Daily lived experiences of visually impaired learners at a mainstream school in Lesotho

[1]Nthama Matsie and [2]Sindiswa Stofile
[1]Department of Educational Foundations,
National University of Lesotho, Lesotho
[2]Department of Educational Psychology,
 University of the Western Cape, South Africa
Corresponding author: matsienthama@gmail.com

Abstract—Learners with disabilities, particularly the visually impaired face different challenges in their learning encounters. The study explored the daily-lived experiences of visually impaired learners at a mainstream school in Lesotho. A qualitative research approach located in the interpretivist paradigm was adopted. Thirty visually impaired learners were purposefully selected in this study. Data were collected using focus group interviews. The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse and interpret data. The results showed both rewarding and detrimental daily lived experiences of visually impaired learners in the school setting. On the one hand, rewarding experiences included social interaction, enjoyment of companionship, appreciation, being valued by the school management, a positive relationship with teachers, a sense of belonging to the school, access to inclusive education, participation in extramural activities, and access to educational and psychological resources support. On the other hand, detrimental experiences of the visually impaired learners reported within the inclusive school included unequal opportunities, inadequate assistive technology, inadequate academic support, inappropriate counselling services, hostile learning environments, and physical and psychological violence. We concluded that the inclusion of visually impaired learners needs to be considered to enhance the effective and appropriate implementation of inclusive education. It recommends that the Ministry of Education and Training should make it compulsory for inclusive schools to improve institutional policies with the intention to minimise barriers to learning in institutions of learning.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Visually Impaired Learners, Mainstream School, Lesotho
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I. INTRODUCTION

THE inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream education is characterised by difficulties. Visually impaired learners are not an exception. These learners experience unequal opportunities, inadequate counselling services, disability, unfriendly learning environments, and physical, psychological, and psychosocial violence. One of the main goals of inclusive education is to grant all learners equal learning and social opportunities (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994). Learners with disabilities are indifferent to education and incapable of achieving academically as their counterparts (Suleymanov, 2015). Due to these conceptions, learners with disabilities are marginalised and rejected in developing and developed countries (Harrison, Soares, & Joyce, 2019). This misconception leads to the marginalisation and rejection of learners with disabilities in both developing and developed countries (Suleymanov, 2015). Including learners with disabilities in general education settings has remained the international focus for over two decades (Harrison, Soares, & Joyce, 2019). The history of inclusive education dates to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Assembly, 1948), emphasizing that everyone has the right to education. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognises the right to inclusive education for all persons with disabilities (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2017). While considering the human rights of disabled persons, the doctrine of inclusive education should guide the policy in inclusive education.

From the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, held in Salamanca, Spain, in June 1994, the following major principles on inclusive education (IE) were identified:

a) Schools should accommodate all children regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions.

b) Special needs education incorporates the proven principles of sound pedagogy from which all children may benefit.

c) The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have,

d) Within inclusive schools, children with special educational needs should receive whatever extra support they may require to ensure their effective education,

e) Special attention should be paid to the needs of children and youth with severe or multiple disabilities,

f) Curricula should be adapted to children's needs, not vice versa,

Children with special needs should receive additional instructional support in the regular curriculum, not a different curriculum.

g) Children with special needs should receive additional instructional support in the regular curriculum, not a different

curriculum.

From this conference, a huge jump towards IE with the change of basic policies to encourage the inclusion of children with disabilities in education was performed, mentioning that special needs education is an issue of equal concern to countries of the North and the South, which cannot advance in isolation. IE must form part of an overall educational strategy (UNESCO, 1994). As a result, this strategy involves transforming the whole education system in terms of legislation and policy, financing, administration, design, delivery, and monitoring of education, and how schools are organised.

The Salamanca Framework mandates access to the general education curriculum for all learners, including those with disabilities. At Salamanca 1994, "More than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organisations, met in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994, to reaffirm their commitment and to further the objectives of Education for All by considering the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, namely enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6). This conference explored the policy shifts required to promote inclusive education as philosophy. It was envisaged that this would enable "schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 8).

All countries are signatories of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). They all committed themselves to the implementation of inclusive education. This seems to be a general and global issue. The signatories are excited about implementing inclusive education; as research clearly shows that not all children, especially those with disabilities, have positive learning experiences (UNESCO, 1994; Florian, 2015). Given that many countries seem to share the same ideology towards implementing inclusive education, the concept of inclusion remains identical but is realised differently within different contexts (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2009; Swart & Pettipher, 2005; Stofile, 2008; Florian, 2015). Success stories and evidence show that inclusive education is not implemented as it should be (Suleymanov, 2015). In keeping with the above, studies have revealed that children living with disability are still experiencing exclusion and discrimination in some inclusive schools (Mafa, 2012; Samkange, 2013). However, a broad range of literature explains children's experiences with disabilities, especially learners with visual impairments (UNESCO, 2005). Against this background, we felt the need to explore the experiences visually impaired learners experience in an inclusive school.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual impairment

'Visual impairment' has become an international buzzword characterised by several contentious definitions (Kleege, 2005; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). Kleege (2005) and Dale (2010) claim that visual impairment means different things to different people; hence it is defined differently. The phrase 'visual impairment' encompasses a variety of characteristics, including with limited sight, squinting eyes, blurred vision, or tunnel vision that cannot be rectified by wearing spectacles (WHO, 2014; Howell & Lazarus, 2003). The other group of people with visual impairment is a total loss of eyesight (Brockmeier, 1992), who are normally referred to as 'the blind'.

