EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

By

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

In the

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

In the

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

(School of Education)

At the

UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO

SUPERVISOR: PROF M J THEMANE

2016

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled: “EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA” is my own work and that all the sources used have been duly acknowledged.

…… **……**

Signature **Date**

Mantsha T.R.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me life, the strength and courage not to give up; you deserve my special praises.

The completion of this study would not have been possible without the assistance and support of the following people:

- Professor M. J. Themane, my promoter and my mentor, for his encouragement and support. Your wisdom, caring attitude, patience and positive criticism made me grow;
- My husband, Rashaka Amon Mbuvha, who was supportive throughout this study;
- My special children, Khuliso, Dakalo, Rendani, and Rabelani for your special support and motivation when I wanted to give up;
- My father Vice Bishop A. K. Mantsha and my siblings, with your prayers and good wishes, I am where I am now;
- Mr. A. M. Gadisi and Mr. A. O. Sirwali, my colleagues, your support was highly appreciated; and
- Lastly, to all the participants, who allowed me to interview them. Thank you.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to:

My father, my husband and my children for the support and love they gave me during the gruelling journey of putting this research project together. Without your invaluable tolerance and patience this work would not have been accomplished. Your support is greatly cherished and appreciated.

ABSTRACT

For the past two to three decades, there has been a large influx of students with disabilities into institutions of higher education worldwide. In South Africa, in these past three decades, records of intake of students with disabilities were not recorded as services and support of this kind were not institutionalised. Within this transformation process, which involved including previously under-represented groups, institutions of higher learning are currently facing challenges of what kind of educational support to offer to students with disabilities, in order to help them to succeed academically. This study investigated the educational support offered to students with disabilities at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) as experienced by the students themselves. The study, therefore, gives an insider perspective. The study followed a qualitative research approach, and used classroom observations, document analysis and focus group interviews to collect data. Ten students with various disabilities participated in the study. The findings of this study reveal that there are some degrees of support that UNIVEN offers. However, some gaps to meet students educational needs still exist. These gaps include lack of information about the programmes that UNIVEN is offering, physical infra-structure barriers and lack of disability knowledge. This study recommends the establishment of a forum in which students with disabilities can discuss and address their educational needs on campus. Other recommendations include the following: lecturers' training, disability awareness, the installation of an online interactive portal to increase communication between students and the university, and an online survey measuring lecturers' attitudes and knowledge. The study suggests that future research could include factors that predict graduation rates among students with disabilities.

Key words: Educational support, Disability unit, Medical Model of disability, Social model of disability

ACRONYMS

AT	Assistive Technology
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DSC	Disabled Student Council
DoE	Department of Education
DU	Disability Unit
FOTIM	Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis
HE	Higher Education
HEDSA	High Education Disability South Africa
HEI	Higher Education Institution
INDS	Integrated National Disability Strategy
LD	Learning Disability
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NCSNET/NCESS	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training/National Committee on Education Support Services
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
ODP	Office of the Deputy President
OSDP	Office on the Status of Disabled Persons
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UK	United Kingdom
UL	University Limpopo
UNIVEN	University of Venda
UPIAS	Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UK)
USA	United States of America
US	United States

SRC	Student Representative Council
WHO	World Health Organisation
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pages

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS, CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

APPENDICES

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Educational support for students to succeed academically at higher education institutions (HEIs) is often described as inadequate, particularly in developing countries like South Africa where there are few resources to provide for such support (Greyling, 2008). This problem is even more pronounced among students with disabilities (Muthukrishna, 2000). The problem of these students is compounded by the fact that, historically, less attention has been given to them. However, with the advent of White Paper no. 6, more and more attention is being focused on them. White Paper No. 6 proposes that all students regardless of their inabilities, can learn if given sufficient support (Department of Education, 2001).

Quality educational support for students with disabilities at HEIs needs to be in place to enhance their educational success (Graham-Smith, 2004). Educational support may refer to a wide variety of instructional methods, educational services (Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), or other university resources provided to students in their learning. Such support aims to help them to catch up with their peers, meet their learning standards, or, generally, succeed in academic work (Pingry, 2007; Michail, 2010). Educational support in a learning environment may be provided to individual students, specific student populations (such as non-English speakers or students with disabilities), or all students.

I became aware of the low completion rate among students with disabilities as I am employed in a Disability Unit (DU) in an institution of higher education in South Africa. DUs normally offer specialised educational support to students with disabilities, in order to facilitate access and integration of these students at their institutions (Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM), 2011). Despite legislation and

efforts to support students with disabilities, there seems to be no breakthrough with regard to throughput rates of these students. Studies have demonstrated that these students' pass rates are poor (Pingry, 2007; Naidoo, 2010). My general assumption is that this problem may be caused by lack of support, morally, spiritually, educationally and otherwise. I was, thus, motivated to find out whether the lack of proper educational support and resources at HEIs might be contributing to long stay and high failure rates of students with disabilities in these institutions. It is important to investigate this phenomenon because policy-makers and practitioners are hard pressed to find answers to poor throughput rates amongst these students (Crous, 2004).

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Students with disabilities at HEIs in South Africa are failing to complete their study programmes on time (FOTIM, 2011). It would appear that the lack of proper educational support at these institutions is at the centre of the problem. Notwithstanding the fact that considerable effort has been invested in the educational support internationally, the fact remains that very little has been done in South Africa to ensure holistic progress relating to disability inclusion (FOTIM, 2011).

In the UK, Healey, Fuller, Bradley and Hall (2006) argue for the need to continue to seek out, listen to, and act upon the views of disabled students in an attempt to make higher education thoroughly inclusive. They contend that listening to the experience of students with disabilities, themselves, has the advantage of letting individuals express their lived experiences of being students in HEIs and enabling the physical and hidden barriers that they may encounter to be highlighted. This view is also held by Runhare (2004) who reveals that in Zimbabwe students with disabilities are dissatisfied with the quality of services provided to them by lecturers at tertiary institutions probably because their side of the story is often overlooked. In South Africa, studies have looked at this problem from a different perspective. For example, whereas studies by Muthukrishna (2000) and Howell (2005) have looked at the model for inclusion of students with disabilities in HEs, they have not paid attention to the students' views on what affects them from their own point

of view. Differences between practices offered in different universities have also not been fully explored (Howell, 2005). These studies and others, point to the need for an in-depth examination of this phenomenon. A study focusing on this area has not been done in Limpopo Province so far. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the availability of educational support and the gaps in the support that students with disabilities are receiving at the University of Venda (UNIVEN).

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted the Ecological Systems Theory. The Ecological Systems Theory states that human development is influenced by different types of environmental systems (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2009). It also provides a valuable contribution for understanding the support services of students, lecturers and the institution and the challenges of addressing barriers experienced in learning. Formulated by famous psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner, this theory helps us understand why individuals behave differently in different environments. In this study this theory helped in understanding students with disabilities in their different learning environment. The theory is discussed in the following section.

1.4 THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

This theory, originating in 1979, has influenced many psychologists in terms of the manner of analysing the person and the effects of different environmental systems that the person encounters (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The ecological systems theory has since become a theoretical underpinning that serves as a foundation for other theorists' work. The Ecological Systems Theory holds that we encounter different environments throughout our lifespan that may influence our behaviour in varying degrees. Bronfenbrenner recommends that it is helpful to consider the social context or environment as a set of interwoven structures or systems (referred to as micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-and chrono-systems), each defined as follows:

- The microsystems setting is the direct environment in which an individual develops, and it is characterised by those individuals and events closest to one’s life, and

involves continual face-to-face contact, with each person reciprocally influencing the other, for example: family, friends, teachers and interpersonal relationships.

- The mesosytem involves relationships between two or more microsystems in one's life. This means that our family experiences may be related to our school experience.
- The exosystem is a setting in which there is a link between the context in which a person does not have any active role, and the context in which the person is actively participating.
- The macrosystem setting is the actual culture of an individual. Cultural contexts involve the socio-economic status of the person or his family, his ethnicity or race, his gender and cultural values.
- Lastly, Chrono-system is the developmental time frame that spans across the interaction between these systems and their influence on individual development (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). This means that, at this level, the attention will be on the student, whether he or she has developed or shown an improvement as the systems interact.

Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights the complexity of the interaction and interdependence of multiple systems that impact on individuals, their development and learning (Darling, 2007). Barriers to development and learning arise from a dynamic interaction between internal and external systems factors best viewed on a continuum. Practically, this means that when a student has difficulties or any other system is in trouble, a person who thinks eco-systemically will never debate whether the cause or solution is within a single system, but will take the interdependence between them all into consideration (Swart & Pettipher, 2005).

Moreover, it is crucial to grasp that barriers to learning and development are not only situated in individuals, but in the interaction between systems and the continuum of contributing internal and external factors. Internal factors are those situated within the individual as a system, for instance, as would be the case with a student with a physical impairment. External environmental factors also include lack of proper educational support and facilities to cater for educational needs of students with disabilities. There

should be interaction and reporting back between each system, for the benefit of students experiencing barriers to learning. However, currently, there is no support or national guidelines on how to support students with disabilities at HEIs (Rieser, 2012).

1.5 LITERARURE REVIEW

Services for students with disabilities in the US universities have long been established (Pingry, 2007). The support services were fuelled by the anti-discrimination legislations in 1973, where there was advocacy to expand services to accommodate “deficiencies” of students with disabilities. This advocacy grew into Social Models of disability and, today, they have been expanded to even identifying the campus environment as deficient and exclusive of disabled people. In a small number of services, for example, provision of Braille materials to students with visual impairments, a quiet revolution is taking shape. The support is becoming more proactive, and even extended to campaigning for access, anticipating inaccessibility, universities are educating campuses about inclusion and their faculty about inclusive course and curriculum design (Mole, 2012). It would appear that the Social Model of disability has been the catalyst and a driving force for this revolution. Despite the legislation and anti-discrimination legislation, limited attention has been given to addressing issues of access and success of students with disabilities at HEIs.

However, the problem of poor pass rates/access and success among students with disabilities is not new to South Africa. A survey entitled “Provision for students with disabilities in Higher Education” was carried out by the UNESCO section for Special Needs Education as a contribution to the World Conference on Higher Education (UNESCO, 1999). Many countries, in Latin America, Europe, Asia and Pacific, Arab States and Africa participated in the survey. The survey found that the educational needs of students with disabilities were often ignored. However, it found that this differed from one country to the other. For example, developing countries, like those in sub-Saharan Africa differed remarkably from developed countries in Europe. The study also pointed out that there was a need to improve services on the educational needs of students with disabilities, particularly in those universities in poorer regions, which lack sufficient resources. This is also true in previous disadvantaged universities in South Africa where

previously white universities are better resourced. Thus, universities in poorer regions should mobilise resources to improve their services to students with disabilities.

Booth, Cooper, Karandjeff, Large, Ellegrin, Urnell, Odriguez-Kiino, Chiorring and Willett (2013) consider using student voices to redefine support in California's community colleges. Students offer considerable insight into what they find particularly supportive in their educational process and how institutions can advance their progress and achievement. The researchers provide a detailed description of student perspectives on what they find supportive and their suggestions on how best to meet their needs. Mamiseishvili and Koch (2012) mention the importance of Self Advocacy Skills (Students voices) at College Level. In the HEIs environment, students are expected to advocate for themselves with faculty and staff members. Self-advocacy refers to an individual's ability to effectively communicate his/her own interests, needs, and rights, as well as to assume responsibility for making appropriate choices. Such support could be provided by, among others, the Disability Unit (DU).

DUs normally offer specialised services to students with disabilities to facilitate their access and integration into mainstream faculties (FOTIM, 2011). Typical services that DUs offer to students with various disabilities include, among others, an alternative test arrangement, such as extended time, taking the test and exams in a separate room, having the test read out loud, having a scribe for the test mostly for students with visual impairment (blind and partially sighted), adaptive equipment/technology, provision of materials in alternative print (e.g. braille, large print, and tape-disk), peer tutoring, and permission to tape record lectures (Pingry, 2007; Mole, 2012). Apart from the level of support that the DUs are giving, this research sought to investigate how the students felt about the support they were getting from the DUs. It is of great significance to explore if students with disabilities need more support than students without disabilities.

Although services such as support for students with disabilities are provided across different DUs in South African universities, the variation is more in the number of different services provided (FOTIM, 2011). The FOTIM study reveals that the focus of service

offerings at HEIs mainly addresses impairment by means of technology and assistive devices. Mole (2012) advised that DUs and students should move away from a "technology fixes all" mentality to interrogation of learning and teaching methodologies. By addressing impairment using technology and assistive devices, DUs are promoting the Medical Model of disability over and above the Social Model of disability.

In South Africa, Bell (2012) investigated teaching and learning support for students with hearing impairments at a university in the Western Cape. This study revealed that the existing support services were largely inadequate; a large number of barriers related to teaching and assessment were experienced. Barriers related to teaching and assessment can be attributed to lack of support for teaching and learning. This leads to poor academic achievements.

1.6 RESEARCH GAP

There are numerous problems facing students with disabilities, both in terms of gaining access to higher education and accessing the support they need to navigate through their studies. The implication is that all staff, academic and support, have a responsibility for providing a learning environment in which disabled students are not disadvantaged (Denhart, 2008). The literature shows that if universities want to attract students with disabilities, something needs to be done to improve communication and to ensure that the needs of disabled students are met on a number of different levels (Hearly *et al.,* 2006). Many disability studies have not paid attention to the students' experiences in terms of the support they receive in HEIs. This study differed from most previous research in that it focused on listening to the voices of students. Two students with the same disability may have widely different experiences. This study seeks to look at the availability of educational support and the gaps in the support that students with disabilities are receiving at UNIVEN from an insider perspective. The insider perspective when doing research is a valuable tool to uncover hidden emotions about the subject, revealing specific lived experiences of the researcher's reflections, which might add to current debates and discourse (Obasi, 2012).

1.7 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to investigate the educational support of students with disabilities at institutions of higher learning in South Africa. The University of Venda (UNIVEN) was used as a case study to investigate this phenomenon. My reason for conducting this study is that I have identified weaknesses and gaps between types of education support offered to students with disabilities. This study examines whether the support offered meets the academic needs of students with disabilities at UNIVEN.

1.8 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to:

- Describe the support offered to students with disabilities from an insider perspective;
- Examine the effectiveness of the educational support provided by the Disability Unit at UNIVEN;
- Establish the gaps in the educational support offered to students with disabilities at UNIVEN; and
- Suggest ways to improve educational support to meet the needs of disabled students.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

The findings of this study can contribute to knowledge gaps about the educational support that is offered to students with disabilities at UNIVEN. Identifying these gaps would assist the university to improve its services to students with disabilities. The results of the study can also potentially assist the Department of Higher Education in revising their policy on the National Plan for Higher Education. The study may also assist the Department of Education to develop strategies that will assist in strengthening support services offered to students with disabilities at tertiary institutions.

1.10 REASEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.10.1 Design of the study

The study followed a qualitative research method, where a phenomenological research design was adopted. Since the aim of this study was to establish the kind of educational support offered to students with disabilities and how this support contributes towards their academic performance from their perspective, the qualitative approach seemed appropriate. Moreover, the type of research problems under study required that this study follow an interpretive paradigm within a qualitative research methodology framework since the reality to be studied consisted of participants' subjective experiences of their external world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2007).

1.10.2 Population

The participants were from UNIVEN DU, in South Africa. An attempt to limit extraneous variables as far as possible was done by keeping the group similar in terms of experience, disabilities and also by working with the assumption that their educational needs and learning environment might be similar because they are all UNIVEN students. Students from the first to the fourth level of study will be selected. The total number of students enrolled for the support in the DU is 127. Ten students participated in the focus group interviews.

1.10.3 Sampling

Creswell (2013) suggests that the number of participants in a phenomenological design should be between 5 and 25. In this study, the number of participants was determined within this sample. This study adopted purposive sampling because the researcher was considering particular criteria, that is, students with disabilities. Prospective participants were contacted through the DU.

1.10.4 Data collection

Three methods of data collection were used, namely focus group interviews, observations and document analysis. Interviews were audio-taped with the consent of the participants and then transcribed.

1.10.4.1 Focus groups interviews

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight. When well-executed, a focus group can create an enabling environment that puts participants at ease and allows them to thoughtfully answer the questions in their own words and add meaning to their answers. Students with various disabilities (physical, sensory, mental and medical conditions) who were willing to participate in this study were asked to submit their names. Then a date for the focus group interview was set. The interviews lasted for one hour. The present researcher facilitated the discussion while an assistant took notes and operated the tape recorder.

1.10.4.2 Observations

Observations of educational support for students with disabilities were conducted and field notes were taken. I decided to use observations as a research technique of obtaining data because I wished to gather data from a natural setting, that is, the classroom/lecture halls and walking paths. Observations entail a systematic noting and recording of events, behaviour, and objects in a social setting chosen for the study. Observations rely mostly on seeing and hearing (Creswell, 2013). This study necessitated the use of non-participant observation. I observed lectures where students with disabilities were attending and took field notes of my observations.

1.10.4.3 Document analysis

Document analysis entails scrutiny of relevant documents. This can be a valuable source of information (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smith, 2004), and it gave me an idea of the educational support students with disabilities at UNIVEN received (challenges and

successes). Document analysis involved looking at national and institutional policies on disability, teaching and learning policy, assessment policy, tutoring and mentoring policy, learning materials and timetables. De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2011) point out limitations of using documents as incompleteness of many reports, statistical records and historical documents, with gaps in the data base that cannot be filled in any other way, as well as bias in documents not intended for research. The present researcher used the documents to verify the data collected through focus group interviews and observations. A combination of procedures enabled the researcher to validate and cross-check the findings. Since each data source has its own strengths and weaknesses, the strength of one procedure can compensate for the weaknesses of another (Patton, 2002).

1.10.5 Data Analysis

I applied the constructivist theory analysis guidelines as described by Charmaz (2000) in the analysis of my study data. As an interpretive researcher, I used both the inductive and deductive data analysis approaches. I studied the authentic data gathered through the constructivist grounded theory analysis. The data from classroom observations, focus group interviews and policy documents were transcribed. Concepts that emerged from all the data sources were identified, coded and then grouped together to form different themes and categories. This process helped me to understand the educational support that students with disabilities receive at UNIVEN.

1.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS

All researchers attempt to produce valid and reliable data in an ethical manner. The verification of data refers to checking the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of the research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). I explained each of these terms in relation to my study in the following subsections: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

1.11.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the correctness of data and translates more appropriately for naturalistic enquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). In qualitative research, credibility implies the extent to which the phenomenon studied is accurately reflected in the research. To ensure that credibility is achieved, I conducted focus group interviews with students with disabilities who had been receiving support for about two years at UNIVEN. Credibility was also enhanced by the rich description obtained from observations and document analysis.

1.11.2 Transferability

Transferability is concerned with the extent to which the findings of the research can be applied to other groups within the wider population or to other situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). My interest was to provide rich in-depth descriptions of the research findings in order to make successful comparisons. The selection of diverse participants (students with various disabilities) contributed to the transferability of this study. This study provided rich in-depth descriptions of the research findings. I explained the context and design of the study to the reader. Therefore, the readers could make an informed decision about his/her specific context.

1.11.3 Dependability

Dependability of data is the extent to which the same findings could be repeated if the same research instruments were simulated with similar respondents under similar conditions (Creswell, 2013). Dependability was obtained by using clearly defined guidelines for data collection and data analysis to enable any person to evaluate the quality of the study. All data collected through interviews were kept in a database. The dependability of this study was also enhanced by discussion of my perceptions, insights and analyses with my supervisor.

1.11.4 Conformability

Conformability refers to the extent to which findings are free from bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Throughout the data-collection process, the keeping of a field journal allowed me to record all issues that could affect personal attitude and emotions, as well as those of the participants. I ensured that my personal views, feelings, and attitude would not influence the investigation. I made personal field notes about my attitude, feelings, and reactions to minimise any bias and preconceived ideas about support for students with disabilities at UNIVEN.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.12.1 Permission to conduct study

Relevant persons and authorities (University of Venda's ethical committee) including the ethical committee of the University of Limpopo were consulted and permission to conduct the study was obtained.

1.12.2 Informed consent and voluntary participation

A detailed explanation of the purpose and procedure of the study was given to the participants and their consent was sought. I explained to the participants that their participation in the research is entirely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time. It was made clear to them that, should they choose to withdraw, their information would not be used anywhere in the study. I asked them to give written consent before the focus group discussions.

1.12.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and protection of identity were upheld. To ensure that both confidentiality and anonymity were not compromised, I recorded and stored data using numbers rather than the participants' actual names. Assurance was given on the issues of human dignity, protection against harm, freedom of choice and expression and access to information.

1.13 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The study is outlined as follows:

Chapter one introduces the research topic. The problem statement and aims of the study are outlined in this chapter. Chapter two outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Chapter three reviews the literature on the support given to students with disabilities at HEIs. Chapter four outlines the research design and research methods used in the study. Chapter five analyses data collected and presents the findings and answers the research objectives. Chapter six is a summary of the findings, drawing conclusions in terms of the study and making recommendations for further research.

1.14 CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to orientate the reader to the educational support of students with disabilities at institutions of higher learning in South Africa. The study is a case study of the University of Venda (UNIVEN). Research gaps in the field of inclusive education were outlined. The theoretical framework that underpins the study is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter one, a short overview of the educational support for students with disabilities was given in order to conceptualise the inquiry. In Chapter 2 the concept of disability was explored. Lastly, there was a discussion on the Ecological System Theory, which the present study has adopted. This theory provides a framework for understanding the complexity of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between an individual student and a multiplicity of systems that are connected to the student.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF DISABILITY

Since the reconceptualisation of disability in the late 1970s, the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) developed their own definition of disability. The UPIAS policy statement asserts to change conditions of life of persons with disabilities, and, thus, overcoming the disabilities which are imposed on top of their physical impairments by the way society is organised to exclude them (UPIAS, 1974/1976).

This, though originally inclusive only of people with physical disabilities in later years, it was extended to include all forms of disabilities, both sensory and intellectual, (Barness, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999; Barness, 2000; Barnes & Mercer, 2004). The Social Model locates disability in society not in the individual. Instead, it identifies social prejudices, inaccessible environments, discriminatory work arrangements and segregated education as disabling societal elements. By breaking the causal link between impairment and disability, the UPIAS (1974/1976) and Oliver and Barnes (1998) offer disabled people an effective tool for political campaigning in which environmental, attitudinal, institutional and economic barriers can be identified and addressed. Discriminatory societal practices become the focus for change rather than medical interventions, welfare solutions and

charitable acts. The model provides an empowering proactive approach against disabling aspects of society (Mole, 2012).

