent might have committed. For some parents such a child becomes a source of guilt, shame and stigma. Moreover, the child was perceived as an individual who should merely be looked after and not be expected to contribute anything to the community, or become a valuable member thereof. One response to this perception was not to send the child to school, but keep him or her at home, hidden away from the eyes of the public. This perception was pervasive in Namibia in the past, and to some extent still persists, especially in the rural areas, and it is related to ignorance and a lack of awareness.

In the *'religious charity phase'* the humanitarian tendency was to provide some education to children with disabilities as a religious duty. For a long time children who were deaf, blind or intellectually impaired were educated in

religious schools reserved for them. The purpose was to make children with special needs economically productive and independent. The Finnish missionary schools in Namibia were a good example of this phase.

In the *'society's responsibility for the poor'* phase, governments attempted to provide education to children with special needs within special schools and other special institutions, because governments were regarded as morally responsible for the education of learners with disabilities. For many learners with disabilities, this is currently the situation in Namibia. They find themselves in special schools for specific disabilities.

In the *'normalisation'* phase, the point is to provide education that would make the lives of learners with disabilities as 'normal' as possible by placing them in the 'least restrictive educational environment'. This practice is characterised by the placement of learners with special needs in ordinary schools.

Very few learners with visual impairment in Namibia are placed in mainstream schools for Grades 11 and 12. All other learners with special needs - that is not easily visible - especially those who have mild disabilities, are in mainstream schools because their needs have not been identified, screened or assessed. In Namibia there are a few schools with special classes, catering for learners with learning difficulties, and for learners with hearing or visual impairment.

Analytically, it is clear that different impairments interfere in different ways. They have different implications for health and individual capacity, but also generate different responses from the broader cultural and social environment. For example, visible impairments trigger social responses while invisible impairments may not - the distinction which Goffman draws between a 'discrediting' and 'discreditable' stigma (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002).

2.8.3 The influence of homophily on the social inclusion of learners with disabilities

By interacting only with others who are like ourselves, anything we experience as a result of our position gets reinforced. It comes to typify "people like us". Homophily is the principle that contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people.

Homophily implies that distance in terms of social characteristics translates into network distance, the number of relationships through which a piece of information has to travel to connect two individuals. The pervasive fact of homophily means that cultural, behavioural, genetic or material information that flows through networks will tend to be localised. Homophily is vital for the process of inclusion (McPherson, Smith & Cock, 2001).

2.8.4 Public awareness and social inclusion

Public awareness and acceptance of inclusion are essential for the establishment of an inclusive society and the inclusive education and training system put forward. Uncovering negative stereotypes, advocating unconditional acceptance and winning support are necessary for the process of inclusion. In successful inclusive schools, the entire school population is aware of the need to support learners with disabilities. Information about learners with disabilities can be presented to non-disabled learners through awareness training (Sailor et al. in Westling and Fox (2005). The purpose of the awareness training is not to generate sympathy or charitable feelings toward the learner with disabilities, but to encourage an understanding of their capabilities and needs (accessibility, adaptations, assistance). Some awareness activities that have been used are the "Kids on the Block" puppet show, movies about persons with disabilities, reading books about disabilities, and workshops in the classroom (Westling & Fox, 2005).

Many learners possess only minimal awareness of their attitudes towards and actual behaviours in the presence of learners with disabilities. These early attitudes often convey stereotypical thinking, generalisation of certain characteristics and attributes to learners with similar conditions, even to all

learners with disabilities. Early training geared towards enhancing awareness of learners' attitudes towards persons with disabilities could dismiss such notions (Antonak & Livneh, 2000).

Learners with disabilities should be given the chance to talk about and explain their disability to the rest of the class. The provision of basic information on disabilities is needed to change the attitudes of people (Shapiro, 2000).

Learners and parents recognised that it was the awareness and knowledge of teaching staff that promoted feelings of being socially included in school. Some schools had formal structures (such as information booklets and formalised meetings) of providing staff with information about the needs of some pupils. But, sometimes basic information about a learner's visual impairment was not passed on to class teachers, or had been forgotten (Buultjens et al., 2002). This is why it is important to have knowledge of the different kinds of visual impairment. Contradictory to the above-mentioned is what Lightfoot, Wright and Sloper (1999) said, namely that it was not uncommon for classmates to be initially curious about the young person with a disability because of the newness factor. However, after considerable time and having to answer questions, some of which were quite personal, learners still had very few friends once the "cross-examination" had ceased.

2.9 LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

This research study mostly presents evidence considering the social inclusion of learners with disabilities, and also more specifically on learners with visual impairments. It is necessary to realise that the needs of learners with different disability towards social inclusion differ and that all learners with disabilities cannot be considered a homogenous group (Clarke, 2006).

2.9.1 **Social considerations for blind learners and learners with low vision:**

Learners who experience visual impairments are a heterogeneous group ranging from those who are totally blind to those with a slight visual impairment. We distinguish between learners who are blind and learners who have low vision, because their needs differ. Research clearly documents that learners with low vision are at greater risk for social isolation than their blind or sighted peers. They also have less self-esteem and self-determination, and more potential for depression (Hoben & Lindstrom, 1980).

Learners with low vision often appear sighted and that is why peers, family members and teachers may not understand why many of these learners appear physically awkward, overtly shy, and easily frustrated. Some learners with low vision and additional disabilities may be perceived as having more severe cognitive challenges, rather than decreased visual abilities. Learners with low vision may miss or misinterpret social cues given by peers, family, or teachers, because they are unable to accurately see them. These learners do not have an identity as a blind person, nor are they considered fully sighted (Sacks, 1996).

The education of blind learners should also be based on social considerations. For example, light is both a physical and a social phenomenon. The learner should know that if he/she is standing in a room with the lights on, he/she is visible from the street. The awareness of light and visual phenomena, key aspects of the world of sighted people, is an important concept in the development of the blind learner and should therefore be part of the 'curriculum'. Blindness only cuts off the physical stimulation; it does not close the social window to the world. To a blind person, the interpretation and perception of the world takes place through alternative channels. In social interaction, for example, an insight into the psychological constitution of others is more important than knowledge of the other person's appearance. In many ways, social compensation is more important than biological compensation. The ways of working in an inclusive school should include both curricular and

psychological aspects, which are inseparable. It is not possible to have curricular activities in the morning and social-psychological training in the afternoon (Rodney, 2003). The two aspects should be seen and treated as a joint and simultaneous concept. The two together are what makes up inclusive education, where the psychological dimension of the education, for example the motivational aspect, and the social-psychological learning dimension, for example reflection, support each other. The educational approach towards the blind child and the fully sighted child thus becomes the same (Rodney, 2003).

2.9.2 The effect of a visual impairment on a learner

Landsberg (2005) claims that a visual impairment has an influence on a learner's normal development. Vision is the dominant sense human beings use in their daily living. 80% of information reaching our brains comes from the eyes. Loss of vision or impaired vision may therefore restrict a learner's normal development.

- Physical and motor development: Children with visual impairments, especially those who are blind, have to rely on their other senses for developing motor skills. Babies who are blind will be behind sighted babies in their physical and motor development.

- Perceptual development: Young children develop their perceptual abilities by means of play. Children who are blind are unable to develop visual perception, because they cannot see. Children who are blind may also experience problems with time and spatial awareness, because these may be abstract concepts to them which they cannot discover through hearing and touch.

- Language and cognitive development: Because vision plays an important part in cognitive as well as language development, it stands to reason that children who are visually impaired will be behind other children of the same age in their cognitive and language development.

- Social and emotional development: A visual impairment may cause learners to have limited visual contact with their parents and others; they cannot observe the facial expressions of others, which makes it

difficult to interpret other people's emotions. They have difficulty in establishing social contact with others, because they cannot initiate contact. They are then easily ignored by their sighted peers. Some learners who are blind may exhibit socially annoying mannerisms such as rocking their bodies to and fro, twisting their fists into their eye sockets, waving their hands in front of their eyes, or constantly twisting their heads around continuously. These mannerisms have been attributed to a lack of adequate sensory stimulation. Learners may be called names because of their thick spectacle lenses, and this behaviour on the part of peers may cause low-vision learners to withdraw from them and subsequently become loners (Landsberg, 2005).

Learners with visual impairments come to the learning environment with large barriers related to their sense of vision and visual perception. It is therefore very important that teachers support their other senses and organise the learning environment in a way that will allow the learners to utilise their other senses. The hearing, kinaesthetic (which includes movement and touch), smell and taste senses of learners with visual impairments should be continually and purposefully stimulated by the inclusive teacher. By fully employing the senses, they will gain in effectiveness and efficiency. The sense of hearing is a very important sense for learners who are blind, as it will help them to differentiate between and localise environmental sounds and to estimate the distance between themselves and the particular sound. This encourages the learners to move around and explore their environment. The development of a sound auditory memory is also crucial for persons who are blind in order for them to remember telephone and ID numbers, their addresses, etc. (Landsberg, 2005).

2.10 CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review, the need for researching the social inclusion of learners with visual impairments in mainstream schools has become clear.

Social inclusion is a vital part of inclusion. As Schmidt and Cagran (2008) stated, the physical presence of learners does not ensure social inclusion. As part of the Social Model of disability, there is a need for social change in which all social members - disabled and non-disabled - are to be involved (Goodley, 2001). The role of the school in promoting, developing and supporting the social skills of all learners is seen as an important part of social inclusion. Friendships have important functions in human development, as they are emotional resources used both for fun and to adapt to stress, and also cognitive resources for problem-solving and knowledge acquisition (Aviles et al., 2006).

Different learning needs arise not only from the visual impairment itself - which may hamper the normal development of the child from birth – but also from negative attitudes and stereotyping of differences, an inflexible curriculum, inappropriate communication, inaccessible environments, inappropriate and inadequate support services, non-involvement of parents and inadequately trained educators (Department of Education, 2001). By listening to what the active learners with visual impairments have to say, we might make a big contribution to the future of social inclusion in Namibia.

In Chapter 3, the research design and methodology used to gain insight into the social inclusion of visually impaired learners in mainstream schools in Namibia will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the paradigm, design and methodology chosen for this study. The focus will also fall on the sample selection and methods that were used to collect, analyse and verify data. Lastly the ethical considerations relevant to this study will be discussed.

3.2   RESEARCH QUESTION

As discussed in Chapter 1 (See 1.6) the aim of this study was to attempt, through a qualitative study, to explore how visually impaired learners experience social inclusion in a mainstream school in Namibia.

The following sub-questions can be formulated:
- What is the notion of social inclusion and the degree to which it is portrayed to learners with visual impairment?
- Are learners with visual impairment socially included in the Namibian mainstream school?
- What are the culture and context of the school community like, according to the opinions and experiences of the participants in the study?

