

Giving Voice to the Voiceless: A Case Study of Learners with Impairments in Lesotho Schools

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KEYWORDS Inclusive Education. Challenges. Lesotho. Impaired Learners. Teachers' Role

ABSTRACT Numerous studies show that learners with impairments are generally disadvantaged in their relationships with fellow learners – and some teachers – in mainstream classrooms. In Lesotho, this situation seems, arguably, to be getting worse. For this reason, the researchers chose to explore some of the difficulties that these learners have to deal with, with the aim of suggesting possible intervention measures that teachers could apply to ensure the meaningful inclusion of the learners concerned. An observation and in-depth documentary search was the basis of the data used in the compilation of the structured questionnaire – which was used to collect data from 25 conveniently sampled, impaired learners in two districts of Lesotho: Maseru and Berea. Findings show that inconsiderate and negative attitudes from fellow learners and some teachers – as well as inappropriate infrastructure – are the two dominant issues that impact negatively on impaired learners. The reconfiguration of classrooms and new teacher training approaches require not only a policy overhaul, but also a change of attitude and deliberate parental involvement, in order to remedy this situation.

INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge, that in the past, learners with physical disabilities were excluded and sometimes rejected by their own communities (Barnes 1992; Macmillan and Reschly 1998). Education became critical to change this mindset and the perceptions held about impairments. Learners are still marginalised; they are seen and not heard. The right to education is a basic need for every child. However, many children are not enjoying this basic human right – especially learners with some form of impairment, and especially in Lesotho (Omokhodion 1989; Fuller 1991; Sebatane et al. 1992; Ackers and Hardman 2001). Building on the previous research, Moloji et al. (2008) identify pedagogy in Lesotho that is restrictive of the learning of students and particularly unhelpful for 'slow learners'.

Very often, these learners are faced with unique challenges that go beyond the control of an ordinary teacher (Fisher 2011; Vanderelden and Siegel 1999). According to Nkoane (2006), physically impaired learners face chal-

lenges such as oppression, exclusion and marginalisation; they are seen only as objects of pity and their voices are simply not heard. Furthermore, there are not enough support services for learners with physical impairments (NEPI Report 1992). Hay (2003) adds that education support service professionals are battling to come up with the relevant transformation strategies and have also not made the transition to supporting learners with impairments. Educational support services should change their philosophy and service delivery – in order to cater for the inclusion of physically and mentally impaired learners (Hay 2003). It is in fact necessary to address appropriate ways or strategies for these learners with physical disabilities and mental impairments in educational settings.

All children in Lesotho have the right to an inclusive education. However, there are many barriers to the realisation of this right in the lived experience of children and families there. Current efforts towards upholding the rights of all children are impeded by a lack of understanding of inclusive education – and misuse of the term/concept. Additional barriers include negative and discriminatory attitudes and practices, lack of support to facilitate inclusive education, and inadequate educational and professional development for teachers and other professionals (Cologon 2014).

It is true that the Department of Education has attempted to shift away from the medical

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model to the social model – in which impaired learners are supported by the community and the government (UNICEF 2010). This strategy has not been fulfilled, because learners who are identified do not get support from professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and educational nurses. There are also constraints with regard to the visitation of schools with impaired learners by educational professionals (Sbongile 2009). Ntaote (2003) contends that preliminary investigations reveal that there are many learners with physical and mental impairments in the primary schools of the Berea district of Lesotho. These include neurological and general health conditions. Ntaote (2003) further emphasises that there is no evidence of a minimal systematic investigation into what the educational implications of such disabilities are in the primary schools of the Berea district of Lesotho.

As stated previously, learners with physical and mental impairments are often faced with unique challenges that go beyond the control of an ordinary teacher. According to Kauffman and Hallahan (2005), learners with impairments often have poor academic performance. Factors such as frequent absenteeism and medical attention may contribute to under-achievement. It is our contention in this paper, that given this background – some teachers expect less from these learners.

Engelbrecht and Green (2005) maintain that it is important to explore the various teaching strategies which can be useful in accommodating learners with impairments. It is, for this reason that the researchers decided to explore this issue further – to determine the challenges faced by impaired learners in Lesotho, and over and above ensuring infrastructure development and parental involvement, to establish what possible teaching strategies are available to remedy the challenges already discussed.

