



**THE EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS  
DIAGNOSED WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES  
IN A LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS (LSEN) SCHOOL**

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## DECLARATION

I, Soraya Juditha Magardie, hereby declare that this dissertation and its contents is my original work. In cases where I have made use of other people's work, acknowledgement has been made. I further declare that this work has not been submitted to any other university or institution for any other qualification.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my daughter, Carla, who has been diagnosed with a learning disability and who has experienced being placed in an LSEN school.

You are my inspiration for having an interest in special education and the drive behind my burning desire to get answers to questions on how other learners, with a similar diagnosis, think and feel about their placements and experiences in an LSEN school.

I love you dearly!

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- To my Heavenly Father, who is my constant guide and strength. Through YOU all is made possible. Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through HIM who strengthens me”.
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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
DoE	Department of Education
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
ICT	Information and communications technology
LD	Learning disability
LSEN	Learners with special education needs
NCESS	National Committee on Education Support Services
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training
SDT	Self-determination theory
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal



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## ABSTRACT

Throughout the process of learning acquisition there are always learners who experience delays with grasping new concepts and adjusting to the learning environment. This is a global phenomenon found in all education systems. These learners are usually diagnosed as having learning disabilities (LDs) and are often placed in schools for learners with special education needs (LSEN). However, the global trend is towards inclusive education, as it is thought that segregation partly contributes to the challenges faced by learners with disabilities.

This study gives these learners a platform to voice how they think and feel about their diagnosis and subsequent school placement. The qualitative study was carried out at a school for LSEs in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and the focal point was the perceptions and experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs. The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of labeling learners and placing them in an institution labeled as a special education school as an educational intervention. The study attempts to investigate the effects of such interventions on the social well-being and academic performance of the learners concerned.

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a new focus area of psychology that centres on the development and nurturance of positive traits (Compton & Belmont, 2005), and that has been influential in educational psychology. Positive psychology has been attentive to optimistic human involvements and healthy consequences, which is a significant move in the direction of a complete understanding of human behaviour in society. SDT “specifies an organismic-dialectical meta-theory and suggests that the concept of basic psychological needs provides a useful basis for predicting whether the social environment will support optimal functioning or will, alternatively, promote maladaptation and ill-being” (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). SDT underpinned this study, and informed the approach that allowed learners to voice their thoughts and feelings about their experiences at school. In so doing, the learners created their own intrinsic motivation and interest in their learning process, and were made aware of their learning environment.

An interpretivist research paradigm was used, and data was analysed using thematic

analysis. Data collection instruments included a focus group interview, individual interviews and semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations.

The findings indicate that learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school experience various feelings, the most common being initial feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. The study concludes that the separation and educational instruction of LSENs in a special education school environment does not essentially benefit them. This supports existing research that suggests that separating LSENs from their mainstream counterparts delays their development and integration into society as independent, self-supporting adults.

Inclusive education systems are strongly recommended to encourage all learners to be allowed to interact and receive the same instruction, using differentiation in lesson planning to ensure that all learners are able learn at their own pace irrespective of diversity or learning ability. It is hoped that the findings of this study might be of significance to educators, policy makers and educational psychologists in raising awareness of the importance of considering learners' views regarding their placement in LSEN schools.

*Key words:* Learning disability, learners with special education needs (LSEN), inclusive learning environment, self-determination theory, inclusive education.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **EXPLORING THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Governments the world over have come up with varied interventions meant to improve the delivery of education in special education centres. This research sought to explore some of those challenges within the current South African context by examining a selected case study in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

From the time I trained as a teacher, I understood that learning, as an academic activity, can be quite challenging for learners, and that teachers need to be innovative in selecting learning activities that can assist learners, and continuously positive in their approach to learner assistance. I also encountered learners who almost always needed special attention and assistance, although the level of assistance differed from one learner to another. I understood, too, that some learners in each class would be slow learners and would always need assistance from the teacher; however, learners could assist each other and understand better through their learner-to-learner interactions, so there was no need to separate the fast learners from the slow learners as their interactions could be mutually beneficial.

As a teacher I was not really professionally equipped to deal with certain levels of learner disabilities. My training did not include that aspect of teaching because in South Africa special education teachers are trained separately from conventional or mainstream teachers.

As I gained more experience in the teaching profession, I encountered many cases of learners with learning challenges or disabilities. Some of them remained in the mainstream school but others were eventually transferred to special education schools. I developed an interest in the criteria that are used to identify learners for special education school, and I also had questions around how the whole system operates.

When my own daughter was identified as needing special education care, I became directly affected by the operations of the special education institution that she started

to attend. I began to compare my daughter's performance during the time she attended mainstream school with her performance at the special education school, but I ended up with many more questions than answers.

When I finally enrolled for a Master's degree in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), it presented me with an opportunity to investigate the effectiveness of special education centres. Other studies that have endeavoured to undertake this type of investigation have mainly used an interpretive paradigm, and the point of interest has been the insights of teachers.

Learners who experience delays in grasping new concepts and in adjusting to the learning environment have always been part of any education system and this is a global phenomenon. Learners with severe learning difficulties are usually diagnosed as having disabilities (Antoniou & Souvignier, 2007), and it is understood that children with sub-average school achievement *and* sub-average intellectual development are likely to be suffering from delayed intellectual development (Antoniou & Souvignier, 2007).

According to Sparks and Lovett (2009), one of the most common ways of identifying a learning disability (LD) is by observing a discrepancy between a learner's general intellectual ability and his or her academic achievement. If a learner with general adequate intellectual ability is unable to learn a basic academic skill, an LD is a reasonable explanation for the learner's failure to acquire the skill. An achievement test score is therefore taken as evidence of an LD. Machek and Nelson (2007) report that this approach to identifying LDs according to the general notion of a discrepancy between expectation and performance is one that is endorsed by a majority of school psychologists. However, the diagnosis of learners with LDs has long been a contentious issue. The researcher has therefore chosen to explore the understandings of learners who have been diagnosed with LDs and placed in a school that is supposed to provide suitable interventions that address their needs and academic progress.

According to a study by Wu, Huang and Meng (2008), the LD diagnosis procedure usually involves interpreting a learner's results from certain standard tests or checklist scores by comparing them with norms that are derived from statistical

methods, thus enabling a more informed and accurate identification of LDs.

Studies that have researched special education and inclusivity in the past have mainly done so from an interpretive point of view, where the main point of departure was teachers' perceptions and attitudes, leaving out learners' perceptions and experiences. The experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs were therefore the focal point of this research study.

## **1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

My inspiration for carrying out this study was three-fold. Firstly, I have a daughter who, as a result of neurosurgery, experienced difficulty in adapting to her first classroom environment in a mainstream school. She was assessed by an educational psychologist and diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a condition that causes excessive activity in a learner and a short concentration span, resulting in a learning difficulty. She was therefore placed in a special educational facility to cater for her special education needs, but as a parent and an educator I noticed some potential gaps in the way these institutions operate. In particular, I questioned the idea of labeling children as "disabled" and placing them in an institution that is generally stigmatized, and the effects this may have on a child's development and self-esteem.

Secondly, as a teacher, I have had experiences with children battling to achieve academically at a mainstream school that does not have the facilities or academic staff to cater for learners requiring special education. In my experience there appear to be gaps in the school system and curriculum design that have led to an inadequate provision for these learners' needs, and to the development of a negative attitude towards dealing with learners who find it difficult to grasp new concepts or stay focused on an activity for sufficient time to complete the task independently. I observed educators resorting to regular referrals of learners with learning disabilities (LD's) to educational psychologists for assessment and possible alternative school placements to enable the learners to receive the attention and one-on-one support they required. This situation encouraged me to start my own learner-support

programme at my current school with the approval of the principal and school governing body. This afforded me an opportunity to assist learners with their academic coping skills, with enhancing their resilience, and with their general behaviour. Interaction with these learners allowed me to observe the dissatisfaction of these children, whose educational needs were not being addressed and satisfied, and how this negatively affected their self-esteem and delayed their progress.

Thirdly, as a Master of Education student based in the field of educational psychology, my interests have been swayed towards inclusive education and a critique of the medical paradigm that labels, marginalizes and segregates learners with LDs. I keep abreast of new developments in education and I am the institutional (school) representative on the Special Education Committee. In this capacity I am able to interact with and hear the critical views of other educators on how the medical model and diagnostic labeling affects special education.

The literature reviewed also suggests that the children's voices with regard to their diagnostic labeling and placement in special education systems have not been sufficiently explored. This research study therefore attempts to extend academic debate around the understandings of learners with regard to their learning limitations.

### **1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to survey the consequences of labeling learners and placing them in institutions labeled as special education schools as an educational intervention. The study attempts to explore and to ascertain the effects of such interventions on the social well-being and academic performance of the learners concerned. As stated earlier, this research is an attempt to extend the academic debate around the understandings of learners with regards to their learning limitations.