Visual impairment, also known as vision loss, is a decreased ability to see to the degree that causes problems not fixable by usual means such as glasses (Heller, Alberto, Forney & Schwartzman, 1996). Visual impairment also encompasses a broad spectrum of eye conditions (National Information Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities [NICHCY], 2001). Therefore, visual impairment is a complex phrase that includes a vast range of impairments related to vision (Heller et al., 1996). Visual impairment is often defined as a best-corrected visual acuity of worse than 20/40 or 20/60. It is the consequence of a functional loss of vision rather than an eye disorder (WHO, 1999). 'Blindness' is

used for complete or nearly complete vision loss. This condition may cause difficulties for people in performing normal daily activities such as driving, reading, socializing, and walking.

The phrase 'partially sighted', 'low vision', 'legally blind', and 'blind' are used in education to describe learners with visual impairments. They are defined by WHO (2014, p. 114) as follows:
• "Partially sighted" indicates some type of visual problem that has resulted in a need for special education,
• "Low vision" generally refers to a severe visual impairment, not necessarily limited to distance vision. Low vision applies to all individuals with sight who cannot read the newspaper at a normal viewing distance, even with eyeglasses or contact lenses. They use a combination of vision and other senses to learn, although they may require adaptations in lighting or the size of the print, and, sometimes, Braille,
• "Legally blind" indicates that a person has less than 20/200 vision in the better eye or a very limited field of vision (20 degrees at its widest point),
• Totally blind learners learn via Braille or other non-visual media.

In this study, visual impairments refer to both blindness and low vision. Visual impairment can be defined legally and educationally (Kleege, 2005, WHO, 2014). This study adopted the educational definition of visual impairment, which considers the ability or degree of a person to use their visual ability educationally. Educationally, a learner with low vision has some vision and can read enlarged print. Conversely, an educationally blind child has limited vision or total blindness and thus relies on reading and writing using the braille system or audio tapes (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010).

Moreover, the phrase 'visual impairment' can also be called total blindness and severe difficulty seeing things and events in the immediate environment. This definition includes partial blindness or low vision. Thus, the phrase 'learners with visual impairment' refers to the totally blind and partially blind who can only see minimally in their immediate environments. Learners with visual impairments "use their non-visual senses rather than their visual senses to learn" (Panda, 2008: 18).

Blindness

When defining blindness, it is important to have a good understanding of what it entails. However, as extant literature reveals, there are various conceptualisations of blindness. Thus, blindness is an amorphous concept with several meanings and is defined differently. Kleege's (2005, p. 180) understanding of blindness starts from the "premise that the average blind person knows more about what it means to be sighted than the average sighted person knows about what it means to be blind. The author, who is himself blind argues that "the language that we speak, the literature that we read, the architecture that we inhibit, were designed by and for the sighted, while we the blind are expected to lead isolated lives" (Kleege, 2005, p. 180) What the author means is that sight is a predominant sense in humans. The loss of sight is assumed to be tantamount to a loss of life or a loss of a fundamental quality that makes someone human (Kleege, 2005). According to WHO (2014), "blindness" refers to an eye condition which is "irreversible blindness" (no perception of light), as well as eye conditions that "have light perception but are still less than 3/60 in the better eye".

Visual impairment is also an umbrella term to define vision loss that hinders one's ability to function and can range from low vision with varying degrees of clarity to no vision (Hardman, 2005; Heller et al., 1996; WHO, 1999). Visual impairment can further be defined as a loss of vision that, even with correction, negatively affects a learner's educational performance (Heller et al., 1996). According to Panda (2008, pp. 117-118), visual impairment is "total blindness and severe difficulty to see things and events in the immediate environment they are in, even with the help of specialized devices". Learners with visual impairment use their non-visual senses rather than their senses to learn. They have a good sense of feeling (Kleege, 2005).

It is important to bear in mind that, just as every child is unique, their visual impairment and its effect on their functioning. Factors such as the onset of vision loss, different intellectual abilities, developmental rates, social competencies, and personalities influence a child's performance with visual impairment (Papadaki & Tzvetkova-Arsova, 2013). Therefore, measures utilised to maximise information and learning must incorporate all factors (Foley & Ferri, 2012; Farrell, 2006).