Evolution of Inclusive Education in Lesotho

Inclusive education can be a difficult concept to define (Armstrong et al. 2011). Indeed, it is arguably one of the most contested educational terms (Graham and Slee 2008). A lack of understanding about what ‘inclusive education’ means, is a barrier to inclusion in and of itself (Baglieri et al. 2011). According to Cologon (2010), definitions of inclusive education are rapidly changing (Petriwskyj 2010). However, a trou-

bling ambiguity is that the term ‘inclusive education’ is often used to describe only placement in a mainstream classroom – rather than a child’s full participation in all aspects of the educational setting (Beckett 2009; Berlach and Chambers 2011; Curcic 2009; Fisher 2012; Lalvani 2013; Vakil et al. 2009). However, being physically present in a mainstream setting does not automatically result in inclusion (de Boer et al. 2011; McLesky and Waldron 2007). Cologon (2014) posits that inclusion needs to be properly understood; inclusive education requires recognising the right of every child (without exception) to be included, and also adapting the environment and teaching approaches in order to ensure the valued participation of all children (Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Biklen 2000; Cologon 2010, 2013).

According to Mariga and Phachaka (1996), before the 1980s Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), churches and individuals were responsible for the special provision of education for learners with impairments in Lesotho. It was in this period – between 1983 and 1992 – when parents, impaired learners and their organisations began to seek national education provision for impaired learners. Concepts such as individual dignity were spreading, and gaining support and influence worldwide – with Lesotho also being influenced by this trend. It became an area of focus in which vulnerable and marginalised learners needed to participate in a new educational dispensation – as well as needing to be emancipated in order to promote their own development.

A study of structures and guidelines on Special Education in Lesotho was undertaken in 1987, which initiated the development of a special education programme. It was between 1987 and 1988 that a special education policy included ministries’ priorities, deliberations and programmes. This policy began to be an operational plan in 1990. However, since then – according to the Ministry of Education and Training (1990) – Lesotho established a special education unit to implement inclusive education from 1989 to 1990. The establishment of the Special Education Unit was intended to support the attainment of education for all. To fully support all learners, the Ministry of Education (1990) was developed with the purpose of promoting the integration or inclusion of all learners in the regular school system, in order to enable them to acquire appropriate skills and education (Mariga and Phachaka 1996).

In order to support Special Education learners in the mainstream, the Special Education Unit – with other NGOs – sensitised the public to the educability of Learners with Special Education Needs. Additionally, the Ministry of Education and Training embarked on a project of community-based rehabilitation. The purpose of this was to equalise opportunities and to facilitate the social inclusion of all learners with impairments. The project's objective was to promote inclusive education, which is one of the issues that is in line with the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Learner (1989), which states that all learners should not be discriminated against.

Reflection on Special Education

In a 1995 review of the current situation in special needs education in Lesotho, UNESCO states that there are three targets in the special education policy:

- ♦ inclusion of special education in regular teacher training;
- ♦ development of teacher training; and
- ♦ inclusion of learners with special education needs into regular schools, at all levels.

Special education is administered through the Special Education Unit within the central inspectorate. Despite the establishment of this Unit, in Lesotho there is still neither the registration nor the categorisation of young people with special education needs – and Special Education functions are generally discharged by other organisations such as NGOs or churches. The involvement of parents is limited because of the novelty of the programme. Gibson and Blandford (2005) indicate that the partnership with parents plays a key role in promoting a culture of cooperation between the school, parents/guardian, and educators – and that they should establish effective support with one another. According to the White Paper 6 (RSA 2001), the school should receive educational support such as material resources and the professional development of staff members. They need to receive special attention from the district support teams, so that they can become beacons of hope in our evolving inclusive education system. These are valuable lessons that the Lesotho education authorities should take note of.