## 1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Inclusive education in South Africa has not been promoted as simply one more option for education but as an educational strategy that can contribute to a democratic society. After the end of the apartheid era, the new democratic government committed itself to the transformation of education, and certain key policy documents and legislation emphasise the principle of education as a basic human right as enshrined in the Constitution. In a 1997 report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS), the Department of Education (DoE) acknowledged the existence of different needs “among learners within the education system which must all be met if effective learning and development is to be provided and sustained” (DoE, 1997). This document later led to the adoption of a policy of inclusive education in *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system* (DoE, 2001). This document provided a framework for systemic change through the development of inclusive education, which refers to the process of building a single system of education that is committed to correcting the imbalances of the past by providing quality education to all learners, regardless of their individual differences and needs.

As a new mindset, and in the South African context in particular, the idea of an education system that includes all, irrespective of learning ability, embraces the democratic values of equality, human rights, and the recognition of diversity. Pillay and Di Terlizzi (2009) suggest that although South Africa’s present socio-economic situation means that the country may not adequately be equipped to allow for such an educational change, the policy of inclusive education may be a step towards achieving quality knowledge acquisition for all, and they recommend the positive implementation of the inclusive education policy as the required resources to do so become increasingly available.

As previously mentioned, the voices of special education learners with regard to their diagnostic labeling and placement in special education systems have not been sufficiently explored. This study therefore attempted to gain insight into the knowledge and perspectives of learners who had been formally assessed as having



specific learning needs, and who had been admitted to schools designed to offer interventions to meet these needs.

The study not only attempted to explore the participants' thoughts and feelings about their diagnosis, but how they felt about their subsequent placements as well. Inclusive education in the South African context aspires to ensure that there is equal placement of all learners, irrespective of their needs and diversity. The issue of placement is critical, as placement influences a learner's well-being and performance. In accordance with this, interpretivism was selected as an appropriate research paradigm for this study. According to Grix (2010), social phenomena give meaning to the world in which the participant lives. Therefore, the learners' environment influences how they experience their schooling, and consequently influences their performance.

The overall problem statement can therefore be summed up as follows:

- The knowledge and perspectives of special education learners in South Africa, and how their experiences influence their performance, have not been adequately explored with regard to their diagnostic labeling and their placement in South Africa's limited but evolving special education system.

## **1.5 CRITICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The discussion in the previous section outlined the overall problem statement of the study, which produces the following primary research question:

- What perspectives can learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school in South Africa offer on their own experience and performance, and how can this be used to develop strategies for improved support of these learners?

The primary research question can be separated into the following secondary questions:

1. What are the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school?
2. How do learners feel and what do they think about their diagnosis and

subsequent placement in an LSEN school?

3. What strategies might serve as guidelines to support learners diagnosed with LDs?

## **1.6 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The primary aim of the study was to explore the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school.

The secondary aims of the study were:

- To briefly explore the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school (to be addressed in Chapter 2 as part of the literature review);
- To determine how learners feel and what they think about their diagnosis and subsequent placement in an LSEN school (to be established by the empirical part of the study); and
- To offer recommendations that might serve as guidelines to support learners diagnosed with LDs (to be discussed as part of the main outcome of the study in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

## **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study was a significant attempt to explore the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school. It is hoped that the study has contributed to the development of awareness about how learners think and feel about their diagnosis and subsequent placement in an LSEN school. The study endeavoured to represent the fundamental nature of the feelings and voices of these learners through a triangulation of the data collected, which included a focus group interview, observations, and a review of relevant literature.

Furthermore, it is hoped that the findings of this study might be of significance to educators, policy makers and educational psychologists, by raising awareness of the importance of considering learners' views in relation to placement at LSEN schools.

This study sought to foreground the voice of the child, which is not often considered with regard to the placement and well-being of learners, especially learners who experience barriers to learning. This study aimed to offer recommendations that might serve as guidelines to support learners diagnosed with LDs.

The results of this study could serve as a broad outline for special education practice in promoting the understanding that learners' thoughts and feelings with regard to their learning and school placement contribute significantly to their overall positive well-being and performance.

## **1.8 KEY OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS**

### **1.8.1 Learner**

Springer (2007, p. 160) observes that “school performance is dependent on the interaction between the ‘triad’ of child, parents and school”, arguing that many influences affect a child’s neurodevelopmental potential. Springer states that a child possesses a unique set of strengths and weaknesses, and that there should be an early attempt by teachers to identify learners with potential learning difficulties with a view to early intervention.

### **1.8.2 Learning disabilities**

According to Handler and Fierson (2011), there are a variety of categories of LDs, but learners with LDs can normally be characterised as having at least average intellect but nevertheless have difficulties understanding information and problem solving. Springer (2007, p. 160) clarifies further:

A child with a learning disability has difficulty processing verbal or non-verbal information despite normal intelligence. This can result from relative weaknesses in neurodevelopmental functions such as language (receptive and expressive), memory, attention, spatial ordering, temporal-sequential ordering, neuromuscular function, or higher order cognition.

### **1.8.3 Diagnosis**

Torgesen (2001) observes that “the current diagnosis process of LDs measures the intrinsic processing or capacity weaknesses that are presumed to underlie academic performance problems”. According to Springer (2007, p. 161), the first aim of diagnosis of an LD is to articulate and define the problem. Springer also states at least three groupings of complaints, namely learning, attention, and behaviour.

### **1.8.4 LSEN schools**

Learners who have influences that retard their learning are normally advised to receive formal diagnoses from an educational psychologist in order to specifically analyse their needs and then label their LD. This is so that they may be placed in an LSEN school, with the hope that their particular needs would be addressed and accommodated. According to Pillay and Di Terlizzi (2009), the term “LSEN school” refers to “an environment that provided valuable and necessary resources to meet the learning needs, which were lacking in the mainstream school environment” (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009).

## **1.9 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY**

This study involved participants who are learners diagnosed with LDs. The learners are intellectually or mentally impaired and have limited reading abilities. Antoniou and Souvignier (2007) state that “children with sub-average school achievement and sub-average intellectual development are considered as suffering from an intellectual delay”.

Semi- structured interviews were one of the data collection instruments used in the study. The participants had learning impairments which may consequently have affected their ability to answer interview questions independently. This could have impacted on the integrity and reliability of the responses gathered, as these

participants required assistance in giving responses.

The participants were minors between the ages of six and eight years old, and various ethical implications were therefore considered. Firstly, the appropriate permissions and letters of consent for them to participate in the study had to be granted. Written permission had to be obtained from the DoE in order for the researcher to conduct research at the LSEN school selected for the study (see Appendix A), and from the school principal (see Appendix C) in order to use the school facilities and to involve the learners as participants. Written consent also had to be obtained from the learners' parents or caregivers (see Appendix D). Each stakeholder was informed of the nature and the aim of the research. Substantial setbacks to the study resulted from delayed responses to these requests for written permission.

Secondly, the researcher had to ensure that all ethical considerations as set out by UKZN's Ethical Clearance Committee were met, and an ethical clearance certificate had to be obtained (see Appendix B). This took a long of time to process, causing considerable delays to the commencement of data collection for the study.

## **1.10 STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THE LIMITATIONS**

In order to circumvent the above restrictions to the study, the researcher had to use the following strategies:

- The researcher built a rapport with the participating learners prior to conducting the interview, and this was done through an informal focus group session. As the participants were children with learning difficulties or disabilities, the researcher incorporated the use of a video clip as a prompt before the discussion with the learners. Learners with LDs often need to be persuaded to participate. A focus group interview encouraged the group, rather than the individuals, to voice opinions, and non-literate participants were encouraged to express themselves, thus ensuring a bond with learners that encouraged them to answer the questionnaire more freely when requiring assistance.
- As the participants were minors, written permission was sought from the appropriate authorities and guardians in order to notify them of the nature and aim of the study, and to gain their consent to conduct the research, as well as to encourage learners' participation in the research.
- Confidentiality and anonymity were also guaranteed. The researcher ensured that the children voluntarily agreed to participate in the research project. Pseudonyms were used for the school and for the participants. A summary version of feedback was given to the participants in the presence of their parents on completion of the study.
- If there was a possibility that participants who may have experienced traumatic or stressful life circumstances had been affected during their participation in the study, the researcher utilised the counsel of a psychologist registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) to provide any assistance the participants required.
- All necessary ethical criteria were met by the researcher and approved by UKZN's Ethical Clearance Committee prior to the commencement of the

study.

- In order to enhance the validity and credibility of the study, the researcher triangulated different methods (Shenton, 2004).
- This study used three methods: interviews, questionnaires and a focus group discussion. Credibility was also enhanced by giving participants the option to refuse to participate, leaving only those that were willing to offer data (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation also reduced the effects of possible researcher bias (Shenton, 2004).
- Transferability of the findings of this study is possible, as the findings are able to be generalised. “Transferability refers to the findings being applicable to other similar situations or that have some similarity in another comparable context” (Wilder, S (2014).
- Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009) suggest that “providing background data to establish the context and a detailed description of data can enhance transferability”. The context of the school was adequately described, to allow comparison with other similar studies. Three methods of data collection were used in this study to obtain a rich variety of information in order to strengthen the possibility of the findings being relevant to similar schools in other environments.