In their description of the Social Model of disabilities, Gill, Kewman and Brannon (2003) conceive disability as action of a dynamic interaction between humans and their surroundings. This shifts emphasis from the individual to the broader social, cultural, economic and political environments. From this perspective, disability may even be regarded, primarily, as the consequence of a disabling environment. The Social Model sees the disabling practices of society as the cause of disability rather than individual impairment (Oliver & Barnes, 1998). Where society puts up barriers, such as stairs for wheelchair users or examination time constraints for people with learning difficulties, it produces disability. When educational institutions design spaces, lectures, or activities which incorporate people with disabilities, the disabled are not consulted or included in the processes. Oliver and Barnes (1998) note that if disability is socially caused, then changes in social organisations (which occur all the time) may increase or decrease the number of people with disability in society. I concur with Oliver and Barnes in that the design should be universally designed from the onset so that everybody, including people with disabilities are included. If the design only targets students/people with disabilities, the institution will still be stuck in the Medical Model.

The Social Model of service provision would determine ways to make all aspects of university life accessible from the onset (Mole, 2012). In order for HEIs to embrace this model, the physical, learning and assessment environments would have to be wholly accessible. In most situations, if there is a service for students with disabilities there must, by implication, be a need for accommodation. The logical outcome of this argument is that Social Model services are an oxymoron (Gibbs, 2004). In an ideal world there would be no need for this type of service because all aspects of university life would be accessible.

This research is aligned to the Social Model of disability and accepts that disability impacts on the lives of disabled people. It is understood that support offered to disabled

people will often provide accommodation to counteract societal barriers but also, at times, to counteract the effects that impairments have on individuals. The effect of impairment is stressed by the Medical Model, which views disability as a problem of the person, directly caused by disease, trauma or another health condition which, therefore, requires sustained medical care to be provided in the form of individual treatment by professionals (Word Health Organisation, 2010). The Council on Higher Education (2005) states that the Medical Model, management of the disability is aimed at a "cure," or the individual's adjustment and behavioural change that would lead to an "almost-cure" or effective cure. Medical care is the main issue, and the principal response is of modifying or reforming healthcare policy.

In South Africa, as in various other countries, a Medical Model has been used to understand many aspects of child development in the context of special needs education (Education, 2006). Scott, Loewen and Funckes (2003) create a table that compares the Medical Model of disability with the Social Model of disability. Table 2.1 is utilised in the literature about HE service provision to disabled students and is, therefore, one of the pivotal influences on service providers (see Scott, Loewen & Funckes, 2003).

Table 2.1: Conceptual Models of Disability

Medical Model	**Social Model**
Disability is a deficiency or abnormality.	Disability is a difference.
Being disabled is negative.	Being disabled, in itself, is neutral.
Disability resides in the individual.	Disability derives from the interaction between the individual and society.
The remedy for disability-related problems is cure or normalization of the individual.	The remedy for disability-related problems is a change in the inter-action between the individual and society.
The agent of remedy is the professional.	The agent of remedy is the individual, an advocate, or anyone who affects the arrangements between the individual and society.

Source*: Scott et al., (2003).*

When promoting the Social Model that rejects over-medicalisation of the student, it seems

to ask for medical documentation as proof of disability. This is clearly debated in the literature and disability studies. Scholars confront the power of professionals and medical diagnoses as the final word in matters relating to the provision of services. The focus of this study is to establish from an insider perspective the kind of support offered to students with disabilities at UNIVEN and the gaps that still exist.

The Social Model is, however, not without its problems. In its desire to be an effective political tool, it ignores what Carl Thomas refers to as "impairment effects" (Thomas, 1999). Impairments effects are those limiting aspects of living with impairment that are created by the society we live in; they are a direct result of being impaired. There is a well-documented debate within the Disability Study literature that outlines the advantages and disadvantages of this deliberate omission by social modellists (Olivier, 1996; Thomas, 1999).

2.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

Many scholars have explored the significance of disability in education from multiple perspectives (Howard, 1999; Gay, 2000; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003). Nieto (2004) writes, "Our public institutions are unsuccessful with many students, primarily those with disabilities". Many explanations have been offered for the inequity present in our educational system and society. In fact, a long history of perceived deficit explanations for the failure of students with disabilities exists that place the burden of failure external to the universities. Such explanations include, but are certainly not limited to, students' performance, inadequate preparation, and lack of family support (Douglas *et al.*, 2005). While at the outset deficit explanations for inequity might seem innocuous and offer potential insight, the beliefs held by lecturers and the university community spill over into the daily interactions in the institution in the form of low expectations and self-fulfilling, generative modes of address that serve to privilege some and disadvantage others (Ellsworth, 1997a; Oakes, 1990). These explanations become even more problematic when considered in concert dynamics of with different abilities of HEIs in which the

overwhelming majority of students are non-disabled and cope with mainstream education. Students with disabilities are not performing to the same levels as their able counterparts. Beyond deficit thinking and an overwhelming demographic of high numbers of able students and increasing numbers of students of colour, the public school is influenced by existing barriers to learning that continue to be significant barriers to student achievement (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

However, while disability is an inextricably prominent force in US society, it remains a socio-political construction (Mole 2012; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). It is critical to note that inequity in academic achievement, while complex, is not a result of innate differences in ability based on race (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Rather, we might consider the context of social constructions of disability and its potential impact on lecturers, students, curriculum and teaching in the lecture room to better understand the inequity in our institutions as embedded in a much larger societal context. In the present day, we find an educational system that remains largely unsuccessful in meeting the needs of students with disabilities in South African HEIs. Students with disabilities are not only lagging behind other students on standard measures of achievement as mentioned above, but are also three times as likely to drop out of school and twice as likely to stay longer in the system. They are more likely to be poor, living in sub-standard housing and dependent on welfare (Gibbs, 2004).

2.4 THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM THEORY

This theory is multi-dimensional because both the Medical and Social Models are involved in human development. Ecological System Theory is relevant to the study because it emphasises the interaction between an individual's development and the systems within the general social context. Bronfenbrenner's theory is an example of a multi-dimensional model of human development, which posits that there are layers or levels of interacting systems resulting in change, growth and development, namely physical, biological, psychological, social and cultural (Kejerfors, 2007). What happens in one system affects and is affected by other systems (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2005), thus, human behaviour, experiences and actions cannot be understood if the contexts in which they

occur are not considered. In the context of this study, it means that if the system of education has problems, this will affect the way HEIs offer support to students with disabilities in SA.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model explains the direct and indirect influences on a child's life by referring to the many different environments or contexts that influence a person's development (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). A major challenge to the present education system lies in understanding the complexity of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between the individual student and the multiplicity of systems to which he or she is connected (Landsberg *et al*., 2005). Students do not exist in isolation from the surrounding systems, whether systems of education, teachers, schools or the curriculum, but rather these systems help determine success in their academic career. If all the systems work well together, all the students in all the levels of education, including those in HEIs who are experiencing barriers, should benefit. One of the influential theory perspectives, namely the eco-systemic perspective relates specifically to this research study. These models reflect on the importance of social context on development of individual people (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). The discussion that follows elaborates on the eco-systemic model.

2.4.1 The Eco-Systemic Model

The eco-systemic model is a combination of the ecological and systems theories. The ecological theory emphasises the interdependence and relationships between an organism and its physical environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). These relationships and the underlying connections are seen as a whole, as each entity within the ecological system is dependent on and influenced by the other entities (Landsberg *et al*., 2005). The system's theory is similar, as it views different levels of the social context as "systems" where the functioning of the whole is dependent on the interaction between the parts and each part affects the other in repeated cyclical patterns (Landsberg *et al*., 2005). Thus, different systems, such as the peer group, the community, the university and the broader social system, form significant aspects of the students' social context.

Although the eco-systemic model illustrates the dynamics of the various systems well, Bronfenbrenner (1992) proposes a more detailed bio-ecological model, which further helps to clarify the interaction between an individual's development and the social systems. Subsequently, understanding the origins, maintenance and solutions to barriers to learning and development cannot be separated from the broader social context and the systems within it. This would include the individual (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). According to this model, there are three main interacting dimensions to consider when trying to understand development in context (Swart & Pettipher, 2005), namely:

- Person factors, such as behavioural tendencies that either encourage or discourage certain kinds of reactions from others, for example, the individual's personality;
- Process factors, such as the patterns of interaction that occur in a system, for example, interaction that takes place in the family contexts, such as families, institutions of higher learning, classrooms and local communities, and
- Time, like changes over time due to maturation in the individual as well as changes in the environment.

Furthermore, an individual is seen as part of the sub-systems of society, which are also interrelated. Bronfenbrenner (1992) identifies five structures or environmental systems in which human beings develop namely macro, exo, meso, micro and chrono systems (Darling, 2007). These are described in detail in the next section. If all environmental systems are working together and offer support to students with disabilities, this will contribute to the success of students.

2.4.1.1 Macro-system

As a consequence of Bronfenbrenner's critique (1989: 2002) of his own theory, the definition of the macro-system changed the most. In the first place, it was influenced by Vygotski´s theory about the psyche's socio-historical evolution that led to Bronfenbrenner to see the macro-system as a sociocultural context. Macro-systems are attitudes, beliefs and values that are inherent in the systems of a society or cultures that are embedded (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). In the South African context, the macro-system can refer to the

level at which policy decisions about education are made, namely the national Department of Education (DoE). However, at this level there is an absence of support strategies and guidelines in the policies to address the kind of support that HEIs should offer to students with disabilities. When this study was being conducted there were no clear structures or guidelines documented at this level to regulate the practices of support services for students with disabilities in universities.

2.4.1.2 Exo-system

The exo-system is the environment in which the student is not actively participating or involved, but which may greatly influence the student by what happens in it. Yorke and Longden (2008) identify several problems and challenges in the exo-system, notably the education system, social development, health services, the media, parents' place of work, community organisation, and resources, either human or financial, that are not readily available and that may delay service delivery to HEIs. It is clear that, although the DoE has good policies in place, provision must also be made in terms of resources so that they can be well-implemented by HEIs. I refer to exo-system as a system in which students with disabilities are not directly involved, for example, the implementation of the Department of Education (DoE) policies and plans for higher education. The DoE has not provided or designed guidelines on how students with disabilities should be supported in Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa.

2.4.1.3 Meso-system

The meso-system is defined by Swart and Pettipher in (Landsberg *et al*., 2005) as the relationships that develop and exist between the micro-systems, and which influence the relationship between the DoE, universities, and DUs, as they interact with and modify one another. The meso-system comprises a group of associated micro-systems which affect each other (Donald *et al.*, 2002), for instance, the family, institutions of higher learning and peers; these interact with one another. The interaction may be referred to as the local neighbourhood or community. I noted, the way HEIs offer support to students with disabilities differs according to the context in which they are based and the availability of

resources. Therefore, the support has no uniform structure. This may mean that the academic performance of students with disabilities can be affected negatively.

2.4.1.4 Micro-system

The micro-system is the individual's immediate environment and it is characterised by those individuals with whom people have continuous contact. All people influence each other reciprocally in the context of the family, the institutions of higher learning and the peer group. Proximal interactions take place at HEIs refer to the face-to-face, long-term relationships that shape lasting aspects of development (Donald *et al*., 2002). The micro systems involve the relationships within the crucial setting of the student, for example, the university, DU staff, lecturer, home and parents as the most immediate people who would ensure that students with disabilities are getting support to reach their highest potential.

2.4.1.5 Chrono-system

The chrono-system is the developmental time frame that spans across the interaction between these systems and their influence on individual development (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). This means that at this level attention will be on the student, whether he or she has developed or shown an improvement as the systems interact.

Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights the complexity of the interaction and interdependence of multiple systems that impact on individuals, their development and learning (Darling, 2007). Barriers to development and learning arise from a dynamic interaction between internal and external systems, factors best viewed on a continuum. Practically, this means that when a student is having difficulties or any other system is in trouble, a person who is thinking eco-systemically will never debate whether the cause or solution is within a single system, but will take the interdependence between them all into consideration (Swart & Pettipher, 2005).

Moreover, it is crucial to grasp that barriers to learning and development are not only situated in individuals, but in the interaction between systems and the continuum of contributing internal and external factors. Internal factors are those situated within the individual as a system, for instance, as is the case with a student with a physical impairment. External environmental factors also include lack of support and facilities to cater for educational needs of students with disabilities.

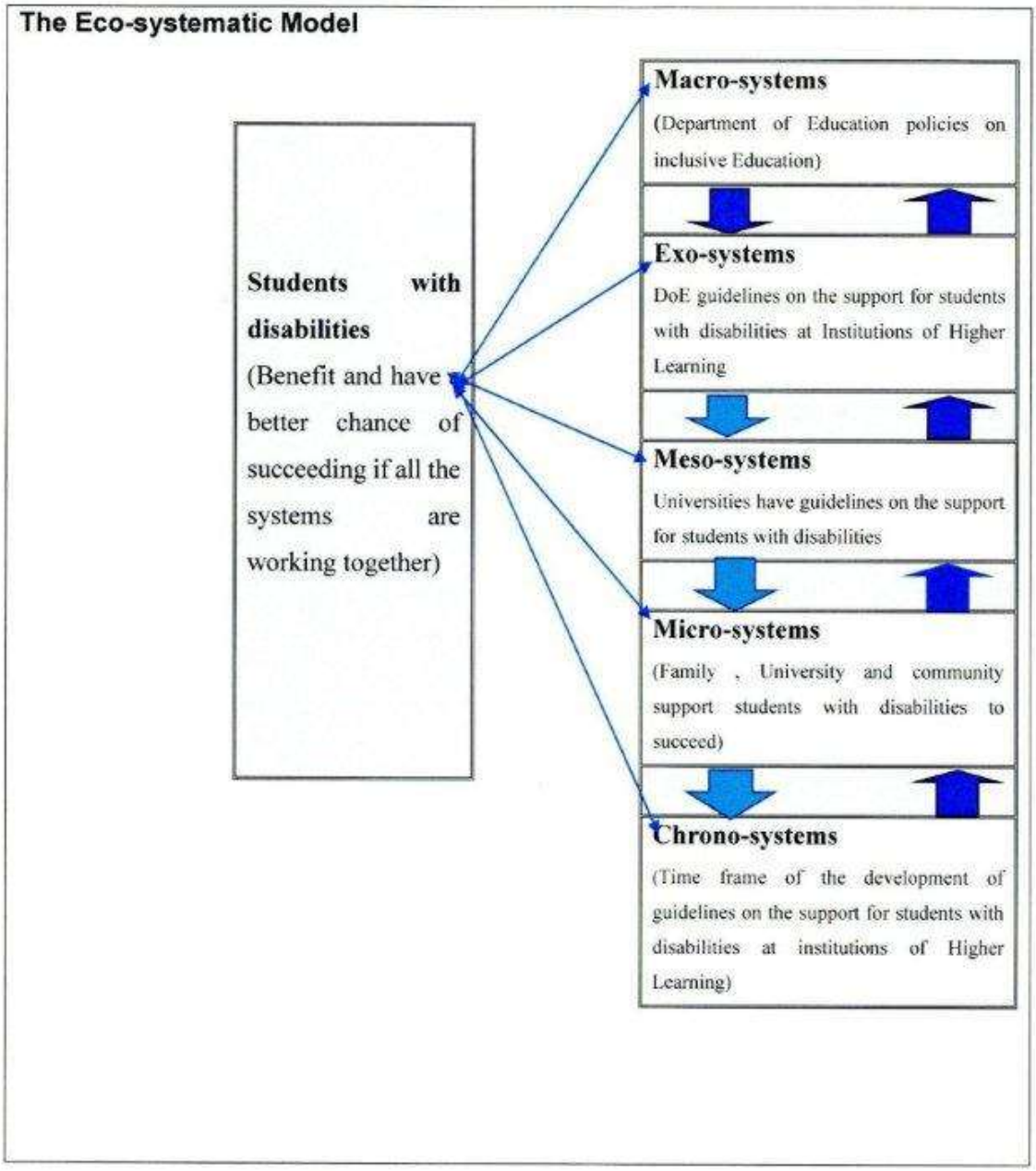

Figure 2.1: The Eco-systematic Model

In Figure 2.1 above there are arrows going in the opposite direction to indicate a supposed interaction and reporting back between systems, for the benefit of students experiencing barriers to learning. However, during this study, there was no support or national guidelines on how to support students with disabilities at institutions of higher learning.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the different paradigms that guide research namely positivism, interpretive and critical paradigm. The researcher adopted an interpretivist standpoint, as it allows one to see the social world as the construction of individuals. The disability and ecological theories were also conceptualised. The study utilised the Social Model of disability because of its emphasis on society as an agent that must change and support people with disabilities. In the next chapter, literature on the impact of disability policies and support for students with disabilities in HEIs are discussed in detail.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the literature on the support for students with disabilities in HEIs. Firstly, I detailed the support offered to students with disabilities in HEIs, both internationally and nationally. The reason for looking at the international perspective is to provide an overview of trends and, best practices and models used by DUs at HEIs and elsewhere. This picture could allow South African HEIs to assess and evaluate their support against international standards and practices. Secondly, the kind of support offered to these students by DUs in South Africa is discussed. For the purposes of this study, it is important to discuss from insider perspective the kind of support given to students with disabilities at UNIVEN. Thirdly, as a focus of the current study, the chapter discusses existing weaknesses and gaps.

3.2 SUPPORT OFFERED TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HEIs: INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Services for students with disabilities in US universities have long been established. The support services were fuelled by anti-discrimination legislations in 1973, which advocated for an expansion of services to accommodate “deficiencies” of students with disabilities. This advocacy grew into Social Models of disability and, today, they have expanded to identifying the campus environment as deficient and exclusive of disabled people. Support for students with disabilities is becoming more pre-emptive and faculties are flattering inclusive education in their curriculum design (Pingry, 2007). It would appear that the Social Model of disability has been the catalyst and a driving force for this revolution (Mole, 2012).

3.2.1 United States of America

The increase of support seems to have been spearheaded by the introduction of several laws such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that required post-secondary institutions that received federal funding to provide equal educational opportunities for qualified handicapped individuals. Such initiatives have contributed to the increasing enrolment of students with disabilities in higher educational institutions in the US. Over the past twenty years, Canada has experienced an increase in students with disabilities attending Canadian universities and obtaining university degrees (Gillies, 2012). This rise is likely a result of recent anti-discrimination laws, and an increase in support services offered to persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities in Gillies' study described University as a place where they felt comfortable and included, and where they had access to a range of support. However, barriers to transition from university to work still exist. Gillies (2012) agrees that, despite these initiatives, students with disabilities constantly face various barriers in their educational environment in the US and in other parts of the world as well.

Typical support for students with disabilities in the USA includes an alternative test arrangement, such as extended time, taking the test and exams in a separate room, having the test read out loud, and having a scribe for the test, mostly for students with visual impairment (blind and partially sighted). Adaptive equipment/technology, provision of materials in alternative print (braille, large print, and tape-disk), peer tutoring and permission to tape-record lectures are made available for students with various disabilities (Pingry, 2007; Mole, 2012).

Students with hearing impairments (students who are deaf or have a degree of hearing impaired) may have common accommodation and alternative arrangements in the same way as students with visual impairments. Hearing impaired students may also need a sign language interpreter, assistive listening devices, such as FM transmitters/receivers (an assistive device that assists students with hearing impairment to hear well). Support for students with physical disabilities also includes accessible buildings where students who use wheelchairs can move around and toilet breaks are arranged for students with chronic

illnesses. Aspects of support also included retrospective accommodations, for example, where a building is inaccessible, the programme is moved rather than the building made accessible.

There was a long debate in the US on the issue of extended time. Pingry (2007) argues that the provision of extended time on tests significantly increased the test scores of students with learning disabilities. Wizikowski (2013), in his study on academic support experiences and perceptions of postsecondary students with disabilities at Claremont Graduate University, found that the provision of extended time had no effect on students' test scores. Brockelman (2011) argues that when faculty members were surveyed regarding academic strategies to help the disabled, they agreed that allowing students with disabilities extra time to complete exam was effective. Extra time is more effective for problem solving exams than easy exams. I, however, think that some students with disabilities sometimes abuse this benefit of extended time. Many students prefer to write their final exams in separate accommodation even when they were not writing tests in the same venue during the year. This raises concern from lecturers when they receive exam scripts from the special venue only during final exams. This means that any support offered to students with disabilities should be verified by medical practitioners.

Recent literature on support for students with disabilities in the US shows that faculty members who use teaching methods other than lectures are more willing to accommodate students with disabilities (Zhang, Landmark, Reber, Hsu, Kwok & Benz, 2010; Brockelman, 2011). Faculties and academics at my institution are willing to accommodate students with disabilities in their teaching and are trying to manage students with diverse learning needs. They regularly consult the DU for advice. Faculties appreciate students with disabilities because they believe that they enrich their classes with diversity. Zhang *et al*. (2010) add that diverse classes assisted the faculty members to have experience to teach in a variety of learning styles and allow for reflection on their own teaching methodologies. Researchers such as (Zhang, Landmark, Reber, Hsu, Kwok & Benz, 2010; Brockelman, 2011) add that many faculty members who were trained during an era of traditional higher education systems do not have as positive an attitude

towards students with disabilities as do faculty members trained more recently. Traditional higher education system excluded students with disabilities in their teaching methodologies. Most faculty rely on the disability support services office on their campus for information regarding, not only specific students' needs, but also general disability information (Zhang *et al*., 2010). The support services office is a crucial contact for faculty advisors. There should be a sound relationship between the support service office and faculty, and regular meetings should be held to discuss educational support that students with disabilities might need (Rao, 2004). Orr and Hammig (2009) comment that most support offices and faculty do not come in to contact unless there is a serious problem to be resolved.

Literature suggests that, to be successful, the disability services office must be knowledgeable and helpful. Support service staff with a lack of disability knowledge are often perceived as uncaring or offensive by students with disabilities (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009). Very often, support services are not staffed with disability experts.

There are currently only three or four programmes that prepare higher education disability staff at the University of Washington. Personnel generally have backgrounds in counselling, law, social work, special education, higher education, and rehabilitation. They may or may not have training relating to adult students with disabilities (Shaw & Dukes, 2006). Many staff members in DUs readily admit that they are inadequately prepared to meet both student and institutional needs. Murray, Flannery and Wren (2009) comment that trained, approachable staff is integral to fostering a climate of acceptance and support on campus. Trained staff can give quality and the needed support that would impact on the academic performance of students with disabilities.

Recently, the US Department of Education published a guide for college and university students (US Department of Education, 2012), which advises students with disabilities to file internal grievance/appeal with the college or universities that refuse to accommodate them to the Office for Civil Rights of the US. This measure can work as a watchdog on the support offered to students with disabilities at HEIs and limit the attitudinal barriers

that they experience. In 2007, Trammell and Hathaway (2007) detailed the faculty/student relationship as another key factor to the success of any student. Often times, students with disabilities struggle in forming this relationship (Orr & Hammig, 2009). They concluded that, frequent student-faculty interactions produced positive correlations with student outcomes. This same result was found by (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2012) in a similar study on the transition from High school to college for students with disabilities. Mamiseishvili and Koch (2012) found that the relatively low percentage of students with learning disabilities discussed appropriate accommodation measures with their professors. In addition, they found that the majority of the interactions between students and faculty members were formal in nature, for example, the student providing a professor with a letter stating how he/she can be accommodated. They concluded that college professors could be an extremely beneficial resource for students, and, as a result, it is important for students to have frequent interactions with their instructors.