Some of the primary schools should be selected for conversion into full, inclusive service

schools. The purpose is to mobilise community and parent participation so that all social partnerships and role players can develop these schools. The existing schools for the physically and/or mentally impaired learners provide a specific type of education – thereby creating an impaired sub-culture. Most of the impaired learners are grouped together and educated in residential schools. There are no resource centres in Lesotho which serve the needs of these learners and special equipment for helping learners with impairments is lacking. There are fewer special facilities and special schools are few and scattered, or situated far from impaired learners' homes. None of these facilities seem to be in rural areas where almost 85 percent of the population lives. Furthermore, most of the impaired learners live in rural areas and do not attend school because their parents are ignorant, over-protective, and negligent – or refuse to send them to school to be educated. As a result, these impaired children are vulnerable to illiteracy (Ministry of Education 1990).

Impediments to Effective Inclusion According to Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)

There are many factors contributing to the lack of inclusivity or the limited accommodation of learners with physical and/or mental impairments in mainstream schools in Lesotho. According to the Ministry of Education (1990), most regular teachers are not adequately oriented to cater for the physical and/or mental impairments of learners in regular classrooms, and this leads to their rejection. There are also no support services to assist with the instructions given by regular teachers – and resource centres are not available to cater for special needs learners. Internationally, for example, the White Paper 6 (RSA 2001) in South Africa maintains that there should be support teams from districts to evaluate programmes, diagnose their effectiveness, and to suggest modifications. Moreover, there are no professionals to educate the increasing numbers of learners with some form of impairment, and there is little knowledge of how to handle special equipment to help these learners. There is also a lack of disability-oriented projects to help the large numbers of variously disabled learners. Furthermore, there are no personnel to disseminate information, and there is a lack of

awareness with regard to the importance of special education (Ministry of Education 1990).

Role of Teacher Education for Inclusion

Susan Hart and her colleagues (Hart et al. 2004) demonstrated that what teachers do in the present can create change ‘for the better’. However, lack of teacher education and support has been identified as a barrier to inclusive education. Teacher attitudes influence the implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom (Brown et al. 2013; Hehir 2002). Carlson et al. argue that “[t]eacher attitude is the means by which teachers are motivated to establish inclusive teaching practices when certain support systems are in place” (Carlson et al. 2012; Curcic 2009; Kasa-Hendrickson and Kluth 2005; Huang and Diamond 2009). Teacher education is directly related to teacher attitudes. Teachers who receive education about inclusion have been found to be more likely to have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disability. Given the importance of attitudes for inclusive education, educating all teachers to be inclusive teachers is an important goal.

Background to the Problem Statement

Lesotho is one of the developing countries in which learners with impairments are arguably not given the attention they deserve. UNICEF (2010) states that “education should be for all” and should be accessible and made available to every child. It is argued that the Ministry of Education should aspire to develop an inclusive education that caters for the needs of all learners – irrespective of their physical and mental impairments (UNICEF 2010). According to the Special Education Report (Mendis et al. 2009) there are only 19 mainstream schools in the Maseru district and 10 in the Berea district which have learners with both physical and mental impairments. These schools are located only in the central regions of these two districts. This report further indicates that most of these learners have not yet been identified in the outskirts of these districts.

Problem Statement and Main Aim

The underlying problem statement of this paper can thus be summarised as follows: learn-

ers with impairments in the Berea and Maseru districts of Lesotho are facing a myriad of challenges – particularly the negative attitudes of unimpaired learners and their teachers, and poorly constructed infrastructure facilities. All this considered, this paper intends to interrogate the challenges faced by impaired learners – but most importantly it aims to identify and suggest appropriate teaching strategies that can be used to accommodate these learners in mainstream schools in Lesotho. Inclusion of impaired learners can be achieved only if teachers understand the purpose of inclusive education as defined by Van Rooyen and De Beer (2007) – that inclusive education is an education system that ensures that all children learn and participate, regardless of their disabilities.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology is the theory of acquiring knowledge of the best ways, methods or procedures by which assembled data will provide the evidential basis for the construction of knowledge about whatever is being researched (Opie 2004).

