



COMBATING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT DISCREPANCIES AMONG LUBOMBO MAINSTREAM HIGH SCHOOLS' LEARNERS WITH PARTIAL HEARING IMPAIRMENT: A BIO- ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of learners with partial hearing impairment (LWPHI) in Lubombo mainstream high schools was welcome with a sigh of relief by parents of LWPHI. The purpose of this study was to explore intervention strategies which can be utilized for combating academic achievement discrepancies among Lubombo mainstream high schools' LWPHI. The phenomenological study used a social constructivism paradigm and a qualitative research approach. Participants of the study were selected using purposive criterion sampling and they were 14 (n=14) in total. The data collection process entailed utilization of individual semi-structured interviews and conducting of non-participant observations. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings suggest that modification of curriculum and instructional strategies can play a pivotal role in combating academic achievement discrepancies among LWPHI. The study recommends that Educational policy makers should consider formulating a policy that incorporates a more comprehensive curriculum that will ensure provision of more vocational subjects. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Training should consider joining hands with the Ministry of Information Communication and Technology to provide sufficient computers and internet connectivity to all mainstream high schools in the Lubombo region so that during their studies, LWPHI can be given ample time to access the computer laboratories and utilise internet resources.

KEY WORDS: Partial hearing, impairment, inclusive education, mainstream high schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) requires that all signatories of the United Nations develop an inclusive education system for all learners (Kiriungi, 2011). In a school set up, inclusion can be defined as a process of organising schools to be responsive to the needs of all its learners (Ainscow, 2010). This implies that inclusive schools should be capable of accommodating every learner regardless of their disabilities, making it certain that each learner belongs to a single community. Azanor and Adighn (2013) define LWPPI as learners encountering difficulties in their hearing system and who need classroom adaptations and implementing communication strategies that will ensure success in their academic and social life. Since hearing plays a significant role in expressing and receiving language, thus keeping us in touch with our world (Doorn, 2008), it is paramount to note that although LWPPI have residual hearing which allows some linguistic information to be processed aurally with or without amplification, partial hearing impairment immensely affects their educational performance (Beard, Carpenter & Johnson, 2011). It is on that vein that Gravell (2014) postulates that LWPPI still belong to one of the most vulnerable groups of children.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to Alsalem (2017) LWPPI constitute the largest sub-group of learners with hearing impairment. Furthermore, Alsalem (2017) posits that they are the least understood and most neglected of all learners with disabilities. This observation may be attributed to the hidden nature of the impairment they have. They have been marginalized because the impairment places them on the borderline between the learners who are hearing and those learners who are deaf (Dalton, 2011). To make matters worse, the LWPPI are not fully accepted by either the learners who are hearing or the learners who are deaf members of the society. In essence, regarding their status, these learners basically lack a sense of identity. Furthermore, teachers do not have enough time to cater for the educational needs of LWPPI (Kritzer, 2011). Several studies reveal that services like speech and language therapy, as well as audiological rehabilitation are not offered by well trained teachers in most developing countries (Parhoon, Hassanzadeh, Parhoon & Movallali, 2014; Drame & Kamphoff, 2014; Eke, Arinze & Okafor, 2018).

A study conducted by Kwame (2009) in Ghana revealed that LWPPI are very good in the grasp of practical lessons as demonstrated by their teachers in vocational subjects, like leather work, carpentry, as well as textile and fashion to mention but a few. As such, LWPPI showed great concentration during practical lessons. This went to an extent where it was observed that LWPPI were usually very attentive and work with little or no interest in what happens around them when they are on their own. As a result, in the practical aspect of examination LWPPI were graded as higher achievers than in theoretical ones, and their products were not much different from what is sold in the open market where they compete.

Another study conducted by Okeke (2010) in Nigeria established that there is an acute inadequacy of teachers who are trained to teach LWPPI. Okeke (2010) further observed that LWPPI have no one to cater for their exceptionality. This is a result of the Nigerian tendency of the Igbo folk of treating persons with



disabilities, as second rated individuals, hence depriving them the due respect they deserve, which results in LWPPI being labelled as underachievers of academic goals.