3.3   THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design provides a plan according to which the research will be conducted (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). A research design ensures that the study fulfils a particular purpose, and the research can be completed with available resources (Durrheim, 1999). Durrheim (1999) described the research design as a combination of four dimensions: the purpose of the research, the paradigm informing the research, the context within which the

research is conducted and the applicable research techniques that will be used for data collection and analysis.

3.3.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study relates to the object of the study, as well as the type of study (Durrheim, 1999). According to Durrheim (1999) the purpose of a study revolves around two questions: Who or what the researcher wants to draw conclusions about, and what types of conclusions are to be drawn. For the purposes of this study, the researcher wants to draw conclusions about the social inclusion of learners with visual impairment in a mainstream school in Namibia and research the extent to which these learners are socially included.

With regard to the type of conclusion, Durrheim (1999) described four types: a) applied and basic, b) exploratory, c) descriptive and explanatory, d) quantitative and qualitative. For the purposes of this study, the researcher has made use of basic, exploratory and qualitative research. The findings gained from basic research can be used to further our knowledge about the social world around us. Exploratory research aims to gain new insights into a phenomenon by using a flexible, open and inductive approach. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand gather their data in the form of the written or spoken word and analyse the data by identifying themes and categories (Durrheim, 1999). Qualitative researchers are interested in the meanings people have constructed as well as their personal opinions and perspectives on events (Patton, 2002). This qualitative approach to research will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

3.3.2 Research Paradigm

This basic qualitative study will be rooted in an interpretive/constructionist paradigm (See 1.6). In a research study the paradigm is the background knowledge, and background knowledge tells us what exists, how to understand it, and most concretely, how to study it (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The paradigm plays a central role in a research study, because it determines how the problem is formulated and methodologically

tackled (O' Donoghue, 2006). We can view the paradigm as a set of basic beliefs that represents a world-view, and these basic beliefs are based on three assumptions. One is the form and nature of reality. This is known as the ontological assumption and is concerned with how things really are and really work. The second assumption is the epistemological assumption, which is concerned with the relationship between the knower and would-be knower, as well as what can be known. The third assumption is how the inquirer goes about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known, and this is called the methodological assumption. To summarise briefly, the researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology), that are then examined (methodology) in specific ways (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007) the ultimate aim of interpretivist research is to offer a perspective of a situation and to analyse the situation under study to provide insight into the way in which a particular group of people make sense of their situation or the phenomena they encounter. This paradigm states that knowledge is constructed not only by observable phenomena, but also by descriptions of people's intentions, beliefs, values, reasons, meaning making and self-understanding. The researcher is the primary interpreter of the gained information, he/she analyses texts and looks for the way in which people make-meaning in their lives, (not just that they make meaning), and what meaning they make (See 1.5.1). Thus, the interpretive researcher looks for the frames that shape the meaning (Henning, 2005). As Norman, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) put it, interpretive practice engages both the hows and the whats of social reality.

Interpretive researchers, through a process of interpretive understanding, are concerned with the meaning of the constructions held by people in specific contexts (Mertens, 2005). They seeks to understand social members' definitions and understanding of situations, as well as an understanding of individual participants' experience and perceptions of their situation from the standpoint of their unique contexts and backgrounds. For the interpretive researcher, causes and effects are mutually interdependent; any event or

action is explainable in terms of multiple interacting factors, events and processes (Henning, 2005).

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007) the interpretive perspective is based on the following assumptions:

- Human life can only be understood from within: Interpretivists focus on people's subjective experiences, how people construct the social world by sharing meanings, and how they interact with one another. In this study, research techniques are used that will reveal how people interpret and interact within their social environment.

- Social life is a distinctively human product: by placing people in their social contexts, there is a greater opportunity to understand the perceptions they have of their own activities. The uniqueness of a particular context is important for understanding and interpreting the meanings constructed.

- The human mind is the purposive source or origin of meaning: By exploring the richness, depth and complexity of phenomena, we can begin to develop a sense of understanding of the meanings imparted by people to phenomena and the social context.

- Human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world: interpretivism proposes that there are multiple and not single realities of phenomena, and that these realities can differ across time and place. As our knowledge and understanding of the social world and the realities being constructed increase, it enriches our theoretical and conceptual framework.

- The social world does not "exist" independently of human knowledge: As researchers, our own knowledge and understanding of phenomena constantly influence us in terms of the types of questions we ask and in the way we conduct our research. Our knowledge and understanding are always limited to the things to which we have been exposed, our own unique experiences, and the meanings we have imparted.

The qualitative approach lies within the interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on social constructs that are complex and always evolving, making them less amenable to precise measurement or numerical interpretation (Gorman & Clayton, 2005). For the purpose of this study interpretivism and constructivism share a common intellectual heritage. Constructivism is of more recent vintage than interpretivist thinking.

Constructivists are deeply committed to the contrary view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth, is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by the mind. We do not find or discover knowledge, but we construct or make it (Schwandt, 2000). Guba and Lincoln (1998) assumed that what is real is a construction in the minds of individuals. There are multiple, often conflicting constructions and they are all meaningful.

The philosophical grounding for interpretivism is hermeneutics, which is a philosophical approach to human understanding. It is a mode of analysis, and it suggests a way of making meaning of textual data. As a consequence, in designing this research the researcher will deliberately plan to collect data that is textually rich, and analyse it to make sense of the bigger picture or the whole (Niewenhuis, 2007).

The interpretivist paradigm emphasises social interaction as the basis for knowledge. The researcher uses his or her skills as a social being to try to understand how others understand their world. Knowledge, in this view, is constructed by mutual negotiation and it is specific to the situation being investigated. In interpretive research education is considered to be a process and school is a lived experience. Understanding the meaning of the process, or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, hypothesis, or theory gathering mode of inquiry, rather than a deductive or testing mode of enquiry (Merriam, 1998).

The central principle of this paradigm is that in order to understand social reality, one has to study how individuals interpret the world around them. The particular view that an individual has of the social reality is constructed and

negotiated by individuals acting according to the perspectives they present on the phenomena in their environment (Woods in O' Donoghue, 2006). 'Perspectives' are frameworks through which people make sense of the world. Such frameworks have the following interrelated components:

- Participants' intentions and the reasons they give for having these intentions
- Participants' strategies for realising their intentions and the reasons they give for utilising these strategies
- The outcomes which participants expect to result from their actions and the reasons they give for this.

The key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's. This is sometimes referred to as the emic, or insider's perspective, versus the etic, or outsider's view (Merriam, 1998). Embedded in the interpretive/constructivist paradigm the researcher should come to an understanding of the perceptions of the participants in the mainstream schools.

3.3.3 The Context

The context in which the research was conducted was a secondary school in Windhoek, Namibia. The school was established in 1972 as an all boys technical school and in 1986 girls joined the school, doing N–secretarial courses. All N-certificates and diplomas were issued by the National Department of Education and ranged from N1 to N6. Learners could obtain a National Senior Certificate (matric qualification) by passing four subjects on N3 level, as well as two languages. With Namibia's independence in 1990 the Ministry of Education stopped the N–courses and changed them into the Cambridge examination system. In 1994 the last Grade 12 learners completed the N–course examination and it phased out completely. In 2003 the school offered 1) an academic course with technical subjects, 2) an academic course with agricultural subjects and 3) a full academic course. The school was not seen as a technical school anymore, because many of the other schools in Windhoek also offer these subjects.

In 2003 the school had a Grade 11 learner had been in a serious motorcycle accident and lost sight in both his eyes. His parents went to the school for the Blind in Worcester, South Africa, to get all the equipment he needed to stay in the school. The parents approached the principal at the time to ask permission for their boy to finish his school career at the school, because he was familiar with the school and all his friends were there. He finished Grade 12 in 2004 and did very well, because his parents made all the necessary accommodations and he used audio equipment, a laptop, and a guide dog. This was the school's first encounter with a blind learner.

In 2005 the Ministry of Education approached several schools in Windhoek to ask if they would be willing to include learners with visual impairments. Only this particular secondary school was willing to take the step. The Principal at the time had a first meeting with the Senior Official of the Ministry of Special Education and the Director of the Khomas Region. They did the planning and ordered text books, Braille printers and other equipment needed to cater for the different needs of the learners. It was decided then that the school would only take learners in Grade 11 and Grade 12, because the Special School for the Visually Impaired did not offer Grade 11 and 12. The school would thus offer a placement to these learners who wanted to finish their school career (Zulch-Knouwds, 2009).

3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 1998). The first characteristic of qualitative researchers is that they are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. Qualitative research is based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998). The second characteristic of all forms of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this

human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire or computer. A third characteristic of qualitative research is that it usually involves field-work. The researcher must physically go to the people, the setting, site, institution (the field) in order to observe behaviour in its natural setting. The fourth characteristic is that qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy. That is, the type of research builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than testing existing theory. Finally, the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. It uses qualifying words in great detail and, in many cases, language provides a very sensitive and meaningful way of recording human experience (Merriam, 1998).

In a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analysing data and, as such, can respond to the situation by maximising opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information. On the other hand, the investigator as human instrument is limited by being human – that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere. Human instruments are as fallible as any other research instrument (Merriam, 1998).

The methodology of this study was guided by a case study (one school was studied) in which one learner with blindness, one learner with low vision, the principal, the coordinator of inclusive education, Life Skills teacher, and two able-bodied peers participated. Case studies are individual histories, which mean that much of the data in these studies are backward-looking in nature. In other words, it comes from looking back into the past (Elmes, Kantowitz & Roediger, 1999). Case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system (Merriam, 1998). If the phenomenon you wish to study is not bounded, it is not a case. Merriam (1998) identified that one technique for assessing the boundedness of the topic is to ask how restricted the data collection would be, whether there is a limit to the number of people who could be interviewed, or a limited amount of time for observation.

A case study is selected for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, for knowledge we would not otherwise have access to (Merriam, 1998). A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. Merriam (1998) concluded that the single most defining characteristic of case study research lay in delimiting the object of study, the case (Merriam, 1998). From an interpretivist perspective, the typical characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a comprehensive (holistic) understanding of how participants relate and interact with one another in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon under study. Case studies offer a multi-perspective analysis in which the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of one or two participants in a situation, but also the views of other relevant groups of actors and the interaction among them. It opens the possibility of giving a voice to the powerless and voiceless (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Case study research is more highly constrained, because the researcher does intervene somewhat in the participant's functioning, such as asking questions of a participant. However, it still allows the researcher flexibility to shift attention to whatever behaviours seem most interesting and relevant at the time (Graziano & Raulin, 2004).