## **1.11 CONCLUSION AND OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT**

This chapter has discussed how learners with LDs are identified and diagnosed. The concept of an LD is addressed, and common ways in which these LDs are operationalised are explained. This chapter has also given an overview of the background, purpose and rationale of the study, the problem statement, the research questions, the aims and objectives of the study, the significance of the study, and the limitations of the study, as well as the strategies used to overcome the limitations.

The following is an outline of the remaining chapters:

### **Chapter 2: Literature review**

Chapter 2 discusses self-determination as the theoretical framework that directs the study, and that allows and encourages the learners to voice and create their intrinsic motivation and interest in their learning process. The chapter also centres on a review of extant literature related to this study on the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs, and how they think and feel about their diagnosis and labeling, and their learning environment. It focuses on the forerunners in this field of study, giving a broad overview of the existing literature as well as where there are gaps and limitations in this current research, and how this study has sought to make a significant contribution to this educational field.

### **Chapter 3: Research design and methodology**

Chapter 3 explains the research strategy, the methodological structure, and the application thereof in conducting the research. This chapter also provides a specific description of the research population. In this research the participants were vulnerable minors, so the related ethical issues are explained in this chapter, as well as how a code of ethical conduct was followed to protect and respect the respondents' vulnerability and autonomy, and to minimise potential harm. The data collection instruments are also described.

### **Chapter 4: Presentation and analysis of the data**

In Chapter 4, the generated data is presented, analysed, interpreted and discussed in relation to the research questions. It is shown clearly how the data was analysed.



## **Chapter 5: Summary of the study, conclusion and recommendations**

In Chapter 5, the findings, conclusion and recommendations are discussed in greater detail, and it is clearly shown how this study will aid in making a significant contribution to academic debate around the topic of the research. It is shown how the conclusions of this study could serve as a broad outline for special education practice in promoting the understanding and awareness that learners' thoughts and feelings with regard to their learning and school placement contribute significantly to their overall positive well-being and performance. Finally, suggestions for further study are provided.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

A literature review forms a significant part of any research project, as it explores the issues under investigation from the perspectives of other scholars in the field and broadens the researcher's understanding of the same issues. A thorough and adequate literature review enables the researcher to identify gaps within the body of existing research so that the researcher's own work addresses one or some of those gaps. A literature review provides the important background information on the subject under study, enables the researcher to avoid duplicating previous research, and narrows the research question (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005, p.39).

#### **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a new focus area of psychology that centres on the development and nurturance of positive traits (Compton & Belmont, 2005), and that has been influential in educational psychology. Positive psychology has been attentive to optimistic human involvements and healthy consequences, which is a significant move in the direction of a complete understanding of human behaviour in society. SDT "specifies an organismic-dialectical meta-theory and suggests that the concept of basic psychological needs provides a useful basis for predicting whether the social environment will support optimal functioning or will, alternatively, promote maladaptation and ill-being" (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004).

According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), SDT supposes that inherent in human personality is the tendency to be inquiring about one's environment. SDT underpinned this study, and informed the approach that allowed learners to voice their thoughts and feelings about their experiences at school. In so doing, the learners created their own intrinsic motivation and interest in their learning process, and were made aware of their learning environment.

Niemiec and Ryan (2009) further argue that approaches based on SDT enable learners to be interested in learning and developing their knowledge. By allowing the voice of the learner to be heard, they were given the opportunity to be directly involved in their learning experience. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) are of the view that all too often educators introduce outside controls into the learning environment that can upset the unity of purpose between teachers and learners, and in so doing hinder progress in the teaching and learning process.

Deci and Ryan (2008) advocate SDT in their study of human motivation, development, and health. They explain that SDT is an “empirically based theory of human motivation, development, and wellness” and that the theory “focuses on types of motivation, paying particular attention to autonomous motivation and controlled motivation as predictors of performance, relational, and well-being outcomes”. Deci and Ryan (2008) further state that “SDT also addresses the social conditions that enhance these types of motivation”. This theory assisted my study as it encouraged an exploration of the intrinsic thoughts and feelings of the learners in relation to them being labelled as having an LD, and examined their experiences and the social conditions at the LSEN school.

This study intended its findings to enhance and strengthen the learners’ understanding of their limitations and self-beliefs, and increase their motivation to learn. According to Deci and Ryan (2008), the basic psychological needs for self-sufficiency and competence affect the strength of a person’s motivation. They further argue that “SDT also examines people’s life goals or aspirations, showing discrepancy relations of intrinsic versus extrinsic life goals to performance and psychological health”. Ryan and Rigby (2006) explain that “autonomy and competence are associated with enjoyment, preferences, and changes in well-being. Competence and autonomy perceptions are also related to the intuitive nature and the sense of presence or immersion in participants’ experiences”. SDT was therefore used as a guiding framework to explore the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs in a special education school.

Carter, Lane, Cnrobori, Bruhn and Oakes (2011) recognise that there is “an association between self-determination and improved educational outcomes, more

so for children with learning disabilities”. This research establishes the attitudes of learners by exploring their experiences, thoughts and feelings about their diagnosis and subsequent placement in a school for LSENs.

Carter et al. (2011) state that “the emerging emphasis within educational programming for students with disabilities is a focus on equipping students with the skills, attitudes and behaviors that foster self-determined behavior”. As learners progress at school, they are expected to become more independent and self-sufficient, to undertake a more significant role in their education and planning, and to communicate their own strengths, interests, needs and preferences more effectively.

SDT was thus a useful tool to use in this research when determining how learners experience their learning environment and why they think and feel the way they do. Learners thus gained knowledge about their abilities and shortcomings. Carter et al. (2011) further argue that “an understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential in self-determination”.

Learners with LDs developed a greater understanding of themselves through answering the researcher’s questions and engaging in discussions focused on their experiences in their school environment, as well as their thoughts and feelings with regard to being diagnosed with LDs. They will therefore, through self-determination, be likely to use this knowledge to direct their lives in ways that are personally valuable.

### **2.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**

Many research projects have been carried out over the years to investigate issues related to the limitations of LSENs and the variety of instructional practices designed to assist learners to learn more effectively. International and local scholars have raised some pertinent issues in their discussions of learning disorders and special education schools. These discussions also identify current trends in global and local policies and practices in the provision of special education.

### **2.3.1 Global perspective**

The history of education has always included the important aspect of special education, which refers to educational practices that cater for children with LDs. However, the policies and resources allocated to special education from region to region, and from one country to another, have differed. Globally, there is a growing trend that shows increasing numbers of children attending institutions that cater for those with LDs, and the idea of teaching learners with disabilities alongside their unimpaired counterparts is becoming the norm (Samadi & McConkey, 2018). There is, however, an urgent need to support and equip the teaching staff in these institutions with the appropriate skills, because this specialized form of teaching requires a great deal of knowledge and commitment. All stakeholders in education need knowledge and awareness of the demands exerted on the educational system by the growing numbers of learners in general, and the special needs of those with disabilities (Heap, Lorenzo & Thomas, 2009).

Special education teachers require specific training in order to handle particular situations and conditions, and educators who are generally trained are simply not adequately prepared or skilled to address the particular needs of LSENs. However, teachers are now expected to create inclusive classrooms where they effectively educate and care for all types of learners, and thus need the skills to be able to transform schools into institutions that offer special care for the learners who may need it (Samadi & McConkey, 2018).

Carrington, Tangen and Beutel (2018) carried out a study on special education in the Asia Indo-Pacific region and concluded that children with disabilities should not be subjected to any forms of exclusion, as that will actually delay their development and their acceptance into all mainstream activities. It is clear that at a time when the world is fighting for universal human rights and equality in all aspects of life, all forms of exclusion should be done away with.

Developing nations have generally rejected the exclusion of certain learners on the basis of disability and have embraced inclusivity, as shown by studies from various

parts of the world in the review that follows. The information technology revolution, which has transformed teaching and learning processes globally, has the potential to make special education teaching and the introduction of inclusive practices feasible. The challenge for teachers and technology companies is to innovate to develop the most appropriate teaching aids for learners with disabilities.

However, the numerous challenges inherent in the process of building inclusivity should be noted and addressed by those tasked with building inclusive institutions of education, including policy makers. It is also clear that there are huge financial implications in carrying out such a far-reaching intervention policy that involves building inclusive institutions nationally, and just like other policy interventions these educational interventions will face challenges.

Researchers have focused a great deal of attention on interventions and alternative instructional methodologies. For example, Chard, Ketterlin-Geller, Baker, Doabler and Apichatabutra (2009) examine the usefulness of repeated reading interventions for improving the reading skills of learners with disabilities. Their study finds that teachers employing this strategy need to adopt a positive attitude and be very patient with the learners concerned. Another example is a study by Aaron, Joshi, Gooden and Bentum (2008) on the component model of reading, which “identifies the reading component that is the source of reading difficulty and targets instruction at that component”.

