

**INVESTIGATING FET COLLEGE LECTURERS' EXPERIENCES OF THE  
INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN A MAINSTREAM  
CLASSROOM**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters degree in Education  
(Educational Psychology) in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Edgewood Campus, Pinetown, South Africa.

2015

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## DECLARATION

As required by University regulations, I hereby state that this work has not been presented at any other university or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus) and that unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text, it is my original work.

Signature: -----

Date: -----

As the candidate's supervisor, I Henry Muribwathoho agree to the submission of this thesis.

Signature: -----

Date: -----

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to both my parents, my late father Alex Linda Mafu and my mother uMaNdlovu Mafu. I thank you for seeing potential and trusting in a girl child that they can also be educated despite all odds. Your prophecy and faith that someday I will reach this level has been fulfilled. 'Nawe Mafu awumncinyana'.

## ACRONYMS

FET	Further Education and Training
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
ICASS	Internal Continuous Assessment
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
SLO	Student Liaison Officer
EWP6	Education White Paper 6

## ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study that involved 7 FET College lecturers and investigated their experiences of including the learning disabled in a mainstream classroom. Both in-depth qualitative interviews and observations were used to investigate their experiences. The findings indicate that the lecturers have both positive and negative experiences of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Despite any formal training on inclusive education as highlighted in Education White Paper 6 (EWP6), the FET College lecturers are striving to include the learning disabled in the mainstream classroom. However, they also encounter a myriad of challenges when including the learning disabled in the mainstream classrooms. The findings indicate that the FET College is currently not equipped with adequate resources and programmes that cater for the needs of students with learning disabilities. Moreover, FET College lecturers that were interviewed indicated that they had no qualifications that specifically equip them to teach students with learning disabilities. They all felt a need for training and staff development in the area of teaching and supporting students with learning disabilities. Recommendations into improving the provisioning of support to the lecturers teaching students with learning disabilities and the students concerned are made.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finishing this study was not of my own doing, but was through the strength and love that God gave me. To God be the glory. I am also thankful for the support and guidance from colleagues, friends and family. I would like to particularly thank the following people for their support and belief in me:

My supervisor, Henry Muribwathoho for all the guidance and support that you provided throughout the study.

The FET College that allowed me to conduct the study. Thank you for opening the doors.

The FET College lecturers who participated in the study. All of this would not have happened without your involvement.

My colleagues, for all the times we spent together working and giving each other advice.

MaNdlovu, for all your support, prayers and encouragement.

My husband, Ruphas Makanya for your overall support and patience while I was doing my studies. At times you took my motherly role at home and you did not complain.

My children, Sinazo and Qiniso Makanya for allowing mommy to do her schoolwork and to attend at the 'big school' and at times even on weekends. I have stolen a lot of time from you. I will now make up for all the time I have stolen from you.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **GENERAL ORIENTATION, PROBLEM STATEMENT, OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND COURSE OF STUDY**

#### **1. Focus and purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of Further Education and Training (FET) college lecturers in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom. This study will enlighten the FET college sector on how it can better accommodate students with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

#### **1.2 Rationale for the study**

Department of Education (2001) mainly promotes inclusion of learners with barriers to learning primarily in schools and a little is said about FET colleges. The policy only indicates that Higher Education institutions are expected to accommodate students with special needs, including those with learning disabilities. It commends Higher Education institutions into having a flexible curriculum and assessment policies that accommodate all students regardless of the kind of learning need. However, in my experience as a student counsellor at an FET college in Durban, KwaZulu Natal, I have observed that FET colleges are attracting a majority of youth who cannot be absorbed by Universities after exiting high school due to various reasons. Amongst these are students who come from schools for learners with special needs. The majority of these students have learning disabilities. I am particularly concerned by the constant referral of students with

learning disabilities by lecturers to the Student Support Services Unit of the college for some form of intervention. The referrals are mainly based on the students' difficulties to learn in class and the fear by the lecturers that these students were 'not catching up as the rest of the class'. Most lecturers have indicated that they find it challenging to teach students with learning disabilities. As a result of this, I saw the need for a study that will investigate the experiences of FET college lecturers and their challenges in including the learning disabled in a mainstream classroom at an FET College. The study hopes to suggest intervention strategies that can be utilised by FET college lecturers to accommodate students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom. In light of this, this study will be used to investigate the experiences of FET college lecturers in including the learning disabled in a mainstream classroom. The results of the study will be useful in informing and updating policies that govern teaching and learning at FET colleges.

### **1.3. Statement of the problem**

To the knowledge of the researcher, there is little South African research that investigates the experiences of FET college lecturers in including students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom. Currently, South African studies have a focus on inclusive education in schools rather than in colleges. There is a need to understand if FET Colleges have adequate capacity to accommodate students with learning disabilities.



#### **1.4. Objectives of the study**

- To investigate the experiences of lecturers at an FET college in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities.
- To identify how the needs of students with learning disabilities are addressed at an FET college.
- To examine how FET college lecturers are equipped to address the needs of students with learning disabilities.

#### **1.5 Critical Questions**

1. What are the experiences of FET college lecturers in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities?
2. How are the needs of students with learning disabilities addressed at an FET college?
3. What are the strategies that the college uses to equip lecturers to address the needs of students with learning disabilities?

#### **1.6. CLARIFICATION OF TERMS**

Below is the clarification of terms that are commonly used in the study:

##### **1.6.1 Further Education and Training (FET) College**

An FET College, recently changed to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College can be explained as a post-school teaching and learning sector for young and old students where students are taught various vocational skills in preparation for the world of work. An FET College offers a range of skills programmes such as National Certificate Vocational

(NCV), Report 191 and various short skills courses and programmes. The term FET will be used throughout the study as it is the term still commonly known.

### **1.6.2 FET College Lecturer**

An FET college lecturer is an individual that is employed by an FET college to teach in one or more of the programmes that are offered by the college on a full or part-time basis. Most lecturers are specialists in specific trades and have occupational qualifications ranging from certificates, diplomas and degrees.

### **1.6.3 Learning Disabilities**

The terms ‘learning disabilities’, ‘intellectual disabilities’ or ‘impairment’ and ‘learning difficulties’ are used interchangeably in the literature (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart& Eloff, 2003; Marino, Gotch, Israel, Vasques, Basham & Becht,2014; Woolfson and Brady,2009). In this study these terms will also be used interchangeably to refer to disabilities with learning that are intrinsic in nature. Such disabilities cannot be alleviated despite good teaching, but are accommodated in class.

### **1.6.4 Mainstream Classroom**

A mainstream classroom is a classroom where learners with or without disabilities are integrated and ‘fitted into’ a normal classroom routine. The integration is focused on changes that need to take place so that the learners can fit in (Department of Education, 2001).

## **1.7 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW**

In South Africa, learning disabilities are one of the types of barriers to learning that are addressed in Department of Education (2001). The policy acknowledges that there are barriers to learning in the classroom, but they are according to varying degrees and may need specific or customised interventions in order for effective learning to take place. It calls for an education system that provides inclusion broadly and eliminates discrimination and disadvantage in the classroom. It is aimed at providing a fair education opportunity for disadvantaged groups such as children and youth from all backgrounds, including those with disabilities. The policy recognises that all learners with or without disabilities can reach their full potential and in future will be able to contribute meaningfully to the South African economy (Department of Education, 2001).

However, it is noted that nothing much is said by Department of Education (2001) on post-school education and training of students with special needs such as those with learning disabilities at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges. It does not indicate how students with disabilities at FET colleges should be supported, except that the policy only indicates that Higher Education institutions are expected to accommodate students with special needs. It commends higher education institutions such as FET colleges and universities into having flexible curriculum and assessment policies that accommodate all learners regardless of the kind of learning need in post-school education (Matshedisho, 2007).

Recently, the Department of Higher Education and Training (2014) published the South African White Paper for Post-School Education and Training which sets out the vision of the Department of Higher Education and Training on post-school education. The vision is aimed to be achieved by year 2030. Part of the vision is that of addressing disability in higher education institutions. The policy requires all higher education institutions to have plans of addressing various disabilities within their own contexts. Amongst other things, the policy envisioned that greater awareness of the needs of students and staff with disabilities should be built as well as building capacity to address disability at all levels of higher education institutions.

However, Minister Blade Nzimande (2014) at the launch of the South African White Paper on Post-School Education indicated that there is currently no national disability framework that guides post-school education institutions. Resources provided to students with disability at post-school institutions remain fragmented. There remains an identifiable knowledge gap in the area of FET capacity in addressing the needs of students with disabilities. In my opinion this translates to no clear guidelines on how the FET sector and in particular FET college lecturers are expected to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities and in particular those with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms. There is not enough evidence highlighting the experiences of lecturers, their skills and capacity in teaching students with learning disabilities. A closer look into the experiences of FET college lecturers in teaching students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom is required so as to inform future policies on disability at FET colleges.

### **1.7.1 Learning Disabilities**

The terms ‘learning disabilities’, ‘intellectual disabilities’ and ‘learning difficulties’ are used interchangeably in the literature (Engelbrecht et al., 2003; Marino et al., 2014; Woolfson & Brady, 2009). These terms are mostly dependent on the model used to define them. The medical and social models of disability are the two common models found in literature that are used to explain causation of disability, including learning disabilities (Watson & Boman, 2005).

### **1.7.2 Models of disability**

Boxall, Carson & Docherty (2004) identified two models that are commonly used when defining disability, i.e. the individual focused medical model and the social model. The medical model views disability as a problem for isolated people who have something wrong with them or an impairment thus needing some form of treatment or intervention in order to assist the individual (Boxall et al., 2004; Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000).

In contrast to this, is the explanation of disability through use of the social model of disability. Disability through this model, is not just caused by the person’s impairment, but includes barriers in our society that fail and disable people with impairments. These barriers could be physical, intellectual or attitudinal within our societies. According to the social model, disability is socially constructed (Boxall et.al, 2004; Harris, 2000).

These two models differ in that the medical model locates the disability within the individual, where else the social model views disability as something beyond the individual, but as something that our surroundings, attitudes and society contribute to. The use of both these models makes it a challenge to understand the term 'learning disabilities'. For the purpose of this study the terms learning disabled and learning disabilities will be adopted as the disability is not only due to the individual, but also due to the surroundings, attitudes and context they are situated in (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh & Reid (2005).