3.5 SAMPLE SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling was used which simply means that participants were selected because of some defining characteristic that makes them the holders of the data needed for the study. Maree (2007) states that purposive sampling means selecting participants according to pre-selected criteria relevant to a particular research question. With this study, the participants would be one learner with blindness, one learner with low vision, the principal of the secondary school, the Life Skills teacher, the coordinator of inclusive education at the school and two able-bodied peers of the learners with visual impairment to enrich the information gained. These participants fit the criteria of desirable participants for the researcher to gain insight about their

perception of the social inclusion of visually impaired learners in a secondary school in Namibia. These criteria come from the researcher's knowledge of the topic and also from the development of the theorising during the research. The most suitable people to join in the research journey should be selected. They represent a theoretical population in that they are the spokespersons for the topic of inquiry (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2005). Purposive sampling is not only restricted to the selection of participants, but also involves the setting, in which case the researcher used the only school in Windhoek that includes learners with visual impairment. In 2009 there were 18 learners with visual impairment in the school, of which one learner was blind. Presently, in 2010, another three blind learners have joined the school, but at the time of the research there was only one blind learner in the school.

3.6   DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Crotty in O' Donoghue (2006) describes data collection as the techniques or processes used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis. Case study as a form of qualitative research does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis. Any and all methods of gathering data, from testing to interviewing, can be used in a case study, but according to Merriam (1998), basic qualitative studies typically use three main methods for collecting data: observation, interviews and the review of documents and records. In this study, data collection methods have included: a) a review of literature, b) interviews with participants, c) a review of documents and d) observation.

Qualitative data consist of 'direct quotations from people about their experience, opinions, feelings and knowledge' obtained through interviews, observations and various types of documents (Patton, 2002). Data collection in case study research usually involves all three strategies of interviewing, observing and analysing documents. All three strategies are not necessarily used equally, as one or two methods of data collection predominate, and the others play a supporting role in gaining an in-depth understanding of the case (Merriam, 1998). This qualitative study has used the review of literature,

interviews, observation, and document analysis to gather enough valuable information. These four techniques will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

3.6.1 **Literature review**

In order to conceive the research topic in a way that permits a clear formulation of the problem and the hypothesis, some background information is necessary. This is obtained mainly by reading whatever has been published that appears relevant to the research topic. This process is called the literature review and is an ongoing process (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2004).

The literature review is used first and foremost in the contextualisation of the study, to argue the case. It is where the researcher manufactures and engages critically with the literature on the specific research question he or she is researching. The researcher sets up a conversation with the literature and plays the host, letting speakers enter the conversation, changing the topic and keeping it lively and critical. Then the literature review also comes in handy where the researcher explains his or her data relevant to the findings of the study (Henning et al., 2005).

The literature review (Chapter 2) provides a clearer understanding of the nature and operation of social inclusion of visually impaired learners in Namibia, thus confirming the need for this research study (See 1.7).

3.6.2   **Interviews with participants**

Interviewing allows the researcher to enter another person's world, to understand a person's inner perspective to outward behaviours. Interviews also complement observation by adding meaning and elaboration (Patton, 2002). It is necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate or to observe (Merriam, 1998).

Merriam (in O' Donoghue 2006) identified three major variants of the interview: the highly structured interview, the semi-structured interview, and the unstructured interview. This study used the semi-structured interview,

which was determined by the need to probe as deeply as possible into the individual's subjective experiences of the phenomenon in question. The semi-structured interview has a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview. It provides topics or subject areas which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions about that will clarify and shed light on that particular subject. The issues in the outline need not be adressed in any particular order and the actual sequencing of questions to elicit responses about these issues is not determined in advance. It simply serves as a basic checklist during the interview to make sure that all relevant topics are covered. The semi-structured interview keeps the interview focused, but allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge (Patton, 2002). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher can ask additional questions to ensure that the participant understands the questions, and to explore the respondent's attitudes (Antonak & Livneh, 2000). (See interview schedule provided in Appendix A).

During this study there will be no reliance on a standardised list of questions. Instead, initial questions will be loosely based on the guiding questions already noted, and subsequent questions will be asked as they suggest themselves and as opportunity arise. The nature of the response will provide the direction that the interview should take next (O' Donoghue, 2006).

As a researcher, you have to be attentive to the responses of your participant, so that you can identify new, emerging lines of inquiry that are directly related to the phenomenon being studied, and explore and probe these (Maree, 2007).

The interviews will be tape-recorded with the consent of the respondents and notes will be taken during the conversations in order to capture the context that the tape recorder is unable to record (O'Donoghue, 2006). Every good interview is also an observation. The interviewer listens and observes. Nonverbal data are still data. Observational data include where the interview occurred, who was present, how the interviewee reacted to the interview and

any additional information that could help establish a context for interpreting and making sense of the interview (Patton, 2002).

3.6.3 Observation

Like interviews, observation is also a primary source of data collection in qualitative research. Observation can be distinguished from interviews in two ways. First, observation takes place in the natural field setting instead of a location designated for the purpose of the interviewing. Secondly, observational data represent a first hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a second hand account of the world obtained in an interview (Merriam, 1998).

Observation is a research tool when careful preparation has been done and the data are thoroughly and carefully described. The description must be factual, accurate and thorough. The primary strength of naturalistic observations is that the data are collected in the field, where the action is, and as it happens (Patton, 2002) (See Table 1.2). Observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them. Observation is an everyday activity where we use our senses (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) – but also our intuition – to gather bits of data. As a qualitative data gathering technique, observation is used to enable the researcher to gain a deeper insight into and understanding of the phenomenon observed. The researcher will adopt a relatively passive role when observing and will observe events as they occur in the natural setting. The researcher will be a non-participatory observer, looking at the situation from a distance (called an etic or "outsider" perspective). It is the least obtrusive form of observation, but it has the limitation that the researcher does not become immersed in the situation (Maree, 2007). It is the designed and planned nature of observation that distinguishes research from other forms of observation. Research differs from everyday observation, because in research observation is planned. Such observation is termed systematic observation, because the observation is guided by concrete research questions and a research design (Durrheim, 1999).

There are several advantages to using observational field-work in this research study, as described by Patton (2002). By directly observing, the researcher is better able to understand the context, and this allows him/her to be inductive in approach (See Table 1.2). The researcher can see things that may escape conscious awareness among participants and learn about things that the participants may be unwilling to talk about.

3.6.4 Document analysis

The fourth technique which will be employed for data collection is document analysis. The artefacts, as Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) have named the documents, are a product of a given context and are grounded in the real world. In addition, they may be analysed for their historical value – where they come from and what they mean historically as source material (Henning et al., 2005). When using documents as a data gathering technique, the researcher will focus on all types of written communications that may shed light on the phenomenon that he or she is investigating. In research there is a distinction between primary and secondary sources of data. Primary sources are data that are unpublished and which the researcher has gathered from the participants or organisations directly. Secondary sources refer to any materials that are based on previously published works. In this research study the researcher will collect all correspondence between the Ministry of Education and the Principal of the secondary school. For secondary sources the researcher will make use of newspaper clippings about significant events concerning inclusive education in Namibia (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006).

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The process of data analysis is an ongoing process in qualitative research. It uses all the data collected to answer the questions the research set out to answer. Data analysis is conducted so that the researcher can detect consistent patters within the data (Tuckman, 1994).

In case studies, communicating understanding, the goal of the data analysis, is linked to the fact that data have usually been derived from interviews, field

observations and documents. The case study researcher can be seriously challenged in trying to make sense of the data (Merriam, 1998). The first stage of the analytical process will necessitate gathering all of the data, namely, the documents and the interview transcripts, and organising these chronologically. The analysis of each interview will begin with its transcription. After the transcription process, the interview will be re-read several times to identify the major categories and themes contained in the transcript. Simultaneously, data will be read thoroughly and appropriate notes, comments, observations and queries will be made, also by a second independent person to ensure reliability. The aim of this exercise is to produce concepts that fit the data (O' Donoghue, 2006). Classifying the data is an integral part of the analysis, and it is done for a purpose, guided by research objectives. This is how the researcher identifies regularities and patterns in the research data (Henning et al., 2005).

3.8   TRUSTWORTHINESS

In qualitative research, validity is another word for "truth" (Silverman, 2000), or the degree to which the qualitative data collected accurately compute what the researcher is trying to measure. Reliability is concerned with the consistency of measures (Silverman, 2000).

A common term used to describe validity in qualitative research is trustworthiness. Qualitative researchers can establish trustworthiness by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Gay et al., 2006).

Credibility relates to the degree of confidence in the findings of the research, or how believable the findings are. Believability is made easier when the researcher provides a rich, thick description regarding the setting, participants, procedures and interaction (De Vos, 2005:346). In this study the researcher interacted with one blind learner and one visually impaired learner in a mainstream school and researched what their perception of social inclusion in a mainstream school was. This provided multiple sources of data. The

researcher included parts from the interviews and provided background on each participant (See Chapter 4).

Transferability refers to instances when research findings can be applied or generalised to another situation (De Vos, 2005). Qualitative research does not aim at generalisation, because it wants to provide a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon, but qualitative studies can lead to working hypotheses that allow some transferability to other, similar situations. Because the researcher indicates that the participants are learners with visual impairment and their perception of social inclusion in a mainstream school, other researchers working with similar participants might be able to transfer this study's findings to the setting in which they are working. By including direct quotes from the interviews with the learners with visual impairment, teachers and peers, the researcher has made it easier for other researchers to decide whether transferability would be possible.

Dependability refers to the degree to which the study's findings might be found again, or about how consistent the findings are. To help determine such consistency, the researcher must describe the context and circumstances fully and describe the data collection process and analysis clearly (De Vos, 2005). The data collection process is described in Chapter 3, and how the data were thematically analysed is represented in Chapter 4. The analysis helps prove the dependability of the findings. In addition, the researcher asked some of the participants to check that she had documented and interpreted their interviews dependably.

Confirmability is about whether other people agree with the findings of the study or if the latter can be confirmed (De Vos, 2005). One way to do this is to reread the interview transcripts repeatedly to check whether the same themes keep coming up and whether there are perhaps themes that contradict those that were identified. One could also use stakeholder checks and ask participants to verify the analysis and conclusions reached (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). In this study the researcher returned to the participants

to discuss the conclusions made. The researcher double checked whether there were contradictory themes.