With the notion of inclusion, LWPPI in Kenya can attend mainstream schools alongside the learners who are not partially-hearing impaired (Kigotho, 2016). According to Kigotho (2016), the Kenyan education system provides the schools with assistance in the form of sign language interpreters, note-takers and/or hearing aids. The provision of such imperative learning assistive devices plays a tremendous role in combating educational discrepancies, thus ensuring maximum attainment of educational goals for LWPPI.

In addition, Kiboss (2012) found out that Kenyan high school LWPPI score lower in math tasks. As a result the Kenyan National Examination Council has continuously reported dismal results in this area, especially, in geometry. Kiboss (2012) postulates that the poor academic achievement of LWPPI in geometry is attributed to the utilization of inappropriate teaching methods by teachers, lower homework completion rates and lower overall motivation demonstrated by the LWPPI.

Furthermore, findings of a study conducted by Gudyanga, Wadesango, Hove and Gudyanga (2014) in Bulawayo proved that classroom design and layout, for instance, its capability to minimise noise, have great importance for LWPPI. Furthermore, findings of the study conducted by Gudyanga et al, (2014) revealed that since the mainstream schools consist of learners who use hearing aids and those whose hearing impairment does not require them to use such assistive devices, understanding the importance of the learning environment can enhance LWPPI's self-esteem, as it would facilitate the acquisition of educational goals.

Moreover, Kalenga and Fourie (2012) noted that though inclusive education policies in South Africa often work on the assumption that mainstream schools should be supported by specialist services, in the mainstream, LWPPI are inadequately served by the school systems. Several studies reveal that teachers have no clue on what to do with learners with special educational needs in their classrooms. They lack required training and expertise for teaching LWPPI (Kalenga & Fourie, 2012; Manchishi, 2015; Nair & Ramaa, 2014; Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2013).

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Eswatini (2005) stipulates that persons with disabilities have a right to respect and human dignity, and the government and society shall take appropriate measures to ensure that those persons realise their full mental and physical potential. In Eswatini, the Inclusive Education Draft Policy (2008) explicitly postulates that education is an inalienable right to all and it should be acquired in schools in the neighbourhood.

Theoretical framework

This study was underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Theory (1979) as a backbone and Hettler's Holistic Wellness Theory (1979) to augment the first theory. According to the bio-ecological systems perspective, individuals do not exist separately from their environments, thus environmental events and situations can have an intense influence on behaviour and development towards the persons in that immediate setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (1979)



views the environment as a series of nested structures, also called systems, and each system is contained within the next. These systems are the micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, macro-system and chrono-system (Landsberg, Kruger & Swart, 2011). Barriers to participation in any of these environmental systems will undoubtedly influence negatively the developing individual since an individual is a sub-system of the whole (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2011).

The micro-system: The micro-system is described as the first and innermost level; it contains the factors within the child's immediate environment and it directly affects the child. For most learners, this is the home where the child lives (Haihambo, 2011). It is the baby's life at home with its family. It is in the home that a child with partial hearing impairment first interacts with parents, siblings and visitors. This is the structure with which the child interacts in face-to-face situations on a daily basis and this system may have a direct input on the child's development.

The meso-system: The meso-system is a set of micro-systems connected with one another. This comprises the interrelations of two or more settings in which the developing child is actively involved. It is at this level where interaction between the peer group, school and family systems take place. It is important to note that what happens in one micro-system, such as home, can influence how LWPHI will respond in another micro-system, like, the school. For instance, a child whose parents have rejected him/her due to partial hearing impairment may have difficulty in developing positive relations with teachers. Likewise, the manner in which the LWPHI relates to typical peers in the classroom setting may have a bearing on the relationships outside the class; hence developmentalists increasingly believe that it is important to observe behaviour in multiple settings, such as, in a family, peer and school context.

Exo-system: According to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (1979), at this level the system consists of one or more settings that do not involve the developing child as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect or are affected by what happens in the setting containing the developing child. In this system, the environment is further from the child, but it has an impact on the child's development. Such inactive settings where the child is not fully involved, although he or she is part of it include the community, government agencies, mass media, informal social settings and professionals involved in the implementation of school programmes. Any of these exo-systems factors can possibly affect the experience of individual learners in an inclusive educational programme.