### **1.7.3 Common elements found in students with learning difficulties**

Lerner & Johns (2012) indicate that the learning disabled have challenges in processing, storing and producing information. They encounter disabilities in one or more areas of learning such as reading, writing, speaking, spelling and computing mathematics. They also have challenges with reasoning, attention, memory, coordination, social skills, and emotional maturity. Learning disabilities are typically identified in school and are found in children and adults from all economic, racial, ethnic and language groups. Teachers, lecturers, specialists and family are therefore the most important people who can assist the learning disabled (Lerner & Johns, 2012).

### **1.7.4 Prevalence of learning disabilities in South Africa**

In searching for the prevalence of learning disabilities in South Africa, only Census 2001 was able to provide statistics on people with learning disabilities. Statistics South Africa (2005) classified learning disabilities under intellectual disabilities. Intellectual disabilities were

explained as serious disabilities with learning. Based on the 2001 census, people with disability in general constituted 5% of the total population. Amongst these, 12 % had intellectual disability. At least 3% of all people with disability were in higher education (Statistics South Africa, 2005:11). The exact number of people with learning disabilities in higher education, including FET colleges was not indicated, however, Statistics South Africa suggested that the low percentage of disabled people in general in higher education may have been caused by the fact that people with disabilities were often excluded from educational opportunities. However, this is contradictory to the views of Connor (2012) and Skinner & Lindstrom (2003) who argue that more students with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, are now attending higher education institutions.

## **1.8 Theoretical framework**

The study was looked at through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) which focuses on interrelationships between systems in the environment such as schools, teachers, learners, parents, department of higher education and the larger society. The application of the ecological systems theory is important in this study as lecturers, their experiences and their duties at the college do not exist in isolation, but are entrenched within a larger structure interrelated with other social institutions and domains such as the students, their families, college management, college departments and the larger community which includes the Department of Higher Education. All these parts are nested and interrelated, each part impacting on the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In relation to this study, the experiences of the FET college lecturers of

including students with learning disabilities in their mainstream classrooms cannot be viewed in isolation. The experiences of lecturers in relation to the interconnected parts were investigated.

## **1.9. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.9.1 Research paradigm**

This study was underpinned on the assumptions of the interpretive paradigm because there was a need to understand the subjective experiences of FET college lecturers on including students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) argue that the interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the subjective world of human experiences. In interpretive paradigm, the researcher seeks to understand people's experiences through interacting with them and listening to what they say. Through this paradigm, people's subjective experiences are real and should be taken seriously. Cohen et.al. (2011) argue that in order to maintain the reliability of what is studied, the researcher must try by all means to understand the people under study from within. The interpretive paradigm is suitable for this study as the study seeks to investigate the subjective experiences of FET College lecturers on including the learning disabled in the mainstream classrooms.

### **1.9.2 Qualitative research approach**

A qualitative research approach was used in order to get an in-depth knowledge on the first hand experiences of lecturers at an FET college in including students with learning disabilities. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) define a qualitative approach as a form of inquiry that is inherently multimethod in focus with an attempt to secure in-depth understanding of phenomenon under



study hence interviews, focus groups and observations can be used to generate data. Creswell (2012) indicates that a qualitative research approach is useful in gathering in-depth knowledge about a particular phenomenon. This approach was found to be most suitable for this study because it enabled me to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon to be studied. It allowed me as a researcher to ask general broad questions that allowed research participants to share their views openly on their experiences.

### **1.9.3 Case study design**

This study employed a case study design as it concentrated on one particular FET college. Creswell (2012) classifies case studies as one of the types of ethnographic designs. Broadly, ethnographic designs allow qualitative researchers to describe, analyse and interpret the behaviours and beliefs of people who have a similar culture in detail. Thomas (2011) indicates that a case study is a method of research that concentrates on one thing, looking at it in detail, not seeking to generalise from it. The case study design is thus suitable for this study as it allows a focus on an in-depth exploration of one case.

## **1.10. Data collection methods**

The following instruments were used to collect data:

### **1.10.1 In-depth Interviews**

Data was collected through in-depth interviews in order to find out about personal experiences of the lecturers in teaching students with learning disabilities. Mears (2009) points out that in-depth interviews solicit stories of personal experience and offer entry into the world of another's

perspective. In-depth interviews allow for detailed or thick descriptions, seeking to present reality through the eyes of participants. This requires an interaction with a specific sample of people who will provide the information. A tape recorder was used in order to record the interviews so that the interviews could be transcribed at a later stage.

### **1.10.2 Observations**

In addition to interviews, one unstructured classroom observation was done to collect secondary data. An observation is “a process of gathering open-ended, firsthand information by observing people and places at a research site” (Creswell, 2012, p.213). An observation allows an opportunity to record activities as they occur at the research site. The activities that included and excluded the students with learning difficulties in the mainstream classroom were recorded during observation.

### **1.11 Sampling**

This study took place at a specific FET college in Durban. A purposive, non-random sampling method was used to select a few information rich cases to respond to the research questions. The purposive sampling method allows a researcher to select a few information rich, critical cases and helps the researcher to understand the problem in depth (Creswell, 2012). The sample population comprised of seven FET college lecturers. It included lecturers that have taught students with learning disabilities for more than three years.

### **1.12 Ethical considerations**

Creswell (2012) indicates that it is necessary to obtain the consent and cooperation of people who will be assisting in the investigation. All participants were informed about the ethical issues involved when doing research. They were asked to give informed consent in writing in order to partake in the study. They were advised that they should participate willingly and had a right to withdraw if they felt so. The anonymity and confidentiality of all the research participants was guaranteed. Permission to conduct research was obtained from the Department of Higher Education, University of KwaZulu Natal, the participants as well as from the FET college rector.

### **1.13 Data analysis**

Data that was collected was then analysed thematically. Braun & Clarke (2006) highlight that thematic analysis is one of the processes that are used to analyse most qualitative data. Thematic analysis is used in encoding qualitative information where explicit codes are required. Explicit codes may also be a list of common themes that may emerge during an interview. An analysis of class lesson observations was also done to support interviews.

### **1.14 Reliability and validity issues**

Cohen et al. (2011) indicate that validity and reliability in the context of qualitative research are important. The researcher needs to ensure that the qualitative study is trustworthy. To ensure validity and reliability, data was collected using two data collection tools, namely in-depth structured interviews as well as observations.

### **1.15 Overview of chapters**

Chapter two discusses the relevant literature on the experiences of teaching students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom, both at international and national level. This chapter also provides the theoretical framework in which this study is framed and analysed.

Chapter three explains the research design, methodology and procedures that were followed in order to collect data.

Chapter four outlines the findings of the study.

Chapter five presents data analysis, interpretation and discussion of findings.

Chapter six presents the conclusion, implications of the research, limitations and recommendations.

### **1.16 Conclusion**

This chapter looked at the background of inclusive education, learning disabilities and briefly how learning disabilities are viewed and addressed by educators, both nationally and internationally. This chapter highlighted that there is little research done at an FET college sector on how learning disabilities amongst other disabilities in the FET college sector are addressed.

The next chapter reviews literature relevant to the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction and Background**

The Samalanca World Conference on Special Needs Education set the base for international countries to adopt the principle of education for all, highlighting that learners with special needs also need to be included into the mainstream education system regardless of disability (UNESCO, 1994). As a result of the discussions and adoption of transformation of educational policies and practices by countries around the world, South Africa also adopted the inclusion policy which requires the inclusion of all learners with or without disabilities into a mainstream classroom. As adopted in South Africa, inclusive education is linked to the campaigns of social justice and human rights. Inclusive education is enshrined within the principle of providing equal educational access, support and accommodation of all learners with diverse learning needs within the mainstream classroom (Department of Education, 2001). In the South African context, inclusive education is in line with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) which stipulates that all learners have rights to education.

Dyson (2001) and Ainscow (2009) cited in Landsberg, Kruger & Swart (2010) add that inclusive education is built on principles of building a democratic nation where everyone is equal, receives quality education and that schools are in a position to accommodate all types of learning needs. Broadly, inclusive education is about rising communities and an education system that is inclusive of all persons regardless of their needs. Inclusive education promotes a shifting from looking at an individual learner as the one with a problem that needs to be fixed. However,

inclusive education promotes the adoption of a social model where the learner's challenges are not only looked within the student, but also on how the wider community where they are situated can be involved in overcoming the challenge (Landsberg et. al, 2010).

Based on this premise, there is a need to understand how FET colleges are currently including and addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. In this study, the experiences of FET college lecturers of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom are investigated. Literature relevant to this study will be reviewed in this chapter with an objective of gaining a substantial understanding of the experiences of teachers in including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.

## **2.2 Defining Learning Disabilities**

Learning disabilities are one of the subgroups of special educational needs as they are considered to be a barrier to learning (Woolfson & Brady, 2009). Defining the term learning disabilities is not a simple task as there is no one clear and single definition and causality of learning disabilities (Waber, 2010). Scholars (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011; Selikowitz, 2012) argue that defining learning disabilities is controversial. This is supported by the definition of learning disabilities by Selikowitz (2012) who defines learning disabilities as “ an unexpected and unexplained condition, occurring in a child of average or above average intelligence, characterised by a significant delay in one or more areas of learning” (p.4). Flanagan & Alfonso (2011) add that the controversies are evident in the terminology. The terms that have been used

in the past and continue to be used include “organic drivenness syndrome; dyslexia and dyscalculia, minimal brain dysfunction and lately specific learning disabilities” (Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011, p.115).

Smith & Strick (2010) are in agreement that learning disabilities are hard to define because they are poorly understood by the general public and other educational professionals. Smith & Strick (2010) argue that the confusion about understanding the term ‘learning disabilities’ is that it does not refer to a single disorder, but there is a wide range of handicaps that affect areas of performance. In addition to this, learning disabilities cannot be traced to a single cause. Selikowitz (2012) adds that learning disabilities are diagnosed in children who have marked disabilities that are beyond the average range when using the standardised tests for intellectual maturity. The results of the standardised psychological assessment tests indicate that children and adults who have learning disabilities normally have a significant delay that is two or more years behind their chronological age. Their mental age does not match with their chronological age (Selikowitz, 2012).

Landsberg et al. (2010) add that some learning disabilities may be less noticeable and one may not be aware that students with these disabilities can actually do better. Such students can be able to achieve certain subject outcomes, but certainly do not achieve their potential. Students who experience such disabilities are facing difficulties that are extrinsic in nature because they can be alleviated. However, some students may experience difficulties which may be intrinsic in

nature because they have a learning impairment that cannot be alleviated either by lecturers or good family grounding (Landsberg et.al, 2010).