Inclusion is also another area of interest for researchers. According to Norwich and Kellya (2004), there is an international move towards greater inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. This study advocated a mainstream setting rather than special education schools for LSENs.

Nind and Cochrane (2002) focus on “an inclusion initiative and action research project involving the special schools and services of an education administration” (Local Education Authority) in the United Kingdom. The project was concerned with classroom contexts and dynamics that create difficulties for LSENs, and focused on pupils of concern who contest the normal self-assurance and capability of teachers. Nind and Cochrane (2002) state that “the local education administration of the UK aims to avoid placement of these pupils out of the locality in specialist provision

elsewhere in the country by developing appropriate curricula, pedagogy and support locally”. Nind and Cochrane’s study informed the focus of this research study on exploring the thoughts and feelings of learners with LDs concerning their placement in a special LSEN school, and the intention of this study to promote awareness of the importance of the voice and perspectives of LSENs within the schools.

Paneque and Barbetta’s (2006) study focuses on the effects of the skills and competence of teachers and of organisational matters in relation to learners with language learning disabilities. The study demonstrates a positive correlation between learners’ language ability and teacher competence. It also informed my problem statement, namely: “How do learners diagnosed with LD feel and what do they think about their diagnosis and subsequent placement in a school for learners with special education needs (LSEN). The learners’ voices have been given a platform through this research study, the findings of which will hopefully act as a vehicle of change in educational practices by informing the decisions of policy makers and professionals such as educational psychologists with regard to the diagnosis and placement of learners.

It became evident after reviewing various studies that no research has been conducted specifically in South Africa that explores the experiences of learners who have been diagnosed with LDs during their placement in a special education school for LSENs. This study intended to provide a platform for learners with LDs to voice how they think and feel about their diagnosis and experiences as a result of their subsequent placement, and to close the gap caused by insufficient research involving learners’ experiences. These learners experience the phenomena at first hand and are active participants in a social setting (a special education school for learners identified with LD), and should be afforded an opportunity to partake in the decision making.

Denhart (2008) investigates “barriers to higher education faced by students labeled with LD”. This study was similar to my study as it used the learners’ voice as the primary data. However, “data were analyzed and interpreted through a disability theory perspective revealing barriers that stemmed largely from external social causes”. This research study, however, was interpreted using SDT, a branch of

positive psychology. Denhart (2008) also focuses on the barriers these learners face in moving effectively through higher education, while this study uses the voices of school learners to explore their experiences and their feelings about being labeled with an LD and their subsequent placement in an LSEN school.

The results and findings of this study sought to offer alternatives to the education department, educational psychologists, and all other stakeholders, in relation to the diagnostic process, curriculum development, and decision-making regarding school placements, based on the voices of those experiencing the phenomena. This study attempted to improve the accuracy of diagnosis or identification, the quality of the intervention techniques, and the level of inclusion, by hearing and considering the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the learners involved.

### **2.3.2 South African perspective**

As has happened globally, there has also been a drive to promote inclusive education in South Africa. South Africa is a country where deep inequalities exist within the population along racial lines due to the legacy of its colonial and apartheid past. Currently, facilities in predominantly African special education schools are much worse than those of their predominantly white counterparts, and even within African communities there are inequalities from one community to another. Although the democratic government has made some strides in improving the facilities of African special education schools, there are still significant disparities that effectively create a dual education system along racial lines (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

However, the South African government is committed to ensuring universal access to quality education for all South African children, regardless of their race, economic status or disability. *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system* (2001) stipulates the promotion of inclusive practices in the country's institutions of education. This drive for inclusivity means that all schools must become centres of care and integration, and largely does away with the need for special education schools, since learners with disabilities will be accommodated at mainstream schools.



While the idea of inclusive education appears to be a significant step in the right direction, some scholars feel that it may create new problems and worsen existing ones. For example, institutions catering for learners with disabilities currently have inadequate facilities, and moving these learners to mainstream schools may create even bigger resource challenges, particularly within a socio-economic environment where resources are already strained in the mainstream schools.

Other challenges have to do with the skilling and equipping of teachers who can competently serve all learners within the inclusive schooling environment. In South Africa, the teacher training processes produce two types of teachers: special education teachers and conventional mainstream teachers. Conventional teachers are not equipped to teach learners with disabilities, and thus an inclusive classroom may be overwhelming for any teacher who has not been skilled to handle such a situation.

However, challenges related to finance, the availability of appropriate facilities and inadequate teaching skills should not prevent the integration of learners with disabilities into mainstream schools, as these challenges can be managed with adequate and innovative planning and management (Hay & Beyers, 2011). Finding teachers with the appropriate attitude towards learners with disabilities is a critical step towards achieving inclusive education. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous section, the information technology revolution can go a long way in assisting teachers and other stakeholders in education in South Africa by providing the technological solutions needed for inclusive teaching.

According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), the most significant constraint in the South African context, as informed by experience, is policy implementation. In the past, well-crafted and well-meaning policies have been mismanaged at the point of implementation and the desired results have not been achieved. This policy failure is a consequence of a lack of clarity in policy statements, and it is highly likely that the policy of inclusive education will suffer the same fate, especially considering that much of what has been outlined in *White Paper No 6* has not been implemented. The ultimate responsibility for the implementation and enforcement of policies rests with the government, and schools and other learning institutions can only successfully implement and work with policies that the government is actively enforcing.

### **2.3.3 Challenges in South African special education schools**

Lomofsky and Lazarus (2010) trace the development of the policy and legislation since 1994, which “marked the introduction of a unitary non-racial system of education and training in South Africa”. According to Lomofsky and Lazarus (2010), “policy development in this context has been guided by the universal principles of a human right to basic education, equality and the recognition of the democratic rights of parents, teachers and all learners, including those with disabilities”. Lomofsky and Lazarus (2010) further state that “a major paradigm shift in education policy has reflected a move from a dual, special and general education system towards the transformation of general education to recognise and address the diverse learning needs of all learners”.

There have been numerous attempts by government to reorganise and revise the national curriculum. This includes the introduction of a new general curriculum to accommodate a variety of systems and learner needs. The most recent education policy recommends a change in rationale about “special needs and support services” in the country, and promotes an increased level of commitment to the advancement of an inclusive education and training system. However, Lomofsky and Lazarus (2010), in accordance with Donohue and Bornman (2010) as discussed in the previous section, realise that “the real challenge which faces South Africa will be in the implementation of the above recommendations”.

It is clear that those concerned with fostering an inclusive education and training system need a total shift in mindset. Government policy initiatives to restructure the system need to be adequately implemented, by both government officials (in terms administration, curriculum planning and sufficient resource provision for education) and teachers, who need to be open to change and resourceful in modifying the existing curriculum to accommodate the diverse needs of learners. In this way an inclusive education environment can be created, characterized by equality and an “all students can learn” approach.

## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

The findings from the global literature have shown that LDs and the various interventions intended to address them have been around for a long time. The current global trend is a strong movement towards building inclusive educational institutions that cater for children with disabilities alongside those without disabilities. This drive has gained the acceptance of global institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations, and both developing and developed nations have embraced inclusive educational practices. This is meant to improve the acceptance and integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream in all aspects of life.

The literature on South Africa has also outlined how government, since colonial times, has attempted to address the numerous challenges posed by LDs through setting up special education schools. However, what has been demonstrated by these two bodies of literature is that there are no quick and easy solutions to these challenges. It is an area that requires ongoing research and consistent strategies in order to find workable solutions that are context appropriate. Governments are particularly important players in policy implementation and enforcement, as well as resource provision, and if inclusive education is to become the norm rather than the exception, then the South African government needs to take it seriously.

The following chapter discusses the research design and methodology that were used to conduct the study, and explains the particular methods, approaches, paradigms, and instruments for data collection that were chosen.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Research, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), is “a systematic approach to collecting, analyzing and interpreting data in order to increase our understanding of a phenomenon about which we are interested in or concerned about and to communicate our findings with the larger scientific community”. For a researcher to be able to credibly and successfully carry out a research assignment, an appropriate research methodology has to be selected and employed. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) define research methodology as “the general approach a researcher takes in carrying out a research project”. There are numerous other definitions which have been proffered by scholars but they can all be summarised as a scientifically approved way of carrying out research. The general approach to research generally falls into two broad categories: quantitative and qualitative research. This study employed a qualitative approach, and adopted a case study methodology to address the critical research questions that the researcher intended to answer in order to address the objectives of the study.

The previous chapter provided the theoretical framework that underpins the study, as well as a review of the leading research, in order to contextualise the study. This chapter discusses the research approach, the research paradigm and the research design. It also describes the study location and the sampling strategies used to collect the data used to complete the study. The research procedure, data collection methods and data analysis are explained, and the methods used to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study are discussed. The necessary ethical considerations taken into account before and during the course of this research study are also specified.