I have noticed that students with disabilities who frequently interact with their lecturers succeed in academic work. Most students with disabilities have a tendency to withdraw and they find it difficult to interact with people without disabilities. They even find it difficult to communicate their learning needs with their professors. Students in the US universities are encouraged to attend office hours of their professors, to ask questions about the course content, and to inquire about effective ways to study for classes. Although college students will have less direct contact with their instructors as compared to high school students, it is important that they take the initiative to speak with their professors and to ask questions about the course content to ensure that they understand the information.

3.2.2 Asia

In their study on supporting medical students with learning disabilities (LDs) in Asian medical schools, Majumder, Rahman, D'Souza, Elbeheri, Abdulrahman and Huq (2010) argued that medicine is a field that requires a focused learning style and approach. Studying medicine can be more stressful if strategies for coping with LDs are not effectively adapted to meet the demands and needs related to the course. It is of utmost

importance to detect and support students with LDs early, thus enabling them to maximise their potential. However, a few studies on the support of students with disabilities have been conducted in Asia as compared to the USA (Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler & Yang, 2013).

3.2.3 Greece

Hadjikakou and Hartas (2007) investigated higher education provision for students with disabilities in Cyprus in Greece. Their study revealed that the effective provision for students with disabilities depends, to a large extent on an accurate identification of their needs, consistency in availability and access of services and expertise, equality in accessing resources and the existence of an inclusive ethos and culture in HEIs. They concluded that provision for students with disabilities was not embedded in institutional and legislative frameworks. At both individual and organisational levels, provision was not systematic and pro-active, but was driven by an *ad-hoc* response to needs raised by the students and their families (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2007).

3.2.4 United Kingdom

The University of Sussex in the UK reported the learning and social experiences of the majority of students with disabilities as positive (Jacklin, Robinson, Meara & Harris, 2007). However, a significant minority (22,4%) reported that they were not happy with their learning experience; others (12,5%) were not happy with their social experiences, while a small proportion of these students (7,5%) were unhappy with both learning and social experience. My experience is that, although students might have documented disabilities according to different categories, their needs are unique (sic). For example, one student might need a wheelchair and lifts to access the floors in the building, while another student might need crutches to climb stairs to access the floor. The built environment is an important issue for some students with mobility difficulties. The use of signage for students with mental health difficulties and teaching and learning styles were often raised by those with specific difficulties (Jacklin *et al.*, 2007). I have witnessed how built environment can affect interaction between students with disabilities and academic staff.

The incident happened when a wheelchair user wanted to submit an assignment to the lecturers in a building where there were no lifts to access the second floor where the lecturer's office was. That particular student sent another student to submit the work on her behalf. As a result of this barrier created by the built environment, the student did not receive her marks because the assignment did not reach the lecturer. Other concerns include students having sufficient time with their tutors, availability of books in the library and delay in receiving support, including financial support.

Significant progress on the provision of support to students with disabilities at universities was seen after the replacement of Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) by the Equality Act in October 2010 in the UK (US DoE, 2011). The Equity Act stipulates that UK universities and colleges should make their courses inclusive and their premises accessible to students with disabilities. Hadjikakou, Polycarpou and Hadjilia (2010) affirm that the quality of support for students with disabilities are affected by physical access, provision availability, positive responses by fellow students without disabilities, and the level of awareness among the members of the academic staff or the rest of the staff (e.g., cleaners, administrative officers, and accommodation staff).

3.2.5 Australia

Healey, Fuller, Bradley and Hall (2006) note a growing international interest in supporting the learning of disabled students in higher education in Australia. They observed the interest stimulated by legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) in Australia, and in (2008) the DDA of 1995 in the UK. Hearly *et al.,* (2006) did a study on the learning experiences of disabled university students. This study amplified the voices of students with disabilities at HEIs. It revealed that, in most cases, staff at the DU plan support for students without taking into consideration their experiences and individual learning needs. They noted that taking into consideration the experience of students with disabilities has the advantage of letting individual students express their lived experiences in HEIs and also highlighting the physical and hidden barriers that they may encounter. Hearly *et al.* (2006) study reveal that the experiences of disabled students are varied. Some encounter barriers, others are not aware of any, some find the support they receive

praiseworthy and others find that it does not meet their needs. Although the survey revealed that only a few disabled students faced barriers in teaching, learning and assessment, for those who did the impact was serious. These findings suggest that using a catch-all category of “students with disabilities” is problematic and that devising generic policies to support their teaching, learning and assessment may not always meet the specific educational needs of individuals (Adams & Brown, 2006). This emphasises the importance of a discussion with individual disabled students, rather than assuming that teaching and assessment that is required will be determined by generic impairment. From my experience, attributes of the individual are an important variable in the provision of educational support within HEIs (sic).

The type of disability and the level of severity of that disability will likely influence not only the specific educational support needed by a student, but an entire support strategy. For example, students with severe cognitive disabilities will need significantly different services and support than students who are visually impaired or who are experiencing a mental health disability. Students with learning disabilities, who need varying levels of support, are often successful if their level of support is tailored to meet their abilities. Students with physical challenges may, however, profit from a barrier-free environment and a campus climate that is disability friendly. I have seen students with sensory disabilities or health-related disabilities preferring to use correspondence courses offered through online instruction and distance education, in order to conserve their physical energy for studying and other activities. Factors such as one’s self-belief, level of independent thinking and action, and level of socialisation are crucial in accessing support and attaining personal goals. Individual factors such as ethnicity and cultural background may also significantly impact one’s successful participation, self-advocacy, and progress in HEI environments.

Although institutions are trying hard to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities, Brett (2010) pointed out that the deaf student model in Australia is problematic because of the shortage of sign language interpreters. Brett alludes to the inherent difficulties associated with interpreting in a higher education context because an Auslan

(Auslan is an acronym of Australian Sign Language) interpreter will manually finger spell rather than have a discussion of discipline-specific vocabulary.

3.2.6 Scotland

In Scotland, Macleod and Cebula (2009) explored the experiences of students undertaking initial teacher education and community education degrees in a Scottish university. The survey focused, in particular, on decisions around disclosure of disability and experiences on “placements” in schools or community work settings. Findings indicated that many students chose not to disclose their disability, and, for those who did, this was a very individual process that was made up of a series of negotiations rather than being an once-off decision. Those students who choose to discuss their disability during placements reported positive responses, although for a few students the demands of placement proved problematic. From my experience, disclosure of disability is crucial for HEIs to enable them to offer support that is required by students (sic). Similar trends are found in the UK, US and Africa, where students choose not to disclose their disabilities. I think HEIs should find ways of encouraging students to disclose their disabilities by giving surety statements on the confidentiality procedures used and also making sure all personal information about students and their disabilities is secured.

3.2.7 Norway

In Norway, knowledge about disabled students in higher education is fragmented. Brandt (2011) comments that it is difficult to assess whether policy goals actually promote better conditions for disabled students. Brandt takes a closer look at the experiences of disabled students in Norway. He conducted in-depth interviews with disabled students in order to identify obstacles in the higher education system. Findings indicate that educational reform in Norwegian higher education seems to have helped to strengthen disabled tertiary students’ potential for learning. There are, however, a number of critical periods during their studies when it is imperative for disabled students to get the adjustment needed.

3.2.8 India

India has the third largest higher education system in the world after China and the US (Jameel, 2011). While going through the policies and programmes in India, it was found that not much has been done in the field of disability and higher education. Jameel (2011) in a study entitled “Disability in the context of higher education: Issues and concerns in India”, marked a radical departure from the view that lack of support services hinders the entry of students with disabilities into higher education in India. A recent study by Sharma (2012) indicates impressive entry growth in the last five decades. Entry growth in universities ranges from 25 to 544 and in colleges the growth was from 700 to 31 324. However, according to the National Sample Survey 2004, 55% of persons with special needs were illiterate and only 9% had completed higher secondary education. This brings the stark reality that India's higher educational system is not accessible to 98.8% of its disabled youth.

3.2.9 Thailand

Support for students with disabilities varies from country to country. Cheausuwantavee and Cheausuwantavee (2012) found that there had been no further educational provisions and facilities for students with disabilities in Thailand despite the legal frameworks which are in place. There is a discrepancy between legislation and practices due to the ineffectiveness of law enforcement, and the negative attitudes of service providers and society towards students with disabilities. Therefore, positive attitudes of stakeholders have to be promoted.

3.2.10 Israel (Middle East)

With regards to Israel, Schreuer (2011) notes that performance and participation of students with disabilities at HEIs seems to differ from that of other countries in as far as admission is concerned. There were some differences in entry requirements for students with disabilities and those without disabilities. More students with disabilities were admitted to academic institutions without full matriculation certificates and with lower grades (Schreuer, 2011). Because of this practice, low enrolment and high dropout rates

can be understood to be a result of inadequate accessibility of higher education institutions, lack of support, adverse social attitudes and social isolation, as well as low financial capacity. The flexible admission procedures for students with disabilities gave them an opportunity to enter higher education.

At the same time, adjustments and accommodations should take into consideration more creative solutions to the temporal barriers that many students face, far beyond the granting of extra examination time. A parallel study on the inclusion of students with disabilities in HEs, their performance and participation in students' experiences was conducted by Sachs (2011). The study compared the formal achievements and overall participation of 170 disabled students in HEIs in Israel with 156 students without disabilities. Results reveal that academic achievements of students with disabilities were almost as high as those of students without disabilities and overall students' experiences were similar. But the two groups of students differed in areas of experiences, as did students with various disabilities among themselves. A recent study by Davidovitch, Schacham and Margalit (2012) on coping with learning disabilities (LD) in academic institutions entitled: "Experience at the Ariel University Centre in Israel", showed that a time extension on exams was the most desired needed support.

3.2.11 Africa

In Africa, Obiozor, Onu and Ugwoegbu (2010) conducted a study on academic and social challenges facing students with developmental and learning disabilities in higher institutions. They commented that African societies have much to learn from the exemplary programme and projects on disabilities, adult literacy and special education provisions in developed societies, like the USA, where effective legislation, curriculum and support services are provided at all levels for individuals with disabilities. The study noted the challenges which developmental and learning disabilities pose to students in general as well as recognised the potential, talents, and individual abilities of such students in contemporary institutions of higher learning. This could be applicable to African universities and colleges. In this regard, recommendations on understanding student developmental and learning disabilities; the application of universal design for

learning (UDL) and institutional roles needed to ensure that such students cope in class and achieve success on campus, were provided.

3.2.11.1 Tanzania

Matonya (2012) investigated the lived experiences and individual support given to disabled women need to enable them to survive comfortably at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. The findings show that more effort should be put toward shaping the lived experiences of disabled women in higher education, and six key issues that should be given more attention are identified. First, accessibility to new technology was the key necessity mentioned by disabled women. Second, disabled women said they needed to be encouraged and to experience interactive classroom teaching and learning. Third, disabled women needed commitment by the university to facilitate barrier free curriculum, infrastructures and to develop effective support services as well as openness towards their rights. Fourth, commitments from the university to organise community awareness training for attitudinal change towards disabled women, and fifth, parents and family should create effective and appropriate environment towards their education. Lastly, the university should organise a pre-induction course for the incoming students. I agree with Matonya (2012) that support for students with disabilities should be a collaborative effort between families and HEIs.

3.2.11.2 Zimbabwe

Runhare (2004) reveals that students with disabilities are dissatisfied with the quality of services provided to them by lecturers at tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. The study investigated the extent to which students with disabilities were coping with the inclusive educational setting. In particular, it aimed at tracing these students' perceptions towards their mainstream peers and lecturers, as well as determining the extent to which the university accommodated them in its various degree programmes.

3.2.11.3 South Africa

Research by Naicker (2000); Muthukrishna (2000); Howell and Lazarus (2003) and Howell, (2005) is regarded as ground breaking in the field of disability support in HEIs in South Africa. Historically, the area of special needs education, or specialised education, and education support services provision have reflected the general inequalities of South African society, with disadvantaged learners receiving inadequate or no provision (Naicker, 2000). Since 1994, the South African government has been committed to transforming educational policy to address the imbalances and neglect of the disabled in the past (Muthukrishna, 2000). In addition, education policies and legislation with respect to disability reflect a move away from welfare to a rights and developmental approach. Education policy documents that have emerged since 1994 entrench principles enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa, namely education as a basic human right, quality education for all, equity and redress, the right of choice, curriculum entitlement and the rights of parents (Muthukrishna, 2000).

This fundamental right to basic education is further developed in the Constitution of South Africa in Section 9 (2), which commits the State to the achievement of equality, and Section 9 (3), (4) and (5) which commits the State to non-discrimination. These clauses are particularly important for protecting all students, including those who have disabilities and those who have special learning needs (Department of Education, 1999).

Limited attention has been placed on addressing issues of access and participation of students categorised by the government's National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) as "non-traditional students" (Department of Education, 2001). Included within this category are students with disabilities, identified as an important target group to reach in broadening the social base of the higher education system (Department of Education, 2001).

However, since the introduction of non-discriminatory legislation in various countries, there have been many changes in higher education, such as the following (Crous, 2004):

- Colleges and universities have developed systems that provide access to qualified students with disabilities to participate effectively in academic and social programmes;
- Changes in faculty attitudes and practices towards students with disabilities, and
- An increase in students' self-awareness and knowledge of their own impairments.

Institutions of higher education in South Africa are presently undergoing a period of transformation (Dalton, Mckenzie & Kahonde, 2012). Howell (2005) attempts to sketch the historical, cultural and organisational challenges that face HEIs in South Africa, in terms of driving the process of transformation surrounding the fully equitable inclusion of disabled students. Since 1994, South African institutions of higher learning have been including disabled students in their programmes, as required by the national policy on higher education and training (Muthukrishna, 2000). The South African National Plan for Higher Education requires higher education institutions to increase the participation of students with special educational needs (Department of Education, 2001).

This implies that even though institutions cannot refuse a student entry because of the existence of impairment, institutions continue to influence the levels and scope of participation by students with impairments, especially at programme level, that is through courses they can or cannot participate in (Howell & Lazarus, 2003). Although it is extremely difficult to provide solid evidence of discriminatory practices on the basis of disabilities, subjective evidence suggests that students with disabilities are often persuaded that they would not be able to cope within a particular course (Howell, 2005). Similarly, on the basis of what is regarded as reasonable to the institution, students with disabilities are still being told that the institution is not equipped to provide them with the support that they require, and that it would thus be in the student's interest to seek out alternative institutions. Such students are, therefore, expected to take responsibility for the perceived limitations created by their impairments (Matshedisho, 2007).

Also, breaking the ground in understanding support needs of students with disabilities at HEIs in South Africa was the work of Crous (2004) who maintains that a large number of students with disabilities find study material and other university documents inaccessible. I agree with Crous in that communication at HEIs is not available in all reading formats. For example, notices that are often posted on notice boards without considering the diverse needs of the students. It means students with disabilities learn of announcements and notices through rumours. Crous further argues that a number of students requested that all study material and other documentation should be made available in Braille, on audio and videotape, and on CD or on the internet. The study revealed that the majority of students with disabilities do not get all the help they need and that they should be given some form of preparation before starting higher education. They suggest that lecturing staff should be trained to deal with students with impairments (Crous, 2004).

There should also be awareness campaigns to make lecturers aware of the specific needs and problems of students with impairments. On the issue of awareness, Naidoo (2010) found that there was insufficient awareness around disabled students' academic and social needs at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He stated that the entire university population is responsible for creating an inclusive environment. Naidoo suggested that to make staff and students aware of the plight of disabled students, programmes to educate faculties and peers about support, accommodation and the rights of individuals with disabilities should be included in the future planning of student support. This could also be done by training staff in matters that affect disabled students.

Mayat and Amosun (2011), in their study of the perceptions of academic staff towards accommodating students with disabilities in a civil engineering undergraduate programmes in a university in South Africa, found that staff were willing to admit and accommodate students with disabilities. I think the training of academics and staff at HEIs is central to the provision of support offered to students with disabilities.

Another example of the importance of training is underscored by Magongwa (2009) who investigated the experiences of deaf and hard-of-hearing teachers as students at one of

the HEIs in South Africa. The findings suggested that if deaf and hard of hearing students experience positive inclusion at an early age, they are more likely to be successful in HE.

However, his findings contradict those of an earlier study by Miller and Mizrahi (2000) who were investigating how hard-of-hearing university students related to hearing and deaf culture. Miller and Mizrahi concluded that hard of hearing students related more to hearing than to deaf culture. It is difficult to comment on the support for deaf and hard-of-hearing students as many of them are unable to reach HE. In my institution, we have hard of hearing students who can cope with hearing aids or assistive devices for hearing. Some students use lip reading to get information in class; these students are encouraged to occupy front seats. This consciousness of the support for deaf students was confirmed by CHE (2005) which noted the lack of sign language interpreter service in most institutions. From their study CHE discovered that only 5 out of 24 public higher education institutions had some provision for deaf students and interpreter services. Some institutions indicated that such provision was not available because there were no deaf students on their campuses at the time of the research.

The CHE (2005) also noted that the levels of provision ranged from well-resourced units or programmes with a relatively large staff to one person offices that struggle against enormous odds to provide whatever support they can to disabled students. CHE is an independent statutory body responsible for advising the Minister of Higher Education and Training on all higher education policy issues, and for quality assurance in higher education and training in South Africa. The CHE stated that there was no systematic and central monitoring of disability in most HEIs. This lack of systematic monitoring undermines most attempts at evaluating policy implementation in relation to students with disabilities. In 2005, Howell (2005) also noted that Disability Units in South Africa were experiencing resource constraints that limited the nature and extent of the services that they offered. Similar findings were reported by FOTIM (2011) that the levels of provision are influenced by the historical trail of the institution.

The CHE (2005) and FOTIM (2011) raise the fact that historically advantaged institutions have more services and staff for supporting students with disabilities than the historically disadvantaged institutions. Institutions that are in urban areas cannot be compared with those in rural areas in as far as resources are concerned. In South Africa, most DUs are located in the administrative structure. Location may be an indication of the institution's awareness of disability and willingness to commit resources to its support. In most cases, the reporting structure of the DUs is linked to the senior manager who may mobilise resources for the unit at a high managerial level. However, available evidence suggests that initiatives that are in place within higher education institutions vary considerably. The variation is more in the number of different services provided, with some DUs providing more than the others (FOTIM, 2011; CHE, 2005).

When compared with the UK, the US and Asian countries, the state of support of students in SA appears to be somewhat similar as they are all strongly rights-based. However, there are intriguing differences between countries with very different local practices. There are strong parallels between the US and the UK models of supporting students with disabilities. However, all countries provide reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. The only exception was found in Israel where entry requirements for students with disabilities and those without disabilities differ. In Israel, more students with disabilities were admitted to academic institutions without full matriculation certificates and with lower grades (Sachs & Schreuer, 2011). Most countries, including SA have same entry requirements for all students, who wish to study at HEIs including students with disabilities. In comparison with the US and other developed countries, African countries, including SA, face resource challenges, mostly in rural-based HEIs.

In this section, I have detailed the support offered to students with disabilities in HEIs, both internationally and nationally. I concluded by comparing the support for students with disabilities in different countries. In the next section I look at support offered in the DUs.

3.3 KINDS OF SUPPORT PROVIDED BY DISABILITY UNITS

In the past two to three decades, there has been a large influx of students with disabilities into institutions of higher education worldwide (Crous, 2004). In South Africa, information on the intake of students with disabilities was not recorded in the past three decades, as services of this kind were not institutionalised. More and more tertiary institutions are now focussing on the mainstreaming and inclusion of students with disabilities. Some HEIs in South Africa have established so-called Disability Units (DU) to offer specialised services to students with disabilities, in order to facilitate access and integration of these students at their institutions (Mayat & Amosun, 2011).

For many students with disabilities, the Disability Service Unit or Disability Support Service is the first point of contact. These units work to facilitate access and ensure participation in the university for students with disabilities. This involves making "reasonable adjustments" and providing support for students with disabilities to ensure full participation and equal opportunities. Students with disabilities that will need support and alternative arrangements range from students with hearing impairments, visual impairments, physical impairments, health impairments (such as chronic illness), learning impairments, or psychiatric disabilities (Crous, 2004).

Although universities, both locally and internationally, may systematise support in slightly different ways, many universities follow similar trends, in order to accommodate and support students with specific disabilities according to their needs. Cheausuwantavee and Cheausuwantavee (2012) argue that appropriate support systems in teaching and learning are vital in ensuring equal access for students with disabilities. The commitment of the institution to facilitating support and participation depends on its willingness to change admission, curricula and assessment procedures, as well as physical accessibility of the institution. We have seen from the literature that support for students with disabilities varies from country to country.

In South Africa, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg seems to be ahead in supporting students with disabilities (University of the Witwatersrand, 2010).

Besides their outstanding assistive technology services, some of their best practices include continual quality checks of scanned or edited student material, continually looking at adding or improving their services and technology or adaptive devices, and annual evaluation forms to be filled out by their Disability Unit students. Moreover, what is quite impressive is the sensitisation and empowering of their students. For instance, the Disability Unit hosts teaching workshops to sensitise and educate university lecturers about teaching disabled students, organizes a disability awareness week to create awareness among the University population, encourages Disability Unit students to introduce themselves to and liaise with their lecturers (using a letter of accommodation as a starting tool), and encourages Disability Unit students to attend various university workshops (e.g. CV writing workshops) to aid them in their personal development.

From my experience, Wits is currently using the Higher Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA) as a forum for benchmarking best practices for DUs in South Africa (sic). Many services available at Wits are now available in other universities as well, though it must be borne in mind that services differ from institution to institution.

Several studies have identified the types of services provided in postsecondary institutions (Tagayuna *et al*., 2005; Pingry, 2007; Michail, 2010), and these are summarised below.

Students with disabilities encounter more academic, attitudinal, and physical barriers while attending lectures than students without disabilities. Specifically, they are more likely than their non-disabled peers to have difficulty in the following areas: study/test skills, note-taking, listening comprehension, organisation skills, social skills, self-esteem, and reading/writing deficits (Pingry, Markward & French, 2012). Students also have concerns about the ability of instructors to modify classroom environments to meet their needs. In this regard, students with physical disabilities, especially those who use wheelchairs, have considerable difficulty negotiating many campus environments/ classroom accommodation.