Macro-system: This level encloses the micro, meso and exo-systems. The macro-system is defined as consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems that exist at the level of the subculture or culture as a whole, along with any attitude, belief system or ideology underlying, such as the consistencies setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This means that macro-system refers to the dominant sub-cultural institutions (economic, social, education and political systems) and lifestyles. According to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (1979), change at the level of the macro-system, including the values, laws, customs, and resources affects all other levels and have an impact on the learners' well-being.

The chrono-system: This system involves the patterning of environmental events and transitions over a life course and socio-historical circumstances with regard to socio-cultural circumstances within a given space of time. Education for learners with disabilities, LWPHI inclusive, has kept changing from homebound to



special institutions, fulltime special classes, integration, and today the global trend is inclusive education, hence partial hearing impairment can be considered a life time event. The age of onset of hearing impairment, as well as the degree of hearing impairment has an impact on language development, thus, each of these levels can be seen to provide either an opportunity or a limitation to an individual in the system to which he or she resides and belongs. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (1979) is ideal for the study on the grounds that Inclusive Education is a complex process, influenced by many factors within the classrooms, families, as well as communities.

To augment the above theory, the study used Hettler's Holistic Wellness Theory (1979). In this theory, Hettler recognizes a human body as a formal expression of physiological development and personal evolution. According to this theory, wellness refers to an active process through which people make choices towards a more successful existence (Rachele, Washington, Cockshaw & Brymer, 2013). The theory is composed of six major dimensions which are intellectual, emotional, physical, social, occupational and spiritual dimension. This theory is ideal for the study in the sense that it looks at the learner in a holistic manner. It states that to develop holistically, LWPHI should be fully supported in all these six dimensions. Lagging behind in any of these six dimensions brings unrest which disrupts the LWPHI's wellness and in that way impedes the LWPHI from reaching self-actualization.

METHODOLOGY

Research questions

The main research question for the study was: What intervention strategies can be utilized to combat academic achievement discrepancies among Lubombo mainstream high schools' LWPHI? To achieve the main research question, the study was guided by the following sub-research questions:

- a) How can curriculum used enhance academic achievement for LWPHI in Lubombo mainstream high schools?
- b) What intervention strategies can be used to ensure that resources in Lubombo mainstream high schools combat academic achievement discrepancies among LWPHI?

Research method

To explore the ways of combatting academic achievement discrepancies among LWPHI in Lubombo mainstream high schools, the study utilized a social constructivism paradigm. This paradigm assumes that understanding, significance and meaning does not only take place within an individual. Instead, learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities, such as interaction and collaboration with other human beings (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Social constructivism was selected as the best paradigm for this study on the premise that it believes in language as the most essential system through which human constructs reality, hence if LWPHI are to acquire optimally in terms of educational goals, they should be provided room for active and meaningful participation.

This study utilized a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research allowed the researchers to explore the strategies for combatting academic achievement discrepancies among LWPHI in Lubombo mainstream



high schools from multiple perspectives (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020) that is, through the utilization of interviews and observations. A high level of authenticity of data collected was ensured through conducting the interviews in private rooms, as such minimized chances of destruction to both the interviewers and the interviewees. This study was underpinned by a phenomenological research design. The phenomenological research design enabled the researchers to collect data using a multiple data collection technique, by employing interviews and observations (Creswell, 2014).

Participants for this study were fourteen, and these comprised of eight boys and six girls who were purposively sampled. They were LWPHI in Lubombo mainstream high schools. Purposive sampling was ideal because it enabled selection of participants on the basis of their anticipated richness and relevance of information they were likely to give in relation to the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Data were collected using interviews and observations. Individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted in English, and these enabled the researchers to immerse themselves into the research setting with open minds (Creswell, 2012). While conducting interviews, the researchers noted in some cases that the conversations were drifting in an unproductive direction and therefore, the researchers gently guided the conversations back on course (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Furthermore, interviews gave the researchers an opportunity to study non-verbal behaviour of each participant. Probing deeper enabled the researchers to gather in-depth information from the participants' opinions and emotions (Creswell, 2012).