In this study the researcher contributed to the trustworthiness of her research and to the understanding of it by addressing descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalisability and evaluative validity (Gay et al., 2006). The researcher ensured descriptive validity by making sure that all the data were factually accurate, some of it not disregarded, or fictional. The researcher addressed interpretive validity through the meaning attributed to the behaviours or words of the participants studied. Theoretical validity was addressed by explaining the phenomenon studied in relation to a theory, and the researcher was objective by reporting the data in an unbiased way, without making judgements.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical considerations were of the utmost importance in the study, since the learners with visual impairment that acted as participants are described as vulnerable children, Duffy (2008), also refers to the researchers themselves as vulnerable within the context of conducting qualitative research, as they are subject to vulnerability in terms of various forms of institutional and personal pressure (See 1.5.11).

For the process of ethical clarification to begin, the participants need to give informed consent to participate (See appendix C). The clients must have knowledge of the nature or extent of the harm or risk; appreciate and understand the nature of the harm or risk; they must consent to the harm or assumed risk; and finally, for proper, informed consent, the consent must be comprehensive. This means that they must be fully informed about the research in which the interview is going to be used. They need to know that their privacy and sensitivity will be protected and what is going to happen with their information after recording. In a letter of consent the participant gives consent to these and other ethical issues that may be relevant (Graziano & Raulin, 2004).

The American Psychological Association (APA) was one of the first professional organisations to develop ethical guidelines for research, recognising both the need for research and the rights of participants. The most important safeguard built into the APA guidelines is this: it is the participant who decides to participate in research. The participant has the right to refuse or to discontinue the study at any time, even after having agreed to participate (Graziano et al., 2004). In order to respect the autonomy of the participants in this study, the researcher used the APA Guidelines, informed the participants about the broad aims of the study and also that their participation was voluntary (See 1.6.2). The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point during the research.

3.10 **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the research paradigm, design and methodology of the study were discussed in detail. Methods used for collection and analysis were explained. Ethical considerations related to the process were highlighted. The research findings will be discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter 1 and 3, the primary research question this study aimed to answer, was:

- How do visually impaired learners experience the social aspect of their inclusion in a mainstream school in Namibia?

The following sub-questions were formulated:

- What is the notion of social inclusion and the degree to which it is portrayed to learners with visual impairment?
- Are learners with visual impairment socially included in a Namibian mainstream school?
- What is the culture and context of the school community like, according to the opinions and experiences of the participants in the study?

The sub-questions will be answered by using the opinions, experience and perceptions of a learner with low vision, a learner with blindness, the principal of the school, the Life Skills teacher, the school's coordinator of inclusive education, as well as two able-bodied peers in the school.

An exposition of the research findings will be presented in this chapter in answer of the research questions. The findings are presented as a discussion of the identified themes and categories derived from the two case studies and additional interviews with the other participants.

4.2   EXPOSITION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Various categories, which are grouped into themes emerged from the coding (analysis) of the raw data. These are summarised in tables 4.1 after which a discussion follows.

Table 4.1: Themes and categories obtained from the interviews of the learner with blindness, the learner with low vision, the principal, Life Skills teacher, coordinator of inclusive education and two able-body peers.

THEMES	CATEGORIES
Transition from the special school to the mainstream secondary school	Change Prejudice and stereotyping Bullying
Preparations made for social inclusion of learners	Training Environment Adaptations made by teachers
Factors having an impact on the learners with visual impairment's social inclusion	Awareness Equipment Attitudes
Outcomes of inclusion identified by participants	General feeling of inclusion Social interactions Social inclusion

From here on "Participant One" will refer to the first participant, namely the learner with low vision, and "Participant Two" will refer to the second participant, namely the learner with blindness.

4.2.1 Transition from the special school to the mainstream secondary school

Wallander and Varni (1995) states that puberty and the shift from elementary to high school are considered to be major transitions in the lives of youth with

disabilities. This statement is supported by the two case studies in this research.

4.2.1.1 **Change**

Participant One was not born with low vision. He inherited his eye problem and it got worse with age. He has very low vision and cannot write with a pen, because his writing is too big and takes up a lot of space. He is now a Grade 11 learner in the secondary school and came from NISE Blind (the Special School for learners with visual impairments in Windhoek).

Participant One experienced the transition in Grade 11 from the special school to the mainstream secondary school as very difficult. He said there is a big difference between the two schools. In the special school everyone has eye problems and everyone helps one another. The school environment is blind-friendly and the teaching styles are blind-friendly. In the mainstream school the classes are very big and overcrowded and it was hard for him to find his classes on the big school grounds. He agrees with the rest of the participants that the secondary school terrain is not blind-friendly with all the stairs and steps.

Participant Two was also not born blind, but her vision started to fade at age ten and the older she got, the worse her sight became. She is now a Grade 11 learner at the mainstream secondary school and came from NISE Blind (the Special School for learners with visual impairments in Windhoek). She experienced the transition from the special school to the mainstream school as hard at first, because people talked about her, but it got a lot better with time. Also, she needs to be guided a lot of the time and sometimes her peers are not willing to do this, then they act funny towards her.

4.2.1.2 **Prejudice and stereotyping**

For Participant Two the hardest thing about coming to the secondary school was comments from the former blind learners in the mainstream secondary school. Comments like: *"Blind people are not treated the same",* scared her about coming and made her wonder if she would ever make friends again.

Participant Two doesn't really experience any stereotyping or prejudice. She reflected: *"They do gossip, but I don't care about that" (Participant Two).*

In an interview with two Grade 12 learners in the school, these learners said that they used to be very prejudiced about learners with visual impairment. Recently they had to do a project with some of the learners with visual impairment and this was a revelation to them. They only then realised that these learners were just like them, they only had an eye problem. They actually admitted that they used to believe stereotypes like *"learners with visual impairment are stupid and that they would not understand what one was saying"*, but after working with them on the project, they discovered that the learners with visual impairment could think logically, and that they actually had to, and did think a lot wider than themselves. They enjoyed working with the learners with visual impairment.

"Yes, I was a bit prejudiced before, but then the teacher asked me to help them with projects and stuff and I just saw that basically they are not like weird or anything, it is just that they can't see." *"Ek het altyd gedink as jy blind is, dan moet jy seker bietjie dom ook wees."* *"Dit is moeilik om vir hulle iets te beskryf, soos in 'n projek wat baie visueel is, met baie kleure en so. Maar dit is alles reg, jy kom op 'n manier daardeur."*

(Translated: *"I have been under the impression, that if you are blind, you must be stupid too. It is hard to describe something to them, especially in a visual project, but it is possible."*)

The insight of one of the able-bodied peers was: "Ja, ek het gedink hulle is nie so slim nie, of hulle sal nie altyd verstaan wat jy met hulle wil praat nie. Ja, dit is wat ek eerste gedink het, en ja, as jy nie met hulle praat nie, dan bly dit so, dink ek." Maar as jy hulle eers leer ken, kom jy agter hulle is net soos jy. Ek dink die ergste is om net eers die ys te breek".

(Translated: *"I always thought they're not to clever, and that they don't understand what you are saying. When you don't talk to them, this is what*

you will believe, whereas if you get to know them, you realise they are just like you. I think the hardest part is to make the effort.")

From the interviews with the participants we can agree with Anderson (2006) that it is fear, ignorance, superstition, arrogance and pride on the part of able-bodied people, as well as socially constructed stigmas assigned to people who differ from those holding positions of power, that keep the learners with disabilities from complete inclusion.

4.2.1.3   **Bullying**

In an interview with the principal she admitted that there are cases of bullying, especially emotional bullying, because, as she says, "*You get rude learners and the albino learners suffer the most.*" One of the biggest barriers to the learners with visual impairments is eating. They struggle to eat in front of other learners in the hostel and this is embarrassing to them. There are 18 learners with visual impairment in the hostel – this includes all the 2010 learners with visual impairment presently in the school. They are all in the hostel. In an interview with the coordinator of inclusive education, she also stated that not all learners' attitudes were good towards these learners and that emotional bullying did happen, especially in the hostel while the learners were eating. The sighted learners will sometimes steal their meat from their plates. Eating is a big problem for Participant Two, because the other learners steal her food or teabags from her cup. Participant Two admits that some learners gossip about her, although this does not bother her.

The peers of the learners with visual impairment admit that cases of bullying happen in the school, especially emotional bullying, and mostly towards the albino learners. There is a group of learners that are mean towards the learners with visual impairment.

One of the able-bodied peers remarked: *"Ek sal sê daar is 'n groepie wat die kinders spot, en meeste kere is dit maar met die albino's, soos hulle sal sê: 'Jy mag nie in die son kom nie'. As ons saalperiode het, sal hulle nie langs hulle sit nie." "Ek moet sê, emosioneel was daar nogal baie 'bullying' gewees,*

maar ons het toe 'n waarskuwing gekry dat as daar enige 'bullying' gebeur, gaan jy dadelik hoof toe."

(Translated: *"I have to say that bullying does happen, but mostly to the albino's. They would say things like: "you are not allowed to come in the sun". When we have assembly, the other learners refuse to sit next to them. There is a lot of emotional bullying in the school, but the Principal gave everyone a warning about this."*)

This validates a study by Zimba, Mostert, Hengari, Haihambo, Mowes, Nuugwedha and February (2007) which found that 50% of learners reported that teasing of learners with disabilities took place in schools.

4.2.2 Preparations made for inclusive education

As schools become more inclusive, it becomes clear that the change from segregated school settings towards inclusion affects not only the subsystems in the schools, but also the whole school system in a specific community. In order to accomplish change, a systematic way of addressing both the practical and the personal components of change should be developed. The values, opinions, attitudes and concerns of educators, learners, administrators and parents are deeply embedded in the systemic structure of schools and when dealing with change in a system such as a school, these components should be considered and evaluated (Engelbrecht, 2001).

According to the principal of the school researched, the school first did inclusion and then the planning. During the interview with the principal she confirmed that the school was the only school in the Khomas Region that included learners with visual impairment and that the only adaptation the school made to try and socially include these learners was the appointment of a coordinator for inclusive education. According to the coordinator of inclusive education, the school was not ready for inclusion.

4.2.2.1   Training

According to the principal, the teachers of the school were not trained in special education. When the Ministry of Education introduced inclusion to the school, the teachers all went on a Braille course, but they never really practised it and it faded with time.

Participant One feels the fact that the teachers are not trained in special education makes it hard for the learners with visual impairment, because some teachers don't specify what they are explaining. They just write on the

 board without verbally explaining and this is very hard for learners with visual impairment. He reflected: "*I feel they accept me, but in the beginning it was a bit tough. We feel excluded sometimes in class, because some teachers are not trained to work with visually impaired learners, so sometimes they explain- they don't specify, they don't say specifically what is there on the board. For instance, when they are writing a number, they don't say one plus two; they will just say this plus this. I think this is because they are not trained.*"

The role of the Coordinator of inclusive education is to assist the learners with visual impairment. She does have training in working with learners with disabilities. She has an honours degree and a diploma in Special Needs Education, and she worked for nine years at a school for visually impaired learners. The Coordinator of inclusive education identified the lack of teacher training as a huge barrier to the social inclusion of learners with visual impairment.