Classroom accommodation allows for student physical accessibility. Accommodation provided may include preferential seating, accessible seating, table top desks, lap boards, and requests to academic departments for a class to be relocated to an accessible location. This was emphasised by Greyling (2008) when she stated that lecturers needed to take into account external environmental conditions such as well-circulated ventilation for students with asthma, extra space in the classroom to manoeuvre wheelchairs, the desk size and level, the seat itself to ease writing, especially for those using laptops to write notes. Accommodation may also provide students with disabilities the option to have frequent breaks or the ability to stand up or lie down during class (CHE, 2005; Mole, 2012; Pingry, 2007).

Most buildings that were built prior to 1994 are not accessible and institutions are building ramps and lifts to make the building more accessible. According to the social model, a building should be designed in a way that it is accommodative of people with different abilities. The social model sees the disabling practices of society as the cause of disability rather than the individual with the impairment (Oliver, 1998; Barnes & Mercer, 1996). Where society puts up barriers, like stairs for wheelchair users or exam time constraints for people with learning difficulties, it produces disability. If educational institutions design spaces, lectures or activities to incorporate people with impairments, then these people will not be disabled but included. Thus, unsafe environments for students with disabilities are deliberate (Becker, Martin, Wajeeh, Ward & Shern, 2002).

Reasonable accommodation includes accessible residences for students with disabilities. Students needing assistance in the performance of activities of daily living are afforded the opportunity to participate in training to improve their knowledge and skills in independent living. They are empowered by the responsibility which they share with the residential hall administrative team for hiring, training, scheduling, managing, and evaluating personal attendant staff. In my university, not all residences are accessible and that leaves students with disabilities with limited choices in terms of where to stay. Ultimately, there are residences for students with disabilities or where a certain category of disability is dominant. The new approach (Social Model) to service provision requires

providers to change their self-concepts. Instead of looking at the disabled students and seeing a deficit that needs to be accounted for by providing accommodation and negotiating different treatment (Medical Model), they are now looking at the campus and learning environments and seeing deficits. They need to be knowledgeable about physical, instructional and curriculum design.

Transportation services should provide accessible university transportation to students with disabilities through the university disability office (Pingry, 2007). I have seen the importance of adaptation of university transport as part of supporting students with disabilities. In many instances, students with physical disabilities, especially those who use wheelchairs are likely to be excluded from educational tours because university transport has not been adapted to their needs.

Accommodating students with learning disabilities provides them with the option to receive alternative format tests or assignments. Examples of alternative format testing or assignments include an essay exam as a substitute to a multiple-choice examination, or a written paper as a substitute for an oral presentation. Alternative service includes converting study material into a more accessible format, scanning and editing of material and conversion of materials into Braille and electronic format (Pingry, 2007). Disability documentation that clearly identifies the need for the accommodation of what is necessary to ensure that disabled students receive this service, and that faculty members are consulted with respect to the intent of the test format. If altering the test format fundamentally alters the nature of the course, this accommodation is not appropriate. In this regard, academics need to be trained on how to modify tests by not compromising the quality of the test. For example, if the test has a map that needs to be labelled, the question should be framed in such a way that it gives the same answer for both sighted and blind students (Mole, 2012).

Vogel, Leyser, Wyland and Brulle (1999) find that most faculties had no or very limited training in the area of disabilities, and almost half indicated that they had limited knowledge and skills to provide requested educational support for students with

disabilities. Interestingly, despite the limited knowledge base, a large majority of faculty expressed a supportive attitude toward students with disabilities by indicating their overall willingness (behavioural intent) to facilitate needed classroom accommodation in their courses. In fact, almost three-quarters of the faculty indicated that the average time they spent in accommodating disabled students was less than 30 minutes per week. It might be argued, however, that the limited time spent in accommodating disabled students is all that is necessary to meet the needs of students who requested such adaptations.

In terms of adaptations, Mole (2012) argues that a key tool for implementing social model approaches to disability service provision is the concept of Universal Design (UD). UD is an architectural paradigm that provides seven principles of design. She further says, the design of products and environments should be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design.

Studies (Pingry, 2007; Dell, Newton & Petroff, 2011) argue that accommodating students with learning disabilities provides them with the option to receive alternative format tests or assignments. Examples of alternative format testing or assignments may include an essay examination as a substitute for a multiple choice examination, or a written paper as a substitute for an oral presentation. Alternative service includes converting study material into a more accessible format, scanning and editing of material and conversion into Braille and electronic format (Moon, Morton & Ivey, 2012).

On the contrary, staunch adherence to the physical model of Inclusive Education ignores the fact that students are not the same, and, therefore, require differentiated teaching. Thus, in our study of Inclusive Education, it is important to align quantitative studies with qualitative ones, in order to gain a holistic picture of students' needs (Harrison, Bunford, Evans & Owen, 2013). Such data may provide data that will enable policy makers in higher education to make informed decisions on how to broaden access and provide quality education to students who experience challenges. Harrison, Bunford, Evans and Owen (2013), in their review of literature of accommodation of students with behavioural challenges, found that, although policies mandate that there should be access to

education in higher education for students with disabilities, very little was done to implement this goal.

Distraction reduced testing is provided to students who have significant difficulty with concentration, or are highly distractible, or employ test strategies that may be distracting to those around them (Crous, 2004). Pingry, Markward and French (2012) suggest that students with disabilities in France may greatly benefit from settings that minimise extraneous stimuli, and this may be especially true for students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and mental disorders. Some students with physical disabilities may need a separate room to lie down or stand up as a way to manage pain or muscular conditions. In my institution, we provide separate venues for tests and exams and these venues are fully accessible.

Distraction reduced testing accommodation allows students with disabilities to have an extended amount of time to complete tests. Extended time is recommended for students whose performance is compromised by a physical or cognitive disability that causes significantly slower reading, writing, recalling or organising. Students may be eligible to receive time and a half, double time, triple time or unlimited time. Bell (2013) states that students with hearing impairments are often eligible for additional time during assessment/examination periods. These arrangements may include extra reading time (usually 10 to 15 minutes per hour). In my institution, students get this kind of support. In most cases they are given fifteen (15) minutes per hour. From my experience extended time has its own challenges in that some students may require more than the postulated time depending on the type of disability (sic).

Pingry *et al.* (2012) conclude that students whose disabilities fluctuate (depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes) may request a test date or an assignment date change so that they are able to complete the assignment/test when interference from their condition is minimal (Pingry, 2007). Students are expected to complete the assignment and tests within a reasonable amount of time from the test date and to notify the instructor of the request in a timely manner. I think this still requires some training for academics to

show them how to be flexible with regards to due dates for assignments and tests given to students with disabilities. The practice in HE is that if students miss test dates, they should apply for a special test provided they have a medical report or evidence for the absenteeism.

Assistive technology is available to students to maximise their ability to effectively complete course requirements. Dell, Newton and Petroff (2011) define Assistive Technology as any item, piece of equipment, or product system, modified or customised to increase functional capabilities of students with disabilities. Some of the adaptive resources and services include adaptive computers, tape recorders, talking calculators, sound amplification systems, television enlargers, voice synthesisers, specialised gym equipment, calculators or keyboards with large buttons, switches, and technology assessments and evaluations. Text conversion is also classified under this category. Text conversion includes the provision of textbooks and other course materials in an alternative format such as electronic/audio text, enlarged text, Braille, and raised graphics.

I have noted that e-learning is gaining momentum in HEIs nationally and internationally. Kahiigi (2013) defines e-learning as any learning method that uses Information Communication Technology (ICT) to support students in achieving their learning outcomes. Kahiigi comments that e-Learning and disability in higher education is evaluating current practice and exploring the tools, methods, and approaches available for improving access to online learning.

Most people working within the higher education sector understand the importance of making e-learning accessible to students with disabilities, yet it is not always clear exactly how this should be accomplished (Seale, 2013). Seale mentions lecturers, professors, classroom designers, learning technologists, student support services, staff developers, and senior managers and administrators as the key stakeholders that should be involved in e-learning. I have seen that assistive technology includes book and a pen for students with visual impairments; they can record their lectures, write tests and assignments. UNIVEN has state of the art Adapted Technology laboratories within the DU.

One of the most prominent findings that emerged from Giangreco, Prelock and Turnbull, (2010) was that classroom assistants were in close proximity on an ongoing basis to students with disabilities. Evidence of this is seen in by (a) the classroom assistant maintaining physical contact with the student (e.g. shoulder, back, arms, hands) or the student's wheelchair; and (b) the classroom assistant sitting in a chair immediately next to the students. This accommodation applies to students who require an in-class assistant or an assistant at the campus library to complete course requirements. Classroom assistants may include a scribe, reader, lab assistant, library assistant, or mobility assistant. A library assistant for students with disabilities are available at UNIVEN and there is a special designated area where students can access on adapted technology. Classroom assistants should be provided with competency-based training that includes ongoing, classroom-based supervision by academics.

Classroom assistants can also include tutor and study skills assistance. This service provides one-on-one weekly, biweekly or, as needed, appointments with the learning disabilities specialist to work on strategies for test preparation, test-taking, reading comprehension, written expression, organisation, goal setting and achieving, and problem solving/crisis management (Peña, (2014). The University of Venda is using mentoring and tutoring systems to support students with disabilities.

A note taker service is another form of classroom assistance. Faculty members may provide students with a copy of their personal lecture notes. When faculty members are unable to provide notes, DU or the professor should recruit individual note takers, ideally, teacher assistants or other students in the classes. Faculty members are notified of students' eligibility for note takers in the form of accommodation agreements, which are mailed or student-delivered. Requests for this service must be supported by appropriate professional and reasonably current documentation.

Interpreting services are available to students who have a documented profound hearing loss or deafness. These services are available in the classroom and for university-sponsored events that require an interpreter. Bell (2013) argues that registered students

with a hearing impairment at the University of Stellenbosch do not make use of the South African Sign Language (SASL). My observation is that students with deafness find it difficult to access HE in South Africa because of their poor matric results. To improve the situation, the Limpopo Department of Education is offering training on South Africa Sign Language to special school educators. At present, students who are accessing HEIs are those with profound hearing loss and who have attended regular classrooms.

Counselling service is also an important part of academic support and classroom assistance in HE settings. This service includes student participation in individual counselling and/or support groups provided by the university disability office. Support groups are available to students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities and students with mental disorders (Greyling, 2008). These support groups meet on a regular basis and provide students with support, social interaction, and problem solving strategies. Most DUs recruit staff that are registered as counsellors with the Health Professional Board Council of South Africa (HPCSA) to render such services to students with disabilities.

Physical therapy and sports training services provide students whose disabilities significantly limit the effective utilisation of the fitness and recreational resources and programme which are otherwise available to students with an opportunity for strength development, physical conditioning and functional training. Through participation in different sporting codes, students with severe physical disabilities are afforded an opportunity to maximise their functional potential, relieve stress and increase their tolerance relative to the rigorous demands of campus life through the milieu of adaptive exercises. Participation of students with disabilities in different sporting activities is decreasing at UNIVEN. The reason behind this might be lack of staff members who are knowledgeable of different sporting activities that students with disabilities can participate in. Physical therapists and graduate assistants aid students in developing and implementing personal exercise programme, particularly for developing and maintaining a range of motions, strength and conditioning. Staff can also assist students with a transfer of skills, for example, getting back into a wheelchair from the floor, manual wheelchair

skills, and gait training with or without assistive devices (Fuller *et al.,* 2004). Supplemental to the active therapy programme, a limited number of physical agents is available for the treatment of acute and chronic musculoskeletal injuries and dysfunction.

There is a critical lack of funds to support students with disabilities in higher education in South Africa, both for the individual student and the institutions. Institutions are currently not meeting their human rights responsibilities because of the financial cost of supporting students with disabilities. NSFSAS is currently the only state funding body in South Africa, and, therefore, very few students are able to access higher education and succeed in their studies (CHE, 2005). NSFSAS guidelines are formalised and geared towards the payment of assistive devices. They do not fund human support (scribes, sign-language interpreters and note takers etc,) all of which are indicated for certain disabilities.

3.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed of the literature on the support for students with disabilities in HEIs. Details of support offered to students with disabilities in HEIs, both internationally and nationally were discussed. I have chosen to look at the international picture as it allows me to provide an overview of trends, best practices and models of how DUs at HEIs function. This picture could allow South African HEIs to self-assess their support and measure it against international standards and practices. The kind of support offered to students with disabilities by DUs in South Africa was also discussed. This chapter showed existing weaknesses and gaps of the Medical Model in giving support for students with disabilities at HEIs, hence recommended the Social Model. The next chapter focuses on the description and discussion of the research design and methodology used to collect data on the kind of support students with disabilities are receiving in HEIs.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter one, this study set out to investigate the educational support offered to students with disabilities in HEIs in South Africa from an insider perspective. The study is qualitative in nature and it used an interpretive paradigm to understand the educational support offered to students with disabilities at UNIVEN. This chapter firstly focuses on paradigm context. Secondly, research design used to conduct the study is discussed. The chapter further discusses the following: population and sampling, data-collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, and quality assurance mechanisms.

4.2 THE PARADIGM CONTEXT

The concept “paradigm” has been attributed to Thomas Khun from the historian, who controversially proposed that paradigms are a collection of concepts, variables and problems attached with corresponding methodological approaches and tools (Dash, 2005) and that, in time, paradigms are overturned by other paradigms. However, in the social sciences, paradigms are generally not discarded when others emerge because they represent different frameworks that reflect different points of view (Babbie, 2008) that are selected to suit the researcher or area of research (Creswell, 2013).

More recently, the term paradigm, in educational research, has come to mean a framework that determines the way knowledge is studied and interpreted and the motivation and goal of the research (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) expand this concept by outlining that paradigms are shaped by epistemological (the nature of knowledge), ontological (the nature of existence) and methodological (how the inquirer should go about finding out knowledge) questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Key paradigms are positivism, interpretivism and critical theory.

Paradigms can be simplistically grouped into two categories, namely, positivism, where knowledge is observable and measurable; and anti-positivism, where meaning is generated from the process of knowing and interpreting phenomena (Dash, 2005). These paradigms are discussed next.

4.2.1 Positivism paradigm

Positivism can be defined as a research approach that is based on the ontological doctrine that reality is independent of the observer. Positivism dominated social science research for a long time until the recent emergence of critical social science. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) argue that positivism is rooted in the ontological assumption of objective reality. Positivism is concerned with variables, which embrace a number of assumptions about the social world and how it should be investigated. It assumes that (a) the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world; (b) there exists a complementary unity of methods between the natural and the social worlds; and (c) the social world can be value-free.

Positivism is logically connected to pure scientific laws and based on facts, in order to satisfy the four requirements of falsifiability, logical consistency, relative explanatory power, and survival (Lee, 1991). Lee (1991) further describes the theoretical requirements of positivism as not only conforming to empirical observations but also as being falsifiable. For the second requirement, theoretical propositions must be related to one another. A given theory must also be able to explain or predict competing theory. Thus, a falsifiable, consistent, and explanatory theory should be able to survive through empirical tests. Levin (1997) argues that positivists believe in a stable reality that is observable and objective and one which others can easily repeat. Positivist research is, therefore, a “systematic and methodological process” that emphasises “rationality, objectivity, prediction and control” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Factors extracted from these ideas of rationality and objectivity, and prediction and control comprised the methodological or instrumental positivism.

However, it can be argued that the positivists' idea about atomizing and quantifying social phenomenon in society is flawed. Positivists fail to acknowledge that the world is fragmented with disorganised units that are distinct from each other and can only critically be understood through interactions. The variables do not have uniform characteristics. When clarifying the nature and quantity of phenomena, quantification may be useful in some cases. Social scientists, especially in political science, sociology, international relations, and so on, are, today, robust with statistical research techniques. The nature and type of the statistical instrument that is employed by a social scientist is informed by the kind of data to be collected.

Despite its popularity, positivism has weaknesses that seemingly undermine its applicability to social science research. It oversimplifies the real world into experimental situations that are difficult to apply in reality. Any social science research should endeavour to understand the meanings of phenomena, causes, effects and values developed within that social phenomenon. Interpretivism emerged as the new paradigm in response to the demerits of positivism. It is used in, for example, research on Human Poverty Index, livelihood, wellbeing, etc. (Chambers, 2006).

4.2.2 Interpretive paradigm

Interpretive research is fundamentally concerned with meaning and it seeks to understand social members' definition of a situation (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretive theory involves building a second order theory or theory of members' theories (Schutz, 1973) in contrast to positivism which is concerned with objective reality and meanings thought to be independent of people. Interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation hence there is no objective knowledge which is independent of thinking, reasoning humans. Interpretivism often addresses essential features of shared meaning and understanding whereas constructivism extends this concern with knowledge as produced and interpreted to an anti-essentialist level.

Constructionists argue that knowledge and truth are the result of perspective (Schwandt, 1994), hence all truths are relative to some meaning, context or perspective. Given the concern with understanding members' meanings, interpretive researchers have often preferred meaning (versus measurement) oriented methods. In particular, data collection and representation have been accomplished with informant interviewing, ethnography, or the thick description of cultures based on intimate knowledge and participation (Van Maanen, 2011), and even ethnographically linked textual analyses (Gephart, 1993) which use data transcripts or verbal protocols of meetings. Such verbal or conversational data are collected to represent interactions in important, naturally occurring social settings.

The assessment of interpretive research differs from positivist theory assessment. Positivists seek rigour using statistical criteria and conceptions of reliability and validity to evaluate the quality of quantitative findings. Sample size, common methods bias and sampling error are common concerns. In contrast, meaning-focused research in the interpretive tradition is assessed in terms of trustworthiness criteria**,** which includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as well as authenticity criteria, which includes fairness and ontological, catalytic and tactical authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

4.2.3 Critical theory paradigm

Critical researchers assume that social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced and reproduced by people (Myers, 2009). Although people can consciously act to change their social and economic circumstances, critical researchers recognise that their ability to do so is constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination. Therefore, critical scholarship seeks to transcend beliefs, values and social structures, taken for granted by making these structures and the problems they produce visible, by encouraging self-conscious criticism, and by developing emancipatory consciousness in scholars and social members in general (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). The aim is to openly critique the *status quo*, focus on the conflicts and constraints in contemporary society, and seek to bring about cultural, political and social change that

would eliminate the causes of alienation and domination. Thus, the paradigm of critical theory encourages evaluators and classroom designers to question and also to evaluate the cultural, political, and gender assumptions underlying the effectiveness of the classroom product or programme (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). The critical theory seeks to deconstruct the hidden curriculum or text and search for the truth and understanding within the social context (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003).

The goal is social transformation involving the displacement of existing structures of domination, the development of more democratic structures and the opening of opportunities for social participation among persons previously excluded and dominated. Since this perspective is oriented towards critiquing and changing the society as a whole, it would not be suitable for this study, for this study concentrates on describing, explaining the feelings, experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities in HEIs.

Researchers base their work on certain philosophical perspectives such as a single or more paradigm(s), depending on the kind of work they are doing. As a researcher, I took an interpretivist standpoint because I see the social world as the construction of individuals. I take the view that South African societies have consistently oppressed people with disabilities and excluded them from opportunities which would enable them to take a dynamic part in social activities. As has already been seen in the previous chapter, I am strongly influenced by the Social Model of disability and have taken this model as the foundation and focus of my research. I see it, not only as a valid critique of society, but also as the basis for a political stance which promotes the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities in all aspects of society.

In the interests of establishing my standpoint, it is significant to note that I am non-disabled and work in the area of service-provision to students with disabilities in higher education settings. Both of these facts impact on the research objectives because they relate specifically to and inform my approach to service provision. I found the approach most appropriate because it afforded me an opportunity to hear and interpret experiences, needs and perceptions of the kind of support offered to students with disabilities from an

insider perspective. By viewing disability as a product of a dynamic interaction between humans and their surroundings, emphasis is shifted from the individual (Medical Model) to the broader social, cultural, economic, and political environment (Social Model) (Mole, 2012). In fact, my opinion is that, disability may even be regarded primarily as the consequence of a disabling environment.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is equivalent to a plan or a map used in finding solutions to research problems (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Researchers use different designs depending on the purpose of their studies, as well as the nature of their research questions. In addition, each design has its own procedures and perspectives. There are no fixed rules to follow, or step-by-step guides to a qualitative research design, but rather the choices and actions of the researcher determine the strategy (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative studies use several designs such as ethnography, phenomenology, case study, to mention but a few. In the present study, I used a case study research design.

A case study design seeks to understand one person or situation in great depth. Creswell (2013) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Stake (2000) defines it as a study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. In other words, the case study is a way of investigating an empirical topic by following a set of pre-specified procedures (Stake, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2013) refer to a case as the object of study. They define it as a single entity and a unit around which there are boundaries. To them a case can be a person such as a student, a lecturer, a university, and a community, even a specific policy. For Creswell (2013), a case means a single individual, several individuals separately or in a group, a programme, events or activities.

The research design can only be consistent when the purpose and the paradigm of the study, the methodology and the context in which the study takes place are cohesive (see

Figure 4.1). The purpose of this study was to explore the educational support of students with disabilities at UNIVEN. This study is situated in an interpretive research paradigm and, therefore, within a qualitative research methodology framework.

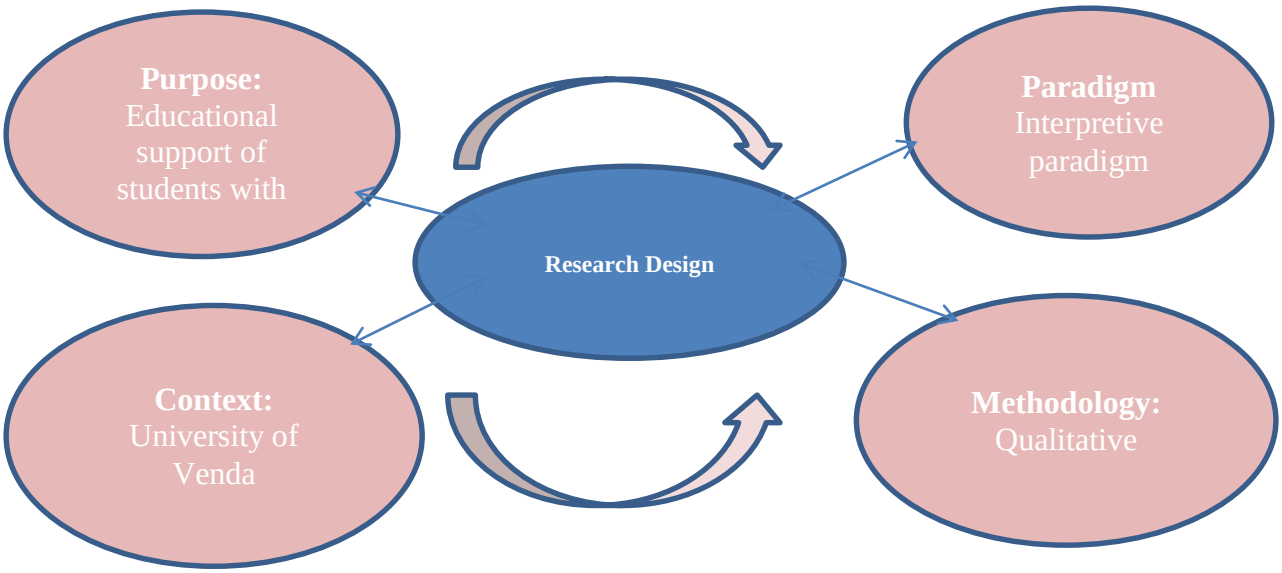

Figure 4.1: Research Design

Adapted from Terreblanche and Durrheim (2007)

In line with the above definitions, I identified the case study as the most suitable research design for my study. I used it because I was dealing with a single case, a specific university and a specific number of participants in a particular area. Opie (2004) explains that the purpose of the case study is to maximise understanding of one phenomenon in order to provide greater insights into an issue or to improve theoretical explanations. Furthermore, the case study stresses the evolving nature of qualitative research, which corresponds with the exploratory and descriptive approaches and inductive and deductive interpretation (Yin, 2013). I focused on a real situation (educational support), with real people (students with disabilities and lecturers) in an environment familiar to myself (classrooms), in order to answer my research questions. I studied the interaction of events, human relationships and other factors.