### **3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH**

This is a qualitative study which collects and analyses rich, descriptive data from direct fieldwork observations and from in-depth, open-ended interviews (Patton, 2005). According to Patton (2005), “qualitative researchers engage in naturalistic inquiry, studying real-world settings inductively to generate rich narrative descriptions and construct case studies”.

The desired purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs and this was best achieved using a case study methodology, as explained by Patton (2005), who asserts that “an inductive analysis across cases yields patterns and themes, which are the fruit of qualitative research”.

### **3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

This study was conducted at one LSEN school. Its purpose was to explore the experiences of learners who have been diagnosed with LDs and have been placed in an LSEN school. The study provided a platform for these learners to express their views about their learning disability and their subsequent placement in an LSEN school.

The Interpretivism paradigm was used for this study. Interpretivism aims to understand a social phenomenon and gives meaning to the world in which the participant lives (Grix, 2010). “The interpretivist focuses on the perspectives of individuals and groups of individuals” (O’Hara, Carter, Dewis, Kay & Wainwright, 2011). “Interpretivism attempts to display how participants make choices in social situations” (Burton & Bartlett, 2005), and in this case how they experience an LSEN school. There is no one version of impartial reality in interpretivism, but different varieties. Interpretivism therefore provided the researcher with a model for how to explore learners’ thought processes and feelings about being diagnosed with an LD and about their experiences in an LSEN school. By means of a focus group discussion, interviews and questionnaires, the learners’ views on the school environment and on their experiences were obtained. The interpretivist approach

thus focused on individual learners and their different experiences in an LSEN school.

### **3.4 STUDY LOCATION**

The location for the case study was a school for LSENs located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and to protect the rights of the participating learners and ensure their welfare, the name of the school is not provided. The school caters for the enrolment and education of learners diagnosed with LDs. It is a reputable institution that caters for learners across the racial divide in South African society, and is representative of the average conditions or circumstances in centres of special education. The location selected for this research was relatively easily accessible, since this is the province and the district in which I am also working as an educator.

### **3.5 SAMPLING**

Sampling is the methodical selection of a group of participants whose characteristics are truly representative of the total population being studied. There are different forms of sampling used in research, and each is determined by the research context. In this research, purposive sampling was used to select the participants. “The purposive sampling technique is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within” (Tongco, 2007). The sample selection can be described as purposive because the learners from the selected school would all have been diagnosed with LDs and their contributions would be meaningful to the study.

Accordingly, six learners were chosen to participate in the study. This sample size was deemed suitable, as Wiersma and Jurs (2009) state that “in qualitative research, purposeful sample sizes are small because they are information-rich cases which will be studied in depth”. In addition, “the cost of using a high number of participants is restrictive in terms of time and privacy” (Dattalo, 2008).

The population of this study consisted of six learners in an LSEN school between

the ages of 8 and 10 years. “Interpretivist studies are usually small scale” (Burton & Bartlett, 2005), and the study was intended to gather detailed perceptions rather than a statistical representation of the experiences, feelings and thoughts of the learners diagnosed with special education needs within the context of their LSEN school.

### **3.6 DATA COMPILATION TECHNIQUES**

Data was gathered using a variety of tools, including a focus group discussion. This aided in establishing the research context and gaining insight into the learners’ experiences at the school, and into their thoughts and feelings about their diagnosis.

According to Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2012), “a focus group discussion is held to gain general information about a topic from a group of people who interact with each other”. A video clip was used, showing a scenario in which a learner, after being diagnosed with an LD by an educational psychologist, arrives at a special education school. The clip shows how the learner struggles to fit in to the new environment. Learners were asked specific questions in order to explore and establish the general topic for discussion.

Interviews with individual learners and individual questionnaires were also used as additional data collection methods. According to Maree (2007, p. 87), an interview is “a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the interviewee questions to collect data and to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views and opinions and behaviours of the participants”. Qualitative data was collected was qualitative, in the form of thick descriptions of the participants’ points of view, so semi-structured interviews were necessary.

Observation was the final means of collecting data, where a learner was observed during a lesson session. Triangulation in this qualitative study involved the use of multiple methods to capture the learners’ experiences, thoughts and feelings accurately. As stated by Golafshani (2003), “reliability, validity and triangulation are relevant research concepts, particularly from a qualitative point of view. They reflect the multiple ways of establishing truth”.

The researcher observed and was also part of the interviews and observations. A rapport was established during the observations and focus group discussion session. This connection led to more meaningful research, as the researcher was able to gather a more holistic view of the interrelationships between factors. More “thick description” was also generated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Observational and personal interview research allowed for the greatest acquisition of situational understanding. It is limited in breadth, but deep in substance and meaning.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and the relevant informed consent was acquired from parents and care givers, as the respondents were minors.

### **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

In order to achieve the objectives of a study, an analysis of the data collected is necessary. The following discussion explains how the data was analysed, categorised and interpreted in the context of the study.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clark (2006), thematic analysis involves examining and recording patterns or themes within a data set. King and Horrocks (2010) explain that “data is transcribed, coded and then themes are looked for in the coded data”. Thematic analysis, according to Joffe (2012), “demonstrates which themes are important in the description of the phenomenon under study” and “the end result of a thematic analysis should highlight the most salient collection of meanings present in the dataset”.

A thematic approach was deemed to be the most appropriate method of analysis because it offered a theoretically flexible and accessible method. Themes were identified from the data in order to group and then summarise the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school.



### **3.8 VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

The researcher was primarily concerned with documenting what the participants think and feel about their diagnostic labels and subsequent school placement. A focus group discussion with selected participants, individual interviews and questionnaires, and classroom observations were conducted to acquire this data. More than one data collection method (referred to as “crystallization”) was used to validate the conclusions drawn from the data analysis.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010, p. 30), “the validity and reliability of your data collection instruments influences the extent to which you can learn something about the phenomenon you are studying, the probability that you will obtain significance in your data analysis, and the extent to which you can draw meaningful conclusions from your data”.

This study intended to allow its findings to enhance and strengthen the learners’ understandings of their limitations and self-beliefs, and to increase their motivation to learn. The researcher ensured that the research instruments used were appropriate and that the methodology was followed strictly in line with academic standards, in order to ensure that the research process, as well as its findings, was valid and trustworthy. If another researcher carries out the same research and follows the same methodology, they will arrive at the same conclusions.

### **3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Research participants were required to share their personal views, feelings and perceptions on an important issue in their lives. For them to be able to do that, they had to be able to trust that the researcher and the research process would ensure their anonymity. Accordingly, the participants were shown the researcher’s formal ethical clearance certificate (see Appendix B) from UKZN as proof that confidentiality and anonymity would be assured in line with the requirements of the university’s Ethics Committee.

Permission was also sought from the DoE (see Appendix A), from school principals

(see Appendix C) and teachers from the relevant institutions, and from the learners' parents/caregivers (see Appendix D), who were made familiar with the research procedures and with the significance of the research, and they did not raise any objections. Since the participants were minors, their parents signed letters of consent on their behalf (see Appendix D). The parent's signature indicated their permission for the child to participate in the research process.

The researcher ensured that the children voluntarily agreed to participate in the research project. It was also impressed upon the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any stage, and that they could refuse to answer a specific question or talk about an issue if they decided not to.

Pseudonyms were used when recording and discussing the findings to further protect the identity of the participants. As proof that the research process was completely ethical, feedback was given to participants when the study was over by allowing the parents to read a summary of the research findings. In case any of the participants had been negatively affected during their participation in the study, the researcher enlisted the services of the study supervisor, who is a registered psychologist with the HPCSA, to provide the required assistance.

### **3.10 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has discussed the research design and methodology that were used to complete the study, and has explained the particular methods, approaches, paradigms, and instruments used for the data collection. The data analysis process, the ethical considerations taken into account, and the validity and trustworthiness of the findings have also been discussed.

The following chapter presents the data generated for the phenomenon under study, and analyses this data for the purpose of answering the critical research questions set out in section 1.5 and addressing the aims and objectives of the study set out in section 1.6.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected from the focus group discussion, the individual interviews and questionnaires, and the classroom observations. Data analysis involves sorting and classifying the data into meaningful categories in line with the research objectives. The data was analysed thematically, and triangulation was used in order to ensure that the conclusions were thoroughly grounded. Triangulation refers to the use of qualitative and quantitative research tools to improve robustness and rigour in the data analysis.

The results from the focus group discussion; semi-structured interviews are presented first (the interview schedule can be found in Appendix F).

#### **4.2 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

The three main themes that emerged from this study were as follows:

1. Theme One: Learner feelings about being diagnosed with LDs and subsequently being placed in special education schools.
2. Theme Two: The need for the promotion of an equitable and inclusive learning environment that suits learners with diverse learning abilities.
3. Theme Three: The policies and practices that can promote equitable and inclusive learning environments suitable for all learners.

Table 4.1 shows the themes and the sub-themes emerging from the research.