Participant Two says that some teachers try hard to accommodate them, but others don't really care, because they still, explain the work only on the board. But still she does feel accepted by the teachers.

4.2.2.2   Environment

The Principal stated that the physical environment of the school is not really safe for learners with visual impairment. The reason for this is because the

school was not planned that way and the school was not ready for inclusion at the time when it happened.

"Well, I would not say really, because it was not planned that way. Steps you know, going up and going down, it is not really that friendly. The ground is not even, there are loose tiles and loose stones and it is not even if you can't see. The one building, the windows, if the windows are open, it is at walking height. They could bump into an open window, that can be a big problem. But you never thought of that, before because it was not necessary."

"The electricity channels for their electrical equipment are still not there, although I have said an electrician must come and do it and budget it from the school's budget. And the blinds, there was an order for the blinds, we got the order for blinds and then something got lost and it was never done. But that was actually approved by the Ministry, but once it is approved, it follows a route and as I say, the order got lost in between somewhere. All the classes need the blinds, because they can't see with the bright light, the light is so bright for them that they can't see a thing."

Participant Two does not see the school as a safe environment for blind learners. The previous school did not have any stairs, stones or pavements, whereas the mainstream secondary school does have these. *"For me the school is not really a safe environment, because at the previous school the place was environmentally friendly, but here is a lot of stairs, stones and pavements. I got used to it."*

Participant One stays in the hostel and he says this is the hardest thing about the mainstream. He says that the hostel is not blind-friendly. There is not a room for the learners with visual impairment to study in, or where they can use their equipment. Studying together with the sighted learners creates a problem for the learners with visual impairments it is the place where emotional bullying starts. In his words: *"I would say the environment is not really blind-friendly."*

4.2.2.3 **Adaptations made by teachers**

One adaptation that was made was the appointment of a coordinator of inclusive education. Her role is to assist the learners with visual impairment and do all the Brailing and de-Brailing. She also goes with the learners with visual impairment from class to class where she is needed most. The principal admits that it is to a big a job for only one person to do.

According to the principal it is not really possible for the teachers to make any adjustments for the learners with visual impairment. She said that the teachers had to take all the learners into consideration and had to teach at the same tempo and carry on with the curriculum. The teachers accommodated the learners with visual impairment by letting them sit in the front row of the class and use tape recorders. They had try to and keep up by listening to the teacher. *"For one component they get zero, because they can't do the practical, but I told the teachers that they had to make a plan and then somehow they must do the practical."*

According to the coordinator of inclusive education, the learners with visual impairment really struggle with subject choices, because they struggle with subjects like Science, Biology and other practical subjects. She felt the school must offer more relevant subjects to the learners with visual impairment, because they cannot do the technical subjects. Participant One felt that the school does not offer proper Life Skills or Career Guidance for the learners. The principal confirmed these lacks: *"The subject choice, because this is a technical school, some of the subjects are not relevant to them. Like Physical Science and Biology, the practical is very hard for them. And the light in the classes is too bright for them. And the equipment, when we don't have the equipment, it makes it very hard, then they just sit there without seeing what the teachers want to show."*

The coordinator of inclusive education said that to some of the teachers the learners with visual impairments are just invisible. Although some of the teachers try really hard to accommodate these learners, others do not. The coordinator of inclusive education remarked: *"The school was not ready for*

inclusion, because if they were ready, they would have subjects that are relevant to the learners, to accommodate them."

She also indicated*: "I would say that some teachers are doing their best and some not. Some just don't notice them, like when they are writing on the chalk board, they don't write big, they don't ask, can you see or do you understand, so they just write in normal print."*

The most important role players for making social inclusion a success were identified as the teachers, therefore the researcher agrees with Engelbrecht and Green (2001) that teachers play one of the most important roles in implementing and successfully maintaining inclusive education in schools. The reason for this is because they are in direct contact with the learners and closely interact with them on a daily basis.

4.2.3 Factors having an impact on the learners with visual impairment

According to the participants, the following factors have the greatest impact on their lives: awareness-making, available equipment, and attitudes of other people.

4.2.3.1 Awareness

The coordinator of inclusive education identified a few barriers to social inclusion, and a lack of awareness is one of the barriers that she observed in the school. She claimed: *"Of course it is awareness, because there was no awareness."*

The principal confirmed the latter by admitting that the learners did not get a chance to explain their disability to the other learners and that there was not a lot of awareness-making in the school.

According to the able-bodied peers of the learners with visual impairment, the biggest social barrier is that they do not know how to befriend these learners. They are very cautious and uncomfortable around them.   They don't understand them.   They have the perception that the learners with visual

impairment don't want to befriend them, because they never look you in the eye and they are always looking down. To them this type of body language indicates that the learners don't want to talk to them. There are certain things that the learners wonder about, e.g. like do learners with visual impairment ever get a girl- or boyfriend and/or are they interested in it? There former principal did tell them that learners with visual impairment would start coming to the school, but there was not enough awareness-making about these learners. They still are strangers, as they explained: "*Ek sal sê ek was versigtig, maar nie op my senuwees nie. Dat ek hulle nie stamp of so nie, so ek het maar altyd my spasie gehou. Dit is moeilik om met hulle vriende te maak, jy voel ongemaklik ,want jy het nog nooit hierdie situasie teëgekom nie. Soos in, jy weet nie hoe nie. So in die begin het ons almal maar net ons 'distance' gehou.*"

(Translated: *"I was cautious not to bump into them, that's why I kept my distance, but I was not anxious. It is hard to befriend them because; it is a situation in which we have never been before. We don't know how to befriend them, that is why we just keep our distance."*)

All the learners with visual impairments live in the hostel. Their parents live far away from Windhoek and cannot be included in the process of awareness-making. The principal stated that the parents of the learners with visual impairment do not get any special or different treatment from the other parents of the school.

Participant Two would like the other learners to be more aware, although she chooses not to explain her impairment to the rest of the class.

Social needs must be addressed through preparation and awareness-making of sighted learners and the readiness of the learner with visual impairment to interact age-appropriately. When social skills are not addressed during placement planning, isolation within the mainstream can occur, and awareness-making was not sufficient in this school. The sighted learners are unaware of the learners with visual impairment's needs and about how to

confront or befriend these learners. Non-disabled learners may not understand the reasons why certain behaviours occur in the classroom and they may be nervous or anxious about befriending the learner with a disability (Terpstra & Tamura, 2008).

Zimba, Mostert, Hengari, Haihambo, Mowes, Nuugwedha and February (2007) confirmed this by highlighting the finding that in order to effectively support the inclusive education of learners, teachers should be provided with pre-service and in-service inclusive education training. Then it will enable them to promote not only academic, but also emotional classroom inclusion. Emotional classroom inclusion refers to the state in which learners are the subject of love, affection and empathetic help. Teaching-awareness will have a magnificent impact on the friendship patterns.

4.2.3.2 **Equipment**

The coordinator of inclusive education said that the teachers really suffered in the beginning of inclusion. Because there was no equipment, they had a lot of extra work and preparation, they didn't finish their work on time and, most importantly, they didn't have training to work with the learners with visual impairments. She remarked: *"No, first it was very tough, because you don't have equipment, you don't finish everything on time and you don't have training, but you know the training won't be with all the teachers in a mainstream school because I am doing the work, I do it, I give the Braille work to them. It must just be introduced properly so they can get used to it."*

Participant One identified a few needs of the learners with visual impairments: More equipment like CCTV's and more computers, so they will not have to share, will make life easier for them. His needs were indicated as follows: *"We just need some more equipment which makes life easier for us, we have very little, so if we get this equipment, I promise that we will do better in our school work. We will cope better. We actually need more computers, because at the moment we are sharing the computers and we need the programs that enable us to see on the computers."*

Participant Two's needs are to have more equipment that can help them learn faster, because sometimes her notes are late, and she does not have a tape recorder. She would also like a radio at the hostel to listen to music, because she is not interested in sports. Participant Two also thinks that it would be a good idea if they have a teacher who goes with them from class to class for the whole day, and not only for a few periods, to explain the work to them.

These findings disagree with Hatlen (2004) that the educational modifications necessary for learners who are blind or visually impaired to access learning experiences may, in themselves, be barriers to social interaction. Hatlen (2004) stated that Braille writers, Braille books, Braille note-takers, and other special equipment emphasise differences. From our participants' experiences, having this equipment is what makes social inclusion possible, and then they can be like all the other learners and don't have to bother the other learners in class. Having this equipment is a need for the learners with visual impairment and helps them not to feel like a burden to the other learners. Participant One feels accepted by his peers and he states that it is because he has his own equipment and can cope on his own. The participants from this study agree with the conclusion drawn from a study by Goudiras, Papadopoulos, Koutsoklenis, Papageorgiou and Stergiou (2009) that learners with visual impairment who frequently use equipment to help them, were more satisfied that their daily, educational and professional needs were met.

4.2.3.3   Attitudes

The principal said that when the learners with visual impairment came to the school, the teachers' hearts went out to them and they put in a lot of effort. Later the teachers became frustrated and their efforts started to fade and they carried on like normal. They felt that there were too many learners in one class (over 40), there was a lack of resources, a lack of assistance and they did not have the training to work with learners with visual impairment. The school does not have a counsellor or a nurse to assist the learners or the teachers.

Participant One feels that the teachers who teach them are very nice. They do feel accepted by them.

The last barrier that was identified by the coordinator of inclusive education was the bad attitudes of sighted people, and that there sometimes was no understanding and empathy for these learners. She remarked: "*If we change the attitude then they will be included. The attitude is the main thing.*"

4.2.4 Outcomes of social inclusion identified by the participants

The participants indicated that inclusive education is still their preference.

4.2.4.1 General feeling about inclusive education

The coordinator of inclusive education supports inclusion, because according to her the learners with visual impairment are very isolated in the special school. They only get to befriend other people during the holidays, and with inclusion they are really expanding their knowledge. To her there is no difference between learners with visual impairment and sighted learners, except that the former have an eye problem. She stated: *"Not at all, just maybe there is an eye problem."* Some of the learners with visual impairment take their subjects on a higher level and the best candidate in Grade 11 is a learner with very low vision.

The principal's opinion is that inclusive education helps the learners with visual impairment to be prepared for the future.