It was my intention to study a single case (University of Venda out of twenty-five Universities in South Africa) in-depth in its natural setting, so as to produce credible and acceptable findings. It is clear that the nature of this study does not need the manipulation of research subjects but requires the researcher to be deeply immersed among them so as to observe them in their natural settings. It can be concluded that the case study's relevance and suitability cannot be overemphasised. In spite of the strengths of the case study elaborated above, some concerns have, however, been raised about the pitfalls of this design (Yin, 2013).

Critics of the case study method believe that the study of a small number of cases can offer no grounds for establishing reliability or the generalisation of findings. Researchers feel that the intense exposure of study participants to the researcher biases the findings. Others dismiss the case study research as useful only as an exploratory tool. Yet researchers continue to use the case study research method with success in carefully planned and crafted studies of real-life situations (Yin, 2013). However, in order to address these criticisms, this study employed multiple sources of data-collection methods as advocated for by Rowley (2002) who says that a typical case study research uses a variety of evidence from different sources, such as documents, interviews and observation.

4.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Creswell (2013) describes a population as any group of individuals who have one or more characteristics in common that are of particular interest to the researcher. In the same vein, Creswell and Planoclark (2007) elaborate that population in a research context is any target group of individuals that has one or more characteristic(s) in common that is of interest to the researcher for purposes of gaining information and drawing conclusions. In this study, the target population comprised all students with various disabilities who are studying at UNIVEN. It was from this population that a sample was chosen for an in depth study.

Creswell (2013) posits that the primary purpose of research is to discover principles that have a universal application. However, studying the whole population to arrive at generalisations would be impracticable if not impossible**.** To solve the aforementioned dilemma, I used the purposive sampling technique to get students who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study**.** Creswell (2013) states that the aim of purposive sampling is to identify information-rich participants who have certain characteristics, detailed knowledge or direct experience relevant to the phenomenon of interest to the researcher. Purposive sampling was used in this study to select a sample of students with disabilities in one university out of twenty-five universities in South Africa.

The profile of students enabled me to gather important information on the educational support offered to students with disabilities. For example, their type of disabilities, their experience of educational support and level of study revealed the high calibre of respondents I worked with. It also provided me with a picture of the extent to which these students were likely to understand the dynamics of educational support offered by UNIVEN within their context. This was pertinent because I needed to know this when gathering and interpreting data. My experience of providing educational support to students with disabilities also assisted me in determining whether the views and opinions of respondents were appropriate and in line with their experiences of the support they received (sic).

All the respondents had documented disabilities and they all qualified to be admitted at HEIs. In order to gain an even deeper understanding of the respondents, I collected data on whether they had attended special schools or not. The findings to this effect are presented in Table 4.1. Participants are identified as ‘participants 1-10 in the study, with their true identity remaining known only to the researcher.

Table 4.1 Sample of the study

P	Type of disability	Age	Gender	Degree	Level of study	Special school/ordinary
1	Physically disable	23	Male	Baccalaureus Legume	2	Ordinary school
2	Partially sighted	23	Male	Bachelor of Commerce in Economics	3	Special school
3	Physically disable (wheelchair user)	21	Male	Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting	2	Special school
4	Medical condition	29	Female	Bachelor of Administration	3	Ordinary school
5	Partially sighted	33	Female	Bachelor in International Relations	1	Special school
6	Partially sighted	21	Female	Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting	2	Special school
7	Partially sighted	24	Male	Baccalaureus Legume	2	Ordinary school
8	Blind	28	Male	Administration in Human Resource Management	5	Special school
9	Physically disable	24	Male	Bachelor of Environmental Science	3	Special school
10	Partially sighted	29	Female	Bachelor of Environmental Science	4	Special school

Participant 1 was a 23 year-old male student at the time of data collection. He was the chairperson of the Disabled Student Council (DSC) representing students with disabilities in the Student Representative Council (SRC). He has a physical disability as a result of a post-traumatic injury and was doing his second year of the Baccallereus Legume (LLB), a four year degree. The student did not attend a special school.

Participant 2 was a 23 year old male at the time of data collection. He had congenital partially sightedness and had registered for a Bachelor of Commerce in Economics, a four year degree. He was in third year of study. The student attended special school before coming to UNIVEN.

Participant 3 was a 21-year old male student at the time of study and he was a wheelchair user. He was in second year of a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting, a four year degree. He attended a special school.

Participant 4 was a 29 year old female student at the time of data collection. She had a medical condition. She was in her third year of a Bachelor of Administration, a three year degree. She did not attend a special school.

Participant 5 was a 33 year old female student at the time of data collection. She had congenital low vision. She had completed a Diploma in Women Development at the same institution. At the time of data, collection she was in her first year of Bachelor in International Relations, a three year degree. She attended a special School.

Participant 6 was a 21 year-old partially sighted female at the time of data collection. She was in her second year of a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting, a three year degree. She attended a special school.

Participant 7 was a 24 year-old partially sighted male student at the time of data collection. He was in second year of Baccallereus Legume, a four year degree. He attended a normal school.

Participant 8 was a 28 year-old male at the time of the study. He has congenital blindness. He served as a chairperson of the DSC. He was in his fifth year of studying a Bachelor of Administration in Human Resource Management, a three year degree. The student attended a special school.

Participant 9 was a 24 year-old female at the time of data collection. She had a physical disability. She was in her third year of a Bachelor of Environmental Science, a four year degree.

Participant 10 was a 29 year-old partially sighted (Albinism) female at the time of data collection. She was studying a Bachelor of Sports, Recreation and Leisure, a four year degree. She was in her fourth year of study. She attended a special school.

4.5 DATA-COLLECTION

The methods used by qualitative researchers demonstrate a common belief that they can provide a deeper understanding of the social phenomena (Silverman, 2000). Data were collected through observations, focus group discussions and document analysis. These data collection techniques are discussed in the sections below.

4.5.1 Classroom observations

Classroom observation was the first method that I used to collect data. I adopted a naturalistic approach to studying educational support offered to students with disabilities in the classroom. I wanted to gain insights into the kind of support lecturers employed when teaching students with disabilities by making personal observation.

Denzin and Lincoln (2013) argue that observations are the major means of collecting data in qualitative research. She further says they offer a first-hand account of the situation under study and when combined with interviews and document analysis, allow for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated. Classroom observation assisted me to answer my research question on what educational support was offered to students with disabilities at UNIVEN. As a non-participant observer, I wanted to give myself time to observe the interactions in the classroom without interfering with the proceedings and without influencing them. The classroom observations helped me to actually see what the lecturers were doing rather than what they said they were doing. I could replay the audio tape to listen to how the teacher was teaching and ask follow-up questions. The disadvantage of classroom observation was that I was sitting close to the lecturers during the lesson presentation because the class was full. I realised that this may have led to subjectivity on my account which could jeopardise the factual reliability of the data.

The classroom observations took two weeks. The longer I stayed in the classroom, the more I became part of the classroom environment. Conroy (2003) comments that, in immersing oneself in the phenomenological method, one is more able to draw out what is hidden within the narrative accounts through careful attention to what is being, and what has already been, said. The details from these observations were discussed during each classroom observation.

During classroom observations, I used a checklist. Having a checklist of classroom observation criteria assisted me to focus on aspects I wanted to investigate in the classroom before, during and after the lecture (see Appendix G). The classroom observation data were coded, transcribed and integrated with the themes which emerged from the focus group discussions. To achieve the aim of my study I adapted the checklists for Effective Learning and Teaching in Higher Education by Brown, Jones and Rawnsley (1993).

4.5.2 Focus group interviews

A focus group interview was conducted with ten (10) students with disabilities. The focus group interview data complemented the classroom observations. According to, Krueger (1994) focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insights. When well executed, a focus group creates an accepting environment that puts participants at ease, allowing them to thoughtfully answer questions in their own words and add meaning to their answers. By bringing together small groups of students with disabilities, I obtained information regarding the nature of educational support at UNIVEN in respect to my research objectives. I hoped that through questions, the conversation would develop naturally. The session was about one hour long. However, focus groups have their own limitations in that some participants are reluctant to contribute. However, in my study the participants willingly participated.

One of the objectives of this study was to describe the support offered to students with disabilities from an insider perspective. The objective of the focus group interviews was to find out about the educational support that students with disabilities are offered at UNIVEN from an insider perspective. The focus group interviews were valuable for this study because the participants interacted with one another rather than the interviewer. At the end of the session, the participants' agenda predominates and not that of the interviewer (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Because the focus of the study was on educational support, the focus group interviews were particularly effective in providing information about why students with disabilities thought or felt the way they did about educational support. I hoped that through the focus group interviews, participants would provide information-rich data relevant to the study. Through this interactive process of the group and myself, I obtained information that allowed me to make use of nonverbal cues in order to verify the authenticity of the responses through observation of participants' facial expressions. I picked up emotional responses, contradictions, stress, anger, frustration, enthusiasm and other feelings that assisted me to understand well the kind of support that UNIVEN is offering to students with disabilities.

Another goal was to uncover some of the emerging themes that affect the provision of educational support to students with disabilities. The focus group design expanded my research knowledge about educational support and provided practical information about the issues that affect the learning of students with disabilities. I made notes of the student's responses in a notepad, and audio recordings were made. This strategy allowed me to concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview.

The focus group interviews were guided by prepared questions, which began with a broad and less structured set of questions to ease participants into a process where they debated issues in an environment that allowed participants to share their experiences without inhibitions (see Appendix F). The questions allowed for flexibility in responding to concerns raised by the group. This gave me an opportunity to get to know the students with disabilities better as they became free and more confident in their responses.

4.5.3 The document analysis

The document analysis entails a scrutiny of relevant documents, which can be a valuable source of information (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smith, 2004). Document analysis involved looking at national and institutional policies on disability, the teaching and learning policy, assessment policy, tutoring and mentoring policy, learning materials and timetables. Creswell (2013) points out that one of the limitations of using documents is incompleteness of many reports, statistical records and historical documents, with gaps in the data base that cannot be filled in any other way, as well as bias in documents not intended for research. Nevertheless, I used the documents to verify the data collected through focus group interviews and observations. A combination of procedures enabled me to validate and cross-check the findings. Since each data source has its own strengths and weaknesses**,** the strength of one procedure can compensate for the weakness of another (Patton, 2002).

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of qualitative research data is a mastery of a special set of interpretive practices and narrative techniques. Patton (2002) defines qualitative data analysis as working with data, organising it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesising it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and deciding what is important and is to be learned and deciding what you will tell others.

Denzin and Lincoln (2013) postulate that large quantities of data are usually collected through qualitative research and these data can be physically sorted out using some of the several computer software programmes such as MAXQDA and Nivivo, but the benefits of such software are mainly in sorting and segregating, rather than in processing or analysing the data.

In this study, the physical sorting and analysis of the qualitative data was done. The raw data were coded into themes, categories, general ideas, concepts or similar features that relate to the main research question. In order to identify units of meaning relating to the experiences educational support for students with disabilities at UNIVEN, I used a model from Creswell (2013). Creswell argues that researchers triangulate data among different sources of data to enhance accuracy of their study. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) concur when they postulate that triangulation involves multiple sources of data with the hope that they will all converge to support a particular theory or hypothesis.

In my study, I collected data through focus group discussions, observations and document analysis to serve this purpose. By drawing on multiple viewpoints, I felt confident that I was moving towards accuracy and credibility as I tapped into a variety of sources of information, confirmation, individuals and processes of data collection. I described, analysed and interpreted what was seen and heard in terms of common words, phrases, themes or patterns that would aid the understanding and interpretation of that which was emerging. Data from audio taped interviews were transcribed *verbatim* before analysis. Finally, data from the observations, document analysis and group interviews were synthesised to form a global picture that answers the question at hand.

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.7.1 Permission to conduct study

Ethical guidelines serve as standards and a basis upon which each researcher ought to evaluate his or her own conduct, and the guidelines should be internalised in the personality of the researcher (De Vos *at al.,* 2011). With human beings, participants in the study, I requested research permission from the Research Ethics committee of the University of Limpopo as well as the University of Venda where the study was conducted (see Appendix A-C).

4.7.2 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Detailed explanation on the purpose and procedure of the study was given to participants and their consent sought. I explained to the participants that their participation in the

research was entirely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time. Should they chose to withdraw, their information would not be used anywhere in the study. They were asked to give written consent to be observed, interviewed and consulted regarding the correctness of the interviews (see Appendix D).

4.7.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Denzin and Lincoln (2013) posit that confidentiality must be assured as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure. All personal data must be secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity. In short, this means that research participants' identities must remain anonymous as the investigation may reveal sensitive information. There was, therefore, no need to disclose the names of the participants. This study did not reveal any names of the participants in any way, thus research participants' identities remained anonymous. Instead of using names, the participants were identified as participants 1-10 in the study; their true identities remained known only to me.

4.7.4 Informed Consent

Creswell (2013) postulates that dignity and rights of participants are linked to consent given by the participants, to sufficient and adequate information provided as a basis for giving that consent, and that the consent is given voluntarily. I ensured that I secured the consent of the respondents by adequately informing them of the aims and objectives of the study. I also pledged my commitment to confidentiality and privacy, as well as anonymity of the respondents as much as possible. I sought permission from UNIVEN to carry out the study and participants were asked to sign letters of consent (see Appendix E).

4.8 QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISM

In order to quality assure this study, a number of processes were taken into consideration. These are briefly discussed below.

4.8.1 Trustworthiness in conducting qualitative research

In quantitative research, the value of any piece of research work is measured against the validity and reliability of the processes undertaken by the researcher to finally arrive at the results/findings. In qualitative research, however, the focus is on the standards of riguor also known as trustworthiness. In this study, the standards of rigour discussed include credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. This is in line with Denzin and Lincoln (2013) who associate the “trustworthiness” of qualitative research with terms such as “credibility”, “transferability”, “dependability”, and “conformability”. In any qualitative research project, there are “four issues of trustworthiness demand attention. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability”.

4.8.2 Credibility

Credibility refers to the correctness of data and translates more appropriately for naturalistic enquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). It is similar to internal validity in quantitative research. Credibility exists when the research findings reflect the perceptions of people under study. Credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). In qualitative research, credibility implies the extent to which the phenomenon studied is accurately reflected in the research. To enhance the credibility of the research findings, I used multiple and different sources of data, which included students with disabilities, classroom observation and document analysis. This allowed the corroboration of the findings from these different methods of data collection. At the end, I provided rich, thick descriptions of the setting, participants, processes, and interactions.

4.8.3 Transferability

Transferability is concern with the extent to which the findings of the research can be applied to other groups within the wider population or to other situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln propose that it is up to the reader, rather than the original investigator, to determine if the findings can be transferred or applied to another setting. This is an equivalent of generalisability in quantitative research. To achieve

transferability, I provided rich, detailed and thick description about research methods, sampling, data collection, data analysis including coding, interpretations, validation, and data presentation (see Creswell, 2013). This was done to help place the reader in the context, and to allow the reader to determine if the findings are transferable. I used peer debriefing which is a process of involving colleagues at work who review and ask questions about the study so that the account will resonate with people other than myself. Through the use of colleagues at the same institution, the study was continuously appraised so that it was weeded of my own perceptions, beliefs and inclinations. These processes enhanced the transferability of the study.

4.8.4 Dependability

Dependability of data is the extent to which the same findings could be repeated if the same research instruments were simulated with similar respondents under similar conditions (Creswell, 2013). This principle can be likened to the idea of reliability in quantitative studies. A dependable study should, therefore, be accurate and consistent. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) posit that dependability (comparable with reliability) is achieved through a process of auditing; inquirers are responsible for ensuring that the process of research is logical, traceable and clearly documented, and can then be demonstrated through an audit trail, where others can examine the inquirer's documentation of data, methods, decisions and end product.

In order to ensure the dependability of this study, I have kept the voice tapes containing raw focus group interview data, the typed transcripts, field notes, observation checklist, focus group interview instruments and the final draft of the research project for auditing and verification by interested groups and individuals. The auditing of the research processes can also be used to authenticate conformability.

4.8.5 Conformability

Conformability refers to the extent to which findings are free from bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The issue of conformability focuses on the characteristics of the data collected and

the processes leading to its collection. These processes of data collection can yield research findings that are objective, neutral, credible and consistent as opposed to those that are based on the researcher's perceptions and preconceptions.

As alluded to earlier, dependability and conformability are interwoven processes, hence the material that has been identified for auditing was made available for those interested in auditing the study. Throughout the data-collection process, the keeping of a field journal allowed me to record all issues that could affect my personal attitude and emotions, as well as those of the participants. I ensured that my personal views, feelings, and attitudes did not influence the investigation. I made personal field notes about my attitudes, feelings, and reactions to minimise any bias and preconceived ideas about support for students with disabilities at UNIVEN.

4.9 CONCLUSION

In Chapter four, I first explained the paradigm context followed in conducting the study. Secondly, I presented the paradigm context. Thirdly, I discussed research design. Fourthly, I explained how data were collected and finally, the ethical considerations and quality assurance mechanisms of the study were discussed. In Chapter five, data are presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A qualitative investigation conducted as part of this study serves as a source of information in determining the educational support of students with disabilities at Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa. Relevant literature was reviewed in chapter three. In Chapter 4, I discussed the research methodology and gave reasons for my selection of participants and data gathering instruments. I used instruments such as classroom observations, focus group interviews and document analysis for collecting data to enable me to answer the research questions.

In this chapter, I present and analyse data collected and their interrelatedness so that the voice of the participants can be heard. This would lead to an in-depth understanding of support offered to students with disabilities in HEIs. The findings from classroom observations, focus group interviews and document analysis are integrated to provide a holistic understanding of the educational support given to students with disabilities at UNIVEN. In order to understand the data, the findings are presented under identified themes supported by statements from classroom observations, focus group interviews and document analysis.

5.2 PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Data presented were obtained through qualitative methods of collecting data, and the main respondents were students with disabilities. The participants' words have been reproduced as they were captured on tape recorder to avoid tampering with the data. The results and analysis of data were presented and discussed according to the identified themes of experiences of educational support by students with disabilities. The themes are:

- Learning needs
- Staff
- Assistive Technology
- Accessibility

5.3 LEARNING NEEDS

5.3.1 Support during application and registration

Students were asked to indicate their experiences with regard to the support they received during the application and admission processes. Eight students commented about the barriers faced in the application and registration process. The students pointed out that a gap of information exists between schools and universities. Lack of enough awareness in high school, especially special schools to prepare students for tertiary education environment was cited as a problem. They found that online application processes in many instances were not accessible to the majority of students with disabilities.

The students indicated that they did not have access to information about the application processes and that they relied more on the career guidance in their previous special schools. Lack of information was evident in the comment made by Participant 8 who said:

We didn't have access to information about the degrees offered by universities. Universities must come to the special schools to tell us the degrees that universities offer.

Participant 2 added: *"When I applied here, I expected them to help me with my registration and the applying process, because I heard they offered such support".*

This comment confirms what is highlighted by DHET (2013) when it says despite the strong legislative and policy framework for addressing disability in the education sector, access and support for people with disabilities remains limited. The UNIVEN (2013) disability policy draft took this further by saying the university welcomes students with disabilities and admits them using the same criteria as that of other students, such as

academic ability and suitability for course/degree. However, the provision of appropriate support will be limited by the affordability of those support systems.
Participant 9 also commented:

> *I also think that it would help if we were made aware of the process of application and registration and other important things. When I came here I had no knowledge of disability rules. I heard about that later on through someone who is a student here. I think it'll help a lot if such information is made known to prospective students, that such facilities are available. That will certainly minimize the fact of having to go through frustrations when you want to apply.*

On the issue of support during application and admission, students felt that there was lack of information about DU services and programmes offered by the institutions. Participant 5 affirmed:

> *…I suggest that at the gate securities must be told to look out for people with disabilities, especially at the beginning of the year. Those who don't know that there is a DU should be informed of the existence of the centre and such students should be escorted to the DU. For example, I when I went to the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus) to submit my application forms the securities there took me to the DU and I didn't even know that there was a DU.*

Participant 8 supported the sentiments above when he said:

> *…eh, when I first came here in 2008 I was supposed to study IT (Information Technology). Unfortunately, I didn't have sufficient information on the course. So I felt should just take the courses that most of the DSC students were studying, meaning that a student gives you information about his/her degree and then you decide to take it without finding more about it. So in a nutshell I could say that one of the support mechanisms we need during the registration period is the information about the various degrees available in this university. This will avoid people studying courses they did not intend to take.*

Eight participants agreed that they had difficulties in accessing information about programmes offered by the universities.

Participant 8:

> … *Growing up many of us had dreams; when we were at the primary level as well as when in high school. We still have dreams. You dream of being a nurse and when you apply to a university of your choice you should be given the chance to study what you want. Let me just put it this way: most of us we did not search for information on the Internet while we were in Grade 12, especially us disabled people because we didn't have access to the Internet in our special schools. We depend more on visits from universities. If a university does not go to my school to visit us, we will never know about the degrees that they offer. In the meantime I stick to my dream and apply. So when I come here I get surprised to find that I am unable to study toward the degree I want for various reasons, or maybe the university is not offering that degree. Most of our special schools don't have access to Internet.*

The participants stressed the importance of career guidance in special schools as students have no access to internet. Participant 2 stated:

> …*I'm suggesting that the university appoints an admission officer who can assist people with disabilities about careers that the university offers, so that when someone makes a choice, they get the necessary information about the degree they want to pursue as a career.*

5.3.2 Disclosing disability on the application form

Disclosure relates to the choice made by a student whether to declare that he or she has a disability or not. It can take on many forms, including application and registration declarations, requesting support within a designated disability service or making complaints when needs are not met. For each student, the decision and manner in which he or she chooses to disclose is personal and this is often a complex process, with each

individual having different expectations regarding how he or she would prefer people to react to the disclosure.