Research Design

According to Coldwell and Herbst (2004) and McMillan (2008), the research design refers to the strategy or plan of carrying out a study. It is a detailed plan outlining how observations will be made and through it, the researcher describe how the participants will be involved, with a view to reaching conclusions about the research problem. In this paper an ethnographic and interpretive paradigm employing a qualitative research approach was adopted. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) state that in a qualitative study, the researcher formulates a theory by inductive reasoning; for example, by observing situations and attempting to support the theory by drawing and then testing the conclusion that follows logically from it. The researchers here generated the hypothesis and grounded their theory from the data collected during field work. In qualitative research, behaviour is fluid, dynamic, situational, social, contextual and personal. For practical reasons, such as time and costs, a convenience-sampling strategy was deemed appropriate to elicit responses from the targeted 25 learners from the two districts.

Population and Sample Size

The target population consisted of all learners with physical and mental impairments in the Berea and Maseru districts of Lesotho. Population refers to the group to which the researchers wish to apply the results. It is the abstract idea of a large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample – and to which results from the sample are generated (Bless and Higson-Smith 2000; Neuman 2006; Mertens 2010; Pali 2006). A total of 25 conveniently-sampled impaired learners from the two districts were the target sample from which the data were collected. Neuman (2006) defines a sample as a small set of cases a researcher selects from a large pool and which the researcher generalises to the population.

A structured interview with the sampled learners was conducted, using data gathered through observation (of challenges they are confronted with at their schools during the school week) – as the basis of questions. The interview questions covered issues such as perception of the treatment received from fellow learners and teachers; access to teaching and learning resources (for example, a chance to write on the board); and the suitability of the facilities to cater for their needs (that is, appropriateness of infrastructure). Interviews were used to affirm or negate some misconceptions about the impaired learners' conditions and ability, and to capture their own feelings and recommendations to the teachers and authorities.

Data Collection and Analysis

A structured questionnaire interview was used to collect data from 25 conveniently-sampled learners with some form of impairment. The questions were informed by data collected through an extensive documentary search, and from years of observations of the challenges faced by these learners within mainstream schools in Lesotho. The data collected were transcribed from the tape recorder and then analysed as text – in order to extract the meaning constructed by the participants. The data were then analysed using Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA) (Fairclough 1992). The TODA Technique involves looking at the written text to be analysed – for evidence of meanings to be gleaned (Matobako 2007). The analyses of documented materials involved breaking down responses into smaller meanings – chunks, so as

to interrogate and sift out the contradictory themes emerging from the responses and thereby offer alternatives to the researcher. When transcribing, consideration was given to how the respondents' feelings and meanings were communicated on paper (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

Ethical Considerations

Extreme care was taken with the compilation of questions, so that they did not infringe on socio-cultural practices and the entrenched human rights of the participants – especially the learners' rights. Permission was first sought and granted by the parents of the 25 learners, as well as from the relevant educational authorities prior to approaching all the participating primary school principals and administering the questionnaire. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, with voluntary participation being assured; learners were free to quit from participation, should they feel uncomfortable or threatened in any way.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper presents the results as follows: Section A: biographical data, and Section B: factual and attitudinal data related to the perceptions and feelings of learners about what they experience at school.

Demographical Data: Gender, Age, Grade, Status

The findings revealed that most learners were females (60%), with 70% in the 11 to 17 years age group. Over 50% were between grade 3 and 5, and 41% in Junior Primary School. This finding is congruent with that of Morolong (2007) and Khoaeane (2012) – where they reported that there are more female teachers than males at primary schools, in this case learners. Most learners (87%) suffered physical impairments, while 11% had some form of mental challenge.

Responses from Interviews with Impaired Learners

Challenges of Impaired Learners in the Didactical Milieu

The results showed that the majority of learners complained that their classrooms are

not inclusive or sufficiently accommodative, because of the poorly accessible facilities. They maintain that their classrooms do not meet the needs of wheelchair learners. They further claim to also experience problems of access to classroom facilities; as one learner states: *"We cannot access the lockers and the blackboard because they are placed too high up for our wheelchairs. What I do not like most is that I depend on other learners to do things for me because I do not have access to class equipment."* Another learner remarks: *"The class structure is very poor because it is impossible for me to go to every corner. This makes it difficult for me to hand in my work to the teacher; some learners always help, but it is very painful. There is also no space for my wheelchair to move around the classroom; tables are placed too close to one another and there is no time for me to clean the blackboard like other learners."*