Non-participant observations were used to provide pertinent additional source of data for verifying, clarifying and expanding the information obtained through the aforementioned interviews. Through non-participant observation, the researchers got first-hand information on what participants were undergoing and not what they said they were undergoing (Bailey, Hennik & Hutter, 2011). The focus of observations in the classrooms was to see whether the teachers did have the expertise to accommodate LWPHI. For instance, making alterations, like visual or tactile instructional materials to compensate the hearing loss.

Data collection process and analysis

The researchers adhered to all ethical considerations before and during the data collection process (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). The researchers visited each school at least three times until such a time when they felt they had gathered enough data needed. The first visits were meant for introduction of the study to the head teachers. On the second visits, the researchers established a rapport with LWPHI, as potential participants, and made arrangements of time to be utilized for subsequent visits, which were for administering the interviews and conducting the observations.

When the process of data collection was over, the raw data were transcribed. Transcription is the process of transforming interview notes and audio recording into texts (Johnson & Christiansen, 2012). Since the study also utilized observation, observation notes were also transcribed. During thematic analysis, six basic steps, as posited by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed. These steps are familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing a report.



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Modification of curriculum

Response from participants revealed that there was a need for curriculum modification. Participants mentioned that for them, the current situation required an urgent monitoring mechanism which should check and find out the reasons behind the low level of academic performance of the LWPHI. They said the current situation indicated that they were currently subjected to a curriculum with loopholes. Hence, participant number 4 in school A stated that:

If we don't get good marks they should see that something is wrong with our subjects (Participant 4, Female, Form 2, School A).

When participants were asked what nature of help they thought should be availed in as far as subjects are concerned, their responses revealed that they wished schools should intervene by introducing more practical and vocational subjects. To justify their stand, most participants stated that those subjects are easy to be understood because they appeal less to the sense of hearing, hence, given the rightful environment, they would pursue practical subjects up to degree level. A participant who was observed neatly sewing a blouse responded by saying:

The government of Eswatini should consider establishing more vocational and practical subjects at high school (Participant 2, Female, Form 5, School E).

Introduction of sign language in schools has been proposed by participants as a good step in enriching their understanding of lessons and overall performance. Participants hoped that being equipped with proper sign language skills would be an effective way of filling the gap created by the impairment. One of the participants had the following to say:

I think the school has to introduce sign language. I think that can help us minimise the gap in communication (Participant 2, Male, Form 2, School D).

When probed further as to who deserved to be equipped with sign language skills, most participants stated that sign language should not be limited to those with partial hearing impairment, but it should be compulsory for all learners. The following participant had this to say:

Learning sign language should be compulsory for all learners. Teaching it to LWPHI may result in discrimination (Participant 2, Male, Form 2, School D).

Intervention on resources

Through observation, it was revealed that although teachers are expected to be key curriculum implementers, instructional strategies which they used were not friendly to LWPHI. Participants' responses, on the other hand indicated that LWPHI wished that during lectures, where learners missed the meaning, repetition of instructions should be done.



Our friends sometimes lend us their exercise books, and that helps us. But teachers should make sure that we hear and understand everything they say because sometimes we do not have time to see our friends (Participant 2, Male, Form 3, School B).

A majority of participants stated that to eradicate the challenge of constant utilization of the lecture method of teaching, teachers, as implementers of the curriculum, have to vary their instructional methods by utilizing roleplaying and visual-audio aids, such as films. A participant was quoted saying:

I think teachers can make learning enjoyable to all of us. For me, I like it when the teacher takes us out for field trip, but they hardly do that. We can also roleplay our lessons. Roleplaying and watching films add some value to our lessons (Participant 2, Female, Form 3, School C).

Observation proved that during group work and class presentation, participants hardly got an opportunity to speak. Tasks, like presenting group work on behalf of the group to the rest of the class would be given to those learners who volunteered. Participants' responses echoed the researchers' observation by also revealing that in terms of following up regularly on participants' work for quick identification and rectification of errors at an early stage, more should be done by teachers. One participant alluded that:

No one said I can't present our work. At the beginning of the discussion I did not know what the teacher wanted us to do because I did not get the instruction clearly. And because we are usually given a specific time to finish the group work, I think it is okay that the others did it (Participant 2, Female, Form 5, School E).