The able-bodied peers feel that they do learn important things from these learners, e.g. that it is not important what a person looks like and that you must take the first step to befriend other people.

Participant One thinks inclusion is a good thing and it makes the learners with visual impairment perform better. In the former school they were only 20 learners in a class, now they are over 40. This motivates him to do his best to perform in the top five in his class. He ended the interview with the following statement: "*Disabilities do not mean inability.*"

The participants are in favour of inclusion. Participant One reflected: "*Yes, inclusion is the right thing, because at the visually impaired school it is like we are isolated, it is nice to see other people and when it comes to tertiary education, we will really suffer, because it will then be like the first time that we are going to be mixed. Now during these two years, we will learn to mix with other people.*"

Participant Two also thinks inclusion is the right thing. The visually impaired school is too isolated. She thinks it is very important to be around other people and get to know other people, because this will make life after school a lot easier. At the visually impaired school she feels they were not free to go and do what they wanted to. At the mainstream secondary school, if you want to go to the hospital, it is fine to go on your own, and these are the skills they must learn to be able to cope in society. She said: *"At first I was nervous around other children, but not anymore. At the visually impaired school people are not free, but here you are free, you can walk around anytime. Even when you went to the hospital, someone had to take you. Because we really need to learn these things for ourselves."*

When asked if the able-bodied peers think inclusion is the right thing the learners responded that they did think it was the right thing, because it gave these learners a fair chance. But there are some consequences, like the emotional bullying and the grounds at the school. They think if the learners can join the mainstream school earlier, from Grade 8 already, it would help. Then they would have more time to get used to the set-up and the other learners would have more time to get used to them. *"Ek is nie seker nie, ek meen, ek weet nie of dit al gedoen is nie, ek dink ons skool is die guinea-pigs, maar ek dink om vir die leerlinge 'n kans te gee, is dit 'n goeie ding. Daar is ook altyd die kans dat dit die leerlinge emosioneel kan afbreek."*

(Translated: *"I am not sure; I mean I don't know if it has been done before. I think our school is the guinea-pigs. I think it is a good thing to give the learners a chance, although they might get hurt emotionally."*)

This study confirms both Engelbrecht (2001) and Swart and Pettipher's (2005) argument that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

4.2.4.2   **Social interactions**

From the principal's experience, she can say that the learners with visual impairment usually stay together and support one another. This is mainly because they know each other from the special school they attended before.

The coordinator of inclusive education also stated that the learners with visual impairment are mostly on their own, or they group together. At times they will mix with their sighted peers in their own class group. But it is very rare for these learners to have sighted friends. The learners with visual impairments are attached to teachers, or to her for support and care. *"Not really, I don't know, they keep themselves together, like during break time they stay together, you won't see a sighted learner there."*

According to the Life Skills teacher, the learners with visual impairments have Life Skills as a subject, but they mostly go to their room with the coordinator of inclusive education during these periods to finish other work, or Braille some of their work.

The able-bodied peers say they never see the learners with visual impairment outside class. During break times they are always in their own computer room and they only mix with one another.   They do not mix with the sighted learners. "*Ek was al een pouse daar by hulle gewees, maar hulle almal gaan na Juffrou (the Coordinator of inclusive education) se kantoor toe, so op die skoolstoepe sien jy hulle nie, hulle sonder hulle af. Maar ek dink dit is 'n kwessie van hulle weet nie hoe jy is nie en hulle dink jy sal hulle bietjie veroordeel."*

(Translated: *"I once went to see them during break time, but they all go to the teacher's room (the Coordinator of inclusive education). You don't see them*

walking around on the school grounds. I think it is because they don't know how we are and they feel judged.")

Zimba, Mostert, Hengari, Haihambo, Mowes, Nuugwedha and February (2007) stated that the main friendship patterns in the school were still that the blind went with the blind or with the learners with visual impairment and the sighted learners stayed with the sighted learners. They did not see one another as enemies, but they were not familiar with each other and chose to stay like this.

4.2.4.3 Social inclusion

According to the principal the learners with visual impairment do get frustrated in the mainstream school, because the school does not offer them sports, like blind cricket. According to her, sport is the field where the blind learners are excluded the most. The learners in the hostel are the most frustrated, because everyone has their own thing to do or to attend and no one wants to sit and do nothing. The learner with a visual impairment must even walk to the cafeteria with someone.

Participant One agreed with the principal that he would like to do sports, but the school does not cater for this need. He does sing in the school choir, but he would love to play blind cricket.

The principal thinks that the learners with visual impairment will stay socially excluded and will never be 100% included, but socially it is better in the mainstream school where they are around other learners. They hear other learners and there is a lot going on around them. She feels that there will always be social isolation to a certain extent. The coordinator of inclusive education agrees with this by saying that the learners are somewhat included, but not 100%.

The Life Skills teacher's opinion was that the learners with visual impairment were not socially included and that they would never really be included. Her heart goes out to them, because she feels children are so rude to one another

and their self-confidence is really destroyed by the other learners. She believes that the special school gives them a safer environment than the mainstream school. When she teaches these learners she feels as if they are invisible. The school does not have enough learners with visual impairment to really teach the sighted learners about empathy and caring. She feels that the learners with visual impairment are present, but not socially included. They do not mix with the other learners. She also said that it was very hard for some teachers, like the Science and Biology teachers, to teach learners with visual impairment, because of the practical work.

Participant One again stated that it was hard in the beginning but if the learners made an effort to get to know you, they accepted you and there were sighted learners that helped him in class. He felt that once the other learners got to know you, they got close to you and saw that you were just like them. Awareness-making again plays a big role in the process of social inclusion. He does mingle with the sighted learners in his class. He enjoys break times, but one barrier he identified was that all the learners wore the same uniforms, so it was very hard to spot your friends on the school grounds. *"In the beginning it was a bit tough with the other learners, but right now I can say that we are close and we have a good relationship." "My day at school is actually very nice, because I am now used to the system, I am now used to the school and I feel accepted, because the teachers are now treating us very nice."*

When Participant One feels lonely, it is only because he misses his family in Angola, but the school does not make him feel lonely.

Participant Two does not really feel socially included at school, she does not have a lot of friends at school, but in the hostel she has great friends. This mainstream secondary school and another school share a hostel. So her friends are in the other school. She does have sighted friends, but only three. She reflected: *"I don't really feel socially included here at school, only at the hostel. Because people are running and pushing one another here at school,*

and sometimes they bump into me. "Yes, some learners gossip, but I don't care about that."

The able-bodied peers don't feel that the learners with visual impairments are socially included. *"Nee, nie regtig nie. Meer met mekaar."*

(Translated: *"No, only with one another."*)

4.3 FIELD NOTES OF THE RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS DURING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Various categories, which are grouped into themes emerged from the analysis of the field notes of the researcher's reflections and observations during the research process. These are summarised in table 4.2 after which a discussion follows.

Table 4.2: Themes and categories related to field notes of researcher's reflections and observations during the research process

THEMES	CATEGORIES
The researcher's personal experience	Theme discussed as a whole
Physical environment	Place/position of workroom
Interactions between learners with visual impairments and able-bodied learners	Groupings of learners Taking part in conversations
Learning experience	Number of learners in a classroom Learning activity Adaptations made for learners with visual impairment
Whole school atmosphere	Assistance given to learners with visual impairment Groupings when leaving a class Teachers' attitudes towards learners with visual impairment

4.3.1 **Personal experience**

As I was listening to the participants, I could sense that they had self-confidence and that they felt comfortable with themselves. I could see the beauty in them for accepting their impairment and living life joyfully. The participants were anxious at first, wondering what I would ask them. When they realised that I only wanted them to share what was in their hearts, they started talking about their feelings on inclusion. I was amazed at the valuable comments they made and their serious attitude towards their academic performance. It seemed as if the coordinator for inclusive education was very busy, as she had to type all the learners' work into Braille and help them with their work, and this was a demanding task for one person.

4.3.2 **Physical environment**

I observed a few obstacles on the school grounds that could possibly be barriers to learners with visual impairment. The school has a lot of stairs and steps and this could hinder the learners moving from one class to another. The corridors have rubbish bins along the walls and this is in the walking line of the learners, which means that they can bump into them. There are also a lot of poles on the pavements of the school grounds and the pavements are uneven, therefore the learners could easily trip and fall. From all the glass windows in the school, there is especially one floor-length window that seems unsafe and learners could easily fall through this window. There are no curtains in the classrooms and the amount of light makes it harder for the low-sighted learners to see.

The hostel does not have a study room for the learners with visual impairment where they can use their equipment. There is no space for their equipment or plugs for using electrical appliances.

The learners change classes with the other learners, but in free periods, Computer, Life Skills and during break times they all go to one *workroom*. This is a *workroom*, only for the learners with visual impairment or blindness and all their equipment is in this room, like a Braille writer, CCTV, computers

with zoom programmes and tape recorders. This room has blinds in front of the windows. I observed how comfortable the learners were in their own computer room. They were chatting, working on the computers, or just listening to music and looked very serene and secure.

4.3.3 Interactions between learners with impairment and able-bodied learners

The observations of *interactions between learners with visual impairment and able-bodied learners* agree with the interview findings, namely that the learners with visual impairment usually stick together.

The learners with visual impairment and the blind learner *group together*. On the days of observation, the learners with visual impairment and the blind learner sat together. They found a spot in the front row of the class.

On the day of the observation the learners with visual impairment stayed together and mixed only with one another. They had *conversations* and had fun. They were not shy around one another or me.

4.3.4 Learning experience

The learners with visual impairment go to all the subjects with the mainstream class. The coordinator of inclusive education accompanies them to some of the classes, but she is unable to attend all the classes with the learners with visual impairment. The job is too big for only one person.

At the time when the research was conducted there were 1 blind learner, 20 visually impaired learners and 695 other *learners in total* in the school. In a normal class there are over 40 learners and the learners with visual impairment are divided into these classes.

The learners were busy with a *learning activity* on computers. There are not enough computers, so the learners had to share them, but the learners with visual impairment stayed together.

The only *adaptations made by the school* was that a coordinator for inclusive education who works with the learners with visual impairment was hired. No physical adaptations were made.

4.3.5 **Whole school atmosphere**

I experienced the school as learner-friendly. While I was in the computer room learners with visual impairment, a few teachers came in to help the learners or to explain work to them. The teachers were all laughing, and chatting in a friendly way on the school grounds and were very willing to help.

I observed a low-vision learner *assisting* the blind learner to find her way.

On the day of observation the learners with visual impairment and the blind learner *grouped together*; they went to their room and stayed there during break time.

The main teacher working with these learners has a very positive *attitude towards* them. The other teachers vary. Most of the teachers put in a lot of effort, others feel sorry for the learners and then some just ignore the learners and teach as usual.