In India, the broad definition of visual impairment as adopted in the Persons with Disabilities Act (Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act 1995) and under the National Program of Control of Blindness (NPCB) is given as blindness. This is referred to as a condition where a person suffers from total absence of sight and with his/her visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 or 20/200 (Snellen chart) in the better eye even with correction lenses or limitation of the field of vision subtending an angle of 20 degrees or worse. Low vision, according to the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995), is any person with low vision, meaning a person with impairment of visual functions even after treatment or standard refractive correction but who uses it or can use vision for the planning or execution of tasks with an appropriate assistive device. According to Farrell (2006, p. 13), blind learners are those who have lost their sight to the extent that they "depend mainly on tactile methods of learning". At the same time, visually impaired pupils are "children whose learning and teaching mainly involve methods relying on insights". Findings reveal that blind children and visually impaired children have been taught in the same educational institutions (Taylor, 2000). Many researchers often mention both groups of children together (WHO, 1999, Papadaki & Tzvetkova-Arsova, 2013). The last of these two expressions are used by visually impaired and blind people themselves (Dale, 2010; Higgins & Ballard, 1999). Vehmas, Kristiansen, and Shakespeare (2009, p. 40) argue that "it has been evident that there are good reasons for giving great weight to the opinion of disabled people themselves about definitional matters." The phrases partially sighted, low vision, legally blind, and the term blind are not used interchangeably in this study. Instead, learners with these disabilities are referred to as visually impaired learners because being visually impaired is a socially accepted way of addressing persons with visual disabilities. Some studies mentioned that people with residual vision would like to register themselves as 'visually impaired' (Dale, 2010; Owens, 2018). They feel "uncomfortable" being called 'blind' because the term 'blind' cannot reveal their eye condition and does not represent their identity.

On the other hand, people who "have no sight at all" (World Blind Union Office [WBU], 2003, p. 2) and "no light perception" (WHO, 2004) prefer to be called "blind people" or "the blind". Higgins and Ballard (1999) and Omvig (2009) argued that as these terms can better present their identity as "people who cannot see" (Omvig, 2009), while, according to Kleege (2017), blindness can be separated from the self as a condition that can be solved. Kleege (2017, p. 4), "presupposes that blindness is somehow outside oneself".

WHO (1999), defines low vision as "[an] impairment of visual functioning even after treatment and standard refractive correction and [where a person] has a visual acuity of less than 6/18 for light perception from the point of fixation, but who uses it, or is potentially able to use vision for the planning and/or execution of a task?" Article 1 of the UN Convention (2014) indicates that persons with disabilities are people "who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments" and these impairments might cause different types of barriers, which hinder them from fully and effectively participating in society as equal as others. In the light of this statement, blind people are people with disabilities.

Unpacking the concept of Inclusive Education

Before any attempt to review relevant literature for the present study considering that the focus of this study is to explore the experiences of visually impaired learners in an inclusive mainstream school in Lesotho, providing a brief history of inclusive education across the world can give enough insight into the experiences of visually impaired learners,

and to manage and implement a good inclusive education environment. In keeping with the above, this section presents a traditional theoretical outline of the fundamental elements of implementing inclusive education and reviews literature pertinent to the implementation. It is subdivided into three sections. The first section explores the historical overview of inclusive education, while the second focuses on conceptualising inclusive education and inclusive education practices. Lastly, the third section discusses different factors that affect the implementation of inclusive education globally.

Historical overview of inclusive education

Generally, "inclusive education" refers to the admission of all learners to mainstream schools. According to UNESCO (2005, p. 12), inclusion is "a dynamic approach to responding to pupil diversity and seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning." In addition to this definition, the UNESCO (2005, p. 1) defines inclusive education as follows:

"Inclusive education is concerned with removing all barriers to learning and the participation of all learners vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation. It is a strategic approach designed to facilitate learning success for all children. It addresses common goals of decreasing and overcoming all exclusions from human rights to education, at least at the elementary level, and enhancing access, participation, and learning success in quality basic education for all".

Equally important, Göransson and Nilholm (2014, p. 269) defined "inclusion as the placement of pupils with disabilities in mainstream classrooms". It is critical to highlight that inclusion is much broader as it not only invites learners with disabilities into mainstream classrooms but also provides a favourable and normalized learning environment for learners who cannot attend school worldwide (Forlin, 2004). From this perspective, inclusive schools are all schools that provide general subjects without discrimination to complete learners' education, including those with special needs.