### **2.3 Areas of learning affected in students with learning difficulties**

Scholars (Webber, Owens, Charfton & Kershaw, 2002 & Selikowitz, 2010) indicate that learning difficulties are evident in two common ways, i.e. through difficulties with verbal and or non-verbal expressions. These difficulties are characterised by delays in learning areas. The delayed areas of learning that are affected in the learning disabled are categorised into two groups, namely the basic academic skills and other skills that are required in learning. The basic academic skills include skills to read, skills to write, skills to spell words, skills to do arithmetic and the use of language both in comprehension and in expression. The above scholastic skills are important to master in order to be successful at school. The second category of skills includes skills that are also important in learning such as ‘persistence, organization, impulse control, social competence, and the coordination of movement (Selikowitz, 2012). Smith & Strick (2010) add that teenagers with learning disabilities are generally less aware about social issues when compared to others of a similar age. They often find it difficult to participate in class discussions on topics such as drug abuse, racism, poverty and other issues affecting society. These difficulties may be evident even in higher education (Heiman & Precel, 2003).



## **2.4 Causes of Learning Disabilities**

Scholars (Selikowitz, 2012 and Smith & Strick, 2010) argue that the causes of learning disabilities are not known and are poorly understood. This is in agreement with (Boxall, Carson and Docherty, 2004) who indicate that disability, including learning disabilities may be hard to explain as two models of disability may be used to explain learning disability, namely the medical and social model as indicated in chapter 1. In agreement with Boxall et al. (2004), on the argument that there is no single causation of learning disabilities. Selikowitz (2012) adds that it is unlikely that a single factor can be attributed to the cause of learning disability. Various factors may be responsible for causing learning disabilities. These may include medical/genetic and environmental factors. These factors are explained below:

### **2.4.1 Medical/Genetic factors**

According to Selikowitz (2012) there is strong evidence that suggests that genes are a contributing factor to the causes of learning disabilities. A relationship between genes and learning disability is suggested. This indicates that children who come from families where there is a history of learning disabilities are more likely to develop the learning disability due to the genes that are inherited from either the father or mother of the child. Boys are indicated to have a higher chance of inheriting the learning disability from the parents because they only have one X chromosome when compared to the girls who have two X chromosomes.

### **2.4.2 Abnormalities in the brain**

According to Selikowitz (2012) and Smith & Strick (2010) disturbances in the brain have been suggested to be linked to the causes of learning disabilities. The brain abnormalities may be caused by an undetectable brain damage, malformation and minimal dysfunction. Selikowitz (2012) postulates that undetectable brain damage might be linked to learning disabilities. The damage could be caused by viral inflammation that affects the brain. These could be detected through brain scans and tests. Brain malformation during conception has also been suggested to cause learning disabilities. Such malformations may be hereditary (Selikowitz, 2012).

Moreover, Smith & Strick (2010) indicate that minimal brain dysfunction due to chemical imbalance has also been found to be linked to disabilities of the brain to learn. Children with a chemical imbalance in the brain are found to have a short attention span, contributing to the learning difficulty (Selikowitz, 2012). Smith & Strick (2010) indicate that a change in brain's chemical balance interferes with neurotransmitters and this impairs the brain's ability to function properly. A disturbed speech, poor motor coordination and lack of problem solving skills are some of the areas of brain functioning that are affected.

### **2.4.3 Environmental Factors**

Scholars Adnams (2010) and Selikowitz (2012) indicate that there is no consistency on whether environmental factors cause or do not cause learning disabilities. However, factors such as violence, economic deprivation, poverty, problems during pregnancy, labour and delivery of the

new baby may contribute to the child developing a learning difficulty. Adnams (2010) adds that other conditions that impact on learning disabilities may include amongst others injury, violence, fatal alcohol syndrome, nutritional deficiencies and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and AIDS. The economic status of the community where a child is raised contributes to challenges and difficulties with learning. Landsberg et al. (2010) add that inadequate nutrition during the child's few years due to poverty and disadvantages in the community may cause learning impairment.

## **2.5. Identifying learning disabilities**

Lerner and John (2012) indicate that learning disabilities are commonly identified in both schools and clinics. There are various characteristics that can be identifiable in persons with learning disabilities. These may be common to some people, but they may also differ across people. An example of this is by Laasonen, Service, Lipsanen & Virsu (2010) who demonstrate that difficulties with learning such as dyslexia could be manifested in various ways with the features such as grammar problems, challenges with reading long words, needing context for comprehension and memory. Below are some of the common features found in people with learning difficulties.

### **2.5.1 Poor Cognitive skills**

Students with learning disabilities have challenges using cognitive strategies of learning resulting in difficulties with problem solving (Landsberg et.al. 2010). They may have problems with computing mathematics (Lerner &Johns, 2012).

### **2.5.2 Poor Memory**

Burack, Hodapp, Iarocci and Zigler (2012) indicate that memory dysfunction is one of the characteristics that have been noted in people with intellectual disabilities, thus affecting areas of learning. Explicit memory, involved with intentional recalling and recognizing things that we have experienced and implicit memory which deals with facilitating performance of perception, cognition and motor tasks are likely to be impaired in people with intellectual disabilities. Landsberg et al. (2010) indicate that students with learning impairment may find it difficult to remember many instructions.

### **2.5.3 Poor perception**

Landsberg et al. (2010) indicate that students with learning disabilities may have poor- eye-hand coordination. This may result in difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics. A study by Brante (2013) on students with dyslexia in higher education found that students with this type of learning difficulty had poor word recognition skills and had to invest a huge amount of energy and time in decoding text before they could reach comprehension. These may in turn impact on their attention and creation of poor concentration in class. Landsberg et al. (2010)

indicates that attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder has been closely linked with students who have learning disabilities as difficulties in areas of learning may result in poor attention which may lead to inappropriate class behaviour due to difficulties with learning.

## **2.6. Learning Disability Measures**

Smith & Strick (2010) bring in an important element of testing for learning disabilities. They argue that it is necessary that learning disabilities are identified early. The most common measures of learning disability measures include both verbal and non verbal assessments. They include assessing memory, cognitive abilities, socio-emotional functioning, visual-spatial assessments and speed.

## **2.7. Learning Disability in Higher Education**

There is a scarcity of studies conducted on learning disabilities in South African higher education institutions. Konur (2006) argues that disabled students around the world were denied prospects of entering higher education in the past, but inclusive policies have now in recent years allowed for an increase of students with disabilities to participate in higher education. This is further supported by the views of Connor (2012) and Skinner & Lindstrom (2003) who argue that more students with disabilities now attend at higher education institutions.

Savvidou (2011) indicates that there is an increasing number of students with disabilities that are entering the higher education sector. However, it is particularly difficult to determine the number

of students with learning disabilities, more especially because the responsibility to inform the higher education sector about the disability relies on the students (Savvidou, 2011). Students with learning disabilities in higher education experience various challenges. A study by Heiman and Precel (2003) on students with learning disabilities in higher education found that students with learning disabilities experience challenges in the social sciences as they require a lot of reading and writing. These challenges are escalated when students are learning in English as a foreign language. As a result of these challenges they also experience problems with attention and concentration in class.

Heinman and Precel (2003) indicate that students with learning disabilities learn differently when compared to students without learning disabilities. Students with learning difficulties in higher education were found to employ learning strategies that accommodated their difficulties with learning such as singing, chanting, using diagrams and sketches in order to memorise their work. Moreover, students with learning disabilities preferred additional explanations from lecturers and visual explanations such as the use of graphs. An increase in the number of students with learning disabilities in higher education may have a number of implications for FET college lecturers and their strategies of teaching. There is a need to understand the experiences of FET college lecturers on how they include and address the needs of students with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

## **2.8. Experiences of including the learning disabled in a mainstream classroom**

There is a scarcity of research conducted on the experiences of FET college lecturers on including and teaching students with learning disabilities in South Africa. Most studies conducted mainly focus on inclusive education in schools (Nel, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Tlale, 2013; Ntombela, 2011; Watson & Borman, 2005). Teaching students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom can be challenging. Knowledge about inclusive education becomes vital for the teachers as they are directly involved with teaching and learning of all students with or without disabilities in a mainstream classroom (Nel et al., 2013).

In a study conducted by Nketsia and Salvoita (2013) on pre-service teachers' views on inclusive education, they found that knowledge about inclusive education differed across colleges. A majority of the teachers were found to be knowledgeable about inclusive education, whilst a few were found not to understand inclusive education at all. Amongst the teachers that understood inclusive education, inclusive education was described as a notion of welcoming all learners regardless of their disabilities and special educational needs. Intellectual disabilities were amongst the special educational needs that were identified by the teachers as one of the barriers to learning that was addressed by inclusive education policies.

Research studies (Ntombela, 2006; Savvidou, 2011) illustrate that teaching students with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities may require much from the teachers. Ntombela (2006) argues that understanding and assisting students with learning disabilities is a challenge for most teachers as learning disabilities are attributed to be a deficit within the learner,

rather than a deficit with the education system. Teachers tend to lack expertise on teaching students with learning disabilities and prefer specialists' referrals such as psychologists and occupational therapists.

Similar to this, is the study by Savvidou (2011) on exploring teacher narratives on inclusive practices in higher education, which revealed that teaching students with disabilities creates doubts, concerns and uncertainties in relation to the professional knowledge of teachers. One of the highlighted concerns of teaching students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom is that it requires teachers to use mixed methods of instructions in order to accommodate all learners. This in turn raises different feelings for the teachers. Teachers also expressed feelings of isolation and anxiety in teaching students with disabilities in a mainstream classroom.

In contrast to this, a study by Woolfson & Brady (2009) indicates that teachers who felt competent in teaching children with learning disabilities view factors that are external to the child as attributing to their disabilities and poor performance. These included the curriculum and the methods of teaching used by the teachers. Moreover, self-efficacy and teaching experience was found to be closely linked by Nketsia and Saloviita (2013). In their study on teachers' views of inclusive education in Ghana, they found that teachers who had previous experience and encounter with a student with a special learning need were associated with preparedness to teach such learners when compared to teachers who have never encountered a learner with a special educational need. These findings indicate that it is important for lecturers to gain practical



experience of including learners with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom in order that they learn how to better accommodate students with learning disabilities in future.