**Table 3.1 Themes and sub-themes emerging from the research**

Main Theme	Sub-Theme
Theme One: <i>Learner feelings about being diagnosed with learning disabilities and placement in special education schools</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning disabilities</li> <li>• Diagnosis of disabilities</li> <li>• Learner feelings and perspectives</li> </ul>
Theme Two: <i>The need for promotion of equitable and inclusive learning environments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equitable learning environments</li> <li>• Promoting inclusivity</li> <li>• The use of innovative interventions such as information and communications technology (ICT)</li> </ul>
Theme Three: <i>Policies and practices that can promote an equitable and inclusive learning environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of government</li> <li>• The role of schools and teachers</li> <li>• The roles of parents and the society in general</li> </ul>

The first question on the interview questionnaire was: *Have you been to another school?* All the six interviewees answered yes, to this question.

The second question was, *“What do you know about this school?”* One interviewee answered that the school helps people, and another that the school is good. This was illustrated by the following responses:

Participant A: *“I think it is because the teacher is kind to me”*.

Participant B: *“School is very good with my reading”*.

Participant C: *“Fun school. Library has books”*

Participant D: *“It is a nice school”*.

Participant E: *“The school helps students”*.

Participant F: *“Library has books”*.

Most of the participants suggested that even if they were presented with an option to leave the school for another institution, they would rather stay. This was exemplified by Participant C, who stated, *“I wood like to stay”*.

The theory of self-determination (SDT) that underpins this study was a useful tool to use in this research. As stated earlier, Carter et al. (2011) recognise that “there is

an association between self-determination and improved educational outcomes more so, for children with learning disabilities”. This research sought to determine the attitudes of the learners by exploring their experiences and making them aware of their subsequent placements.

However, when it came to having learning difficulties, all of them admitted that they struggled with mathematics and writing. There was no evidence that being in a special education school had actually improved their attitudes towards learning or their ability to learn mathematical concepts or writing skills. This is shown in the following responses:

Participant B: *“strugiling with Reading”*.

Participant F: *“My report was bad in Maths”*.

Carter et al. (2011) state that “an understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential in self-determination”. When the above responses are viewed through the lens of SDT, which focuses on positive psychology, it is clear that these learners with LDs had become aware and gained an understanding of and their strengths and limitations. It is hoped that through a growing sense of such self-determination, these learners will be able to use this knowledge to direct their lives in ways that are personally valuable.

From the interviewees’ responses that affirmed the work of the school, it may generally be interpreted that the school has successfully created a learning environment in which learners feel at home. (However, this does not necessarily suggest that their learning challenges are being addressed.) The following responses support this interpretation:

Participant A: *“Yes, cause it’s a lovely place”*

Participant B: *“Yes, because I will be smart”*

Participant E: *“...if I get something wrong I can ask someone to help”*

In response to the question *“If you had a choice would you stay at this school or attend another school?”*, all learners expressed their satisfaction with the school by confirming that they would like to stay at the school if given an option to go to another school. This is a sign that the teachers and learners have built a good rapport

based on a long and trusting relationship. The following participant responses illustrate this point:

Participant A: *“Yes, I would... I make friends quickly here”.*

Participant B: *“Yes, ‘cause I like this class and ...”.*

Participant C: *“Yes, I would... I like the school ‘cause if I’m not sure of sums I ask Miss what’s it”.*

Participant D: *“Yes, I would... nice activities”!*

Participant E: *“Yes, I would... they make it easier for me”.*

Participant A: *“Yes, it’s a nice school for me”.*

When asked *“How were you selected to attend this school?”*, most learners displayed an awareness that they were at the school due to low academic achievement and learning challenges, but some said that their parents had simply decided to enrol them there. The following responses illustrate this point:

Participant A: *“I had a bad riport I dinot have nuf atenshen. They said I need a beter riport”.*

Participant E: *“My mom decided”.*

Participant F: *“My teacher said it is a betr school”.*

When asked about how they feel about being in the school, all of the participants said they liked being there or they were happy being there. When they were asked about whether they enjoyed lessons, all of them said yes. Some of the facilities and activities that were identified as good and helpful by the participants were the availability of library books and helpful teachers and friends. The following responses about how the participants feel about being at the school illustrate this:

Participant A: *“Yes, I don’t feel unhappy”.*

Participant C: *“Yes, good!”*

Participant D: *“Hpey...becas I lik it”.*

Participant F: *“Yes, goode”.*

Deci and Vansteenkiste (2004) state that “self-determination theory stipulates that the concept of basic psychological needs provides a useful basis for predicting

whether the social environment will support optimal functioning”. In considering these questions, learners were made aware of the influence of the school environment on their well-being and educational development.

### **Research Question 1**

- What are the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school?

The data gathered displays a range of feelings experienced by the learners. The most common experience at the beginning of the process of being diagnosed is that feelings of anxiety and uncertainty take over as soon as meetings between parents, psychologists and learners begin. The audio response from Participant D during the focus group discussion illustrates this: *“Makes me feel nervous...”*.

Parents, psychologists and teachers have good intentions in trying to find solutions to learning difficulties affecting children, but it seems they are not aware of the deep feelings of fear and anxiety that develop in LSENs. In the data gathered in audio-recordings, learners expressed that leaving an environment with which they are familiar and leaving their friends who help them in various ways, are some of the causes of anxiety and fear. The responses from Participant A (“I felt scared to leave my friends”) and Participant F (“I miss my teacher”!) exemplify the anxiety that separation can cause.

Most of the participants admitted that they have learning difficulties and that in most cases they struggle to do their work, to the extent that they become frustrated with the learning process. Participant D clearly expressed this by stating, *“I feel angry ‘cause I have to do things over and over!”* All the learners interviewed said that they sometimes failed to cope with the demands of the work at their level, which means they need interventions over and above being placed in a special education school. As illustrated previously, Participant C stated: *“Yes, I would...I like the school ‘cause if I’m not sure of sums I ask Miss what’s it”*. This participant admitted to not being able to complete mathematical tasks independently and was accustomed to receiving reassurance and constant support.

This study used SDT positive psychology principles and learners were allowed to express their thoughts and feelings with regard to being diagnosed with LDs. It is hoped that they will therefore, through self-determination, use these facts to direct their lives in ways that are personally valued.

## **Research Question 2**

- How do learners feel and what do they think about their diagnosis and subsequent placement in an LSEN school?

Most learners were able to point out the types of learning challenges that had led to them being placed in the special education school, and they attributed the decision to enroll them there to their parents. The learners themselves had no say about how they feel and what do they think about their diagnosis and subsequent placement in an LSEN school. It is good to note, however, that they generally viewed their transfer to a special education school as a positive move designed to improve their performance. The responses of most learners also showed that they were happy to be at the special education school and were satisfied with the assistance given by the teachers. These points are illustrated by the following participants:

Participant A: *“I had a bad report I did not have nuf atenshen. They said I need a beter report”.*

Participant E: *“My mom desided”.*

Participant F: *“My teacher said it is a betr school”.*

According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), SDT supposes that inherent in human personality is the tendency to be inquiring about one’s environment. Through the lens of SDT, it is clear that the learners were made aware of their placement and of how the placement was a result of their diagnostic label and LD. As noted previously, Deci and Vansteenkiste (2004) state that “self-determination theory stipulates that the concept of basic psychological needs provides a useful basis for predicting whether the social environment will support optimal functioning”. SDT assisted my study as it encouraged an exploration of the intrinsic thoughts and feelings of learners



regarding their being labelled as having an LD, and encouraged an examination of their experiences and the social conditions at their LSEN school.

In line with the interpretivist approach, which “aims to understand social phenomena and give meaning to the world in which the participant lives” (Grix, 2010), the findings of the research were also analysed in view of the literature findings. The literature review revealed that removing disabled learners from mainstream schools and putting them in special education schools promotes inequality, and that the global trend is that all countries are now moving towards inclusive education and doing away with all forms of segregation. This suggests that the challenges faced by disabled learners in their special education schools could be attributed in part to the segregation process. All learners learn better when they learn as part of a diverse group of people with a range of capabilities, allowing learning not only from teachers but also from one another.

The literature review also demonstrated that although researchers have paid a great deal of attention to interventions and to alternative instructional methodologies that are intended to address learning difficulties, they have done so from the perspective of teachers and policy makers. For example, Chard et al. (2009) “examined the practice of determining the efficacy of repeated reading approaches for improving reading fluency for students with or at risk of learning disabilities”. Their study found that “teachers employing this strategy need to adopt a positive attitude and to be very patient with the learners concerned because they take time to conceptualise issues”.

Donohue and Bornman (2014) explain that “political and policy changes, however, do not always translate into what occurs in practice”. This has been shown to be true in relation to the delayed implementation of the educational inclusion policy stated by South Africa over the past decade. Even if official policies and procedures are in place to create an inclusive education system, they are not being practically implemented.