Development of inclusive education

The greatest challenge experienced by individuals with disabilities in most societies worldwide is exclusion and discrimination from participation in their communities' economic, social, political, and cultural life (UNESCO, 2005a). Inclusive education is a movement that seeks to challenge exclusionary policies and practices. It can be regarded as a struggle against violating human rights and unfair discrimination against persons with disabilities. It ensures that justice for disabled people prevails in communities and societies for disabled people. Most researchers agree that inclusive education has its origins in the human rights pronounced in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (UNESCO, 2005b), which states that:

"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary Education shall be compulsory. Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups. It shall further the activities of the United Nations for maintaining peace" (UNESCO, 2005b).

Inclusive education has been advocated since the United Nations Declaration of 1948 and has been quoted in most UN declarations and conventions. The following declaration extracts can serve as evidence of the advocacy referred to above:

• The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights ensures all children have the right to free and compulsory elementary education.

• The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ensures the right to receive an education without discrimination.

• The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien Declaration) set the Education for All (EFA) goal.

• The 1993 UN Standard Rule on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which not only affirms the equal rights of all children, youth, and adults with disabilities to education but also states that education should be provided in "integrated school settings" as

well as in the "general school setting."
 • The 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education requires schools to accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions.
 • The 2000 World Education Forum Framework for Action, Dakar, EFA, and Millennium Development Goals stipulate that all children have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education by 2015.
 • The 2001 EFA Flagship on the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion. 21 combats discrimination and removes structural barriers to learning and participation.
 • The 2005 UN Disability Convention promotes the rights of persons with disabilities and mainstreams disability in development (UNESCO, 2005, pp. 13-14).

It is estimated that more than 300 participants, representing 92 governments and 25 international organisations, met in Salamanca in 1994 under the auspices of UNESCO and the Spanish Government to further the objectives of Education for All (Enabling Education Network [EENET], 2004; Peters, 2004; UNESCO, 2005; Stofile, 2009). The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy, and Practice in Special Needs Education was drawn together with the Draft Framework for Action (Peters, 2004; UNESCO, 1994; UNESCO, 2005). The statement proclaims the following:
 • Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be allowed to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
 Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs,
 • Educational systems should be designed, and educational programmes implemented, which account for the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
 Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools, which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs,
 • Regular schools adapting this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating the discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide effective education to most children, and improve efficiency and, ultimately, the cost-effective of the entire educational programme (UNESCO, 1999).

Most countries have adopted the philosophy of inclusive education, and they are committed to its implementation. The question is whether these countries implement and interpret inclusive education similarly. Having stated and discussed the origin of inclusive education in this section, the following section explores how the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Inclusive Education is implemented.

Experiences of people with disabilities

Unfair treatment was seen through the distribution of physical and social capital that was reinforced by the confinement of people with disabilities to institutions such as "special schools" (Barnes, 2012). Learners with disabilities experienced "social death" where their human rights were denied and subjected to oppressive professional care practices (Barnes, 1990). In this light, Rieser (2006, p. 15) rightfully expressed that "the medical models' view of us creates a cycle of dependency and exclusion which is difficult to break". Professionals played a major role in steering the lives of disabled people, denying them control over their destiny. Their voices were faint and unheard as they inevitably became the "invisible objects of charity" (Barnes, 2012). However, the power rested on medical professionals and non-disabled people who met the standard of normality and those who were appreciated in this monopolised political and social capital to which the biologically disabled had no access (Rieser, 2006).

The disabled were left with nothing but an identity of abnormality. They were voiceless and dependent on medical professionals. We can assume that these disabled people felt inferior to their counterparts and those competent, adequate, superior professionals. Disabled people may therefore have internalised the negative views of others, resulting in a "low-esteem and a warped sense of worth" (Rieser, 2006, p. 3).

The unfair treatment practiced by the medical model seemed to be justified and unquestionable, yet it created discriminatory grounds for people with disabilities. Thus, if the disability is construed as emerging from biological deficits, the contextual grounds in which it is rooted and created are simply brushed over. The unfair distribution of power, privilege, and status remains unexamined as the social and economic marginalisation of people with disabilities goes unnoticed (Swartz & Watermeyer, 2006). The medical model's focus is then sharply and unshakingly turned to care and cure rather than on the restructuring of society. In this way, discrimination can continue without the slightest ripple of disturbance so long it is kept under the cloak of biological cause and effects. Similarly, learners with visual impairment are still marked by examples of unexamined careless discrimination. Based on the above, we found it necessary to give learners with visual impairment a chance to express how they experienced their education in a mainstream education school and generate data that explain their practices and how they find physical and emotional content acting as barriers to their education.

III.   OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The present research explores the daily experiences of visually impaired learners in an inclusive school in Lesotho.