### **2.8.1 Teachers' attitudes towards including the learning disabled**

There is a need to understand the inclusive practices in the higher education system as a number of students with special educational needs including those with learning disabilities are entering the tertiary education system. Even though inclusive policies commend higher education institutions to be inclusive, there is a need to understand the attitudes of teachers towards including the learning disabled. Savvidou (2011) indicates that there still remains a challenge on teaching approaches used and the attitudes of teachers towards including students with disabilities in higher education. In a South African context, Ntombela (2011) adds that teachers' limited experiences of policy statements such as EWP6 contribute to limited knowledge and understanding of the policy. This is evident in the findings of the research conducted by Ntombela (2011) that teachers in schools lack experience and understanding of EWP6 because they never attended workshops that specifically focus on inclusive education. As a result they had limited information and support for developing an inclusive education system. This suggests that lack of relevant information on inclusive education results in educators who are ill equipped and lack expertise on including students with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.

However, these findings differ with the findings by Berry (2011) who found that amongst other things, teachers suggested the need of knowing the child. Knowing the student included obtaining all relevant information about a student with a disability. Information such as the characteristics of a particular disability that they have, how it can be accommodated in class and

accommodating strategies that have proved to work best in the past. More importantly in getting to know the student, is having background information about their personal information and family background so that they understand their situation better. These findings suggest that teachers need to go beyond the classroom in order to understand and support a student with a disability by getting all relevant information about the student that they are teaching.

Teachers' sentiments and attitudes towards an inclusive classroom differ across countries. A study conducted by Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel and Malinen (2012) found that Finnish teachers had more positive sentiments towards interacting with learners who are disabled. This was found not to be the same with South African teachers as they were less positive about including learners with disabilities in their classrooms. The study revealed that South African teachers generally did not have children with disabilities in their mainstream classrooms when compared to the Finnish teachers. Moreover, South African teachers also indicated to be less concerned about including children with disabilities in their classroom while Finnish teachers were more positive (Savolainen et al. 2012). Various factors may contribute towards teacher's attitudes towards including the learning disabled. Below are some of the factors:

#### **2.8.1.1 Lack of adequate training**

Studies by Nketsia & Saloviita (2013); Supple & Abgenyenga (2011) and Engelbrecht (2004) indicate that lack of knowledge and training on learning disabilities becomes a barrier to learning for the teachers. Nketsia & Saloviita (2013) add that other challenges experienced by teachers included lack of quality teacher preparation. Teachers felt that their practical teacher training

inadequately prepared them to provide support to students with special learning needs. Engelbrecht (2006) postulates that teacher education and training on inclusive education plays a crucial role in equipping and preparing teachers to understand what inclusive education is. The training can also equip teachers on how they can collaborate with other experts in assisting learners with barriers to learning. Engelbrecht (2006) adds that the South African education system still has a majority of teachers that were trained and taught in a historically divided education system where collaboration was not encouraged. Ntombela (2006), adds that teachers contribute to the barriers to learning because the learning disabled are viewed as having a deficit and thus needing to be referred to institutions for learners with special needs. Teachers lack adequate training to manage the learning disabled in an inclusive classroom.

Studies on inclusive education (Ntombela, 2006; Engelbrecht et al., 2003) point out that teachers are not adequately trained to sustain an active learning environment for learners with intellectual disabilities in a mainstream classroom. Teachers experience challenges with giving students with learning disabilities the necessary attention and at the same time giving attention to the students without disabilities, but who are attending in a similar class, and are not performing to their maximum potential. According to Varcoe & Boyle (2013) the success of inclusive education is largely dependent on the attitudes of teachers. Their study indicates that previous training on inclusive education positively influence the attitude of teachers to be inclusive. Teachers who previously received training on inclusive education were better able to define what inclusive education is and displayed a more positive attitude towards it when compared to their counterparts who never received training on inclusive education. Teachers with a postgraduate qualification which included a special education module also seemed to be yielding a more

positive attitude towards inclusive education (Varcoe & Boyle, 2013). Consistent to the view, are the findings in a study conducted by Berry (2011) which indicate that teachers felt a need for information on procedural aspects of inclusive education and on how they can be applied in their contexts and applied into the classroom. Ojok & Wormnaes (2013) add that workshops and seminars on inclusive education shape the attitude as well as willingness of teachers to be inclusive in their teaching. These findings seem to suggest that lecturers can benefit from structured training programme with a focus on inclusive education as these may enhance positive attitude towards inclusivity.

#### **2.8.1.2 Severity of disability and teachers' attitude**

Lindsay (2007) adds that teacher attitudes on inclusive education are largely influenced by the nature of the special educational need. Teachers were found to be more supportive to include learners with physical disability and mild learning disability when compared to students with severe learning disabilities as these learners required additional support. Teachers felt inadequately prepared to deal with students with learning disabilities. Studies on teacher attitudes towards including learners with disabilities (Engelbrecht et al., 2003) have found that teacher attitudes are largely influenced by the type of learner's disability. Learners with learning disabilities were found to pose difficulties for teachers teaching in a mainstream classroom. Teachers found it difficult to include learners who required extra instructions and needed additional management. This is in contrast to the findings by Ojok and Wormnaes (2013) in a study conducted in Uganda who found that teachers who taught students with intellectual disabilities in their regular classrooms had a more positive and willing attitude to include these

learners in their classroom. These findings suggest that teachers with practical experience on teaching students with learning disabilities have a more positive attitude are more likely to support rather than oppose inclusive education.

### **2.8.1.3 Class size and teachers' attitudes**

Ojok & Wormnaes (2013) further indicates that class size contributes towards the teachers' attitudes on including the learning disabled. In their study on including pupils with intellectual disabilities they found that class size impacted negatively on the teacher attitudes. Teachers who managed a large number of pupils with learning disabilities had a negative attitude towards including learners with a learning disability when compared to the teachers who had a fewer number of students with intellectual disabilities. This finding suggests that a sizable class with students who have a difficulty with learning possess as challenge and may be demanding on the teacher. Administrative demands of teaching a sizable number of students with learning difficulties may be a challenge. A study conducted by Engelbrecht et al. (2003) found that administrative issues pertaining to students with learning disabilities were also found to be stressful particularly to the teachers as they had to be accountable for the outcomes of students with learning disabilities. Administrative duties included adapting the curriculum and unit plans so that they accommodated learners with intellectual disabilities.

## **2.9. The needs of students with learning disabilities**

In agreement with studies by (Connor, 2012; Skinner and Lindstrom, 2003) that higher education is now accessible to students with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities. Lerner and Johns (2012) indicate that post school education is now the new academic frontier for students with learning disabilities. These include community colleges and vocational educational training colleges which are often a good choice for young people. Students with learning disabilities have a variety of psycho-social needs which academic institutions need to take cognizance of. Below are some of the interventions that may benefit students with learning disabilities.

### **2.9.1 Specialized educational needs programme**

Ring and Trevers (2005) contend that educational institutions ought to have a specific model of integration of students with learning disabilities into a mainstream learning environment as they have specific educational needs. In their study they found that teachers had difficulties in meeting the needs of learners with special needs in a mainstream class, as these learners required individual attention. Also, the curriculum offered required some specialists teaching which the participants struggled with. Learners with learning disabilities require special accommodation that caters for their difference in academic studies, difference in learning strategies and how they cope with examinations (Ring & Trevers, 2005).

### **2.9.2 Matched Learning Styles**

A study by Nel, Kempen & Ruscheinski (2011) indicates that learners have a unique preference of learning styles that help them to learn best. Teachers accommodated various learning styles of learners who had intellectual disabilities. Based on this finding, teachers are recommended to accommodate different learning styles when teaching the learning disabled. This assists in achieving learning outcomes for all learners in class. The use of a variety of learning styles when teaching is thus recommended as the classroom may have a student with a variety of learning needs. Smith & Strick (2010) postulate that students with learning disabilities are not different. They also can benefit from teachers who recognise their learning styles and help them to understand it.

### **2.9.3 Basic academic instruction skills and tutorial programmes**

Heiman & Prezel (2003) indicate that there are certain factors that impede the success of learners with learning disabilities in higher education. Examples of these factors include insufficient time allocated to task completion, lecturers who are unable to teach students with learning disabilities as well as high noise levels. On the contrasting side, Heiman and Prezel (2003) also found that factors contributing to the success of students with learning disabilities included lecturers who catered for their needs. The needs of students with learning disabilities were catered for in various ways. They preferred learning with visual and oral materials rather than reading and writing. Special test conditions also played a significant role in reducing their stress with academic studies.

Lerner and Johns (2012) also recommend for students with learning disabilities to be enrolled for tutorial programmes by the teachers. Tutorial programmes are designed to help the students with specific problems. Tutorial programmes are based on the student's individual needs and are utilized to strengthen their skills based on the general curriculum. These will focus on improving and assisting the student in a specific learning area and need.

#### **2.9.4 Disability support services**

Students with learning disabilities need a range of support and accommodation while they are at a higher education institution. In the view of the researcher, FET Colleges need to have departments with staff that have specialist qualifications and skill in addressing learning disabilities. This is supported by the findings of Finn (1999) in his study on leaning difficulty programmes at college who found that learning disability programmes were beneficial to the students with learning difficulty. Moreover, dedicated learning difficulty staff members also impacted positively on the students. However, the staff and student ratio must be considered in order for the learning difficulty programmes to be effective as overcrowded classrooms can be an impediment in the success of disability support programmes.

#### **2.9.5 Counselling and support**

Lee (2013) brings in the importance of counseling in students with learning disabilities. According to Lee (2013) counseling helps students with learning disabilities to understand themselves, their behaviours, limitations and coming to acceptance. This is in agreement with the



views of Skinner and Lindstrom (2003) who indicate that students with learning disabilities should be made aware of their strengths and weaknesses in order to allow them to overcome their learning problems and boost their self-esteem. Nel, Nel & Hugo (2013) postulate that learning disabilities should be detected early so that immediate support is provided and teachers can ensure that students achieve according to their potential.

### **2.9.6 Access to assistive provision**

Lack of assistive technology and human support has been found to be one of the factors that impede on the success of students with learning disabilities at college. A study conducted by Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela (2004) on participation of students with disabilities in higher education, found that provision of assistance by lecturers was significant. Students only experienced difficulties and lack of support due to lecturers' indifference and lack of awareness on assistive technology. Students also had difficulties if lecturers did not provide them with lecture notes. This was also true with assistive technology. Poor provisioning of assistive technology affected students with learning disabilities (Shevlin et al., 2004).