Often students learn by experience how they feel about disclosing their disability. This influences their decisions regarding how, when and to whom they disclose. Students are not only confronted by the issue of disclosure at university, but also when they apply for jobs and when they enter the working environment. Students with disabilities often enter colleges and universities unprepared to disclose their disability. They might lack the understanding of how to access services on campus. For students with a hidden or less obvious impairment, such as a hearing impairment, it may be possible for them to pass as non-disabled. Many students within visible disabilities hold strong opinions about their ability to maintain a non-disabled status when necessary. The choice made by these students not to disclose, however, may be detrimental to their academic success as it limits the extent to which an institution is able to provide appropriate support

The participants were asked to share their experiences of the importance of disclosing their disability on the application form. The White Paper for Post-school Education and Training: building an expanded effective and integrated post-school system (DHET, 2013) raises concerns that accurate and up-to-date data on the number of post-school students with disabilities is not available. It further says that, it is essential to achieve a fuller understanding of the number of people with disabilities, and the types of disabilities of people within the post-school system. It is recognised that people with disabilities do not always disclose their disabilities. Another concern raised was the under-representation of people with disabilities who enter universities. This is clearly a reality even if we keep in mind the tendency of some persons with disabilities not to disclose their disabilities. The same sentiment was shared by Participant 4 when he highlighted the importance of disclosing a disability:

> …*I think it's important. If the staff is aware of your needs they'll be able to assist you, but if you don't explain that in the form, nobody will get to know. Some disabilities are invisible. But if you have stated your disability they will be able to refer you to the right place where you will get support.*

Participant 7 added that:

> *…I think that it is important to disclose your disability or condition on your application form. The reason behind it is to get support. When I registered here I didn't disclose my disability in the registration form. Although I tried my best to cope with the academic work I didn't and I kept on failing some courses. I then decided to register with DU. My point is, I think it is crucial for people to disclose their disability so that the people who will be working with them will know how to assist them.*

From the research participants' perceptions, lecturers (in conjunction with the Disability Unit) have an important role to play in supporting students with disabilities in their academic work. Participants voiced their concern that lecturers need to be aware of students with disabilities in their classes so as to ensure that lecture notes are made available to these students well in advance in order for them to be appropriately scanned and edited in time for classes. They should form a relationship with the Disability Unit and learn how the support service operates.

Failure on the part of lecturers to support students with disabilities will affect their academic performance, as Participant 2 reports:

> *…for me, when I registered I disclosed my disability, but I think it didn't serve any purpose because the lecturers didn't know that I was disabled. I had to tell all of them, which shows me that it didn't serve any purpose because people who are supposed to be assisting didn't have that necessary information about my educational needs. So people at the admission office must make sure that if someone indicates that they have a disability, they must tell the lecturer so that they know that there is a student with special educational needs.*

Participant 6 added:

> *… I think it's important to indicate your disability on the application form like I did last year. I applied at the school of management and I was never referred to anyone with my application, but I indicated that I was disabled. They simply don't check.*

From the comments of the participants, it is clear that even if one discloses one's disability, it is not captured and sent to the academics and the academic support units.

Fotim (2011) points out to the importance of student disclosure of their status to inform future developments. It is equally important for students to disclose their disability and HEIs to capture the information for the planning of resources for these students. The space in the form for disclosing disability should be followed by justifying statements showing the purpose. The applicants should know that they are disclosing their status for academic support not for labelling them like in the case in the Medical Model.

Participant 5:

> *…I want to go back to Participant 2's statement…I want to support it. It seems like when we register at this university, the fact that we are disabled remains between DU and the Residence superintendent because he allocates appropriate rooms for us, but to the lecturers it is not known. So I suggest that they must be a disability awareness campaign of sorts within the campus for the lecturers. We aren't many so when lecturers know that they have two students who are disabled they must be invited to such awareness event.*

5.3.3 Support offered by Disability Unit

The participants were asked to share their experiences on the support offered by their institution/DU. The overall impression was that the services offered by the DUs are well received by students and positive comments about DUs (with some exceptions) were received. Six students with various disabilities agreed that the DU was giving them academic support to succeed in their studies. This was clearly stipulated in the UNIVEN Disability policy draft (2013) on section 6(e) which stipulates that the DU provides a number of services including computer facilities, Brailed exam papers and notes, loaning of assistive devices to students with disabilities and counseling. The existing levels of service will be maintained within resource constraints, with annual reviews.

The opinion was affirmed by the following statements:

Participant 8:

…Our university built us a DU that supports us with materials. For instance, they converted my materials from sight to braille. I access the computer whenever I want, during the day. And also, the university understands that I can't stay in a double room, so they gave me a single room.

Participant 3 commended the DU for the support they give by saying:

…DU *offers certain devices to all disabled students.*

This was further confirmed by Participant 5 when she said:

…I was grateful this year. The DU offered me a pebble handheld magnifier to read any font size that I want to read. So it makes things easier. They also gave me a PlexiTalk to enable me to record my lecturers. I can play the recorder before I sleep or before I go to the library. I can also make notes of everything that was done in class. I don't rely on other students to get information for me.

Similar comments were uttered by Participant 2:

…The DU is certainly working. They offered me a purple reader, something that I use when studying, like when I can't see the font size. This eases my studies.

Although the service offered by DU is commendable, the early closing times of the lab are a problem to students with disabilities. This was evident in the words of Participant 10:

… I think the Disability Unit offers good service, but my problem is that the lab closes too early. Sometimes you will find that we have many classes during the day, and when you want to go to the lab it's closed. I suggest that the lab times be revised to allow students to do their work. Sometimes it becomes difficult when you want to finish your assignment which is due the next day.

The participants pointed out that there were only two adapted labs on the campus, one in the library and another one in the DU, but they all close at the same time. Participant 1 added that:

> *…Also the closing time of our library section is not appropriate. The library closes the same time as the lab. They both close at the same time at 16:45. So if the library section can function during the normal library hours it would make the work of many disabled students easier.*

Students were then asked to comment on the additional support they would want the institution to offer. They had to identify the gaps in the support offered by DU in relation to their disability needs. Literature showed that "Nothing about us without us". The participants commented that they needed extra classes in difficult courses mostly those that involved calculations. Participant 2 shared his experiences:

> … *Eh, for me because some of us are doing courses like economics, accounting, and they involve a lot of calculation and numbers, I just feel that they should have additional classes for people like us because you can't really see what the lecturer is writing on the board, even when we're seated in the front row; it is just a waste of time, really. They must schedule additional classes for us so that they can help us, so that we feel accommodated. What happens to most of us now is that we have to rely on our friends or colleagues. Most of the time you have to beg them.*

Consultation of lecturers by students with disabilities was raised as another problem that HEIs should also look at. Students with visual impairments cannot access offices as there no labels in Braille. Participant 8 added:

> *…Ok let me not complain and say it straight. The offices of our lecturers must be identifiable, ma'am. I don't want to ask someone to read the name on your office ma'am Mbuvha. I must do it myself. They must write their names also in braille so that I can go to the lecturer any time I want.*

Teaching and learning was also identified by Participant 5 as a problem that needs attention:

…Eh, as a history student when you get to the lecture hall, the lecturer will just teach, maybe write some notes on the board and she will say, there are prescribed books, you must go to the library and get them. Ok, as a good student I go there, but only to be told that the books are only three in the library and that they have all been taken. So you have to wait for two weeks for the books to come back. The assignment might be due tomorrow and when you go back to your lecturer to ask for extension maybe she will agree. If she agrees, you go back to the library get the book and you find that the book is scratched, marked and there are pen marks all over the book, so it makes it difficult for you to scan and read the book. So I'd like to suggest that possible the library should hand over some books to the DU.

Participant 2:

…I think at the beginning of the year you should compile all the books we will need during the first semester and second semesters. Then these books are requested from the library so that when the students want a chapter from the book as prescribed by the lecturer, they get it from here and everything is done here. In this ways the book will be safe there won't be any torn pages and stuff like that.

Participant 1 added that:

… Or the books should be kept in our library section in the library, since we're the only ones who are allowed to get in there. Knowing that there are students who can't see, our colleagues will not mark these books or tear the pages. They'll keep the books clean at all times.

Participant 5 suggested the following:

…I was suggesting that DU should compile the prescribed books we are going to need. Maybe the students must submit their course outlines to the DSU so that these prescribed books can be brought down here, because sometimes even though they can take it to the books to the lab in the library, you will find that you will have to scan them out in the library and bring them here and it is time-consuming. But when these

books are around here I can come to a staff member in the DU and say I need this book and he or she will be able to go take it and scan it.

Participant 8 added that:

…still on the issue of books, it seems to be a big issue all along. I mean the disabled students have been here for more than two decades now, so I think that the DU must not delete the books that have been scanned. The books must be there in the system so that the other students can get the materials. It is also easier that way rather than students scanning the same book every year. If such books are saved, it'll be easier for the students to get them.

Participant 2 suggested the following:

…You can also ask the library if possible to ask the publisher to deliver the books with software, link the books (the book in a software format) so that it will be easy for the DSC to access the book without taking the physical copy.

On the question of learning materials, Participant 8 concluded that:

…Because of the use of braille books, I depend more on DU to be more friendly. I take the book there and they are able to braille it. I don't know, maybe our library does not have good ties with the braille service, but what we experienced in my special school is that they had a machine which was able to braille books and they were even brailing books for some schools. I don't know if the university can stretch further and buy that kind of machine and hire a person to braille books because ma'am, blind people find it difficult to access information. I can read a novel if the DU can braille a novel for me.

The participants were asked to comment on the following statement: "Students feel their lives are micromanaged" by support services, rather than having service providers focus on individual needs. Student needs must be determined by the students themselves, rather than administrators". Participant 1 responded, by stating the following:

… I think that statement is true; our life and needs are being macro-managed because if a person is going to stipulate what I should do without knowing what I'm going through with my disability, it can be futile at the end of the day because whatever they bring or produce, if it is not consistent or in line with the kind of disability I'm having, at the end of the day whatever they do will be nothing. But if I'm the one who is providing the information to them, telling them what I'm experiencing and I know what can help me, I think I'd become more productive.

It is worth noting that the participants anonymously agree that students are responsible for their learning needs. Participant 8 added that:

…we as disabled people we are not stagnant, we are not rigid, meaning that if I use braille I can't just use braille all the time. At some point I might prefer interning; at another I might prefer software. So as a student, I need to have some space of informing the administrator that today I want to listen and the administrator must try his or her best to give me that device.

5.3.4 Tutor assistance

The emphasis of tutoring assistance is on an individual programme related to meeting the students' needs to enable them to participate actively in and progress in the general curriculum. Many students with disabilities seemed not to participate in tutoring. When asked about tutoring assistance, two participants shouted an emphatic "NO" and others laughed. Participant 1 echoed that: …."*Tutors are there but they are not accommodating disabled students".* All the participants agreed that they were not catered for in the tutoring services.

5.3.5 Availability of learning materials

The participants were asked about their experiences on the availability of learning materials. Access to study material in alternate reading formats is crucial for the education of students with disabilities. Participant 10 said:

…Ma'am, the study materials are not available and when you go to the library, you find that you have to search, and when you go to the lecturers they will tell you to go to the library. They won't assist you with the search. They will tell you to go and search for information. So accessing books in the library is a problem.

Participant 2 added that:

…Lecturers give normal print to us. They don't care if you have eye problem or not. They'll tell you that they forgot.

However, Participant 7 had this to say:

On that I think it depends on you whether you have informed them. As with me all of them know that I have this problem so every time they make notes they make special ones for me with a large font. So I think it depends on whether you went to them and informed them in time, so that they can prepare your notes as well.

The issue of attitude also cropped up in the statement made by Participant 1:

…I think like I said before, it goes with the mentality of people. If you have told your lecturer that you need large print or braille, and if that person doesn't care, he won't do it, but if that person does care he or she may do it. So, it depends on their attitude.

The participants mentioned the importance of a working relationship between the staff at DU and academics in as far as provision of learning materials are concerned. Participants 8 voiced that:

…The relationship between the DU and the lecturer is important for this thing to happen. There are lecturers who are very good, who are able to email the course outline before they give it to the able students in class, but if the lecturer and the DU have no good relationship there will always be a problem.

In conclusion, Participant 8 suggested that administrators in the DU who are responsible for scanning and brailing must get proper training because this things are there in braille, I was able to do economics in high school and also mathematics using the same graphs,

so there must be proper training for our administrators in DU, so that they can braille our question papers.

5.3.6 Extra time

All the ten participants specified that they needed extra time. The participants also indicated that extra time was needed during tests, exams, for the submission of assignments and for the completion of the qualification. They said they were comfortable the way DU managed the extra time, especially during tests and exams. One of the participants shouted: "*extra-time is good mam*". This statement is in line with the UNIVEN Disability policy draft (2013) which sets out that facilities appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities will be made available during examinations and that extra time will be allowed, where appropriate, for students with learning and other disabilities.

5.3.7 Assessment

The participants were asked to share their experiences in as far as assessment is concerned. The participants had different experiences, possibly due to their different disabilities. Many participants said that alternative assessment was used continuously and that supported them especially during tests and examinations. Those with visual impairments confirmed that braille, large print and electronic question papers were provided and that they were allowed to use computers or laptops or make use of scribes. Participant 8:

> *…I don't know if it's my own imagination, but if it's my imagination then it is recurring. When we attend a class as blind students, I attend with four others, each and every test I get 55, 56 and others 57, 58. I don't know how they assess us as disabled students. That's what I've experienced in the past. How lecturers assess us is questionable to me.*

The participants were also asked to make comments on the design and adaptation of the question papers.

Participant 2 complained about adaptions made to the question papers:

> …*Sometimes it becomes disadvantageous because you will find that instead of these diagrams they will give you a long essay again. They will replace that with another question where you will have to explain something, whereas others are given just a diagram. So it becomes disadvantageous and sometimes they will replace the diagram with another question, which means your marks will be lower; it will be the same with other students.*

UNIVEN Assessment policy (2014) provides information about alternative methods of assessment. It elaborates that alternative methods of assessment will be available for students who, by reason of disability, would otherwise be unfairly penalised. This policy further says all special arrangements will minimise any handicap and should not otherwise advantage the students. However, the UNIVEN assessment policy is silent on the way question papers should be adapted. This is stressed by Participant 2:

> *…It only talks of students at risk that are contacted before the final assessment and notified of the procedures to be followed to gain the necessary requirements prior to the end of the course or final assessment. Students at risk is an umbrella term that needs to be further elucidated to determine if it includes students with disabilities.*

In the same policy, it is mentioned that students must be evaluated on their abilities not their disabilities and, where practicable, methods of teaching and assessment should be modified to take account of the difficulties experienced by students with disabilities. This statement is contrary to comments made by participant 8 who said:

> *…let me give you my experience of what Participant 2 is trying to say. In the general question paper there are schematic graphs. So, fine. What the lecturer will do, especially for the visually impaired, is to come up with a new question all together not relating to the general one; a new question to replace that schematic graph. That was happening to me this semester. Fortunately, I passed because I am a genius. … That is what happened. This can be a disadvantage because you will find that in the*

schematic presentation you just explain only, but here they give you a 25-marks question and you will fail.

The following participants mentioned the problems they encountered during assessment:
Participant 5:

…I have a problem in the exams. We disabled students come across this problem. You write your exam and when the results come it will just say absent from exam, even though you were there. I don't know what goes wrong. They do not submit my script or what happened there…. I will even go to the lecturer and ask, and he/she will say I was absent from exam room and she will say to me, when did you write and I tell her the date, and we will go to the exam section. There they will look for the script and it won't be there. I don't know what happens there because we sign. This is frustrating and something needs to be done to stop it.

Participant 5 continued to speak of her experiences:

…NO, it happened when I was doing my diploma. It hasn't happened again, but now I want to tell you ma'am that other students have an advantage over us. They write in the lecture halls and they are invigilated by their lecturers, so they hand in the script directly to them. As for us there is a go-between, between me and my lecturer and sometimes he does not get my script and it becomes a problem. Sometimes when I write the test here my lecturer will even forget that I wrote. The script won't come back and she will say I didn't write. When you explain to her she will say I forgot your script and then I'll just leave. This happened to me last semester. My script remained at the DU for the whole 6 months. She came and got my script when the semester marks had already been issued.

The issue of invigilation during assessment was emphasised by the following participants:
Participant 8:

…I don't know how possible this would be but it must be possible. The lecturer must be obliged to bring an invigilator. There must be a rule that invigilators must be present when we take our tests or exams. These invigilators are paid by the university, that

one I am sure of. So it'll be a simple thing for a lecturer to get an invigilator to come down here and invigilate his or her students. This issue must go as far as the university Vice-Chancellor's office. I know that there is this rule. If we continue like this pleading with them saying please bring an invigilator, these people won't co-operate. There must be a strict rule.

Participant 9:

… I think it is also necessary when writing assessments to have an invigilator present. Sometimes question papers have errors and ours are not corrected and you will be confused.

Participant 2:

…about the issue when it comes to tests and exams, you know some lecturers have questions regarding that, that is why they are reluctant to let us come to DU separate venue for exams. Some lecturers have told me that I shouldn't worry and that they'll try to organise lecture hall A3 for me, as well as give me extra time because they don't trust the DU. So I think that we must make sure that we write under strict exam conditions in the DU.

5.3.8 Financial assistance

DHET (2013) raises concern about the low numbers of people with disabilities in universities and colleges despite the fact that bursary funding for learners with disabilities is available. According to this White Paper, the Disability Funding is underutilised. The low uptake of bursaries is a matter of serious concern, given the continued inequities in access. It is most likely related to the fact that many learners with disabilities do not qualify for university education, but research is required to fully understand this problem.

Following the DHET concerns, participants were asked to share their experiences for financial assistance and bursaries for their studies. As mentioned in Chapter 3, many students with disabilities are funded by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Low-income students with disabilities, like other low-income students, need

financial assistance, in order to afford the costs of higher education. The ten participants indicated that NSFAS provides assistance for tuition, books, accommodation, and living costs. This is a free bursary for students with disabilities who want to study at HEIs in South Africa. The following comments were made about the NSFAS:

Participant 2:

> …*I heard people saying that there is a bursary from the Department of Labour which is administrated by NSFAS. I'm not sure about this, but the point I want to make is that the money they are giving us is not adequate. In that bursary there is a portion for tuition, residence and assistive devices. My view is that assisting devices are not allocated enough money*.

The participants complained of the turn-around time of the assistive devices. They said they receive them towards the end of the year when the academic year is over and they are expected to perform without the devices throughout the year. This was evident in Participant 1's statement when he said:

> …*You'll find that they give us our assisting devices when we are about to go home; when we are done with our academic work and the work of that particular year, so what am I going to do with it? I think if they give us these devices early, say at the very beginning of the year, it'll be more beneficial to us*.

The following complaints were raised by the participants:

Participants 1:

> … *Some students are still waiting for their devices. There is a certain number of students who are still waiting and when they ask they are told to come tomorrow and tomorrow will give birth to another tomorrow. It is a quite a challenge.*

Participant 9:

> …*the fact is that we are always getting the same assistive devices. I don't think everyone needs a laptop. I think maybe the bursary scheme must see to it that individual assistive devices are given to students according to their needs.*

Participant 9…*What I want to say is that the university should offer different kinds of devices. Variety is important.*

Participant 1*:*

> *…I'm replying to the statement that I must be the one to tell them what I want and not them telling me. The other thing is that there must be a certain amount that should come back to me. I should be able to exhaust that money within the duration of my studies. Sometimes we're told that when we need a particular there must be a motivational letter to explain why the device is needed. This is time consuming. There has to be a better way of allowing us to spend the money we're given.*

Participant 4 said:

> *…the other problem that is that you choose one device per year. If you need two devices because of your condition, say a laptop and a plexitalk, they'll tell you that you can have only one item. That's a big problem and it has a negative impact on our studies. In other words, they should allow us to exhaust our budget. I should get what I need.*

Participant 7 remarked:

> *…I think someone has to make sure that we get the assistive devices early enough. Most of the disabled students are experiencing problems when it comes to study materials they use during the course of the year. I think it is very important if arrangements can be made with the people who deliver. I do not know whether the fault lies with the bursary holders or the suppliers. Each and every year we get our assistive devices very late.*

Participant 1

> *… Our funds must help us in time because what they are doing now is not productive. How can they give us assistive device when we are going home? What am I going to do with that at home? They call it an assistive device for academic reasons. So they must exhaust our funds in time not towards the end of the year.*

Participant 8:

…This is not a University of Venda issue only, but it is a national issue. When we were in Durban attending a conference for South African National Blind Council, we managed to ask the question of assistive devices to the deputy minister. That is why I am saying it is a national crisis to which should be dealt with. There are many mechanisms of dealing with it. One involves instructing NSFAS to spend a certain percentage as early as January for assistive devices because in most cases our bursary settles the accounts in November.

Participant 10:

… I am confused about the assistive devices because I heard that we only get one assistive device per degree, but I was surprised when the company for sensory solutions came here; they asked us whether we get assistive devices. So I am surprised that every year they give us money for assistive devices and the university is insisting that we get one device per degree. We can't have another assistive device. Where is the money going to because I only have one assistive device?

Participant 1:

…I have got a question. If they are saying that this year they are giving us a laptop and if next year I need another assistive device, what will happen? What she is saying is that we must get one assistive device per degree; actually, do they choose for me or I choose for myself?

Participant 2:

…one of the rules of NSFAS is that we have to go to the doctor and the doctor must certify that we need these devices. If you are unlucky and you get those doctors who are harsh and you can't really tell what you want, you just write laptop, and you receive the laptop. So this is still a challenge. So I suggest that there are some things that the DU can certify, for example speech impediments. Speech doesn't need a doctor. It is a thing that the DU knows and must recommend the devices. This is better than going to the doctor to recommend speech devices.

Participant 1 suggested that the space in NSFAS agreement form for assistive device should be filled in by DU staff who know them better; medical practitioners do not know their learning needs.

Participant 7 also suggested:

> … *I don't know because I once went to the bursary administrator to ask if I could get my medication from my bursary funds and she said I couldn't, it was impossible. I suggest that NSFAS for students with disabilities should also cover medical expenses because medicines are very expensive.*

5.3.9 Career/counselling service

Students are encouraged to contact Student Counselling and Career Development Unit as soon as they experience social/academic challenges. Participant 2 stated:

> *…I'm not sure but I just feel it is not specialised. I mean like there is no career counselling specifically for students with disabilities. Whatever is available now is for all the students. I think there should be one for us, tailored to our needs.*

This statement by Participant 2 showed that students with disabilities were not using these services. They feel excluded, more especially in career related matters where career guides, pamphlets and psychometric tests are not adapted.