IV.   METHODS

Research approach and design

This study adopted a qualitative approach within an interpretivist paradigm's ambit. The interpretivist paradigm values an individual's ability to construct meaning (Mack, 2010). Interpretivists are interested in how individuals construct their worlds and the meanings of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). The advantage of this approach is that it emphasizes the social context and culture in which participants' experiences occur (Hartas, 2010). The study was embedded in an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) design because of IPA's appropriateness in presenting the accounts of lived experiences of study participants. Developed by Smith in 1996, IPA has its origins in three approaches, which are phenomenology, hermeneutics (interpretation), and ideography (Smith, 2011; Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009).

Participants and setting

The population of this study was drawn from visually impaired mainstream learners selected from a high school in Lesotho. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit and select participants who were visually impaired learners. This technique was suitable for this study since it allows for a predefined group of individuals to be selected to participate (Merriam, 2009). Thirty participants constituted the research sample. Their ages ranged between 12 and 20 years old, from form A to E. Participants were chosen because they were learners in the selected inclusive high school. They had different visual problems, therefore, appropriate for the study. All participants originated from Lesotho and were fluent in Sesotho as their home language. The research site was selected because it was the first institution to cater to the needs of visually impaired learners in Lesotho. It is the only high school with resources for learners with visual impairment in the country.

Data collection methods

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews and unstructured focus group interviews. Using multiple data sources improved the trustworthiness of the data collected through triangulation (Bell, 2005). All the interviews were about 40-45 minutes, and discussions were related to the experiences of visually impaired learners in the mainstream school and were tape-recorded with participants' permission.

Data analysis

The study adopted Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

because it helps discover and describe the meaning or essence of participants' lived experiences or knowledge as it appears to consciousness (Hay & Sigh, 2012). IPA is a strategy that examines participants' narratives or accounts of their experiences in their unique contexts (Smith, 2011). While using IPA, Matsie (2022) transcribed data verbatim, with illustrations of "pauses, mishearings, apparent mistakes, and even speech dynamics" to enable the analysis to capture the key messages or themes from the data (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p. 217). To analyse the data, we followed the following steps. Firstly, researchers started by reading through all the interview responses to identify common themes, and then we searched for words and phrases that were repeated in the partipants' responses. This helped us to condense the words or sentences in each transcript. We re-read each transcript and listened to the recorded interviews again and again for more clarity. All the thoughts and remarks made by the participants were jotted down concurrently along the margins. After reading the transcripts for the third time, researchers could identify some themes and categorisations from the participants' responses. This step enabled us to familiarise ourselves with the content of the interviews and recognise the possible patterns and connections within the text.

Moreover, reading the same text several times increases the chances of the participant becoming the centre and focus of the analysis (Smith et al., 2009). At this stage, the emerging patterns (themes) emphasized convergence and divergence, on the one hand, and commonalities and nuances, first for single cases and then across for multiple cases. Reading the tests repeatedly helped to subdue our voices and allow the participants to be heard. Through this process, we slowly understood the lived world of each participant. Even though qualitative data analysis starts during the interview process, data gathering and processing of information were prepared concurrently. Therefore, researchers replayed the audio-recorded interviews after showing how individual participants responded to the questions and then decided on how the emerging data would influence the following interview questions. Later, researchers used a chart to illustrate the process. The chart was divided into two sections. The left side of the chart was for capturing the exact words, which were interesting and significant to the study, while the right side of the chart was used to note the themes created from the descriptive coding section. Researchers highlighted descriptive words and passages as described by Smith et al. (2009), to identify emergent themes. Through descriptive coding, we began to identify the words and phrases that frequently appeared in the text or those considered necessary by the participants because interpretative coding is a critical aspect when processing qualitative data.

Procedure

We obtained a list of learners with visual impairment from the head of the disability unit. After that, we met the prospective participants, and introductions were conducted, including a note on the purpose of the study, following which an invitation for voluntary participation was extended to prospective participants. Participants were drawn from all the classes (forms A-E). They all had visual impairments; that is, they were either totally blind or partially blind learners who, in our estimation, were likely to provide nuanced data.

Ethical considerations

Extreme care was taken during the compilation of interview questions so that they did not infringe on the entrenched human rights of the participants, in particular, the rights of the learners. The study was triangulated by using two data collection methods to ensure trustworthiness. The parents of the 30 learners granted parental consent while the relevant educational authorities provided gatekeeper permission. Adult consent did not replace the individual's consent. Hence, voluntary participation was emphasized. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Learners were free to quit participation if they did not feel comfortable or felt threatened in any way.

V. RESULTS

Two broad themes emerged from the data analysis. These focused on rewarding and detrimental experiences. The social interaction, enjoyment of companionship, appreciation, and being valued by the school management, positive relationship with their teachers, sense of belonging to the school, access and participation in extramural activities, and access to educational and psychological support could be considered as rewarding experiences that visually impaired learners experienced at the high school in question. At the same time, the detrimental experiences consisted of symbolic, physical, and psychological violence.