Alnahdi (2014) argues that we are living in a society that is being technologically transformed. In trying to address the needs of students with disabilities, Alnahdi (2014) commends the use of assistive technology as the youth find technology to be both attractive and effective. Alnahdi (2014) argues that technological tools and devices have become necessary for students with and without disabilities. In a study on assistive technology in special education, they found that

assistive technology was particularly beneficial to students with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities (Alnahdi, 2014).

Exposure to assistive technology by lecturers can be especially beneficial to the students as they can encourage students to use such tools in order to bypass academic weaknesses. A study conducted by Cullen, Richards and Frank (2008) cited in Alnahdi(2014) demonstrate that assistive technology can enhance performance in writing. Their study found that tudents with learning disabilities improved with minimal accommodation in writing tasks. This study suggests that teachers who teach students with learning disabilities must be knowledgeable about assistive technology that exists and how it works in order to assist the students.

### **2.9.7 Alternative curricular materials**

Marino et al. (2014) argue that alternative curricular materials and pedagogical practices are necessary to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. Teachers teaching learners with learning disabilities need to be familiar with alternative curricular materials such as alternative science texts and video games. In their study on video games and alternative text, they found that students with learning disabilities preferred access to scientific information using technology. The use of technology was found to be better than a textbook and enabled a better understanding for students with learning disabilities.

Marino et al. (2014) found video games to enhance the universal design of learning using text books. Video games were preferred as they allowed collaborative engagement amongst the students and most importantly, learning through games. Games were preferred and brought an element of fun amongst the students, their teachers and parents in learning science. Moreover, games were also found to be a better option than pen and paper assessments for students with learning disabilities as they did not bring anxiety of taking an assessment. Games enabled the students to gain an in-depth understanding of scientific content while interacting with their peers, teachers and family.

### **2.9.8 Flexible practices**

Supple & Abgenyenga (2011) commend that teachers teaching students with learning disabilities should adapt to flexible teaching practices in order to accommodate the learners within their classrooms. The findings of their study highlight that students benefited from the flexible practices of teachers. These included giving more verbal and clear instructions, role plays, offering students with skills on taking notes and giving students extra time when required. These findings are similar to the findings by Konur (2006) who found that disabled students in higher education benefited from lecturers who provided adjustments during examinations. They also allowed tape recording of lecturers.

## **2.10. Strategies of addressing the needs of the learning disabled in a mainstream classroom**

Downing (2010) indicates that teaching students with learning disabilities requires that a teacher uses strategies that will encourage active learning of all learners in the classroom, i.e. for learners with or without disabilities. Active learning can be achieved by creating opportunities for learners to demonstrate their skills through means other than asking them to read or write. In this way, students with learning disabilities are accommodated (Downing, 2010). Below are some of the strategies that can be used to include students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom.

### **2.10.1 Curriculum adaptation**

Lerner and Johns (2012) indicate that the inclusion of learners with learning disabilities requires teachers to adapt their teaching curriculum. This must however be done without sacrificing the integrity of the content. This is necessary in order to meet the demands of students with special educational needs in a mainstream classroom. Teaching students with learning disabilities requires teachers to use various teaching strategies. Examples of these include using visual aids instead of oral and written information, encouraging active participation instead of didactic way of teaching and allowing oral assessments instead of written assessments (Lerner and Johns, 2012).

A finding from a study by Savvidou (2011) supports this view by indicating that some teachers are making an effort to adapt their teaching practice. This involved making use of information

and computer technology and providing additional materials for learners with disabilities. They also provided additional time to meet the needs of students that required extra time. In contrast to this, a study by Nketsia and Saloviita (2013) found that teachers preferred strategies that did not require separate work with a learner with a special need, but rather preferred to give individual attention. Individual educational plans however, were not found to be highly favoured as they required extra work.

### **2.10.2 Differentiated Instruction**

Broderick et al. (2005) bring in an important view. They advocate that teachers should plan lessons that are responsive and differentiate instruction for all learners in the classroom in accordance to their abilities and strengths. This is further supported by Fraser, Goswami & Conti-Ramsden (2010) who indicate that teachers need to use comprehensive assessments of strengths and weaknesses so that they can plan effective instruction and delivery that include all types of learners. This must be done at the beginning of teaching and learning, rather than adaptations taking place during the lesson.

Broderick et al. (2005) argue that the assumption by teachers that the standard curriculum content and instruction method is effective for all learners is a problem. The lessons and instructions should be planned bearing in mind that the classroom has a heterogeneous group of students with various aptitudes, needs and interests. Moreover, segregating students according to their aptitudes and special needs often results in poor educational achievement due to the decline

of teacher's expectations of these learners. In essence, this practice does not remediate the learners, but instead promotes the learner to be a remedial learner for a long time.

Broderick et al. (2005) further implores teachers to first examine their current practices that may exclude the learning disabled. These may include instructional interactions, peer interactions, the physical environment and other factors that have a potential of disabling the learners. The teachers are recommended to make use of teaching practices that include the learning disabled such as creating a reading buddy system, informing the student in advance that you will require them to read a specific section in class and allowing them to volunteer to read rather than surprising them by asking them to read in front of the class. Differentiating the teaching content and skills to be learned is equally important. Lecturers need to be creative in the manner that the content is delivered in such a way that all learners are included through the use of various teaching methods.

### **2.10.3. Learner Centered Classrooms**

Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler & Shevitz (2002) advocate for student-centered classrooms. Student - centered classrooms are purposefully planned for interdisciplinary instructions. They are well resourced and have multiple tools that may assist the learning disabled, such as tape recorders, electronic spellers and calculators, graphic organizers, software products, large print books and a variety of reference materials that might be of benefit to the learning disabled.

Landsberg et al. (2010) add that teachers need to be in cognizance of the strengths and assets of students with learning disabilities. Strength refers to things that the student is good at such as their knowledge, skills and interests. These are things that are within the individual learner. On the other hand is the assets, which are the things that the student has access to such as resources at home, at school, participants, family and peers that can assist them to learn. This shows that the student with a learning disability has the potential to assist himself, but the presence of significant others is also important.

#### **2.10.4 Continued teacher development**

Continued teacher development and collaboration with various stakeholders in order to support lecturers teaching students with learning disabilities is necessary. This in turn benefits the students with learning disabilities. Studies like that of Savolainen et al. (2012) indicate a need for strategies that are practical in implementing inclusive education. Schoeman (2012) further highlights that inclusive education requires interventions such as continued teacher professional development in the area of inclusion in the classroom. This involves an ability of teachers to be able to identify and address barriers to learning. This is done through differentiating the curriculum, assessment and classroom methodologies so as to address diverse learning needs of all learners in the classroom.

This view is also supported by Ring and Trevers (2005:48) who found that “specialist esoteric pedagogy is a requirement in meeting the needs of students with special educational needs”. A similar study by Shangwei and Potmesil (2014) indicates that the teacher educator system should

be improved by creating better chances for professional development in the area of teaching students with special learning needs, including those with learning disabilities. Teacher development is further supported by the views of Golmic and Hensen (2012) who suggest that the experience of teachers gathered during teacher education training in teaching learners with special needs and practicing teaching in an inclusive classroom, better equips teachers to teach and engage with students in an inclusive classroom. In their study of an included experience practical programme, they indicated that teachers who participated in their programme and practiced teaching in an inclusive classroom improved their attitudes and sentiments in teaching students with special needs. Concerns of teaching in an inclusive classroom were reduced after taking part in the included experience practical programme.

#### **2.10.5 Collaboration with other professionals**

Studies by Nel et.al. (2013) and Savvidou (2011) indicate that for inclusive education to be effective, teachers cannot work in isolation, but need to work in collaboration with other stakeholders. Knowledge about inclusive education and about possible different role players in the inclusive education system is necessary for the teachers so that they are better able to assist learners with barriers to learning. Downing (2010) adds that another basis of improving teacher expertise in teaching learners with special needs, such as the learning disabled, also relies on the availability and or access to service providers such as occupational therapists, behaviour specialists, speech and language specialists. These educational specialists can provide support to the learners directly or indirectly while they are in an inclusive classroom.



### **2.10.6 Collaboration amongst teachers**

In a study by Savvidou (2011) a few teachers that understood inclusive education highlighted that teamwork amongst the teachers themselves was found to be an effective informal and formal strategy when assisting learners with barriers to learning. A similar finding by Nel et al. (2013) indicated that when teachers share experiences of assisting a particular learner, the teacher who is teaching the learner for the first time is better equipped by the teachers who have taught the child previously. This better equips the new teachers to assist the learner in the classroom.

### **2.10.7. Learner Peer Support**

Downing (2010) argues that the most natural source of support in learning is derived from peers in the classroom. Even though the learners in the classroom may lack the skills of teaching, some learners may have the motivation and understanding of the lesson better than their peers. They may have a unique perspective of understanding the lesson and are better able to explain and demonstrate their understanding to their peers better than the teachers. In this way peers tend to be a useful source of support for fellow learners with learning disabilities. However, Downing (2010) indicates that there is a need for peer support training. Teachers must train the learners without disabilities on how to support learners with learning disabilities in order to make the critical information effective.

### **2.10.8 Collaboration with parents**

Lack of parental involvement was found to be a contributing stressor to teachers who teach students with learning disabilities. The parents' lack of involvement was found to be due to poor socio-economic status of some parents. They were unable to come to school because they lacked money. As a result of this, they missed out on the learners' academic developments (Engelbrecht et al., 2003). However, collaboration with parents was also found to be equally rewarding. Collaboration with parents of learners with special needs is important for providing support. Nel et al. (2013) indicate that lack of parental support jeopardies the collaboration process as they are the ones with more information, history and background of the learner.

### **2.10.9 Teacher support**

In as much as teachers are responsible for nurturing and supporting learners in the classroom, they also need support. A study by Engelbrecht et al. (2003) indicate that teachers find it difficult to teach students with learning disabilities without receiving support from school management. In their study they found that teachers also need support such as appropriate educational resources and fulltime classroom assistants who will assist during lessons so that necessary attention is offered to all learners.