Most participants felt that most teachers consider their presence as a show to make numbers in class and witness the success and progress of their hearing counterparts. Emphasis on participants' responses was that teachers should effectively teach them, and not treat them as misfits in the mainstream classroom. A participant responded by stating that:

All of us come here to learn. The government of Eswatini should do more to help us. There is no reason why some teachers should not know how they should help us achieve in the mainstream school. We cannot come here to celebrate other learners' success (Participant 4, Female, Form 2, School A).

Findings also revealed that participants appreciate to be given the due help they deserve during the course of the lesson. Most participants strongly objected to extra time after school hours and they validated their stand by citing limited means of transport to their respective homes and mental fatigue.

Teachers should help us during class time. There is no time for helping us after school. I stay at Maphopheni and there is not enough transport after the bus which takes us after 4: 00 p.m. (Participant 3, Female, Form 3, School C).



Another one said:

When the other learners go home, we should also go because we are tired (Participant 1, Male, Form 2, School A).

A majority of participants stated that teachers are the best people to detect the impact of partial hearing impairment on actual learning outcomes versus expected outcome. Participants further stated that teachers are indirectly affected because the quality of their learners' academic results is compromised. As a result, a majority of participants felt that to improve academic performance for LWPHI, teachers, as key resources in the schools, should assist with scouting and identifying sponsors of learning assistive devices, like, hearing aids for those learners whose hearing impairment required utilization of the same. They hoped that with suitable learning devices, most of the challenges LWPHI face at school would be solved. One of the participants said.

We see organisations like UNICEF and Save the Children coming in and out of our school. I believe if teachers can talk to such organisations we can get help because the impairment affects our education (Participant 2, Male, Form 4, School A).

Another participant responded by saying:

UNICEF can help us if our head teacher can ask for help (Participant 2, Male, Form 3, School B.)

One more participant alluded that:

I think if the teachers can ask Luke Commission to help us, Luke Commission cannot refuse to help us (Participant 3, Female, Form 3, School C).

When probed as to why they thought such organisations could help, one participant said:
These organizations have love for children (Participant 2, Male, Form 4, School A).

One more participant said:

UNICEF teaches about children's rights (Participant 2, Male, Form 3, School B).

Responses by some participants in this study showed that provision of learning material and facilities, such as books and internet connectivity were a challenge. Participants mentioned that while they are trying all their best, they believe that if they can be equipped with a broad range of support in the form of the needed material, they were prepared to work an extra mile to improve their academic performance. One of the participants was quoted saying:

We need a lot of learning material. Our school library has some reading material, but we still need more because we do a lot of subjects (Participant 3, Female, Form 3, School C).



Most participants' responses proved that with an impaired sense of hearing, learning aids for LWPHI should be more in visual form to compensate the hearing loss. Participants who were given visual stimuli by teachers, such as lesson outlines, visual instructional aids and main points of each lesson stated that if instructional aids are in visual form, the teachers should be flexible enough to allow LWPHI to sit in their favourable positions; positions where they cannot be obstructed in their effort to have a better view of the teacher. In addition, through observation, the researchers proved that participants' position in relation to the teacher determined the extent at which the participant would be participative in class and the degree of absorption of lesson content. For instance, participants who were sitting in a position where they were away from sources of external noise, like away from open windows, were least obstructed from the teacher, thus they showed high level of alertness during lessons. On the degree of participation, one of the participants said:

Some teachers, surprisingly, pick it from my facial expression that I am left behind. It makes me laugh it out at times (Participant 3, Female, Form 2, School A).

DISCUSSION

Worth noting is that the academic journey of LWPHI hinges among a broad range of aspects of school organisation and teaching, like teachers, pastoral care provision, availability of ancillary help, links with specialist agencies, academic structures like policy makers, curriculum designers and planners, and the attitudes of staff members and other learners. All of these systems interact to provide an environment in which LWPHI are educated, and as such, each of these stakeholders should play a pivotal role in the education of LWPHI. As a result, there is a need for the series of nested structures of different environments to join hands and provide accommodation means to improve the learning conditions for LWPHI in the mainstream high schools. Gudyanga et al, (2014) justify the significance of such accommodation measures as levelling the 'playing' field, as a means of providing equity for the LWPHI.