Rewarding experiences
Social interaction

This study revealed that most participants interacted well with their teachers and peers at school. The interactions included mainly the participants' exchange on competition, conflict, cooperation, and accommodation. Participants revealed that their interactions led to recognition, social connectedness, and support.

"We socialize very well with some of our teachers" (Participant 10).

"Socializing with our teachers and peers improves our communication skills" (Participant 18).

Findings indicated that some partially sighted participants interacted with their sighted peers during extramural activities.

Enjoyment of companionship

Participants expressed enjoyment of the companionship they shared with their sighted peers.

"Even the visually impaired participate in sports activities like football and athletics" (Participant 4).

"The deputy principal goes to the playgrounds with both the partially sighted and sighted boys to play football" (Participant 2).

Participants further reported that their social interactions fostered the development of social circles, friendships, and interpersonal relationship skills needed for future success and inclusion in their communities.

"Support team teachers do not discriminate against us" (Participant 16).

"The school has a sandy soccer playground, and we play football; the sighted boys cover our faces with cloths on the eyes when we play together. There are no separate spots playing fields and courts for the learners with visual impairments" (Participant 3).

Appreciation and being valued by the school management

Participants indicated that the deputy principal would sometimes join them at the playgrounds. They appreciated and valued the efforts made by the deputy principal. Participants expressed their appreciation and sense of being valued. Furthermore, they considered the social activities therapeutic, balancing and helping the school community develop mutual respect.

"Teachers try to organise sports for us, and they want us to socialize with other learners" (Participant 7).

Positive relationship with their teachers

Participants reported good relations with their teachers because they could share their ideas and thoughts.

"We participate in classroom debates" (Participant 3).

"The debates improved our relationship with our teachers and sighted peers" (Participant 8).

Sense of belonging to the school

The participants reported that they experienced a sense of belonging to their school and acceptance by their teachers. They were allowed to participate in contact sports with their peers; this made them feel accepted, belonging, and happy. This is how one of the participants responded:

"We socialize very well with some of our teachers" (Participant 10).

"The deputy principal goes to the playgrounds with both the partially sighted and sighted boys to play football" (Participant 2).

Acceptance by their teachers

The participants reported that their teachers had accepted them.

"Our teachers do support us" (Participant 13).

"Our teachers give us more time to do our assignments, especially if we must do a lot of reading before writing" (Participant 7).

"During exams, our teachers give us extra time to finish our work" (Participant 9).

Access to and participation in extramural activities

The participants indicated that the school management team ensures that the school has sports codes to accommodate diversity. The availability of sports codes enables all learners, including those with visual impairment, to participate effectively in sports activities. Some participants reported that their teachers encouraged them to participate in outdoor sports and extramural activities to refresh their minds from academic pressure and socialise with the sighted learners. Generally, participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunities afforded by the school. They specifically valued that the teacher recognised them, believed in them, and increased their access to sports activities. Their involvement in these activities gave them freedom of choice and opportunities to explore and pursue their sports careers. They reported that their teachers elected them to participate in the African Olympic Games, such as football and athletics.

"I have joined the Africa Olympic Games because of them (teachers), and I am a member because of their support. It is only this year when I did not go because their timetable clashed with my June exams" (Participant 3).

Access to educational support

Participants mentioned that the support they received from some of their teachers consisted of providing extensions to assignment deadlines, especially in cases where extensive reading was required when preparing for the assignments. Furthermore, participants were given extra time during such assessments as tests and examinations. Participants explained that visual-impaired learners were given double the time during the examinations. They were also given time for a break to allow them to complete their examinations.

"During exam times, our teachers gave us extra time to finish our work" (Participant 9).

In addition, the visually impaired learners in the inclusive school participating in this study reported that some of their teachers explained the diagrams to them, especially in geography, where there were many diagrams to conceptualise. They revealed that teachers willingly provided learners with visual impairment with diagrams in Braille. These educational diagrams assisted them in exploring the subject in-depth.

"Subject teachers explained the diagrams clearly, particularly in Geography, where there are drawings" (Participant 15).

The support extended to learners with visual impairment helped them reinforce their intellectual capacities at school, construct knowledge, and make decisions on educational issues. The learners also indicated that their teachers felt valued and appreciated. In keeping with the above, they reported that their inclusion in the mainstream classrooms allowed them to learn and exchange ideas with their sighted peers. They acknowledged and valued the assistance that they received from their subject teachers. They indicated that their subject teachers' support testifies that they were considered and included in the teaching strategies. Therefore, they reported that the teachers' considerations made them feel included and accepted.