Evans (2007) has cautioned that teachers have to ensure that classroom facilities are accessible to all learners and that barriers encountered in the learning process – such as materials being placed too high – should be changed. Safe mobility and accessibility in classrooms should be possible for all learners. Teachers should ensure that the environment of learners meets their needs – by making the necessary changes to the classroom. Westwood (2007) adds that in order to ensure the easy access and mobility of wheelchair learners, adequate space is needed in institutions of learning. School buildings and classroom doors should be redesigned so that doorways are wide enough for use by learners in wheelchairs. Furthermore, doors should be able to be easily locked and unlocked.

Relationship with Unimpaired Learners

Respondents had mixed feelings about their relationships with other learners – who do not use wheelchairs. Some learners complained about poor relationships with other learners, while others stated that they interact well with them. They revealed their feelings as follows:

"Some do not help us, while others really enjoy helping us, but to tell you the truth, they do not help because they hate us; it is because of their upbringing." Another learner complains that *"some learners mock us just because they know that we cannot do anything; other learners do not want to do group work with us be-*

cause sometimes we are slow in understanding some concepts. Our teachers work hard to teach them to respect us, because we are human beings like themselves."

Relationship with Teachers

Most respondents were satisfied with and appreciated the way their teachers work with them. Learners' responses include the following: *"Most work co-operatively with us, yet there are some who do not cooperate with us"*. Another learner postulated that *"they also teach other learners to respect us (wheelchair learners)"*. Downing (2008) advises that learners without disabilities need to know how to assist their classmates, when necessary. Unimpaired learners should, for instance, know how to push the disabled learner safely, if he/she is in a wheelchair – which invariably means knowing how to apply the brakes of the wheelchair. It is crucial that teachers should foster a warm relationship with learners, especially those who have disabilities; they should be approachable and also give the learners their unwavering support. These teachers need to be the bridge to a better understanding between able bodied and disabled learners. This will ensure that all learners will be more accommodating – as they will realise that there are no real differences between them.

Participation in Extra-mural Activities

The overwhelming majority of learners (73%) were critical of the accessibility of their recreational places – and described them as very poor. They claim that accessibility is not consistent across different areas of the grounds. They stated that accessibility is mostly unsatisfactory in areas where learners need to play. One learner states that: *"most of the time we are just spectators, because our school grounds are so rough that they do not allow wheelchair mobility. In most of the places, there are stones and grass which do not allow wheelchairs to move"*. Similarly, another learner adds that: *"the paths to the playing grounds are not smooth and it is difficult for us to move in such places; after rainy days we experience more problems because our wheelchairs sink in the mud"*. Additionally, *"our ground is so small that it does not allow us to play all the sports that we are interested in; the ground is made for certain sports such*

as basketball only” – complained another learner.

The physical environment plays an important role in every child’s learning process. When designing recreational facilities, accessibility for all – especially impaired learners – should not be compromised. Evans (2007) indicates that all schools need to upgrade their physical environments by implementing the necessary changes – so that all services provided by the school are accessible to all learners. In other words, not only the classroom, but also the playground, sports field, dining hall and toilets need to be accessible to the disabled learner. These places should also be comfortable, welcoming, and attractive.

Time Allocation for Completion of School Work

The results revealed that some learners felt they were not treated fairly by some of their teachers. About 53% stated that they are not given enough time to complete their work during examinations and tests; and, as a result, they fail and continuously repeat classes. It is sometimes obvious that learners with impairments tend to be the victims of time, because some teachers do nothing to ensure that they have extra time available to finish their work. This is succinctly captured in the following comments:

“I have a problem of a hand deformity. As a result, I need more time to write, but the teacher does not take this into consideration; once others finish writing, our teacher just stops us even before I finish and he takes my answer sheet before I finish writing.”

“Most of the time my work is not marked, because I do not manage to complete work in time; as a result, I usually fail my examinations. I find it of no use to come to school because my work is sometimes not considered.”