5.3.10 Support from the library

All the participants appreciated the support they got from the library. Participant 1 commented that:

> …*The university, I think is 4 or 8 months ago, opened a new section for disabled students in the library. This is because there are students who use wheelchairs or are*

blind and cannot go upstairs. So they opened a section of the library downstairs, where almost every disabled student can access a particular library at any time.

Participant 5 added:

…but there we missed something. When I went to the library one day to the offices of people who are helping us, to find information and books, the lady there told me that you can come here but what about your friend who is in a wheelchair? You can climb the steps and come to my office, what about your friend who is using a wheelchair? So she suggested to me that I must tell the DSU that they must suggest to the library that other offices must be created downstairs so that students using wheelchairs can access those offices and they can be helped, or a lift be installed.

Participant 5 commended the services rendered by subject librarians, but she was concerned by the absence of lifts to access their offices*:*

…offices in the library are all upstairs. Some of them must be taken downstairs. I was told to speak to you about it so that you can suggest the matter to the library manager.

Participant 8 suggested that*:*

…in the meantime while they are still busy moving the offices downstairs, I want to be a bit cost-effective. We have intercoms, phones, if we can use them to call those people to come down. That is a suggestion which can work in the meantime while they are fixing the lift.

5.4 TEACHING STAFF

With regard to the lack of staff at the DU and the disproportionate ratio of staff to students, the findings show that participants differ in their opinion. Five participants raised the issue of a lack of permanent staff at the University's Disability Unit. They reported that this affected their academic development in that there aren't enough staff members to provide adequate support to the large number of students with disabilities at the University. This was evident in the comments made by Participant 1:

...There was this issue where a student was supposed to write on a Saturday. Lecturers are unable to bring their invigilators, which means you guys must be here on a Saturday and you find that the test is to be written at 14:00, and the people who must help us work from 8 to 10. If the DU can have more staff it will be easier and we will be accommodated.

A different view was given by Participant 8 when he argued that:

…Staff is adequate but, I have a confusion about the job description because I don't know who to approach to do what. If I have a problem with a computer, who should I approach? The problem here is who must do what, that is what I see. The staff to me is adequate.

Participant 4 added that:

…maybe it will be much better if we had staff that worked maybe on a Saturday because you find that on Saturdays, our lab is not open and we have school work to do. At the end of the day, we can't do our assignments because the lab here is not open and even at the library is closed. So if we can have enough staff the problem will be sorted out.

The participants argued that teaching and administrative staff need to be adequately trained to deal with students with disabilities. They suggested that lecturers and administrative staff should receive specialised training on disability related issues. These suggestions are in line with DHET (2013) which suggests that a more integrated approach to adapting teaching and learning methodologies and approaches is necessary in post-secondary education. Greater awareness should be on the capacity of teaching staff to address disability at all levels of post-school institutions. From class observations, I found that the lecturer for Physics 1521 obtained his Masters in Physics abroad and has experience of teaching students with disabilities. The lecturer is in his third year level of PhD in Physics. He was trained on how to teach students with disabilities both at Cape Peninsula University of Technology and at the University of Venda.

5.5 ADAPTED TECHNOLOGY

The policy on post-secondary education draws attention to the importance of the use of specialised technology and assistive devices to help people with disabilities. Access to technology and other learning supports what is critical to the success of students with disabilities in HE. Adapted technologies can allow persons with disabilities access to the internet, a tool which offers incredible potential for persons to develop social contacts academically and to create networks and communities of interest, thus, enabling greater participation and social inclusion. All participants concurred that the DU has state of the art adapted labs, but there were concerns about the maintenance of the computers.

Participant 1 said:

> *…Maintenance of computers in the DU is very bad. We have lots of computers there but only four of them are working. Every semester when the university closes people from IT should come and fix the computers. After the final examinations in November they should come again. We're asking only twice a year. So they need to maintain those computers because they affect me and my academic performance.*

Participant 10 said:

> …A*dapted technology is more important to me; a computer is a pen to me, so when there is a speech, for example, I can use the computer to prepare it and deliver it with ease.*

Other technologies which were identified were the Plexitalk, Pearl reading cameras and Pebble reader. These devices assisted them to record lectures. Participant 10 added that: …"*More printers are needed, because we rely on pen and printers, and because all the 101 students rely on that one printer. So if we can have 4 to 5 printers that would make things easier".* The participants indicated the need for more scanning devices to foster their independence. Services offered by DU seemed to depend more on technology and this shows the influence of the Medical Model whereby students must adapt to the environment.

5.6 ACCESSIBILITY

In terms of accessibility, DHET (2013) presents another challenge besides less funding for and resourcing of disability units at historically black institutions compared to historically white institutions. The document further reveals that the situation has been exacerbated by the fact that disability grants are not provided directly to institutions. However, a differentiated approach to funding has been implemented through provision of funding to all 23 universities to conduct infrastructure audits with a view to improving accessibility, and to ensuring that new buildings are accessible to people with disabilities. The document aims to channel the funding towards ensuring universal access to university infrastructure and facilities. In line with DHET (2013), the UNIVEN disability policy draft stipulates that physical access to and within buildings will be planned, modified, maintained and extended in accordance with continually revised University-specific building guidelines (see Appendix H). Other necessary facilities and amenities will be installed and the University will ensure that adequate signage indicates the location of accessible entrances, toilets and emergency exits, ramps and lifts.

Among the barriers to higher education opportunities for persons with disabilities, the most obvious, have been the physical barriers that exclude some from campus facilities. These included stairs that cannot be navigated by wheelchairs. In short, the built environment was often built to exclude rather than include students with disabilities. Many problems relating to the physical accessibility of the environment, buildings and facilities remain on campus. Campus accessibility seems to be an area that the majority of institutions have made improvements in over the last ten years, and most had carried out an access audit.

Despite this, it was noted that there is still a need for more progress. The participants indicated that physical infra-structure barriers play a negative role in the experiences of students with disabilities on campus. They cited various examples of environmental barriers impacting on their performance. Participant 4 commented that:

…First things first. The School of Management Sciences should come down. Some of us we have a problem in accessing the offices there. Most of the lecturers are located up there, so it is quite impossible to reach the offices there and we cannot send other students to consult for us, because when they come to us the information is no longer the same; it is diluted.

Other issues on accessibility had to do with the signage and lack of communication during construction. Participant 8 had this to say:

…The university must ensure that the constructors they employ must build roads and that they maintain our infrastructures, they must know that. I am complaining about landmarks. You know, for 6 years I have not been able to go to the main gate alone because the landmarks and the pavements are not put in order, and it is embarrassing. Even now, I am scared to find a hole in my bedroom door. They should be informed about the issue of landmarks, the issue of pavements.

Participant 8 added that the institution had done well in some aspects when he said that:

…I think in terms of the infrastructure for me to go classes the university seems to have tried their best to accommodate me. However, it would have been much better if they had consulted the disabled people and asked them about how roads must be constructed. For instance, how the landmarks should appear and where they should be put. But again, it appears that the university is trying. They could do more, unfortunately they don't know how to do it.

The issue of constructors was echoed by Participant 5 who said:

…I am experiencing a problem that Participant 8 has pointed out. Usually I attend classes at the A block and when I find that they are working it causes a problem. I'm blind and when there is too much sun I can't see anything. I rely on my stick. Sometimes when I go to class I find there is a tractor making a huge noise and I can't find my way and I decide to go back. And then I find out that my colleagues formed groups and I end up not having a group because I didn't make it to class. That's something that needs to be looked at.

Participant 8: added:

> …W*e as blind students depend more on road pavement. If there are no road pavements I will be disoriented. The constructors must have that important information. The university must tell them how the roads must be constructed. We understand the University of Venda is still under construction, but that does not mean education is not going on. We need to use these roads and even if they are still under construction, they must modify them.*

Some debate exists concerning UNIVEN infra-structure. The participants complained about the old buildings that are not accessible to most students with physical impairments. . Residences are also not accessible as revealed by Participant 10:

> *…The roads are not accessible. What if your friend is up there and you want to visit? How you will go there if you are using a wheelchair because there is no lift? There are only steps there, and also the issue of bathrooms needs to be looked at.*

The comments of Participant 10 concurs with the data I have collected during my observations: On 19th May 2015, I observed Physics 1521 class at A5 lecture hall. In both front and back entrances of A5 lecture hall, there were no ramps. This lecture hall is designed in a way that some of the front seats were left without seats for students who use wheelchair. These reserved seats are only found in the front as students who are using wheelchair can only access A5 at the front entrance only. Hereunder are some pictures that I took during classroom observation:

Figure 5.1: Entrances at the front of A5 lecture hall

Figure 5.2: Entrance at the back of A5 lecture hall

Figure 5.3: Inside A5 lecture hall: Front bench reserved for wheelchair users

Students enrolment for this course was 254 and 4 students had disabilities. One student was using a wheelchair, two were partially sighted students and the last one was a hard of hearing student who uses Bellman Audio Domino Pro FM. Domino brings out the words to students to hear them loud and clear even at a distance. The lecturers were trained on how to use these devices during class. The class started at 10:00am and the mood of the students was high as they were preparing themselves for the midyear exams. The lecturer greeted the students and asked them if there was an assistive device which he needed to use to assist the students with hearing impairment and no student came up. He then continued with the lesson and the following teaching aids were used: a White board, data projector and hand-outs. Partially sighted students were given A3 papers with a large print. The lecturer also encouraged students to open email accounts to facilitate teaching and learning electronically. During the lesson, the lecturer's voice was audible and clear although the class was big. The students who were partially sighted were allowed to record the lecture with their recording devices. The students with disabilities participated freely and were able to answer questions with confidence.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The aim of study was to establish the educational support offered to students with disabilities at UNIVEN from insider perspective. Data obtained from classroom observations, focus group interviews and document analysis were presented and discussed under categorised themes. Each theme was presented and a brief analysis given. Data discussed in this chapter confirms that there is a need to listen to the voice of the students with disabilities when offering educational support. In Chapter 6, I present the summary, conclusions and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter is designed to summarise the key findings of the study, present conclusions from the findings, and provide recommendations. The first section summarises the key findings about the support that students with disabilities receive at UNIVEN. The second section provides implications for the study and then provides recommendations to be taken into account when supporting disabled students. The last section presents limitations, suggestions for further research and conclusions of the study.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The aim of this study was to investigate the support that students with disabilities receive at UNIVEN. The study followed a qualitative research approach where a case study design was adopted. Three methods of data collection were used, namely focus group discussions, interviews, observations and document analysis. The overall findings of the study were that students with disabilities at UNIVEN were facing challenges in terms of educational support.

Data collected centred around the main research question, which was: what support is offered to students with disabilities to assist them with their academic performance? Data presented were obtained through qualitative methods of collecting data and the main respondents were students with various disabilities who were at different levels of their studies. As indicated in Chapter 4, data were collected until saturation was reached. The results and analysis of data are presented and discussed according to the identified themes of experiences of students with disabilities at UNIVEN. The themes are:

- Learning needs
- Staff

- Assistive technology
- Accessibility

6.3 LEARNING NEEDS

With regard to career guidance, participants showed that they faced challenges when they were applying and registering for their degrees due to the lack of career guidance in secondary schools they come from. This finding is consistent with other findings elsewhere. In Spain, Álvarez-Pérez, Alegre-de-la-Rosa, and López-Aguilar, (2012) highlighted the lack of guidance and information regarding access to university courses for students with disabilities and the need to implement support measures to assist the learning process and also the urgency for improving institutional policies favouring the disabled. In Zimbabwe, Chireshe (2006) found that the majority of school counsellors and students viewed the school guidance and counselling services as beneficial, although these did not match international standards. In Nigeria, Kelechi and Ihuoma (2011) concluded that career counselling should be mandatory for every adolescent and young person who intends to succeed at school, as well as in the work place.

Generally, there is a need for HEIs to conduct career guidance in Special Schools and to make students with disabilities aware of the programmes offered. The findings of this study reinforce Ecological System Theory which underpins the study. The theory emphasises the interaction between an individual's development and the systems within the general social context. It came out in this study that lecturers and DU staff should work together as they have an important role to play in supporting students with disabilities (see Figure 2.1).

In Bronfenbrenner's model external factors can be located in the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Greyling (2008) mentions university support, family support, interaction with others, and interaction with faculty as important factors that contributed to students' success. The student does not exist in isolation from surrounding systems. Rather, other societal systems, the education system, family, teachers, schools or the curriculum help to determine the student's success. Therefore,

the Department of Education at macro-level should see to it that career guidance is conducted in special schools, in order to prepare learners with disabilities for post-secondary education. During classroom observations, I found that students with disabilities did not like sitting in front of the classroom, more especially when they are late for the class.

This study revealed mixed feelings among the participants about the importance of disclosing their disability on the application form. Some students commented that they did not want to disclose their disabilities because of the fear of being labelled as disabled, discriminated against, victimised and stigmatised. This finding is consistent with a study by Butler (2011) in the USA who found that a large proportion of students with learning disabilities disclosed their disabilities after they had experienced difficulties with the college curriculum or when they had received poor marks. In Canada, Tsagris and Muirhead (2012) evaluated Postsecondary Support for Ontario Students with Learning Disabilities. Their results showed that students desired to remain unidentified and independent. In South Africa, FOTIM (2011) found that data captured during the registration phase did not provide an accurate picture as not all students disclose their status and that very limited verification takes place on information provided during the registration phase.

In contrast to non-disclosure of disability, CHE (2005) found that problems of collecting and managing data are not peculiar to information about students with disabilities, but are rather reflective of institutions' more general lack of capacity to develop and maintain accurate and reliable information systems. The findings of this study strengthen the importance of macro-systems in that, there should be clear guidelines documented at this level to regulate the practices of support services for students with disabilities in HEIs. Macro-systems are attitudes, beliefs and values which are embedded and inherent in the systems of a society or culture.

The study found that students with disabilities appreciate the academic support offered by the University of Venda DU, and students stated that the support had an impact on

their performance. These findings are consistent with those reported by Troiano, Liefeld and Trachtenberg (2010). Troiano *et al*. (2010) investigated the way 262 students with LD related to their academic support centre, as well as student achievement. Their results showed that students who consistently attended academic support centre appointments had higher rates of success than those who did not attend or who did not attend consistently. In England, Vouroutzidou, (2011) found that, even though the majority of the students expressed a general satisfaction with the services they receive from the institution, there were some complaints about the Disabled Student Units (DSUs) and about some other members of staff. It was found that complaints were related to the bureaucratisation of the disability services. I think that educational support should be the responsibility of all structures of the university, not just those people appointed in a specialised disability support office. CHE (2005) stresses that the whole campus is responsible for fostering a diverse campus climate and for addressing the students' diverse needs. It should not be the responsibility of the DU alone, although the crucial role they play is appreciated. All the participants spoke highly of the DU and the commitment of the staff. Staff at DU seem to play a significant role in advocating for students' needs in university services and facilitating communication between the faculty and students with disabilities.

South African researchers (Crous, 2005; CHE, 2005; Greyling, 2008; FOTIM, 2011) found that in many instance, DUs are still playing a pioneering role in terms of academic support for students with disabilities. They found that support offered to students with disabilities may differ from university to university and somewhat the support offered might be similar. However, a flexible design of support will ensure that individual differences and needs are accommodated and support is provided. Results from these studies confirm that HEIs are practicing the Social Model of service provision to make all aspects of university life accessible from the onset.

6.3.1 Support during lectures

The study found that students with disabilities at UNIVEN do not have tutors/personal assistants to support their learning. This finding is inconsistent with CHE's, (2005), findings that most South African HEIs are providing personal assistance for example, additional tutoring, note takers and various mentoring programme to students with disabilities. Alexander (2004) investigated students' experiences with tutorial learning at Louisiana State University. Participants felt that tutoring was a success, especially how they felt personally, as well as how they did academically.

This study revealed that academics need training on how to teach and provide learning materials for students with disabilities. This finding is similar to other findings elsewhere. In South Africa, Crous (2005) found that a number of students with disabilities requested that all study materials and other documentation should be made available in Braille, on audio and on CD or in the internet. This study recommends that, as a principle of education for all, everybody in higher education should be trained to support students with disabilities and involved in the support for all students.

6.3.2 Support during exams

This study found that extra/additional time during tests and exams was needed by all participants. This finding is consistent with existing literature (Crous, 2005; Greyling, 2008; FOTIM, 2011; Butler, 2011; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). The findings from this study demonstrate that students with disabilities need extra time during tests and exams because they get tired quickly, lose concentration and some go to the toilet frequently. While findings in this study also show that extended test times increase the likelihood of students with disabilities graduating, they do not support previous findings by Pingry (2007) who found that extended test time improves the test scores of students with learning disabilities (LD). Students with LD have additional needs for academic success and they spend more time on their studies compared with their non-disabled peers.

This finding revealed that participants experience difficulties related to assessment. This finding is consistent with findings reported by Healey *at al.,* (2006) who investigated learning experiences of disabled students at six English universities. About a third of the disabled students who participated acknowledged difficulties with multiple-choice tests and the structuring of the assessment paper. In South Africa, Greyling (2008) found that alternative assessment (particularly oral exams) could not be recommended because it does not give students enough time to think about an answer. This study reveals that even though students with disabilities are enjoying the benefits of a separate examination venue, which is accessible, they are still concerned about lecturers who are not sending invigilators.

6.3.3 Financial support

This study found that funding from NSFAS is not enough to cater for all study costs for disabled students. The findings in this study are consistent with those of FOTIM (2011) in the disability in higher education project report. The report revealed that NSFAS is not adequate since students paid personally to address the needs that the disability allowance in other countries covers. Similarly, DHET (2013) raises concerns about the low numbers of people with disabilities in universities and colleges despite the fact that bursary funding for learners with disabilities is available. According to White Paper, Disability Funding is underutilised. The low uptake of bursaries is a matter of serious concern, given the continued inequities in accessing HEIs.

With regard to other support services, the findings in this study revealed that career/counseling service at UNIVEN is not specialised and that it excludes students with disabilities. This finding differs from that of other researchers (Tsagris, 2010; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012) who found that counseling services improve understanding and acceptance of participants' disabilities.

6.4 ADAPTED TECHNOLOGY

The study found that students with disabilities at UNIVEN use Adapted Technology to enable them to access information, for example, internet access, Braille conversion and printing, communication and training. These findings are consistent with those of other studies (Pingry, 2007; Harrison, 2012; Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). In Ontario, Tsagris and Muirhead (2012) found that Assistive technology (AT) has the potential to enhance postsecondary students' learning ability by circumventing academic deficits and improving information access. In Kenya, Kochung (2011) concluded that HEIs should provide assistive devices to support students with disabilities. In Israel, Schreuer (2011) found that assistive technology can help reduce and in some cases eliminate barriers that students with disabilities face in the promotion of equal opportunities in higher education and in employment.

Pingry (2007) notes that students with disabilities at the University of Missouri-Columbian who received assistive technology services were likely to graduate as compared to other students who did not receive these services. Similarly, in this study, a student with visual impairment mentioned that assistive technology assists him to succeed academically.

6.5 ACCESSIBILITY

The findings indicated that physical infra-structure barriers play a negative role in the experiences of students with disabilities at UNIVEN. This finding is congruent with other research studies which found that many problems relating to the physical accessibility of buildings and facilities remain on prevalent campuses (FOTIM, 2011). This is similar to the findings in Hadjikakou et al. (2010) who found that physical access affected experiences of students with mobility impairment in Cypriot higher education. Koca-Atabey, Karanci, Dirik and Aydemir (2011) found that the physical environment was listed as affecting the psychological wellbeing of Turkish university students with physical disabilities. The universal design was recommended as a framework for designing places, things, information and communication to make them usable by the widest range of

people in the widest range of situations. The universal design is the human-centred design of everything with everyone in mind.

Fuller *et al*. (2005) found that students with disabilities in HE face various barriers in their educational environment. Many HEIs, both abroad and in South Africa, UNIVEN included, adopted the social model perspective to support and accommodate students with disabilities. This involved institutions reorganising, understanding and addressing disability as a human rights issue, where key principles such as non-discrimination and equity are appropriately applied to the experiences of students with disabilities (CHE, 2005). Furthermore, policy emphasises that HEIs should emphasise that HEIs should put mechanisms in place to provide educational support for the diverse student population (Education, 2001). The DHET (2013) and UNIVEN disability policy draft stipulate that physical access to and within buildings will be planned, modified, maintained and extended in accordance with continually revised University-specific building guidelines.

The current findings deepen the Social Model approach that does not locate disability in society on the individual, but it identifies social prejudices, inaccessible environments, discriminatory work arrangements and segregated education as disabling societal elements. This model requires HEIs to change their self-concepts. Instead of looking at disabled students and seeing deficits (Medical Model) that need to be accounted for by providing accommodation and negotiating different treatment, they are now looking at the campus and learning environments and seeing deficits.

The findings of this study reveal that accessibility is a huge problem at UNIVEN. Greyling (2008) mentions that physical environment is important to the safety of the students. Physical environment send powerful non-verbal messages regarding the campus climate. Moreover, the manner in which a university responds to accessibility issues can communicate a message of tolerance rather than of embracing differences and diversity. During focus group interviews, the inaccessibility of various buildings was reported. For example, the old Science building where lifts to access laboratories are always out of order was cited. Lack of lifts made it difficult for a wheelchair user to participate in

experiments. The fittings and furniture in the laboratories are not supportive to wheelchair users. This was confirmed during classroom observation and the lecturer confirmed that he relocated some of the resources to DU so that students on wheelchairs can also participate in Physics experiments. The School of Management Sciences, School of Environmental Sciences and the Old admin building where the School of Education is situated, were considered the most physically inaccessible buildings of UNIVEN.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Only one institution of Higher Learning in South Africa, UNIVEN, was sampled for this study. Therefore, additional research is needed to include a larger and more diverse sample of students and a variety of educational outcome measures. The results of the case study can, therefore, not be generalised to include other contexts. However, I have described the case in-depth as the aim of this study was to investigate the educational support that students with disabilities receive at UNIVEN possible to transfer the research methods to other contexts (Silverman, 2005). Therefore, this case study could be used to provide a research-based model for exemplary practices in educational support for students with disabilities at HEIs. Based on the findings of the study, I present recommendations about issues that need to be addressed.

- It is recommended that the university should establish a forum whereby students with disabilities can discuss and address their educational needs on campus. It is imperative that students with disabilities be given a chance to communicate their needs, especially those pertaining to teaching and learning, as well as physical accessibility of the campus.
- Lecturers should be trained on how to teach and support students with disabilities as this will enhance the quality of teaching and learning for students with disabilities. These recommendations are in line with DHET (2013) which suggests that a more integrated approach to teaching and learning methodologies and approaches is necessary in post-secondary education. Greater awareness on disability should be on the capacity of teaching staff to address disability at all levels of post-school institutions.