Access to psychosocial support

The results revealed that some participants received psychosocial support from their teachers. Counselling units were available on the school's premises where the diverse needs of the learners were addressed. The learners were given emotional and psychosocial support services ranging from physical, psychological, medical, nutritional, and social support. They explained that the units supported those learners whose psychosocial needs would have been affected by negative academic progress. Counselling services were provided on request and when deemed necessary. The counselling services and good relationships that learners with visual impairment had with the teacher-counsellors helped them to improve their participation in classroom activities, their self-esteem, and their access to education, to promote their well-being and social growth, and to improve their behaviour. The learners considered the counselling services credible, believable, and persuasive enough to support them. They reported that the counselling services helped them to gain knowledge and skill to respond to the various challenges they experienced at the school.

"Counselling services are provided. They counsel us on request and when there is a need to do so" (Participant 11).

"On my part, I am satisfied with the role played by the school counseling unit" (Participant 11).

Detrimental experiences

Unequal opportunities

The results showed that most visually impaired learners were denied access to certain curriculum content. The participants reported that visually impaired learners were denied access to such subjects as Biology, Physics, and Geography at the Junior Certificate Level (secondary level). Yet, these subjects are required globally. Participants reported that the lack of access to the above subjects influenced their career choices negatively. They felt they were denied the opportunity to study scientific subjects, which they believed they needed. The participants in the study indicated that they received negative attitudes from some of their teachers.

"Teachers always tell us that we cannot pass their subjects" (Participant 20).

"Some of our teachers tell us we are stupid and not educable" (Participant 3).

Negative comments such as the above evoked undesirable feelings towards teachers. Furthermore, the learner participants indicated they were disadvantaged by being denied access to science subjects their peers were studying. They felt rejected and not valued as learners. During the interviews, participants reported that the subject teachers did not have compassion for learners with visual impairment.

Inadequate assistive technology

The results indicated that most of the participants in the study reported that they did not get access to assistive technology. They believed that the lack of assistive devices negatively affected their studies because often, their work was not transcribed into Braille in time; as a result, they were always behind their sighted peers. They further indicated that the existing assistive devices posed enormous challenges because there were very few, and some were very old and not user-friendly.

"Management does not have empathy, and there are no machines for us to use. The braille machines are old and inadequate, I must run to the disability unit to get a braille machine on time" (Participant 14).

"Sometimes we cannot submit our work on time because our braille machines will be broken, and they take time to be fixed by the management. Hence, we sometimes lag our peers regarding submissions" (Participant 3).

Some participants indicated that during examination times, they had to wake up early and run to the disability unit to be the first to get a braille machine. Participants further indicated that it was frustrating and tiresome because the machines were slow and not easy to use.

"I am unhappy because I do not get the chance to use the braille machine effectively; they are very slow" (Participant 15).

"The computers are not working at all; those there are very old and not easy to use" (Participant 5).

Consequently, participants felt overwhelmed by declining participation in class activities and lost their sense of self. This further led to frustrations.

Most visually impaired learners indicated that management had no passion for them. They reported that some of their teachers perceived them as incapable of coping academically, making them feel unhappy and hopeless. They further reported that they were tempted to abandon their studies due to the bad conditions related to assistive technologies. However, their values, norms, and beliefs compelled them to persevere. This indicates that they were learning in extremely difficult conditions, negatively affecting their academic progress. Participants mentioned that some of the teachers did not support them even when they were

going through unpleasant experiences. Some of them indicated that the school management and the teachers deliberately ignored them. They expressed their views, indicating that psychologically and academically, they felt excluded from the school community. Because of the lack of access to assistive technology as a detrimental experience, the visually impaired learners revealed that they had to work under pressure to submit their assignments to meet their continuous assessment requirements.

Inadequate academic support

The data revealed that some participants did not get adequate support from the Support Team Teachers. They highlighted that the Ministry of Education hired the Support Team Teachers to assist them academically. However, the support is not effective. Learners with visual impairment reported that the STT seemed to be more interested in working with their sighted counterparts. Participants reported that the STTs took a very long time to mark their work and give them proper feedback. The support was not always available when they needed it. In addition, the participants reported that the STTs used teaching methods that were not inclusive. The visually impaired learners were forced to take the teachers' written or verbal presentations from the board. They were not provided with information on braille. The teachers preferred to use face-to-face teaching methods, which were not accommodative of the visually impaired learners. The learners mentioned that they could not access the notes unless their peers assisted them. Consequently, they did not get any notes from their teachers, which made them feel ignored and discriminated against.

"At this school, we do not have notes on large print, we struggle very much" (Participant 6).

"We, the partially sighted, often do not copy notes or questions from the board because these are written using a very small font, which is not visible at all" (Participant 11).

The participants reported that teachers were not clearly explaining the drawings on the board for the learners to visualise them. They also reported that the teaching strategies utilised by their teachers to impart knowledge were inappropriate for learners with visual impairment. Therefore, they reported that they felt disliked and not accepted by the academic system. This belief from the participants further revealed that they were negatively affected by the teachers' lack of adequate support for visually impaired learners, coupled with poor interaction with other learners. They felt isolated within the school community. This leads to feelings of frustration, depression, and neglect. The participants reported that the teachers did not care about their success compared to what they did for their sighted peers. As a result of this treatment and consideration, some participants indicated that they preferred to be on their own to avoid discussing their depressing situation with the sighted learners.