The finding of this study which revealed most participants requesting for a checking mechanism to determine the root cause of their low level of progress in academic goals is a great cause of concern. LWPHI are striving for high academic goal attainment, and their inclusion should be coupled with a revisit of the curriculum to see if their inclusion does serve the purpose of providing quality education as stated by the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (1990) which requires the commitment of all schools to child-centered pedagogy where individual differences are accepted as a challenge not to the learner, but to the entire education fraternity. The concept of the least restrictive environment should be in the perspective of accessing the curriculum, thus swift measures should be put in place to ensure a quick identification and rectification of errors at an earlier stage.

In this study, findings revealed that in the mainstream high schools, the curriculum offered puts more emphasis on education for white collar jobs, thus, vocational subjects were limited in scope. They were Agriculture, Fashion and Fabrics, and Food and Nutrition. This finding is contrary to one which was conducted



by Kwame (2009) where there was a vast provision of vocational subjects: carpentry, textile and fashion, leatherwork, visual arts and welding to mention but a few. Participants in this study, therefore, expressed their desire for addition of more vocational subjects and they justified their request by stating that such curriculum would be responsive to their exceptionality.

The finding of this study on participants complaining about the limited scope of vocational subjects needs to be given the urgency it deserves. Kwame (2009) revealed that LWPHI enjoy the practical aspect of vocational subjects and such interior motivation boosted the academic performance of those learners. Worth noting is that this participants' complaint on limited scope of vocational subjects comes eight years after the introduction of Inclusive Education in all Eswatini public schools, a time when one would expect that curriculum designers have had ample time to modify the curriculum to match it with the nature of diverse learners it serves. In a Bio-ecological systems point of view, the act of dehumanizing LWPHI portrayed by negligence of curriculum designers on designing curriculum which suits LWPHI seems to be an influence of the ancient held belief which attributed disabilities to a result of punishment from God for the wickedness of the parents of the LWPHI or disobedience by the expectant mother by venturing into the sacred grooves. If the purpose of mainstreaming LWPHI is to pave their way to self-reliance, the curriculum should, therefore, be tailor made to meet their exceptionality, as such would eradicate the discriminatory attitude which is portrayed by the current curriculum LWPHI are subjected to.

One of the participants of this study was observed neatly sewing a blouse and with such a skill, the participant may be turned to act as a good role model or peer educator to other LWPHI. This finding resonates well with a finding from a study conducted by Kwame (2009) which explicitly proved the importance of guidance to LWPHI and emphasises that without education and right guidance, the talents possessed by learners with hearing impairment, would be locked up and the society would be poorer of them. This is in the sense that teaching of vocational skills to the LWPHI enables them to function independently by assuming overall responsibility for their conduct (Kiriungi, 2011). For instance, in a school which offers leather work, a LWPHI who is good at leather work can be given access to the workshop and his or her potential assessment can be in terms of manual dexterity, attitude and aptitude.

Some of the LWPHI use hearing aids and they mentioned that they would love their schools to try means of minimizing unnecessary noise, which usually disrupted them while the learning was in progress. This finding echoes Gudyanga et al, (2014) who assert that an ideal classroom for LWPHI should be away from noise and controlled for acoustics that affect hearing aids, since in an environment which is unsympathetic in acoustic terms, the hearing aids pick up and amplify every detail of sound, irrespective of its relevance. Gudyanga et al, (2014) postulate that the teaching and learning environment is least restrictive if it facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Therefore, to combat academic achievement discrepancies among LWPHI in mainstream high schools, restrictive infrastructure needs to be adjusted to harmonise with the needs of the LWPHI they are accommodating. There is a need for adaptation on classrooms by adding carpets, window treatments or acoustical wall or ceiling coverings to absorb sound.



Responses from a majority of participants showed that participants expected teachers to be knowledgeable of how they can help LWPHI. The quality of the teaching staff, goes a long way to help achieve quality education. Mushoriwa and Gasva (2008) opine that teachers should try to understand the problem of the learners and try to cooperate with them in helping their navigation of the learning process. While teaching, a teacher can stand at one place, so that he or she engages the attention of LWPHI so as not to distract them with constant movements. To enhance intellectual wellness for the LWPHI, the teacher can try to speak slowly and clearly, as well as repeat questions and comments from the other learners. The finding of this study on the act by teachers of not taking into consideration the presence of LWPHI in the mainstream classroom cripples the effort of the Ministry of Education and Trainings of providing equitable education to all learners. Since hearing is what keeps us in touch with our world (Doorn, 2008), failure to repeat the instructions for LWPHI robs them opportunities of meaningful participation, as their attendance of lectures signifies physical inclusion, while not taking into consideration their hearing status contradicts the motive behind their inclusion.