Teacher support is further accentuated by Varcoe & Boyle (2013) who found in their study that teacher attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities are also influenced by the availability of resources to assist them in their teaching practice. Teachers who had access to resources

were better able to manage their inclusive classroom when compared to those with no resources. This indicates the importance of availing support resources to lecturers who are including learners with learning disabilities in their classrooms.

### **2.11. Theoretical framework- Ecological systems theory**

In order to understand the experiences of FET College lecturers' experiences of the inclusion of the learning disabled in a mainstream classroom, the ecological systems theory is used. The ecological systems theory originates from the works of Bronfenbrenner (1979). Widely used in developmental psychology, the ecological systems theory focuses on inter-relationships between systems such as schools, teachers, learners, parents, the education department and the larger society. These systems are looked at how together they contribute to the development of the learner (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The application of the ecological systems theory is important and relevant in this study as lecturers and their duties in assisting the learning disabled cannot exist in isolation, but are entrenched within a larger structure that is interrelated with other social institutions and domains. Bronfenbrenner (1979) postulates the equal importance to both the environment of development and the developing person. He argues that there is an inter-play between the person and their surrounding environment.

The theory contends that there is reciprocity of relationships and that human beings and systems do not exist in isolation, but exist through interactions, connection and relationships with one another. When applied in the context of this study, for FET college lecturers to be able to include the learning disabled in a mainstream classroom, the theory suggests that all stakeholders at the college need to each play a part. The relevant stakeholders at an FET college in supporting the learning disabled include the college council, management, lecturers, the students, parents, the curriculum department, the student support department, the student administration and exams department, the information technology department and human resource department. All of these important parts need to work coherently and in harmony to support the said learners.

Watts, Cockcroft and Duncan (2009) echo the importance of parental support, supervision and encouragement in addition to teaching in class to support learners. This view is very important as the involvement of parents at an FET college is commonly overlooked. The involvement of parents is usually at the beginning of the year when students are enrolled. Parents meetings are not a norm because they are not scheduled on the academic calendar and called. Parents are normally called only if the student has done something wrong and an intervention is required. In the case of students with learning disabilities at an FET college, parents need to be involved throughout the student's life at college. Lecturers teaching the students can benefit from the input of parents and vice versa.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) the ecological systems theory consists of five interrelated parts, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem. All

these parts are nested and interrelated, each part impacting on the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These parts cannot be seen as complete or as a whole without one another as the existence of the whole depends on all other parts. In the context of this study, it is important to understand the experiences of the lecturers in including the learning disabled within the college system which has a variety of layers that depend on one another. The college has different units serving the needs of students such as student administration, curriculum, student support services and human resources department.

Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana (2002) make reference to the ecological systems theory in the education environment. Below are the elements of the ecological environment as applied in the education sector:

### **2.11.1 The microsystem**

The microsystem is the layer that represents the immediate surrounding that affects the individual that is developing. This is the context where there are bi-relationships and face-to-face interactions influencing one another back and forth (Watts, Cockcroft & Duncan, 2009; Donald et al., 2002; Landsberg et al., 2010). In the context of this study, the microsystem level includes the interactions between the student with a learning disability, lecturers, peers in a classroom, college and the family. This level is the most immediate environment where immediate processes take place. The connections and interactions within all the various people exert some influence on the student. The microsystem “should support the child’s feeling of belonging, love and support and serve as a protective factor” (Landsberg et al., 2010,p. 14).

### **2.11.2. The mesosystem**

The mesosystem is made up of different microsystems. The mesosystem accommodates linkages and connections between one another. This is the level where they interact (Donald et al., 2002). In relation to the study, the mesosystem could be the relationship between the FET college lecturer and the student and the relationship between lecturers and other support staff. It can also be the way that the student with a learning difficulty interacts with his peers.

### **2.11.3. The exosystem**

The exosystem is the social context that is beyond the person's immediate environment, but that affects him or her in one way or the other. The person is affected or influenced by people that he has proximal relationships with (Donald et al., 2002). In relation to this study, a student with learning difficulty may be impacted by the lecturer's lack of training in the area of learning disability, parents' educational and employment status, college curriculum, college resources, activities, change of lecturers, assessment procedures and time allocated for assignments.

### **2.11.4. The macrosystem**

Watts, Cockcroft and Duncan (2009) define the macrosystem as the 'overarching institutional patterns of the culture or the subculture such as the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems, of which macro, meso and exosystems are the concrete manifestations. The laws, values, traditions and customs of a particular society are to be found at this level (p.506). In

the context of this study, the policies that govern the college or lack of in respect of including students with learning disabilities at an FET College form part of the macrosystem. Dynamics outside the college context that affects the whole system levels form part of the macrosystem.

#### **2.11.5. The chronosystem**

Donald et al. (2002) indicate that developmental time at this level is an important factor. Interactions in all the systems are also influenced by the person's development as well as the developmental time frames. In the context of this study, the lecturers and the college may be in a phase where they are also developing. Currently, the Department of Higher Education is promoting access to FET colleges in order to combat skills shortage. Most students want to learn at an FET college. Some may have learning disabilities, but whether FET colleges are ready at this developing time remains a question. The lecturer teaching a student with a learning difficulty is thus influenced by this. The students with learning disabilities at an FET college at this point in time are affected by this.

The ecological system's theory best describes how the different parts of the FET College system operate optimally to support students. However, in relation to this study, the ecological systems theory tends to overlook the context of systems. Mishler (1979) suggests looking at meaning in relation to context. Mishler (1979) argues that traditional research largely ignores the importance of context. In this regard I argue that the ecological systems theory assumes that all parts of the system exist and are functionally working in synergy with one another. In relation to this study on the experiences of FET college lecturers on including students with learning

disabilities in the mainstream classrooms, the theory may not recognize that some other parts supposedly to support both the lecturer and the student faced with learning disability, may be non-existent or dysfunctional. Examples of these could be the absence of parents or parents who are uninvolved in the learning of their child, parents who exist, but are not literate and are not inclined to knowing what learning disabilities are, lack of resources and or training of the existing staff on learning disabilities. In the context of the FET college sector, there is currently no disability framework or policy governing how students with learning disabilities in higher education, including FET colleges are to be included and supported while in the mainstream classrooms. Although with some gaps, the ecological systems theory seems to be able to demonstrate how different parts of the college systems can support students with learning disabilities provided all parts work well with each other and operate in a context supporting one another.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

The chapter has reviewed relevant literature on the experiences of teachers and or lecturers on teaching the learning disabled both at international and national levels. It looked at the dynamics of including the learning disabled in educational settings, including strategies and challenges faced by those facilitating teaching and learning. The ecological systems theory better elaborates on how lecturers at an FET college cannot solely assist students with learning disabilities, but also need to rely on other stakeholders involved in supporting the learning disabled. The next chapter will look at the methodology that was used to gather data on the experiences of FET college lecturers on including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to detail the method that was used to obtain information about the experiences of FET College lecturers of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms. The study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of FET college lecturers in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities?
2. How are the needs of students with learning disabilities addressed at an FET college?
3. What are the strategies that the college uses to equip lecturers to address the needs of students with learning disabilities?

The research paradigm underpinning the study, the methodology and procedures that were used for data collection are outlined below.

#### **3.2. Research paradigm**

An interpretive paradigm was used to approach this study. This implies that the researcher plays an important part throughout the research process. An argument by Cohen et.al. (2011) is that in an interpretive paradigm, the researcher seeks to understand the subjective world of the human experience. The integrity of the experiences of the research participants is retained by trying to understand them from within. This is done through having conversations, listening and observing the research participants.

### **3.3. Nature of the study**

#### **3.3.1 Qualitative research approach**

The study was qualitative in nature as it aimed at understanding the meaning the FET college lecturers attributed to their worlds and experiences and in particular their experience of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describes a qualitative approach as a method whose activities pinpoints the observer into the world. A qualitative research approach allowed exploring and doing an in-depth investigation in order to get better insight of the lecturers' experiences.

Qualitative research consists of interpretive practices that make the world observed visible. Things are studied in their natural settings and the researcher interprets and makes meaning of the phenomenon under study. Creswell (2012) indicates that a qualitative research approach is useful in gathering in-depth knowledge about a particular phenomenon. The qualitative research approach allowed me to ask general broad questions that in turn allowed the research participants to share their views openly on their experiences.

#### **3.3.2. Case Study Design**

Cohen et al. (2011) indicates that a case study involves capturing the lived experiences of the research participants in a particular context and situation. This study employed a case study design because I wanted to concentrate on a specific context (Creswell, 2012). In this study the specific context was an FET college and in particular, FET college lecturers that have taught

students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom. Creswell (2012) classifies case studies as one of the types of ethnographic designs. Ethnographic designs allow qualitative researchers to describe, analyse and interpret the behaviours and beliefs of people who have a similar culture in detail. In particular reference to this study, the lecturers of a specific FET college who share a similar culture were interviewed. Thomas (2011) indicates that a case study is a method of research that concentrates on one thing, looking at it in detail, not seeking to generalise from it.

### **3.4 Research Site**

This study was conducted in one of the TVET colleges, previously known as FET colleges in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The college has approximately seven thousand and fifty students who are enrolled for National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programmes, Report 191, and skills programmes. A majority of the students are Black with only a few Indians and Whites. The college has 8 campuses which are located within communities in both urban and rural areas. The communities where the campuses are located are characterised by high levels of unemployment, social ills and poverty. The college employs approximately five hundred and twenty staff members who work on both full-time and part-time bases.

### **3.5 Sample characteristics**

An analysis of the seven (7) interviews that were conducted indicated that the lecturers involved in the study taught across all National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programmes. Some of the

lecturers were also part-time lecturers of the afternoon Report 191 programmes. Their ages ranged from 26 to 63 years. The participants included 4 females and 3 males. Their teaching experience within the TVET sector also varied, ranging from 2 years to 20 years. With regards to educational qualifications, the lecturers had qualifications such as university degrees, diplomas and certificates. Some lecturers are currently enrolled for their teaching diplomas with the local universities. All lecturers were using English as a medium of instruction at the college.

### **3.6 Sampling**

A purposive, non-random sampling method was used to select only a few information rich participants. Creswell (2012) indicates that a purposeful sampling method allows a researcher to select a few information rich, critical cases and this helps the researcher to understand the problem. In the context of this study, the researcher selected only eight college lecturers who have taught or are currently teaching a student (s) with a learning disability in the mainstream classroom. However, only seven lecturers eventually participated due to logistical challenges. These lecturers were selected because they each had experience of teaching the learning disabled in a mainstream classroom, even though at varying degrees. Based on discussions with the lecturers prior to the interviews, all lecturers that were selected had no formal training on inclusive education and in particular on teaching students with learning disabilities.