"They do not explain drawings to us. In class, they do not care if we pass their subjects; they are often concerned about the sighted learners; we are just there sitting and doing nothing during experiments" (Participant 11).

Inappropriate and inadequate counselling services

The results showed that the counseling units did not provide appropriate counseling services. The services did not address the diverse needs of learners with visual impairments. The main challenge they reported was the shortage of teacher-counsellors in the school. With a limited number of teacher-counselors, each had many learners to counsel. Participants reported that teachers could not provide counseling services efficiently and effectively. In reaction, most visually impaired learners complained that they did not get the counseling services they needed, although the counseling units were operating within the school campus. They reported that the rooms used for counselling were often not made available, and they were not easy to use as they were mostly used as classrooms. Some visually impaired learners felt rejected. They lacked the necessary support and had unpleasant experiences with the teacher-counselors.

"Rooms for counselling sessions were always not free, and we must wait all the time. It is very frustrating" (Participant 19).

VI.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that the visually impaired learners selected in an inclusive school had positive and negative experiences. Nevertheless, some participants pointed out that they were not only included in the inclusive school but were also accommodated and treated with dignity by their teachers and peers. Most learners who participated in the study indicated that although they were admitted to an "inclusive" school, they were maginalised and denied access to social and educational opportunities. The study's findings reveal that as much as learners were included within the school system, their needs were not fully considered as participants with visual impairments. On a broader level, the findings show an example of how people with disabilities are excluded within our school systems, which is contrary to the Salamanca Statement, which committed signatories to ensure that learners with disabilities have access to mainstream schools and are accommodated within a child-centered approach that addresses their needs (UNESCO, 1994). However, some scholars claim that inclusive education reduces discrimination within learning institutions (Walton, 2018; Hasson, Adhabi, & WrightJones, 2017). Based on the findings, if visually impaired learners are denied access to educational opportunities at this school, can their admission still be considered for inclusion? As revealed by literature, the response is "no". Therefore, discrimination against learners with disabilities is not peculiar to Lesotho. It is important to consider that it appears that school authorities are responsible for reducing the prevailing rate of discrimination to the minimum by educating "normal" learners and their educators. What does inclusion mean to the school? Does the school have the capacity to include learners with visual impairments?

Based on the findings, we recommend that services from the disability unit must be managed better: information about prospective students with disabilities must be sought out properly, support needs to be determined, and the management team of the school should commission services planned by a task team before the beginning of an academic year. Visually impaired learners should have libraries with enough space, necessary facilities, and reference materials- both Braille and electronic services to accommodate their needs.

Secondly, it is recommended that the learners' needs be considered when setting the timetable to accommodate their differences. The management must provide mobility training at no cost for disabled learners. During parents' meetings, the rights of disabled learners should be advocated. We recommend that there should be improved communication between management and staff about the school's physical environmental barriers, such as potholes and the lack of running water, and maybe some disadvantages to learners with disabilities.

Thirdly, teachers should share their notes and study materials in alternative formats to accommodate learners with visual impairment that experience barriers following lessons or taking notes.

Fourthly, schools should expand sports codes to include games accessible to learners with visual impairment. Learners with visual impairment should compete against learners from other inclusive schools. Again, learners should be allowed to advocate for their rights and share their experiences of the barriers they encounter at the inclusive school. The visually impaired learners should challenge the existing practices at the inclusive school as unequal and biased; the school environment will remain indifferent. Learners with visual impairment should have libraries with enough space, necessary facilities, reference materials Braille, and electronic services. Education in the 21st century has incorporated most technological services that facilitate teaching and learning. Investment in technology improves teaching equipment so that smart boards will help learners with visual impairments and transform the learning context of the entire school setting.

The study intended to explore the daily experiences of visually impaired learners in a mainstream inclusive school in Lesotho. From the findings,

it can be deduced that inclusion is a strategy influenced by different issues worldwide. Success is dependent on the collaboration of different stakeholders. The findings revealed that visually impaired learners experienced both positive and negative experiences. Some participants reported being included in mainstream schools and treated with dignity by some teachers and peers. However, some of the participants revealed that despite being admitted into the inclusive school, they were marginalised and denied access to social and educational opportunities as visually impaired learners. They reveal that their outcomes are uncertain. Findings further show that although learners with visual impairment are tolerated, their needs are not addressed satisfactorily. The findings in this study are contrary to the Salamanca Statement, which committed signatories to ensure that learners with disabilities have access to mainstream schools and are accommodated within a child-centered approach that caters to their needs (UNESCO, 1994).

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