“I do not have time to ask questions in class and the lesson ends before I have understood. The teacher also goes too fast when teaching. When I ask questions, it’s as if I am wasting others’ time. Other learners try to explain what we have done, but it is sometimes not easy.”

According to Nieman and Monyai (2006), impaired learners should be helped to manage their time and to be organised. Since impaired learners struggle to use their time effectively, the teacher should help them with time manage-

ment so that they can get the maximum benefit from the learning process. This could be made easier to achieve if their work is broken up into small chunks (Vaghumm et al. 2007). Wearmouth (2009) further believes that learners with special needs should be given more time to solve problems and more time to practise skills and be provided with adequate examples from which to learn, and also have instructions repeated. It takes the learner with special needs longer to acquire skills, to understand what has been said and to construct an appropriate response (Vaghumm et al. 2007).

Aggregated Challenges/Difficulties Experienced by Impaired Learners

Cologon (2014) highlighted (i) structural barriers; (ii) labelling/categorisation; (iii) systems of support; and (iv) paraprofessional support as areas that require urgent attention when it comes to impaired learners. Responses from the impaired learners in this paper bemoan similar issues. For example, they complained that they are viewed and treated as misfits – both at school and in society in general. Their impairments are completely misunderstood – “handicap does not mean we are insane or crazy” posits one. The findings highlight and address commonly shared concerns as expressed by impaired learners. Labelling, discrimination, structural barriers, and ignorance ranked highly amongst common difficulties experienced by the respondents.

Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Inclusion of Learners with Impairments

There are various teaching strategies which can be used to accommodate learners with some form of impairment (Vaughn et al. 2007). An extensive desk-top documentary search of journal articles, books and the internet was used to gather information. The researchers isolated the following teaching issues from the literature as being the commonest ones with which learners with impairments struggle: spelling, mathematical problems and written language expression.

Spelling

There are various strategies that can improve learners’ performance in spelling. According to Stakes and Hornby (1996) and Anderson (2004),

spelling is regarded as one of the most important language aspects in acquiring proficiency in communication. A high value is placed on the ability to spell words correctly (Brown 2007). The choices students make as they spell words are important indicators of their knowledge of both phonics and spelling. For example, learners who spell phonically might spell *money* as *mune* (Tompkins 2003). In this paper, it became evident that learners – especially those with mental impairments and who are short-sighted – experience problems in spelling in both districts, with no significant difference between males and female learners. Stakes and Hornby (1996) indicate that spelling is made difficult by the way it is taught, such as when learners are asked to write in circumstances that are not purposeful. Spelling difficulties are caused by society as a whole – which overemphasises the importance of correct spelling in written work and takes little or no account of the real-life situation.

Principles of Effective Spelling Instruction

According to Vaughn et al. (2007), teaching spelling patterns is more important than teaching regular subjects. The authors opine that learners should always be exposed to a common word pattern – such as suffixes and prefixes. The teacher should teach learners only a few words a day, since mentally impaired learners forget easily; for example, learners should practise 3 to 5 words per week. Learners should be encouraged to spell these words all the time. Hammeken (2000) further indicates that spelling words should be relevant to the learner and the words can be increased in number when the learner achieves mastery. Additionally, the time given to learners to study words should not be too long (Mastropieri and Scruggs 2007) – with teachers needing to provide sufficient practice and feedback on the words practised each day. All learners should work cooperatively and feel free to provide feedback (Vaughn et al. 2007).

Written Expression

Written expression refers to handwriting, spelling and composition. One of these may be a problematic area for learners with impairments. Nevertheless, adaptations can be made in order to promote success in inclusive classrooms (Mastropieri and Scruggs 2007). According to

Stakes and Hornby (1996), competent handwriting is important for learners at all levels in school – but impaired learners are often not able to write legibly because of a lack of fine motor skills. The results of this study showed that both mentally and physically impaired learners had difficulty recalling the correct letters for certain words, because of the learners not writing them properly. Furthermore, impaired learners seemed apprehensive, shy and reluctant to express themselves – even with a short, one-line sentence. They exhibit extreme difficulty in writing, a condition referred to as dysgraphia – a written language disorder of mechanical writing skill. It is noticeable from the poor writing in learners (Vaughn et al. 2007). Some learners find it difficult to copy from the chalkboard or overhead projector, while others find the forming of letters from memory a problem – thus making handwriting difficult (Mastropieri and Scruggs 2007). Weintraub and Graham (1998) indicate that poor handwriting is characterised by:

- ♦ Very poor formation of letters;
- ♦ Poor consistency in letter size;
- ♦ Difficulty in using the correct letters where necessary – such as capital letters;
- ♦ Not leaving enough space between letters (little or no space); and
- ♦ No consistency in writing letters; that is, letters are not consistently cursive or slanted.

Vaughn et al. (2007) consider that handwriting problems can be handled and corrected. There are two major components on which teachers need to focus when teaching handwriting: legibility and fluency.

Legibility

Legibility is one of the essential factors of handwriting. Poor letter formation is the main factor likely to reduce legibility. Vaughn et al. (2007) mention that teachers should point out critical attributes by comparing and contrasting letters and using physical prompts and cues; for example, the teacher can guide the learner's hand by providing arrows for directions. The letters should be reinforced and there should be provision of corrective feedback for letters that need self-verbalisation – whereby learners pronounce the letter formations aloud and then say them again to themselves whilst writing. Furthermore, letters should be written in different colours, as well as being written on large cards.

One of the best strategies to enhance legibility is to provide a moving model through which learners form letters and words instead of simply copying them from the board (Vaughn et al. 2007). For example, the teacher should choose three letters and write each letter on the chalkboard, then sound the word, for example, *c-a-t* and blend the sound to read the word. The teacher should then help students identify the letters of the word – starting with “c” and followed by the other letters. To provide a moving model, the teacher should be near the learner as he/she forms letters or words – and guide the learner through the process.

Fluency

Stakes and Hornby (1996) mention that the teacher should include exercises which help learners in fluency – such as practising large rhythm patterns on paper. The size of the paper needs to be commensurate with the needs of the learners – moving from large to smaller pieces of paper with practice. The teacher can also use finger tracing as a useful exercise. Learners should be introduced to the letter shapes and have experience of tracing textured letters with fingers; for example, writing letters in the air or on sand. Thus, learners can be introduced to the letter shapes and experience letters by using their fingers to trace the texture. Vaughn et al. (2007) believe that after learners have begun to master basic letter forms and their writing has become legible – the next step is to learn to write quickly. This can be done through timed writing and journal writing.

Mathematics

Most learners with mental impairments should receive special, individual educational services for mathematics – because difficulties manifest themselves in different ways, such as reversals in numbers (Hammeken 2000). The findings in this paper are consistent with the report from the literature, that most learners find it difficult to master mathematics because of poor memory; general strategy use; literacy; communication; specific processes and strategies associated with mathematical problems; and low motivation. Learners with mental impairments exhibit most of these difficulties – such as procedures and reasoning in mathematics, and es-

pecially difficulties with mathematical concepts. In other cases, impaired learners lack the computational skills to complete problems (Vaughn et al. 2007).

Strategies for Teaching Mathematics in an Inclusive Setting

There are different ways that teachers in an inclusive classroom can help learners to do well in mathematics. Teachers should be models of the subject – they should show an interest in and have a positive attitude towards mathematics by providing a number of opportunities for success. They can motivate learners by emphasising that the mastery of mathematics is essential for success in other subjects. Teachers need to determine and identify what really motivates their students, instead of assuming that learners are motivated by the same things as they are (Pasomentier and Jane 2006; Reddy 2006). It can be motivating for learners to select real-world problems that address issues of importance to them. It is also helpful for learners to chart their progress – because success is the best motivation. Learners should also be equipped with tools and calculators in order to support their efforts, and should be encouraged to work with partners on suitable occasions (Vaughn et al. 2007).