4.4 **DOCUMENTS**

Two categories, which are grouped into themes emerged from the coding (analysis) of the available documentation. These are summarised in tables 4.3 after which a discussion follows.

Table 4.3: Themes related to the documents used in this research study

THEMES	CATEGORIES
Ministry of Education's involvement	Discussed as a whole
Vision and mission statement of the school	Discussed as a whole

4.4.1 Ministry of Education's involvement

The principle of the school asked the Ministry of Education for funds to install electricity channels for electrical equipment of learners with visual impairment, and blinds for the classes. From the documentation, there was an order for the blinds, but then it got lost and the work was never done, although the blinds had actually been approved by the Ministry. According to the principal, once something is approved, it follows a route and, as she says, the order got lost somewhere.

"*All the classes need the blinds, because they can't see with the bright light, the light is so bright for them that they can't see a thing*" (Principal).

4.4.2 Vision and mission statement of the school

A document used in this research study was the vision and mission statement of the school. The vision of the school is to be the preferred school of excellence for every career-minded learner. This vision does not state anything about inclusion, or the importance of inclusion.

The mission statement focuses on education for the Namibian community, preparing learners for tertiary education and/or the workplace, to help the learners develop into loyal, mature adults and to help the learners discover their true abilities and talents. The issue of inclusion is not mentioned in the mission statement.

4.5   CONCLUSION

Findings from the interviews and observation during the research process have indicated that the learners with visual impairment want to attend a mainstream school. They feel that they can achieve more in a mainstream school and develop their full potential there. The learners with visual impairment prefer to be surrounded by able-bodied learners and, although emotional bullying does happen and it is not right, they accept it and acknowledge that it happens everywhere. There will always be a speck of social isolation in schools. This validates a study by Grubbs and Niemeyer

(1999; See Chapter One), stated that physical integration will not ensure that learners with disabilities will interact with others in their environment. The reciprocal interactions of learners must be promoted. Learners without disabilities should be trained to interact with learners with disabilities and learners with disabilities should also be encouraged to interact with learners without disabilities.

In the next chapter the focus will fall on the concluding remarks, recommendations and implications for future research, as well as strengths and limitations related to the study.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUDING REMARKS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITIONS AND STRENGTHS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide concluding remarks on the main findings of the research, discuss recommendations, mention the limitations and strengths of the study, and make suggestions for further research. The chapter will conclude with the researcher's final reflection.

5.2 SUMMARY: LITERATURE STUDY

From the literature study, Swart and Pettipher (2005) made the statement that regular schools with an inclusive orientation were the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. The social experiences available through inclusion are thought to enable young learners with disabilities to be far more socially competent than their peers attending segregated special schools. Overall mainstreaming is likely to benefit learners with disabilities (Fisher, Pumpian & Sax, 1998). It is, however, important to keep in mind that the physical presence of learners with disabilities in the classroom (physical integration) does not by itself ensure a learner's social inclusion (Schmidt & Čagran, 2008). Whether or not a learner feels truly included depends on their participation beyond being physically included in activity, school, work or relationships. There must be a reciprocity that makes it possible for the individual to be involved (Wager & Bailey, 2005).

Research indicates that learners with disabilities are likely to be perceived as different, they are more likely to be ostracised, to lack friends, and to be bullied when compared with their classmates (Llewellyn, 2000). Many learners possess only minimal awareness of their attitudes towards and actual behaviours in the presence of learners with disabilities (Antonak & Livneh, 2000).

Literature also highlights the importance of the attitudes of teachers and peers. In most of their studies, Nowicki and Sandieson (2002) found that learners' attitudes toward peers with disabilities were negatively biased and in need for improvement. The attitudes, negative as well as positive, of teachers have a profound influence on the learners' performance (Engelbrecht et al., 2005).

McPherson, Smith and Cock (2001), claim that homophily is vital for the process of inclusion. Homophily implies that people who are the same and have the same characteristics, stick together. It typifies "people like us", meaning learners with visual impairment will befriend other learners with visual impairment.

5.3   SUMMARY: EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

From the empirical investigation it became clear that the learners with visual impairment prefer the mainstream inclusive school. The mainstream secondary school offers them more opportunities, freedom and prepares them for their future.

Barriers like bullying are present at the school, but the learners with visual impairment don't see this as their biggest threat. These learners are more concerned with the training of the teachers and having the right equipment to help them to be more independent and perform better in school.

No prior awareness-making took place for preparing both the learners with visual impairment and the able-bodied learners for the process of inclusion, leaving the learners as strangers and without the social skills to befriend one another. Social interaction between learners with visual impairment and able-bodied learners is very scarce. The learners with visual impairment stay together and the able-bodied learners stay together.

5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The views of the participants in this research were that prejudice did not play such a big role in the school community. According to the able-bodied learners, they were prejudiced at first, but after getting to know the learners with visual impairment, they realised that it was a lack of knowledge and awareness that kept inclusion unreceptive. For years people with disabilities were kept separate from the rest of society by placing them in special schools, only alienating the people of our society from one another and creating an 'us' and a 'them'. This has happened to the extent where we do not know how to communicate or interact with people that are not like ourselves. The participants in this study revealed that learners with disabilities were also accountable for the latter statement, because they themselves struggled to befriend able-bodied learners and they themselves stuck together at break times or during free periods - never giving the able-bodied learners a chance to get to know them. The able-bodied learners perceived the body language of the learners with disabilities as if they did not want to be befriended (no eye contact, looking down, not smiling and walking fast).

Raising awareness is a crucial element and contributing factor in the social inclusion of learners with disabilities. The views of participants in this research were that awareness-making did not happen in Namibia and was still not up to standard. This could be a reason why able-bodied learners, learners with disabilities and teachers are unfamiliar with one another. They have been alienated for many years and by now placing them together physically, social inclusion will not happen overnight. It cannot be assumed that learners would readily accept inclusion. Such an assumption could be dangerous, since some learners – as mentioned by the participants – have negative attitudes towards inclusive education. According to the participants, Namibia did commit itself to inclusive education before getting everything into place and preparing all the role players for the process to begin.

It is clear from the preceding discussion that the sampled participants are generally positive about inclusive education. This research study found to

agree with Rodney (2003) that learners with visual impairment often do not automatically become part of a group's social experiences, but still, the participants from this research study experience the social aspects of their inclusion as positive and they prefer being a part of a mainstream school. From the views of the participants in this research it seems as if it is equally hard for the learners with disabilities to adapt to a new situation than it is for the able-bodied to adapt, while the learners with disabilities actually have to make the bigger compromise. Learners with visual impairment might still sit alone or only with one another at break times, but it is the friends that they choose. They do feel that they have freedom in a mainstream school and can make their own choices. Emotional bullying does happen in schools, but this might be stopped by an anti-bullying policy or a policy on inclusion.

Another contributing factor for social inclusion for the learners with visual impairment is to be able to cope on their own and not depend on the other learners so much; that is why the teachers need the right amount of training on how to teach learners with disabilities effectively. The school needs all the required equipment to help the learners and the teachers reach their full potential. Pre-service training in inclusive education and continued professional development are of paramount importance if inclusive education is to be successfully implemented. The resourcing of schools is essential if the anxieties around the implementation of inclusive education are to be addressed.

This study has showed that educators, learners and parents are not fully educated about inclusive education and has an influence on the social inclusion of the learners with visual impairment. The school community is not closed for inclusive education; they are still unfamiliar with it. The fact that literature seems to reveal both negative and positive attitudes towards inclusive education is indicative that a lot of work needs to be done nationally and internationally. It should be acknowledged that South Africa is one of the leading countries in the world in terms of the implementation of inclusive education. Community mobilisation and advocacy work are urgently needed

for the Namibian population to be able to buy into this new concept of inclusive education (Mdikana, Ntshangase & Mayekiso, 2007).

This research study succeeded in answering the primary research question - *how do learners with visual impairment experience the social aspects of their inclusion in a Namibian mainstream secondary school* (See Chapter 1) – by making use of a case study as a form of qualitative research, and using three basic methods for data collection: interviews, observation, and the reviewing of documents and records. Through analysing and describing how learners with visual impairment experienced the social inclusion in a mainstream setting, the researcher hereby determined that learners with visual impairment are not yet truly socially included in a mainstream school. Although these learners are not lonely and they prefer the mainstream school to the special school, they are not yet fully accepted by able-bodied people.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the future, schools in Namibia will have to cope with an increasing number of disabled learners joining the mainstream. Although this research study was a case study with few participants, the following recommendations might be helpful to enhance the process of social inclusion for all the learners in the school. It has to be kept in mind that inclusion is a process and Namibia must move with the paradigm shifters, not with the restrictors, to meet the people who are against inclusion head-on. Also, the recommendations from this study should be seen as constructive feedback, therefore Namibia should remember that when you make a mistake with inclusion, you have to admit the mistake and start again.

Firstly and most importantly, the school should have a shared vision and commitment to the inclusion of all. Namibian schools should focus on training the mainstream teachers in educating learners with disabilities effectively and how to use the different resources efficiently, carefully and systematically for the benefit of the learners. Often when teachers are frustrated and don't know

what to do, the learner with a disability becomes "invisible" in the classroom. Through training the teachers, the school can have an innovative and experienced teaching team working to solve problems collaboratively. Teachers can also implement programmes that will enhance social inclusion for the learners, like a buddy system, circle of friends and cooperative learning. This way the learners with disabilities will be less invisible to the other learners.

The second recommendation is that the school should start with awareness raising. They should start a campaign with information pamphlets and speakers, open to the whole school community to attend.

The third recommendation will be that the Ministry of Education should provide the school with the necessary equipment needed to help the learners with disabilities. This will make a huge difference in their academic performance and social status. Then they will be less dependant on their peers and teachers and will not be seen as a 'burden' to them.

The last recommendation from this study is that the school should look into appointing a counsellor and school nurse to support both learners and teachers on the premises. This will promote the learners' emotional and physical wellbeing and give them a feeling of safety and caring.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has limitations that need to be addressed in future research. The first limitation concerns the way in which the data were collected. The researcher wanted to explore how learners with visual impairment, in a mainstream, experience social inclusion, but, unfortunately, at that time the local school had only one blind learner. A larger number of participants would have provided a more thorough study of the unit of analysis, although qualitative research claims that in-depth studies are relevant and definite.

Another limitation was that the only blind participant was a girl. It is important to note that boys and girls might experience social inclusion differently. In doing future research, focus groups with visually impaired learners can assist the researcher to explore the topic in depth through group discussions.