ICT was identified as essential in making classrooms inclusive, as it has the capacity to facilitate learning for learners with diverse learning challenges, and also fosters more learner interaction and cooperation across abilities or disabilities. This will encourage the learners to progress and learn at their full potential, while still

maintaining positive relationships with their families, peers and school community. Most of the studies that have been carried out on special needs schools focus on teachers' attitudes and understanding of the challenges facing the special needs education sector, and do not take into account the learners' perspectives.

A general perception of inclusivity in the classroom is that with the appropriate educational support, teachers could practise inclusivity in their classrooms. For Vygotsky (1987), "the environment in which children grow up will influence how they think and what they think about". In this study it is evidenced; as stated before that parents, psychologists and teachers have good intentions in trying to find solutions to learning difficulties affecting children, but it seems they are not aware of the deep feelings of fear and anxiety that develop by placements in LSEN schools. In the data generated, learners expressed that leaving an environment with which they are familiar and leaving their teachers and friends who help them in various ways, are some of the causes of anxiety and fear. The responses from participants whilst data was being generated, and analysed in chapter four shows that students "...felt scared to leave my friends" and Participant F ("I miss my teacher!"); exemplify the anxiety that separation can cause.

Children learn from their parents as well as from their peers and from interacting with their environment, as well as from their teachers at school. It is vital for teachers to understand the social environment that their learners come from so that teacher and learners can relate to each other adequately and beneficially. However, those placing disabled learners in special education schools seem to overlook this important observation by Vygotsky.

Beacham and McIntosh (2014) conducted a study that "showed that as much as the pre-service teachers' attitudes towards using ICT within inclusive education were positive, they were also reluctant to use it as they had not had the required training". This finding emphasises the importance of skilling and equipping teachers for the diverse challenges associated with making classrooms truly inclusive.

The epistemology of the interpretivist paradigm suggests that knowledge is not just grounded in the classroom setting but also in historical and social contexts. It is socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society

(Scotland, 2012). Giving the learner a voice means that teachers have to actually listen to learners' opinions, even if those opinions are in conflict with theirs.

Teachers are already faced with numerous challenges as they go about their daily duties, including oversized classes and the negative attitudes of learners, so they require support from all stakeholders, especially parents, government and the communities in which they work.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

The chapter has presented and analysed the findings that emerged from the exploration of the experiences of learners at the LSEN school. The data was gathered using focus groups, individual interviews and questionnaires, and a classroom observation. "The process of data analysis was about inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2014).

According to Joffe (2012), "a thematic analysis should highlight the most salient collection of meanings present in the data set". Several themes emerged from the analysis, related to learners' perceptions of their disability and of the diagnostic process, and the varied learner experiences at the LSEN school. The processes involved were almost always the same for every learner. The learners appreciated and seemed to generally like being at the LSEN school; however, they admitted that they still experienced learning difficulties to the point of frustration at times, and that they had had no say in the decision to enrol them in the special education school.

The conclusion is that the segregation and teaching of these learners with disabilities in a special education school environment has not necessarily helped them to cope with their school work. This supports the findings in the literature that suggest that separating LSENs from their mainstream counterparts in fact delays their development and integration into society as independent adults who can function on their own.

The following chapter sums up this research study, provides an overall conclusion, and makes recommendations for stakeholders involved in special education.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study aimed to explore the practice of placing LSEs in special education schools at a time when the global trend is to promote inclusive educational policies and institutions. The study was conducted using six purposively sampled learners to generate data that could be used to address the following three specific research objectives.

- To briefly explore the experiences of learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school;
- To determine how learners feel and what they think about their diagnosis and subsequent placement in an LSEN school; and
- To offer recommendations that might serve as guidelines to support learners diagnosed with LDs.

The following section provides an overview of the research project and its findings.

#### **5.2 SUMMARY OF STUDY**

This qualitative case study sought to examine the appropriateness of the exclusionary educational practice of placing learners in a special needs school, and is deemed to be truly representative of similar institutions within South Africa. Semi-structured interview participants were chosen through purposive sampling, and a total of six learners were interviewed. The main research tool employed was the semi-structured individual interview, where the responses were captured using written questionnaires and audio recordings. The audio data and interview data were analysed and conclusions drawn.

Before data generation and analysis, a thorough literature review was conducted on the subject of special education, which distinguished between global research and South African research.

The global research showed a general trend away from exclusionary practices in education, including in special education. The adoption by most countries of the UN's declaration of education as a universal right for all children means that all forms of inequality and selective development of learning systems and facilities are being discouraged. The research shows that learners have different types of disabilities, that such disabilities are diagnosed at different levels of education, and that learners react differently to the diagnosis. It reveals too that although learners are generally referred to as learners with disabilities, their levels of competency and the issues that constitute disabilities are varied. The diagnosis process is also different from one learner to the other, and their parents communicate to them differently about their disabilities.

In this study, as was indicated by some of the learners that were interviewed, relocation to a special needs school meant that they had to be removed from an environment that they were used to, and from friends and family. Previous research shows that moving learners from one learning environment to another can disrupt their learning capabilities. This is probably one of the reasons why governments around the world are generally moving away from exclusive educational practices and towards embracing inclusivity in education.

The literature on South Africa demonstrated that the challenges of inequality in the provision of special education were a reality created by the apartheid past. The democratic government is trying to address these challenges, but with limited success. Facilities in special education schools around the country still differ from school to school, showing serious discrepancies along racial and class lines.

The data analysis was guided by an interpretivist paradigm, and in line with the qualitative research procedures, inductively reached research outcomes were arrived at, which in turn informed the conclusions drawn.

Apart from showing the appropriateness or lack thereof of special needs schools, the

interviews were also meant to ascertain the competencies of the learners. It was evident, based on the responses of the interviewees, that the learners are still struggling to cope with their work despite being moved to special education schools. Some learners, despite six years of formal education at a special education institution, answered the interview questions in very short and poorly constructed sentences.

This shows the level of disability as well as the enormity of the challenge of educating disabled learners. Of course, some are better than others, and their levels of articulation are clearly different. Some learners appreciated the work of their teachers and said that they were very helpful, but still they acknowledged difficulties in learning. As explained through the literature findings, special needs education is a challenging subject even for educators who are trained to offer it. It is highly demanding and teachers are quite often called upon to do other duties that go beyond teaching and that may require knowledge of other fields such as healthcare provision.

The South African government has taken the initial steps towards building a more equitable and inclusive policy on the provision of education through the publication of *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system* (2001). Education policy now includes and firmly supports inclusive education, but implementation is lagging behind. Action is needed to speed up implementation and to provide the necessary resources and facilities for the incorporation of learners with disabilities into mainstream schools.

### **5.3 CONCLUSION**

The analysis of the research findings has shown that there are many challenges faced by institutions and learners in delivering special education. The situation and challenges faced in the case study are likely to be similar to those faced by other institutions offering LSEN education across the country.

Children at the school selected for the case study were all separated from their non-disabled peers, and their socialisation was limited to their impaired counterparts and

their teachers. According to the literature findings, this situation limits learner growth. Compared to an inclusive school, the socialisation of learners in LSEN schools leaves a lot to be desired.

Aspects of learning such as language development, numeracy and literacy all develop better in an environment where children can learn from their teachers and also from their peers. It is therefore likely that all the learners in special education schools will lag behind their non-disabled counterparts in academic achievement, and also behind other disabled learners who are attending inclusive mainstream schools.

#### **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STUDY ITSELF**

This study aimed to offer recommendations that might serve as guidelines to support learners diagnosed with LDs. The findings of this study could serve as a broad framework for special education practice in spreading awareness that learners' thoughts and feelings with regard to their learning and school placement contribute significantly to their overall positive well-being and performance.

This study identified some of the challenges affecting special education schools, and further studies may be carried out to determine how mainstream schools can be transformed into inclusive educational institutions without adversely affecting the current teaching and learning process. Further studies should also be conducted to determine how government planning and implementation can be improved, because the literature reviewed showed that most government policy fails at the stage of implementation. Other studies can also examine and evaluate the benefits of inclusive education for all learners across the board, and not just for disabled learners.

#### **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT**

This conclusion responds specifically to the third research question: What strategies might serve as guidelines to support learners diagnosed with LDs?

The government needs to fully embrace the drive for inclusive education by creating new policies that promote its adoption and implementation. Such steps will need to include the training and up-skilling of teaching staff. The literature found that in South Africa teachers are either trained to be special education educators or conventional school educators only. No teaching programmes currently train teachers for teaching inclusive classes, and government therefore needs to come up with innovative and practical ways of preparing all teachers for the inclusive classes.

The data that was presented and analysed demonstrates that an inclusive educational environment would be more appropriate for learners with disabilities, so government plans and policies should shift towards the promotion of inclusive education. Springer (2007) is of the view that, “school performance is dependent on the interaction between the ‘triad’ of child, parents and school,” and further argues that “many influences affect a child’s neurodevelopmental potential”. Springer (2007) recommends that “a child possesses a unique set of strengths and weaknesses and there should be an early attempt by teachers to identify learners with potential learning difficulties with a view to early intervention”. School performance is dependent on the interaction between the ‘triad’ of child, parents and school and Springer (2007) further argues that many influences affect a child’s neurodevelopmental potential. The same author recommends that a child possesses a unique set of strengths and weaknesses, and that there should be an early attempt by teachers to identify learners with potential learning difficulties with a view to early intervention. However, such interventions must necessarily consider the learners’ interests and views.

## CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

This study gives learners identified with learning disabilities (LD’s) a platform to voice how they think and feel about their diagnosis and subsequent school placement.

The focal point of this qualitative study was the perceptions and experiences of the learners. The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of labeling learners and



placing them in an institution labeled as a special education school as an educational intervention. The study explored the effects of such interventions on the social well-being and academic performance of the learners concerned.

The study is underpinned by the Self-determination theory (SDT) and is a new focus area of psychology that centres on the development and nurturance of positive traits (Compton & Belmont, 2005), and that has been influential in educational psychology. SDT informed the approach that allowed learners to voice their thoughts and feelings about their experiences at school. In so doing, the learners created their own intrinsic motivation and interest in their learning process, and were made aware of their learning environment.

The concept of basic psychological needs provides a useful basis for predicting whether the social environment will support optimal functioning or will, alternatively, promote maladaptation and ill-being” (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004).

An interpretivist research paradigm was used, and data was analysed using thematic analysis. Data collection instruments included a focus group interview, individual interviews and semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations.

The findings indicate that learners diagnosed with LDs in an LSEN school experience various feelings, the most common being initial feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. The study concludes that the separation and educational instruction of LSENs in a special education school environment does not essentially benefit them. This supports existing research that suggests that separating LSENs from their mainstream counterparts delays their development and integration into society as independent, self-supporting adults.

Inclusive education systems are strongly recommended to encourage all learners to be allowed to interact and receive the same instruction, using differentiation in lesson planning to ensure that all learners are able learn at their own pace irrespective of diversity or learning ability. It is hoped that the findings of this study might be of significance to educators, policy makers and educational psychologists in raising

awareness of the importance of considering learners' views regarding their placement in LSEN schools.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1041

Ref.:214/B/1285

Ms SJ Magardie  
97 Lancelot Avenue  
Bluff  
Durban  
4052

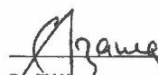
Dear Ms Magardie

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "THE EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS DIAGNOSED WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN AN LSEN SCHOOL", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 24 July 2017 to 09 July 2020.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Umlazi District

  
Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 26 July 2017

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## APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



3 August 2017

Mrs Scraya Magardie 206520078  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Magardie

Protocol reference number: HSS/0862/016M

Project title: The Experiences of learners diagnosed with Learning Disabilities in an LSEN School.

### Full Approval – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

In response to your application received 13 June 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Visvaranie Jairam  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza  
cc School Administrators: Ms B Bhengu-Mnguni, Philisiwe Ncayiyane, Mbalenhle Ngcobo, and Tyzer Khumalo

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

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## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPATION FORM

### REQUEST LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND CONSENT

Dear Principal,

My name is Soraya Magardie. I am a M. Ed. student from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Registration number: 206520078. I am required to carry out research to write up a dissertation. Your school has been selected to participate in this research project. The title of my research is:

#### **The Experiences of learners diagnosed with Learning Disabilities in an LSEN School**

The importance of this study is that it will contribute to professional development and practice.

With regards to professional development, teachers in a similar context, educational psychological and other related organizations will benefit from this study as it will stimulate transformation of thinking within the schools about how learners think and feel about their diagnosis and placements.

The study requests the participation of learners in interviews and focus group discussions. Participation is purely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time if they wish and no harm will befall them. I will observe maximum respect to your institution and participant anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study as well as in the reporting of findings. Information will be made available to all participants before publication of the study.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Soraya Magardie

You may also contact the research office UKZN -Westville Campus:

Premlull. Mohun  
HSSREC Research Office  
Tel: 031 260 4557  
Email: [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

#### CONSENT

I, the principal of \_\_\_\_\_ School, give permission to Soraya Magardie to conduct the study entitled “**The Experiences of learners diagnosed with Learning Disabilities in an LSEN School**”. I hereby confirm that I understand the nature of the research project, and I consent to the school participating in the research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FOR LEARNERS

### 1. Nature of the research project

Researcher	Name: Soraya Magardie Qualification: M Ed. (Educ. Psychology) Telephone No.: 060 678 3143 E-mail: sorayamagardie@yahoo.com
Supervisor	Name: Dr. Jairam Qualification: PHD (Educational Psychology) Telephone No.: 031 260 1438 E-mail: <a href="mailto:jairam@ukzn.ac.za">jairam@ukzn.ac.za</a>
Purpose	Experiences of learners diagnosed with Learning Disabilities in an LSEN School

### 2. Requirements of Participants:

I understand that:

- The research is about the experiences of learners diagnosed with learning disabilities in an LSEN school.
- My child's/ward's participation in the research is voluntary and subject to informed consent.
- My child/ward can withdraw from the research process at any time without any negative consequences.
- My child's/ward's participation in the research will not affect his/her position as a learner or their relationship with other teachers/parents at school.
- Participant's rights will be respected.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest of confidentiality.
- My child/ward can refuse to answer any questions asked to him/her.
- The researcher will use information from my child/ward in a way that will assure my child's/ward's continued respect amongst other learners, teachers and the wider fraternity.
- My child's/ward's identity will not be disclosed in the thesis.
- Photographs/videos of my child/ward will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- The research interview will not impact on my child/ward class time.

### 3. Declaration

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (the parent/guardian of \_\_\_\_\_) have been approached to request permission for the participation of my child/ward in the research entitled: "**The experiences of learners diagnosed with learning disabilities in an LSEN school**". I hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to my child/ward participating in the research project. I understand that my child/ward is at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, so he/she should desire. I also give permission for the use of audio recording and video recording in the research.

I **agree** to my child/ward \_\_\_\_\_ participating in a study that Soraya Magardie is conducting.

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE**

The focus group interview should take approximately an hour and a half. As my participants are children with learning difficulties/ disabilities I am incorporating the use of a Video clip as a prompt before the discussion with the learners. Learners with learning disabilities often need to be persuaded to participate. A focus group interview will encourage the group, rather than individuals, to voice opinions and non- literate participants will be encouraged.

I will explain to the learners what the purpose of the interview is and how valuable the information that they provide me with is for the success of my study and how it will be used.

The video clip will portray a learner and two adults (psychologist and parent) in a setting indicative of the interview after an assessment procedure was undertaken and the learner's arrival at a special school. Learners would be questioned about the video clip in order to express how they feel about being placed in a 'special' school and being diagnosed and categorized (labeled) as having a learning disability and excluded from mainstream schooling. I intend using a tape recorder and later transcribing the learners' perceptions, opinions and attitudes of this sensitive issue. Hearing other learners voice their feelings, I hope, will conjure up thoughts and memories and inspire the vulnerable child to partake in discussions.

---

### **POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:**

1. Who are the characters in the video clip?
2. What were they talking about?
3. Why do you think they have decided to bring the child (name given) to that school?
4. How is the child (name given) feeling?
5. Why does he/she feel that way?
6. Do you remember when you first came to this school?
7. Why did you have to attend this school?
8. What do you like about being in this school?
9. What do you not like about being in this school?
10. How do you feel about being in this school?

## **APPENDIX F: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - LEARNERS**

Good morning!

- Thank the participants for their assistance
- Explain the purpose of the interview
- Explain the purpose of my study
- Permission to use a recording device (Dictaphone)

**“Tell me why and how you were selected to attend this school.”**

- Do you find any difficulty with learning?
- If yes, how do you feel when you cannot cope or grasp concepts?
- Have these difficulties been explained to you?
- Can you explain and tell me what your learning disability is?
- How was this determined? Who helped to define and decide on this diagnosis?
- What do you understand by being a learner at this school?
- How were you selected to attend this school?
- Is this school able to help you with your learning difficulties?
- What were you told about this school and your placement here?
- Who are the other learners in your class or school?
- How are your feelings toward them and them toward you?
- What do you like/ dislike about attending this school?
- If you had a choice would you stay at this school or attend another school? (Please give reasons for your choice)

**Thank you for your participation!**

**APPENDIX G: EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE**

P.O. Box 100715

Scottsville

3209

11 January, 2019

To whom it may concern,

I have edited the following document for language errors, and in the process have checked the referencing and layout:

**Title:** *The experiences of learners diagnosed with learning disabilities in an LSEN school.*

**Author:** Soraya Juditha Magardie

**Degree:** Master of Education (Educational Psychology)

**Institution:** University of KwaZulu-Natal

**Student number:** 206520078

**Supervisor:** Dr V. Jairam

Please feel free to contact me should you have any queries.



Kind regards,

Debbie Turrell

debbie.turrell@gmail.com

## APPENDIX H: TURNITIN REPORT

### Masters Thesis

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

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