Mastropieri and Scruggs (2007) recommend components that can be used in designing effective instructions for learners with impairments. First of all, the teacher should focus on ‘big ideas’. This means that concepts should be generalised, rather than focusing on individual details. Learners should be taught strategies that are neither too broad, nor too specific in mathematical operations and problem solving. Strategies need to be communicated clearly – with learners being provided with practice and review exercises to promote retention. Hammeken (2000) emphasises that when teaching basic mathematical skills, the teacher should use concrete manipulative materials; for example, the teacher can use graphic presentation charts such as problem solution charts, concepts maps, tree diagrams and flow charts (Pasomentier and Jane 2006). The development of learners with mental impairments can be facilitated by progressing from concrete to abstract facts. Furthermore, mathematics acquisition can be improved by reinforcement, mnemonics and cog-

native strategy training (Mastropieri and Scruggs 2007).

Hammeken (2000) encourages teachers to introduce mathematical concepts into real-life situations – thereby making mathematics come alive as students exercise their computational and social skills. This provides students with real-world skills they can use in their daily lives (Gregory and Chapman 2008) – helping learners to understand the reason for the concepts. The teacher should also brainstorm and create a list of ways in which mathematics is used in everyday situations. Making use of diagrams and the provision of a dictionary of mathematical terminology – are very important.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to highlight challenges faced by learners with impairments – with specific reference to Lesotho. On the basis of mounting and strong evidence advocating inclusive education, undoubtedly inclusion does work when key components of the classroom and the school environment are in place. It is however safe to infer that the transformation to inclusion is never a smooth exercise. The researchers believe that impaired learners get the short end of the stick – that is, they are not always understood by both fellow learners and their teachers in the mainstream classroom. Consequently, their needs are never adequately addressed. The findings of this paper revealed two significant aspects: firstly, these learners endure inconsiderate and negative attitudes from both fellow learners and some teachers; and secondly, the infrastructure in schools does not cater for their special needs. These findings confirm the underlying contention of this paper, which is that learners with impairments in mainstream schools face a myriad of challenges. The task of understanding and accommodating the needs of these learners is not just the teachers' responsibility. It is imperative therefore that educational authorities, parents and teachers collectively make a concerted effort to ensure that these learners – like unimpaired children – meaningfully reap the benefits of attending school. It is our contention that attempts are regularly made to give voice, not only to unimpaired learners in classrooms, but also to impaired learners – so that they are afforded the opportunity of being heard and served. Leadership is always required

to bring about change towards inclusion; educators need to be supported to think outside the box in this regard.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidently, many of the barriers to full inclusion of children with disabilities encountered in Lesotho – attitudinal, economic, social and systemic – are present not only in low-income countries but also, to some degree, in the very societies where the inclusion orthodoxy was first formulated. This situation poses a serious challenge to learners with impairments and their teachers. The responses from the respondents proved that environmental accessibility within the schools is very poor. It also became clear from the findings that learners experience problems within the teaching and learning milieu in Lesotho. The government of Lesotho should supply schools with infrastructure that is designed to remove barriers or provide practical solutions to everyday problems of impaired learners. For example, assistive technology can be used to help an individual without mobility to control his/her environment. Mechanical devices such as adaptive typewriters, book holders and page turners can be obtained to assist in using academic materials for learners with physical impairments.

It is equally crucial for the government to supply infrastructure that can be used to help slow learners to communicate through the augmented communication system. Integration is generally regarded as one of the most important factors in the development of the education of learners with physical and/or mental impairments. Therefore, all stakeholders should commit themselves to the task of developing and supporting impaired learners to acquire basic education. Moreover, there is a need to modify the curriculum and employ teaching strategies – so that special educational needs are met. Resources need to be employed in ways that support vulnerable or at-risk learners. Lastly, it should be mentioned that all those responsible for the education of impaired learners should work hand-in-hand in order to implement the policy – that all learners have a right to quality education. Support in the curriculum should be organised so that a range of barriers preventing access to the curriculum are identified and addressed.

Finally, the most meaningful intervention that teachers can employ is to shift away from the medical model of teaching – to the social model. In medical-model teaching, the problems of learners were not considered by anybody, but in the social model these problems are considered holistically by all stakeholders. Everybody is responsible for the problem of the learners: parents, teachers and educational authorities. In the social model, the belief is that each learner is different and that they should be approached and assessed differently.

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