A third limitation was that the researcher felt self-conscious about asking too many questions about what the school was doing to promote social inclusion, because it was the only school in Namibia that catered for learners with visual impairment, and the researcher did not want to make them feel like victims in the process.

5.7 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

The participants in this study provided insights into the domain of social inclusion and inclusion as such, and more specifically the importance of socially including learners with visual impairment in Namibia.

This study can be used as a source of information to design strategies for improving school environments, teacher effectiveness, peer support and learner wellbeing. It has also created a better understanding of how difficult it is for a school to make the shift from mainstreaming only, to inclusion without help from the community. Therefore this study highlights the importance of collaboration and changing the attitudes of the whole community to benefit our learners.

The study has also highlighted the importance of teacher training and support to empower teachers and make them confident in working with the learners with visual impairments. It has provided the participants with the opportunity to express their true feelings, frustrations and fears as well as their hopes and dreams for inclusive education.

The final strength is that this study gives the perspectives of able-bodied and learners with disabilities, because they are both involved in the process of inclusive education.

5.8 FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

Although only two learners participated in this study and transferability is not possible, the findings of this study provide insight into the phenomenon of how learners with visual impairment experience social inclusion in a mainstream school. This suggests that further research on a larger sample population will be advisable.

Further research on ways of maximising social inclusion for learners with visual impairments in mainstream schools would be valuable. From a study like this, concrete and practical strategies and guidelines might be developed for the teachers concerned with the learners every day.

Another research possibility would be to explore the attitudes of able-bodied towards people with disabilities, and the difference that awareness-making can do to these attitudes. Especially in Namibia, where inclusion is still fairly new and people are unsure about how to befriend a person with a disability this would be important.

The last research possibility drawn from this study is to research the possibility of the learners with disabilities being partly responsible for their own exclusion, or their contribution to it.

5.9 REFLECTION

I have to start by saying how amazed I was to see the confidence, strength and joy of the learners with visual impairment. This was a wonderful inspiration to me. These learners do not complain about their impairment, they acknowledge it and strive to achieve the best that they possibly can. They are thankful for the opportunity of inclusive education.

The research journey made me aware that inclusion is about how we welcome people, how we help them with grief, sadness and difference, not

just letting them into our schools. I realised that you can make a learner feel welcome with one word. I also realised that the world still does not know how to fully and actively include learners with disabilities; it is an ongoing process of trying and making mistakes and trying again.

The voices of the learners with disabilities regarding ways on how to include them should be highly valued. This is because it is essentially about them, it is they who are the experts on their own situation. They must also model the ways of inclusion, so that the able-bodied can learn from them about how to approach them. Most importantly, I have realised that it is not that easy practically to include learners with visual impairments, whether or not literature tells us to do it. We must give more credit to the schools trying to make a success of inclusion. We all know that many of us have a fear of the unknown, and I have now experienced this saying. Inclusion is a new concept for teachers and they still feel powerless. As a future Educational Psychologist who has done research on the topic of social inclusion of visually impaired learners, I hope to make a difference one day and support the teachers through the process. After this study I am also asking myself whether we aren't the ones making the people with disabilities disabled.

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APPENDIX A

Semi-formal interview with learner with visual impairment:

1. How would you describe the teachers' attitudes towards you?
2. How would you describe the other learners' attitudes towards you?
3. Do you have a lot of sighted friends?
4. How would you describe your day at school and include break times?
5. How do you spend your break times?
6. Do you participate in after school activities? Would you like to?
7. How did you experience the transition from the school for the visually impaired to HTS?
8. Would you say that you are socially included?
9. What are the hardest thing/things about a mainstream school?
10. What are your needs?
11. Are you nervous around certain children or teachers?
12. Does the school offer you any life skills or career guidance for the future?
13. Would you say the school is a safe environment?
14. Does your academic performance play a role in social acceptance?
15. Did you get a chance to explain your visual impairment to the class?
16. What is your visual impairment?
17. Have you ever been bullied?
18. Do your sighted peers have empathy for you?
19. Do you experience any stereotyping?
20. Are you ever lonely?
21. How would you describe the school's culture?
22. Do you feel accepted and included?
23. What can the school do differently?
24. Are we doing the right thing with inclusion?

APPENDIX B

Table 4.1: **Observation Schedule of the learners with visual impairment and the physical environment.**

Date:	28 July 2009 30 July 2009
Observer:	Lizl Human Intern Educational Psychologist
Name of School:	Windhoek, Namibia
Physical environment:	
Position/Place of work room:	
Friends sitting close to visually impaired learners:	
Taking part in conversations:	
Teacher's attitude towards learners with visual impairment:	
Groupings in the room:	
Number of learners in the room:	
Learner activity:	
Adaptations made for the learners:	

Groupings when leaving for break:	
Assistance for visually impaired learners when leaving for break.	
Whole atmosphere of the school:	

APPENDIX C

<div align="center">

University of South Africa
(Adapted from the University of Stellenbosch)

<u>Permission to take part in research</u>

</div>

(Due to the nature of the participants disabilities, this form will be explained/ discussed step-by-step to each individual learner, in collaboration with the teacher who works with these learners on a daily basis)

Investigating the social inclusion of learners with visual impairment in a mainstream secondary school in Namibia.

You are asked to take part in a research study which is being done by Lizl Human/Opperman, M.Ed. Psych student from the department of Educational Psychology at the University of South Africa. The results will form part of a thesis for the M. Ed. Psych degree. You are chosen as a possible participant for the study because you are one of the learners who have been transferred to a mainstream secondary school, as part of the governments' inclusive teaching project.

1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to determine how learners with visual impairment are socially included in a mainstream school.

2. Procedures

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to do the following: Answered questions about the learners with visual impairment – for example, how they are socially included in the school. You will also be required to provide any other material (such as letters, pictures or documents) which will explain your experience. A minimum of one interview will be held and you will be informed of the venue where this will take place.

3. Possible risks and uncomfortable issues

You are expected to be honest. It might be uncomfortable to discuss matters which can point out possible flaws at your school.

4. Possible advantages for the community

Through your participation you can contribute to a better understanding of the effective transfer from a school for learners with visual impairment to a mainstream school. Social inclusion is not only about placing the learner in a mainstream classroom, but also takes a lot of other aspects into consideration and there are a lot of adjustments that needs to occur. You can also give advice on how to make this process easier for learners with visual impairment.

5. Remuneration for participation

There will be no remuneration for your participation.

6. Confidentiality

Any information which is shared with me will be completely confidential and will only be made known with your permission or as required by law. The participants will stay completely anonymous. The information will be kept in a safe place. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the information.

7. Participation and withdrawal

You can decide if you want to participate in the study. If you have any questions regarding the study, feel free to ask me. If you decide to participate in the study, you can withdraw at any time, without any ramifications for you. You may also refuse to answer certain questions, but still participate in the study. I may also withdraw you from the study if circumstances make it necessary.

8. Identification of researcher

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, you can contact me, Lizl Human at 081 212 5717.

9. Rights if Participants

You may withdraw from participating at any time, without any negative consequences for you. By participating in the study you do not distance yourself from any of you rights, claims or procedures.

APPENDIX D

Declaration by participant / legal representative

The above information was given to me, [name of participant], and explained by [name of person involved] in [Afrikaans/English] and [I am/the participant is] fluent in the language or it was satisfactorily translated. [I/the participant] was given the opportunity to ask questions and the questions were answered adequately.

[*I hereby give permission to take part in the study/I hereby give permission that the participant take part in the study*]. A copy of this form was given to me

_____
Name of participant

_____
Name of legal representative (if applicable)

_____   _____
Signature of participant or legal representative   Date

Declaration by researcher

I declare that all information in this document has been explained to [name of participant / legal representative]. He/she has been encouraged and given enough time to direct any questions to me. The conversation was in [Afrikaans /English] and no translator was used.

_____   _____
Signature of researcher   Date

APPENDIX E

University of South Africa
(Adapted from the University of Stellenbosch)

Permission to take part in research

Investigating the social inclusion of learners with visual impairment in a mainstream secondary school in Namibian.

You are asked to take part in a research study which is being done by Lizl Human/Opperman, M.Ed. Psych student from the department of Educational Psychology at the University of South Africa. The results will form part of a thesis for the M.Ed. Psych degree. You are chosen as a possible participant for the study because you are the principal of a secondary school which has been chosen by the government for their inclusive teaching project.

10. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to determine how learners with visual impairment are included in a mainstream school.

11. Procedures

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to do the following: Answer questions about the learners with blindness – for example, how they are socially included in the school. You will also be required to provide any other material (such as letters, pictures or documents) which will explain your experience. A minimum of one interview will be held and you will be informed of the venue where this will take place.

12. Possible risks and uncomfortable issues

You are expected to be honest. It might be uncomfortable to discuss matters which can point out possible flaws at your school.

13. Possible advantages for the community

Through your participation you can contribute to a better understanding of the effective transfer from a school for learners with visual impairments to a main-stream school. Social inclusion is not only about placing the learner in a main-stream classroom, but also takes a lot of other aspects into consideration and there are a lot of adjustments that needs to occur. You can also give advice on how to make this process easier for learners with visual impairments.

14. Remuneration for participation

There will be no remuneration for your participation.

15. Confidentiality

Any information which is shared with me will be completely confidential and will only be made known with your permission or as required by law. The participants will stay completely anonymous. The information will be kept in a safe place. Only I and my study leader will have access to the information.

16. Participation and withdrawal

You can decide if you want to participate in the study. If you have any questions regarding the study, feel free to ask me. If you decide to participate in the study, you can withdraw at any time, without any ramifications for you. You may also refuse to answer certain questions, but still participate in the study. I may also withdraw you from the study if circumstances make it necessary.

17. Identification of researcher

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, you can contact me, Lizl Human/Opperman at 081 212 5717.

18. Rights if Participants

You may withdraw from participating at any time, without any negative consequences for you. By participating in the study you do not distance yourself from any of you rights, claims or procedures.

Declaration by participant / legal representative

The above information was given to me, [name of participant], and explained by [name of person involved] in [Afrikaans/English] and [I am/the participant is] fluent in the language or it was satisfactorily translated. [I/the participant] was given the opportunity to ask questions and the questions were answered adequately.

[*I hereby give permission to take part in the study/I hereby give permission that the participant take part in the study*]. A copy of this form was given to me

_____
Name of participant

_____
Name of legal representative (if applicable)

_____ _____
Signature of participant or legal representative   Date

Declaration by researcher

I declare that all information in this document has been explained to [name of participant / legal representative]. He/she has been encouraged and given enough time to direct any questions to me. The conversation was in [Afrikaans / English] and no translator was used.

_____ _____
Signature of researcher   Date