It was also revealed in this study that the constant utilization of the lecture method mounted unnecessary boredom and fatigue to the LWPHI. The participants' proposal of utilization of stimulating instructional strategies seems to be a remedy that could combat academic achievement discrepancies among LWPHI. An infuriated participant asserted that there was no reason why teachers could not help LWPHI. The participants' responses seem to be in line with findings of a study conducted by Okeke (2010) in Nigeria who established that there is an acute inadequacy of teachers who are trained to teach LWPHI as well as findings of a study conducted by Kiboss (2012) which proved that the low academic performance of LWPHI in geometry was attributed to inappropriate instructional methods used to teach the LWPHI.

Worth noting is that in the Lubombo region, the Ministry of Education and Training set up an In-Service Education and Training (INSET) department and a Special Education Needs unit. INSET is expected to capacitate in-service teachers by keeping them abreast with latest methods of teaching, while on the other hand, since every learner has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs, the Special Education Needs unit is entrusted with ensuring that each learner is accorded instruction tailored to meet his or her exceptionality. Therefore, since special education deals with making provisions for or adapting to the distinct needs of LWPHI (Kiriungi, 2011), to combat academic achievement discrepancies among LWPHI, there is a dire need for a multi-disciplinary team, which comprises of the INSET, Special Education Needs experts and the pool of regional subject inspectors who are capable of assisting in-service teachers to be well acquainted with all the techniques available to teach LWPHI, and also to ensure that instructional strategies in mainstream high schools are guided by trends or philosophies which are sensitive to the uniqueness of LWPHI. For instance, to equalize opportunities for meaningful participation in practical subjects, verbal delivery of lessons can be augmented with practical illustrations, experiments and fieldwork.

Okeke (2010) posits that Inclusive Education is about a philosophy of acceptance and provision of a framework within which all learners, regardless proven difficulties at school, can be valued equally, treated with respect and provided equal educational opportunities. Accordingly, the goal of mainstreaming LWPHI is not to deny the existence of differences, but to enable all learners to belong to an educational community



that values and validates their individuality as members of the society (Okeke, 2010). During the course of the lesson, activities should involve all the learners. Therefore, with their expertise as micro managers of their respective classrooms, teachers should avail opportunities of boosting self-esteem to LWPHI by allocating them times at which they should speak, like making presentations on behalf of their respective groups, as opposed to always opening hands to volunteers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study explored some intervention strategies which could be employed on combating academic achievement discrepancies among Lubombo mainstream high schools' LWPHI. The major conclusion of the study is that for effective implementation of the inclusion of LWPHI in mainstream high schools, the schools should be thoroughly modified so that they can be responsive to the needs of LWPHI. External intervention from various quarters of society, including school authorities, education administrators, government and well-wishers can play a pivotal role to combat academic achievement discrepancies among LWPHI.

In line with the findings discussed above, different entities in the education fraternity are expected to work collaboratively to combat academic achievement discrepancies among LWPHI in Lubombo mainstream high schools. Furthermore, educational policy makers should consider formulating a policy that incorporates a more comprehensive curriculum that will ensure provision of more vocational subjects, as such can give an option to LWPHI to focus on the subjects they are good at, as well as interested in. The Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini, through INSET is encouraged to create an intensive nexus in order to adequately capacitate in-service teachers with new pedagogies which entail embracing and celebrating inclusion of LWPHI in the mainstream high schools. Moreover, most mainstream high schools in the Lubombo region have already been electrified, therefore, the Ministry of Education and Training should consider joining hands with the Ministry of Information Communication and Technology to provide adequate computers and internet connectivity to all mainstream high schools in the Lubombo region so that during their studies, LWPHI can be given ample time to access the computer laboratories and utilise internet resources. Teachers on the other hand can make use of projectors during teaching to enable animated power-point presentations.



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