- It is also recommended that disability and diversity awareness should be included in the university calendar, in order to create a more inclusive environment.
- Furthermore, services for students with disabilities should be included in first-year orientation activities, inductions and workshops.
- UNIVEN blackboard should include an online survey to measure lecturers' attitudes and knowledge about working with students with disabilities.
- DU could establish an online interactive portal for its registered students, in order to increase communication between students and the university. The portal could be used for the distribution of information that may be of interest to students and lecturers. Notices about construction activities on campus can be posted in this portal.
- In pursuit of a broader conception of Inclusive Education, higher education institutions should avoid creating adverse conditions that exclude or disadvantage other student groups. It is, therefore, important that universities like UNIVEN should consider the importance of context when setting tests, assignments, and other learning and assessment activities. These should seek to accommodate rather than to exclude students with disabilities. For example, giving a test in the evening may expose female students and other vulnerable groups such as students with disabilities to danger. In this regard, lecturers may consider alternative ways.
- Finally, it is recommended that the university should ensure that educational support stays up to date so that students with disabilities can succeed educationally at HEIs.

The aim of this study was to investigate the educational support that students with disabilities receive at UNIVEN. Future research could include factors that predict graduation among students with disabilities at UNIVEN. Sample size of students with disabilities should be increased to be more representative of the larger student population.

6.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

All researchers attempt to produce valid and reliable data in an ethical manner. The verification of data refers to checking the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of the research findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The results of this study were credible because the phenomenon studied was accurately reflecting on the support offered to students with disabilities at UNIVEN from an insider perspectives. As I work at UNIVEN DU, if a neutral person conducted the study in the same institution the results could have been different. The extent to which a study's results (regardless of whether the study is descriptive or experimental) can be generalised or applied to other people or settings reflects its transferability. In this respect it should be noted that the sample described in this study were very specific to UNIVEN support for students with disabilities. Only 10 students with various disabilities and on different levels of study participated in this study. The generalisability of the results to other South African universities is limited because the relationship between the supports offered to students with disabilities could differ from one university to another. Future studies could include samples that are more heterogeneous, where students with disabilities from urban areas are considered.

6.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study found that there is a gap between the support that UNIVEN offered to students with disabilities and the individual support that students need as perceived by themselves. The little research I have found show that there is little literature published on the topic. This study makes the following suggestions for future research:

- The sample of this study covers only one institution of higher learning in South Africa; therefore, additional research is needed to include a larger and more diverse sample of students and a variety of educational outcome measures.
- Factors that predict graduation among students with disabilities at South African HEIs.

- Future research efforts focused on education support for students with disabilities are needed, and necessary, to support successful postsecondary outcomes for this population.

6.9 CONCLUSION

For the past two to three decades, there has been a large influx of students with disabilities into institutions of higher education worldwide. In South Africa, in these past three decades, records of intake of students with disabilities were not recorded as services and support of this kind were not institutionalised. Within this transformation process which involved including previously under-represented groups, institutions of higher learning are facing challenges of what kind of educational support to offer to students with disabilities, in order to help them to succeed academically. This study investigated the educational support offered to students with disabilities at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) as experienced by the students themselves. The study, therefore, gives an insider perspective. The study followed a qualitative research approach, and used focus group interviews, classroom observations and document analysis as methods of collecting data. Ten out of hundred and twenty-seven students with various disabilities participated in the study. The findings of this study reveal that there are some degrees of support that UNIVEN offers to support students with disabilities. However, some gaps to meet students' educational needs still exist. These gaps include lack of information about the programmes that UNIVEN is offering, physical infra-structure barriers, lack of disability information captured by the institution, inaccessibility of learning materials in Braille and other reading formats and lack of disability knowledge. The issue of accessible environment was of great concern to students with disabilities as an environment which is inaccessible creates barriers to free mobility. This study recommends the establishment of a forum in which students with disabilities can discuss and address their educational needs on campus. Other recommendations include the following: lecturers' training, disability awareness, the installation of an online interactive portal to increase communication between students and the university, and an online survey measuring

lecturers' attitudes and knowledge. The study suggests that future research could include factors that predict graduation rates among students with disabilities.

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APPENDIX A

University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 2212, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email:noko.monene@ul.ac.za

TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING:	06 May 2015
PROJECT NUMBER:	TREC/40/2015: PG
PROJECT:	
Title:	Educational support of students with Disabilities at Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa: A case study of University of Venda
Researcher:	Ms TR Mantsha
Supervisor:	Prof MJ Themane
Co-Supervisor:	N/A
Department:	Education Studies
School:	Education
Degree:	PhD in Education

PROF TAB MASHEGO
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**

Note:
i) **Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee.**
ii) **The budget for the research will be considered separately from the protocol.**
PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

Finding solutions for Africa

APPENDIX B

P.O. Box 564
Sibasa
0970
7 May 2014

The Director
CHETL
University of Venda
P/Bag x5050
Thohoyandou
0950

Dear Sir

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT UNIVERSITY OF VENDA DISABILITY UNIT

I hereby request permission to conduct research. I am registered for a PhD (Educational Psychology) with the University of Limpopo (Turfloop campus) under the supervision of Prof. T.M Themane, contacts no 015 268 2928. The research is about "Educational support of students with disabilities at institutions of higher learning in South Africa: A case study of the University of Venda"

The aims of this study are:

- To explore the educational supports offered to students with disabilities at the University of Venda from an in-sider perspective.
- To find out the factors affecting the provision of educational support to students with disabilities in HEIs.
- To explore the strategies that could be used to improve educational support to students with disabilities at HEIs.

A qualitative design will be used in conducting the research and the methods for data collection will be in the form of focus group interviews, classroom observation and document analysis. Participants in the study will be students with various disabilities in different levels of their studies. Interviews will be audio taped with the consent of the participants. Interviews will be transcribed after which the tapes will be destroyed. Be assured that the principles of confidentiality, anonymity and privacy will be adhered to.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours faithfully

Mantsha TR
Tel: 015 962 8018/083 444 7475

APPENDIX C

CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, TEACHING AND LEARNING: DISABILITY UNIT

Date:	11 May 2015
Name	Mantsha TR
Address of the researcher	Box 564 Sibasa 0970
Telephone number	015 962 8018/083 444 7475
Fax	086 696 4667
Research topic	"Educational support of students with disabilities at institutions of higher learning in South Africa: A case study of the University of Venda"

Re: Approval in respect of request to conduct research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above mentioned researcher to proceed with the research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rest with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the disability Unit and students involved in this research. On completion of the study the researcher must supply the University of Venda with one hard copy of the final approved research report.

UNIVEN Disability Unit wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind Regards

.....

CHETL: Director

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

PRIVATE BAG X5050, THOHOYANDOU, 0950, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA. TELEPHONE (015) 962 8018 / 8716 FAX (015) 962 8739 E-MAIL ... WEBSITE ...

"A quality driven, financially sustainable, rural-based comprehensive university"

APPENDIX D

Date : 12 May 2015

Dear Participant

Consent to participate in research

This is to request your participation in a research study. The researcher is a registered student for a PhD (Psychology of Education) at the University of Limpopo, under the supervision of Prof. M. J. Themane tel no 015 268 2928/082 200 6042. In this study, I am trying to investigate the educational support for students with disabilities at institutions of higher learning in South Africa with of the University of Venda serving as a case study. Data will be collected by means of focus group interviews, observations and documents analysis. The interview will not be more than an hour and it will be recorded and later transcribed. Data will be kept safely under lock and key for five years, after which it will be destroyed. Documents will include national policies and institutional policies.

The objectives of this research are to:

- Describe the support offered to students with disabilities from an insider perspective;
- Establish the effectiveness of the educational support provided by the Disability Unit;
- Establish gaps in the educational support offered to students with disabilities at UNIVEN; and
- Suggest ways to improve educational support to meet students' needs.

Should you consent to participate in the research, you will be assured of complete confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity. Your details are known to the researcher only. The principles of human dignity, protection against harm, freedom of choice and expression, and your access to information on the research, will be assured. Participants are assured of the right to withdraw from the study without harm at any time and they will

not be expected to act contrary to their principles. Participants will not incur any costs and they will be informed of the progress of the research. Participant will be given feedback in writing once the research has been completed. All the information and data generated through this study will be made available to the University and the participants.

You can ask any questions whenever you wish. My contact numbers are 015 962 8018/083 444 7475/ and my email address is mbuvhat@univen.ac.za

Completion of the attached consent form will give indication that you agree to take part in the study.

Thanking you in advance.

Tshifhiwa Rebecca Mantsha

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

Name: I ……. hereby give consent to participate in the research study conducted by Mrs. T. R. Mantsha entitled: Educational Support of Students with Disabilities at Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa: A Case Study of University of Venda

I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Signed : ……..

Date : ……

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What kind of support do you need when applying for admission at the university?
2. What kind of support do you need during registration?
3. Does your institution have a policy on disability?
4. What kind of support is currently offered by your institution/DU?
5. What support is offered to students with disabilities to assist them in their academic performance?
6. What additional support would you want the institution to offer?
7. How can the university improve these services?
8. Can you explain the relationship between the kind of services offered and the academic performance of students with disabilities?
9. Do students with disabilities have a tutor/personal assistant for example deaf interpreter to facilitate their learning?
10. Are study materials for the blind students available in large print, braille, electronic, email, etc.?
11. Does your institution offer additional time for test and exam?
12. Describe your experience in as far as assessment is concerned.
13. What is your main source of funding e.g. bursaries, loans, self/family support and how adequate is it?
14. What can the institution do to resolve the problem of turnaround strategies of assistive devices?
15. Does your institution offer career/counselling services for students with disabilities?
16. What type of learning resources do you need for your study?
17. Briefly describe the kind of support that you need your library to offer.
18. What kind of support that the DU is not offering that should be offered?
19. How effective is the educational support provided by the Disability Unit and how does it affect the academic performance of students with disabilities?

20. How adequate is your DU staff?
21. Does staff at the DU have knowledge on disability issues?
22. Describe your experience with academic staff.
23. Describe your experience with administrative staff?
24. What is your view on access to assistive technology in the campus?
25. List all the technology/assistive devices that you use for your study?
26. Briefly explain the importance of adapted technology?
27. List adapted technology that you do not have now and how this affects your study?
28. What kind of adapted technology can be added to your labs?
29. What can the university do to communicate notices and announcements to disabled students?
30. Briefly describe your need for access to information, for example, internet.
31. Briefly describe the physical environment of you institution.
32. What should the university do to address accessibility of classroom, offices, the library and residences?
33. What barriers do you experience which hinder your full participation at the institution?

Thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX G

Classroom Observation: checklists

Observer's Name : …….. Place :…….

Lecturer's Name :…… Date :…….

Classroom Demographics

	Classroom 1	Classroom 2
Enrolment	…….	……..…
Students with disabilities	……	……..
Type of disabilities	……	……..
Students without disabilities	……..	……..

Walking paths: Are the walking paths user friendly to students with various disabilities?

Venue: Is the classroom accessible to students with disabilities, adequate in terms of teaching, sitting arrangements, lighting and ventilation?

Teaching Aids: Which of the following teaching were used?

a) Blackboard/white board
b) Overhead transparencies
c) Hand-outs

Audibility: Could the lecturer be heard and seen by all students?

Hand-outs: Were these hand-outs adapted to different formats e.g. braille, large print etc.

Speech: Was the voice audible?

Student support: Was there any support for students with special needs?

Presentation methods: Which of the following methods of presentation were used?

Overhead projector.

PowerPoint presentation

Video Sound

Flipchart

Blackboard

Handbooks Photocopies

Note-taking: Were notes dictated?

Were students with disabilities allowed to record the lecture?

{**Adapted from: Brown, Jones and Rawnsley (1993), checklists for Effective Learning and Teaching in Higher Education}.**

APPENDIX H

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

Disability policy guidelines

REVISION HISTORY

VERSION NUMBER	DATE (dd.mm.yyyy)	AUTHOR	DESCRIPTION	Reviewed and Approved By	Approval Date
1	January 2013	CHETL	Initial draft		

Directorate : CHETL and HR

Policy guidelines Reference Number : ……
Date Approved by Council : ……
Signature of the Registrar : ……

1. INTRODUCTION (PREAMBLE)

There are a number of imperatives for the development, adoption and implementation of Policy Guidelines on Disability for the University of Venda. The University has identified the need to ensure the diversification of staff and students as one of its strategic imperatives, stating in its Strategic Plan Institutional Values (2012-2016) that "the University recognises that diversity and excellence are mutually inclusive, enhancing our teaching, scholarship and community engagement, as well as our ability to interact with all people".

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, government policy documents and various pieces of legislation make it clear that discrimination on the basis of disability violates the right to equality. In addition, educational institutions and employers are required to take active steps to address the disadvantages suffered in the past by people with disabilities.

The Bill of Rights entrenched in the South African Constitution states that: "No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3)". Subsection 3 lists these grounds as "race, gender, sex …… *disability* …or birth." It goes on to stipulate that "Discrimination on one or more of the grounds listed in subsection (3) is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair."

The Employment Equity Act (EEA) requires "Every employer (to) take steps to promote equal opportunity in the workplace by eliminating unfair discrimination in any employment policy or practice." The EEA states that "No person may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee…on one or more grounds including race, gender, *disability*…or birth." In addition, "Every designated employer must… implement affirmative action measures for people from designated groups" (black people, women and people with disabilities). "Affirmative action measures… must include… making reasonable accommodation for people from designated groups."

The EEA requires that all employers with a staff complement of over 50 must ensure that people with disabilities are equitably represented in the workforce. There is thus a demand for qualified people who have disabilities. By admitting and supporting students with disabilities and enabling them to graduate, the University will contribute to the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market and the improvement of their life chances.

In the section dealing with principles, The White Paper on Higher Education states that, "The principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. Applying the principle of equity implies … a critical identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, *disability* and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage, and … a programme of transformation with a view to redress. Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals…".

2. PURPOSE OF POLICY GUIDELINES (STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE)

The University is committed to the promotion of equal opportunity for all persons. The University will foster and encourage among its staff and students positive and unprejudiced attitudes towards people with disabilities and shall make provisions, in so far as resources reasonably permit, for any service needed by and for people with disabilities.

The University will take positive steps to encourage people to seek admission to or employment with the University regardless of disability, endeavour to ensure that its teaching promotes an understanding of disability and that its research pursues the creation of knowledge around disability.

The University notes the following definitions – adopted by the World Health Organisation:

- Impairment refers to any loss or abnormality of psychological; physiological or anatomical structure or function;
- Disability refers to any restriction or lack (resulting from impairment) of ability to perform an activity within the range considered normal for a human being;
- Handicap refers to a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from impairment or a disability that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normally possible for that individual.

In the Employment Equity Act, 5:
“People with disabilities” means people who have a long-term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospects of entry into, or advancement in, employment.

The Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS) 16 locates disability within its social context. Looked at within this framework “the collective disadvantage of disabled people is due to a complex form of institutional discrimination…. The social model is based on the belief that the circumstances of people with disabilities and the discrimination they face are socially created phenomena and have little to do with the impairments of disabled people”.

3. THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The University recognises the importance of the layout of the site and of the design of buildings in the provision of a quality learning environment for students and working environment for staff with disabilities.

Physical access to and within buildings will be planned, modified, maintained and extended in accordance with continually revised University-specific building guidelines. Other necessary facilities and amenities will be installed and the University will ensure that adequate signage indicates the location of accessible entrances, toilets and emergency exits, ramps and lifts.

The University will endeavour to make suitable adaptations to office and work, learning and residential, sport and leisure facilities where necessary, in order to accommodate people with disabilities. *[The goal of reasonable accommodation will be to ensure that no student or staff member is unjustifiably excluded from any University activity or facility because he/she is disabled.]*

4. REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

"Reasonable accommodation" means any modification or adjustment to a job or to the working environment that will enable a person from a designated group to have access to or participate or advance in employment.

The goal of reasonable accommodation will be to ensure that no student or staff member is unjustifiably excluded from any University activity or facility because he/she has a form of disability. Procedures for the provision of Reasonable Accommodation (RA) will be developed for staff and students.

5. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities have the following rights:

- Equal access to modules, programmes, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aid, within the constraints of the provision of reasonable accommodation.
- Reasonable and appropriate access to housing, services, activities and facilities.
- Confidentiality of all information pertaining to the disability with a choice of whom to disclose their disability to, except as required by law.
- Information reasonably available in accessible formats.

a) Admissions

The University welcomes students with disabilities and will admit them using the same criteria as for other students, such as academic ability and suitability for course/degree. No student with disability will, on that ground alone, be refused admission to the University. However, the provision of appropriate support will be limited by the affordability of those support systems.

The University commits itself, within current and future financial constraints, to enabling as many students with disabilities as possible to study at this institution. The Registrar and Schools will ensure that the admission of students with disabilities is confirmed as early as possible, so that proper arrangements can be made to ensure that they have appropriate support throughout their years of study.

b) Teaching and Examinations

Students must be evaluated on their abilities not their disabilities and, where practicable, methods of teaching and assessment should be modified to take account of the difficulties experienced by students with disabilities.

At the time of application for admission, current and prospective students with disabilities must be discussed with Lecturers and the staff of the Disability Unit (DU) with regard to their particular needs in respect of participating in course work, fulfilling course requirements and completing examinations. In the event that the University is unable to meet the known requirements of an individual student, the limitations of provision shall be explained to the student prior to their admission to the University.

The Head of the Disability Unit and the Lecturer concerned will liaise to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities, for example extra time for tests and examinations, provision of computers to be able to access work electronically.

Facilities appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities will be made available during examinations and extra time will be allowed, where appropriate, for students with learning and other disabilities. Alternative methods of Assessment will be available for students who, by reason of disability, would otherwise be unfairly penalised. All special arrangements will minimise any handicap and should not otherwise advantage the students.

c) Financial assistance

Students with disabilities may apply for financial aid through the Financial Aid Office.

d) Co-operation with other institutions and organisations

In the interests of providing students with disabilities with the best possible support and to optimise the use of resources, the University will co-operate with relevant stakeholders, including other Higher Education Institutions in Limpopo, nationally and internationally.

The University will strive to liaise with other University stakeholders, e.g. the National Department of Higher Education and Training and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa to explore ways of financing disabled students' studies.

e) The Disability Unit (DU) as a model

The University will encourage research, policy and programme development within the DU, to serve as a sustainable model for funding and policy options around disability in Higher Education in South Africa.

The DU presently provides a number of services including computer facilities, Brailled exam papers and notes, loaning of assistive devices to students with disabilities and counselling. The existing levels of service will be maintained within resource constraints, with annual reviews.

6. STAFF WITH DISABILITIES

a) Recruitment

Our advertisements will include the following statement: “UNIVEN is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer. It is our intention to promote diversity (race, gender and disability) in the University through the filling of these positions. Disability symbol will be used in our advertisements.”

b) Appointment

A decision to appoint a staff member will be based on the inherent requirements of the job and the ability of the candidate to fulfill those requirements. Disability per se will not be justifiable grounds for non-appointment. If appropriate, the candidate may be required to furnish a medical report certifying that he/she is able to perform the work required.

c) Conditions of Employment

Reasonable Accommodation in respect of conditions of employment e.g. flexible working hours will be negotiated, if necessary, with staff that have disabilities. In all other cases, staff with disabilities will be subject to the same conditions of employment, disciplinary codes and contractual obligations as other employees. Disability will not be a criterion for refusing to promote, train and/or develop a staff member.

d) Reporting disability:

To comply with the Employment Equity Act (which requires a demographic analysis of the workforce in respect of race, gender and disability), records will have to be kept by the Human Resource Department of staff members with disabilities. These records will be confidential and will be used for no other purpose than anonymous reporting to the Department of Labour.

e) Reasonable Accommodation

In addition to modification of the physical environment, equipment and facilities appropriate to the needs of staff with disabilities will, in accordance with the "Procedures for the Provision of Reasonable Accommodation", be made available in order for them to fulfill the requirements of the job. Performance management will take into account whether the staff members' reasonable accommodation needs have been met. The provision of reasonable accommodation will primarily be aimed at removing the barriers that would otherwise hinder the full integration of a disabled staff member in the workplace. Managers and supervisors will be sensitised to the needs of people with disabilities.

f) Termination of Employment

The termination of employment of an employee with a disability will be subject to the same policies and procedures as all other employees. Specifically:

- No employee will have his/her employment terminated on the basis of disability alone, nor will disability influence retrenchment decisions;

- Retirement on the grounds of ill health will be based solely on the employee's ability to do the job, after having assessed the provision of appropriate reasonable accommodation(s).

- An employee with a disability will be employed until normal retirement age, unless the disability [*condition*] becomes so incapacitating that he/she is unable to fulfill the requirements of the job satisfactorily. Disability and ill-health retirement will be assessed in the usual manner and the usual conditions pertaining to disability or ill-health retirement will apply.

g) Benefits

Staff with disabilities will be entitled to the same benefits as all other staff.

The University will strive to ensure that the rules and procedures relating to access to and provision of employment benefits including provident funds and medical funds do not discriminate unfairly against employees with disabilities**.** The University acknowledges, however, that final decisions about membership and benefits will be governed by the rules of the Medical Aid Scheme and Provident Funds.

7. DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES:

The University has comprehensive grievance and disciplinary procedures for staff and students.

8. POLICY GUIDELINES FRAMEWORK

1. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa
2. The Employment Equity Act 1998
3. University of Venda Policy on Disability
4. The White Paper on Higher Education 1997
5. The Integrated National Disability Strategy 1997
6. University of Venda Strategic Plan (2012-2016)

10. RESPONSIBILITY

The Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL) will be responsible for the overall coordination of issues pertaining to students with disabilities while the Human Resources Department will be responsible for the overall coordination of issues pertaining to staff with disabilities

11. POLICY GUIDELINES AMMENDMENTS

Changes to these policy guidelines shall be approved by council upon recommendation of Senate.

APPENDIX I

EDITOR DECLARATION

I, Dr Bevelyn Dube, of the Communication and Applied language Studies Department at the University of Venda declare that I edited and proofread the Doctor of Education in Educational Psychology thesis *"Educational support of students with disabilities at institutions of higher learning in South Africa: A case study of the University of Venda"* written by Mantsha, T.R.

17/06/2015.

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APPENDIX J

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Prof. M.J. Themane
University of Limpopo
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Dear Prof. Themane

LANGUAGE EDITING LETTER

This letter serves as proof that I edited the thesis of Ms **TSHIFHIWA REBECCA MANTSHA (201222139)** entitled **EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA.**

Regards

Dr. Lukas Dominikus