### **3.7. Research Instruments**

The researcher needed information on the FET college lecturers' experiences of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Both in-depth interviews and observations were found to be suited for this kind of study in order to collect the information. There was a need to get first-hand information and interpretations of the experiences of the research participants (Cohen et al., 2011).

#### **3.7.1 In-depth structured interviews**

In qualitative research, in - depth interviews can be used as a primary data gathering method to obtain information from research participants about their beliefs, practices, experiences and opinions (Harrel & Bradley, 2009). In this study, in- depth interviews were conducted. Open-ended questions that allowed probing were posed to all the participants. This enabled me to enter into a dialogue with all the interviewees and they were in return able to give thick and rich descriptions of their experiences. Mears (2009) indicates that in-depth interviews allow the researcher to solicit stories of personal experience and offer entry into the world of another's perspective.

Interviews were originally planned to be conducted with eight lecturers at the FET college, but one lecturer declined to be interviewed due to other administrative duties. A total of seven interviews were eventually conducted. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour each. This was where the lecturers were able to share testimonies and their experiences of including students with learning disabilities in their mainstream classrooms. All interviews took place at

either the lecturers' classrooms or the campus boardrooms, depending on what venues were available and quiet at the time. All interviews were conducted in English and recorded on a digital voice recorder to enable transcription at a later stage.

### **3.7.2. Observations**

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, one unstructured observation was done in addition to the interviews. I had planned to conduct at least four classroom observations where the lecturers were teaching in a classroom where there is a student with a learning disability, but this proved to be a challenge as data collection took place just before the internal continuous assessments (ICASS). Due to this phase at the college, class attendance was very poor and some classes were cancelled. None the less, I was able to seat in one class lesson where I observed one lecturer doing a revision lesson with the students in preparation for the ICASS.

Creswell (2012) indicates that observations are done in order to collect field notes about what is happening in the research site without being actively involved. A researcher creates an observation schedule where he records field notes. In this study, an observation schedule was used in order to establish the patterns used by lecturer when teaching in a class where there is a student with a learning disability. (See appendix 6). The purpose of the observation schedule was to record activities by the lecturer that included or excluded a student with a learning difficulty in a mainstream class. Moreover, the observation was to confirm if what was said by the participant during the interview actually happened in class.

The class lesson lasted for approximately 35 minutes. The lecturer used participatory methods like role plays and class discussion to encourage a class which had one student with a learning disability to take part during the lesson. This observation allowed me an opportunity to record activities as they occurred in the classroom. Thomas (2011) indicates that observations allow the researcher to watch particular behaviours in the research site as they happen. These could be quantifiable elements that the researcher can count such as actions, behaviours, use of language, or a particular question or phrase used by the research participants.

### **3.8. Data analysis**

Data that was collected was thematically analysed. Braun & Clarke (2006) highlight that thematic analysis is one of the processes that are used to analyse most qualitative data. Thematic analysis is used in encoding qualitative information where explicit codes are required. Explicit codes may also be a list of common themes that may emerge during an interview. It required that I transcribe the interviews, read interview transcripts, observational notes and field notes with an aim of identifying recurring issues and identifying themes. The themes were then coded and grouped into sub-themes.

### **3.9. Validity, reliability and trustworthiness**

Validity refers to the ability of the research data collection tools to measure what it is supposed to measure while reliability refers to the ability of the data collection tool to yield the same results when applied more than once (Cohen; Manion and Morrison, 2011). Cohen et al. (2011)

argue that it is important to ensure both validity and reliability of the research tools in order to improve trustworthiness when conducting qualitative research. In this study, to ensure the validity of the data collection tools, a triangulation method was used where more than one data collection tools, namely in-depth structured interviews and observations were used. These data collection tools are used to tell the same story from different points of view of participants. Denzin & Lincoln (2008) indicate that triangulation is an attempt to secure the understanding of the phenomenon in question. To ensure both validity and reliability of this study, all the in-depth structured interviews and observation tools followed the same format and sequence of questioning for all research participants. All participants were asked about the same issues in a same way.

### **3.10 Ethical procedure**

Creswell (2012) indicates that it is necessary to obtain the consent and cooperation of people who will be assisting in the investigation. In this study, prior to data collection, formal requests to conduct research at the FET College was applied for at both the Department of Education and at the FET College. Upon receipt of approval to conduct research, all the participants were asked to give individual informed consent before data was collected from the participants. Participants were advised to participate willingly and that they had the right to withdraw from the research process if they felt so. In this study, informed consent was obtained from all the participants and their confidentiality was guaranteed.



### **3.11 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the research design and methodology that was used to conduct the study. It gave clarity on the tools that were used to collect the data and the ethical procedures that were employed in order to obtain the cooperation from the research participants. In-depth qualitative data was obtained during data collection. The next chapter will present the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

Qualitative interviews were conducted with FET college lecturers in order to generate data. Chunks of data were then categorised into themes, hence, thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data and to explore FET college lecturers' understandings of learning disabilities as well as their experiences of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important in this study that I use data to tell a story. To answer the research questions, thematic analysis was used and direct quotations from the interview transcripts and observation notes were used. In this chapter the findings of the study are outlined and discussed.

#### 4.2. Findings of the study

The findings were grouped into the following four themes:

- ✓ Theme 1: Participants' understandings of learning disabilities.
- ✓ Theme 2: College lecturers' experiences of addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities.
- ✓ Theme 3: Strategies employed by lecturers to address the needs of students with learning disabilities.

- ✓ Theme 4: College based intervention strategies to assist lecturers to address the needs of the students.

#### **4.2.1 Participants' understandings of learning disabilities**

As a starting point, I felt a need to first get an overall impression of the lecturers' understandings of learning disabilities as related to their experiences of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms. As it was highlighted in chapter 2, the term learning disabilities is not an easy construct as there is no one clear definition and causality of learning disabilities (Waber, 2010; Flanagan and Alfonso, 2011 & Selikowitz, 2012). The study generated data that suggest that FET college lecturers have varying definitions and understandings of the term learning disabilities.

The theme of participants' understanding of learning disabilities allowed participants to highlight their in-depth understandings of learning disabilities. As also indicated by Flanagan & Alfonso, 2011) one of the findings of this study was that learning disabilities prove to be a complicated phenomenon to understand. Participants indicated a variety of ways of what they understand learning disabilities to be. Below are some of the accounts of how they described learning disabilities based on their experiences:

Learning disabilities were defined as difficulties experienced by students in understanding what is being taught in class. Participant S recounted her understanding of learning disabilities:

*The term learning disabilities refers to students who have an uneasiness or an inability to grasp what is being taught in the classroom either through reading, to reading a passage or even orally read out on the board. They fail to understand anything that is being taught at a theoretical pace. I regard that as a learning disability.*

Learning disability has also been defined as a barrier in learning. Participant M said:

*I think someone with a learning disability is someone that has a certain barrier. They can be in class and you can be teaching and you see that the simple things that you will know any normal person can grasp or any human being can grasp.....they will look at you with a blank facial expression or even its very basic, basic adding or basic things and you expect then that they will be able to make it by adding one or two....one specific person still doesn't get it and it is not amazingly difficult, but it's just that they just don't get it.*

This shows that students with learning disabilities may not be the same. They may experience one or more challenges in the areas of learning. This finding suggest that students with learning disabilities have difficulties grasping content in the areas of learning. The finding is supported by Flanagan and Alfonso,2011) who indicated that learning disabilities are an unexplained condition that is characterized by significant delay in one or more areas of learning such as reading and writing.

The majority of the participants indicated that learning disability is a disability that is manifested through difficulties with writing and reading. According to Participant E:

*They are much slower when it comes to writing... I would say it's a disability from the brain to the writing, the coordination. They cannot do it. They can't understand a written word. They need*

*somebody to read to them and someone to write their answers. There is quite a few students who have a scribe at the moment. You know because when I scribe for them I can actually see that they are unable to cope from beginning to end.*

Participant M adds that “*if she wants to write let’s say in ‘mathematics’, instead of using an ‘e’ she would write an ‘a’. I don’t know why, but it was more of a spelling*”. This is validated by Lerner and Johns (2012) who indicated that learning disabilities may be associated with various individual characteristics such as reading and writing difficulties which are mostly identified in schools.

Lecturers highlighted an important view that even though students with learning disabilities may have difficulties when learning, however they do have knowledge and potential to learn. Most lecturers that were interviewed highlighted that some students with learning disabilities are able to demonstrate knowledge and have good potential as students despite the fact that they have a difficulty in a particular area of learning. Participant M explains her experience with one the students:

*Her problem was that she doesn’t grasp things as easily as the normal student would do, but if you explain it continuously to her, she would grasp at the end and in the end she passed level 4. She is now doing a diploma.*

This finding is consistent with the views by Landsburg et al. (2010) who indicate that students with learning disabilities can actually do better. They can be able to achieve certain subject outcomes. Participant P indicated that students with learning disabilities may have challenges in other areas, but may be exceptionally good in others:

*The problem is with writing, but whenever it comes to them speaking...I remember one student, he was so good in speaking. He was a good student, good student, the best. Whenever we were in class when I was asking questions about the matter he was good, but when it came to writing the problem started and you could see that the student was stuck.*

According to participant X, students with learning disabilities understand when they are taught, it's just that they take longer to understand: "*She eventually understands, it's just that she takes longer*".

These findings are confirmed by research conducted by Ring & Travers (2005) that teachers may encounter difficulties in providing curriculum content that is identical to that of non-disabled classmates. Students with learning disabilities require that teachers find alternative ways that enable the students to take part in class and to learn. This suggests that the students learn differently as learning disabilities manifest in various ways as a result students may not be treated in the same way during the delivery of the class lesson. Different students in class may require differing interventions.

#### **4.2.1.1 Participant's understandings of the causes of learning disabilities**

Participants provided a variety of explanations on what they think are the causes of learning disabilities. According to the participants, the causes ranged from genetic and or natural abnormalities to environmental factors. Below are sub-themes on the participant's understandings of learning disabilities:

#### 4.2.1.1.1 Natural causes

Participants indicated that learning disabilities are caused by natural and or medical causes. This suggest that they think learning disabilities are intrinsic and have nothing to do with the social environment. Participant E describes what she thinks causes learning disabilities:

*Learning disabilities....., I would say people who are unable to cope with normal work in most situations because of brain malfunction or some developmental defects....it's a disability from the brain to the writing, the coordination.....there are actually different levels of intelligence that we are born with. Some people have a lower level of intelligence. They cannot pick up, they cannot. They can't remember what I said to them two minutes ago, you know. So I would say the symptoms that they are born with come from brain malfunction.*

Selikowitz (2012) and Smith and Strick (2010) support that disturbances in the brain may be linked to the causes of learning disabilities. Brain abnormalities may be associated with undetectable brain damage, malformation and minimal dysfunction which impacts learning. On the same token a brain chemical imbalance is associated with some of the causes of learning disabilities. Participant S further adds: "*hormones, aah chemical imbalance in the brain. I think it's usually a chemical imbalance within the brain that causes learning disabilities*". This finding is also supported by Smith and Strick (2010) who indicated that a change in the brain's chemical balance interferes with neurotransmitters and this impairs the brain's ability to function properly. This disturbance in the brain's ability to function properly may result in disturbance of speech, poor motor coordination and lack of problem solving skills.

#### 4.2.1.1.2 Environmental causes

Participants indicated that learning disabilities may be linked to environmental causes such as complications during pregnancy and birth. According to participant S: *“it’s during the process within the embryo, maybe within that nine months, it cannot receive adequate oxygen and adequate nutrients, that could cause a learning disability, but also after birth I think there are defects”*. Participant S says learning disability may be caused by poor early childhood development grounding: *“I don’t know, maybe I am very old school, but if they are not taught properly at a grass roots level, especially at primary school they will never be able to grasp the knowledge”*

These above responses reveal that understanding the causes of learning disabilities is not easy. There is no single way of understanding learning disabilities. Learning disabilities have been found to be controversial as they are a difficult condition to understand and to explain as each individual is different. As Smith & Strick (2010) put it, learning difficulties are hard to define because they poorly understood by the public, teachers and other professionals. This premise is also supported by Flanagan and Alfonso (2011). These findings indicate that lecturers may benefit from comprehensive training on learning disabilities, how to identify learning disability and strategies that can be used to support the learners with learning disability in a mainstream classroom.



## **4.2.2 College lecturers' experiences of addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities**

The findings indicate that participants had both positive and negative experiences on including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Below are their positive experiences:

### **4.2.2.1 Positive experiences of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms**

Participants showed that they have a myriad of positive experiences on including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms. Below are some of the positive experiences that they shared during the interviews.

#### **4.2.2.1.1 Giving individual attention**

Giving individual attention means that lecturers were able to work closely with the individual learner in trying to assist them to understand what was being delivered in the classroom. Most lecturers that were interviewed indicated that they give individual attention to students with learning disabilities in order that they become included in the class lesson. Individual attention was demonstrated through various ways such as giving them extra care as participant P described it:

*I give them extra care because I know they are having a problem. So I would go to them and ask 'did you understand?' just to get feedback from them. I try to explain to him again because that's*

*what I want. I want him to pass. I tell them that they are supposed to pass. I do not want them to feel that they are people who do not belong in this class. You belong in this class.*

Participant S also concurred on giving individual attention: *“I think I give them special attention. I pay more attention to them by giving them extra reading resources and extra materials, checking up on them”* Participant M adds: *“I would come around and explain, re-explain until he understands”*. Individual attention was also demonstrated through repeating instruction for clarity to the individual student. Participant X describes his experience of how he gave individual attention to a student with a learning disability through repeating: *“after explaining the task I also need to go to them individually to explain those tasks so that they can understand them”*. According to the ecological systems theory, the lecturers have demonstrated the context where bi-relationships and face-to face interactions influence one another back and forth at a micro systemic level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Watts, Cockcroft & Duncan, 2009; Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2002).

Scholars Ring & Travers (2005) and Engelbrecht et.al (2003) argue that teachers may find it difficult to give individual attention to students with learning disabilities at all times due to class size. A study by Engelbrecht et al. (2003) indicates that teachers cannot always rely on themselves to provide individual attention to the students. They also need support as teachers such as classroom assistants who will assist during the lesson and provide individualised attention to students with learning disabilities within class.

#### 4.2.2.1.2 Use of assistive technology as teaching aid.

Use of assistive technology means the lecturer's ability to make use or encourage use of any electronic devices by students for the purposes of teaching and learning. During the interviews a few of the participants indicated that they make use of technology in order to stimulate learning and to accommodate students with learning disabilities in the classroom. Participant S indicates:

*"I would play something from You Tube, a short video. The video is much more effective in terms of teaching".* This shows that the lecturer does not rely only on the use of the textbook to deliver a lesson, but also makes use of technology in order to accommodate students with learning disabilities. These findings are consistent with the findings of Shelvin et.al (2004), Marino et.al (2014) and Alnahdi (2014) who posit that provision of assistive technology by lecturers assists students with difficulties, especially those with learning disabilities. However, the current study also found views that are inconsistent with these findings. Participant M elaborates:

*One time we did Learnscapes, everybody would understand Learnscape because it's all about listening and watching. Even though he was listening and looking and they were doing it, he still didn't grasp because after they listened and looked at it and they were playing it and then I asked them to do a small exercise, he still couldn't do it.*

This finding indicates that this particular type of a technological programme did not assist a student with a learning disability. Even though assistive technology can assist students with learning disabilities, the lecturers may need to search for technology that might be compatible with the students' learning styles (Nel et al., 2011).

#### 4.2.2.1.3 Class peer support

Class peer support refers to the assistance that is offered to the students that have learning disabilities by fellow peers in the classroom in order to achieve classroom tasks that are prescribed by the lecturers. Most participants found the use of class peers useful in including students with learning disabilities in the learning process. This is what participant S expressed: “*I pair them up to a brighter student....because I won’t be able to give equal attention to all other students in the class*”. Participant M describes how class peers assisted a student with a learning disability in class:

*It came to a point where everyone understood that she has a writing problem, but they were not insulting about it. A good thing I think it’s because they are a group of grown-ups. They were very mature. They did not laugh. If she wrote in incorrectly instead they would actually write it correctly. On the board you will find that another student would write for her. She would initially give the answer even if it’s incorrect they will correct it for her.*

Participant M gives an account of how one girl is assisting a class peer with a learning disability: “*but if he sits next to that girl, that girl does not mind helping him. She just continuously helps him*”.

Students with learning disabilities may benefit from fellow class mates. Peer support assists students with learning disabilities and at the same time it may also benefit lecturers as they cannot always be able to give equal attention to all the students in the classroom due to class size. This finding confirms the findings in a research conducted by Savvidou (2011) who found that teachers who had a desire to help students with learning disabilities integrated them with

their peers and this created a positive attitude towards disability amongst students. Downing (2010) supports that the most natural source of support in learning is derived from peers in the classroom. Even though the learners in the classroom may lack the skills of teaching, some students may have the motivation and understanding of the lesson better than their peers. However, in my opinion the danger of this could be the peers who are not knowledgeable themselves on the subject matter. They may transmit wrong information to a learner with a learning disability without the knowledge of the lecturer. There may be a need for trained in-class peer supporters or assistant lecturers.

Looking at these findings through the lenses of the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) the findings suggest that the FET College lecturers supported and included students with learning disabilities at both the micro and meso systemic levels. These systemic levels worked together to the development of students with learning disabilities. At a micro systemic level, FET College lecturers demonstrated that they employed a variety of strategies that included students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom, even though these were not universally applied. At this micro systemic level, the students with learning disabilities were supported, a sense of belonging was created by those in their immediate environment (Landsberg et al., 2010).

#### **4.2.2.2 Negative experiences of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.**

Despite positive experiences that the participants had, they also shared some negative experiences of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.

##### **4.2.2.2.1 Not knowing how to help the student**

Not knowing how to help the students refers to the participant's feelings of a sense of helplessness when it comes to accommodating the needs of students with learning disabilities. Most participants indicated that they often do not know how to help students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Participant P gives her account:

*I did find out that there were students who were having problems, but the thing is I did not know how to help them out. How could I help her? Before I could see that the student had difficulties, but I did not have the means to help because I did not know how.*

The same concern was raised by participant M:

*His mother wants to take him out which means he wasted a year. ..now he wasted a year of his life...I have a student now who is going to be removed from the FET and where would he be taken? He can't go to a special school if his mother is honest about what she says and he can't stay here...which means the future of the child has stopped.*

These testimonies reveal that the FET college lecturers lack the necessary knowledge that is required in order to better support students with learning disabilities in the classroom. As indicated in the above quotation, the student who enrolled at an FET college in preparation for a

future job could not continue with his studies at an FET due to the lecturers' inability to help him out. The lecturers lacked the skills and knowledge that is required to accommodate students with learning disabilities. This finding is consistent to the studies by Nketsia & Saloviita (2013); Supple & Abgenyenga (2011) and Engelbrecht (2004) which indicate that not knowing how to help may itself be due to lack of knowledge and training on inclusive education. It is evident that the lack of training and knowledge about inclusive education translates into a barrier to learning. The students cannot learn because of the lecturer's barrier. This finding reflects what Ntombela (2006) and Engelbrecht (2003) point out that teachers are not adequately trained to sustain an active learning environment for learners with intellectual disabilities in a mainstream classroom. Teachers experience challenges to give students with learning disabilities the necessary attention and instruction that will enable the students to learn.

Interviews with lecturers indicate that FET college lecturers do not all possess similar qualifications and this impacts on their understandings of learning disabilities. When asked if their training prepared them to teach students with learning disabilities, most lecturers indicated that they have received some form of training to prepare them as lecturers, but the type of training received by lecturers differed significantly and did not include inclusive education.

Participant M testifies:

*No, I'll be lying if I said yes. The only teacher qualification that I have is my normal diploma which is Electrical Engineering and then I have NPDE which is the only teaching qualification that I have. NPDE, yes they are teaching you about different types of teaching methods and everything, but I don't think there was a section where... I feel they left a section about special*

*kids and how to attend special kids because people have a misunderstanding that colleges are for special kids.*

Participant S attests to the training that she received:

*It was just the facilitator/ moderator training. It was just basic teaching, but I think we need training for students with learning disability because I cannot teach in a class of 30 and 2 students have a learning disability. They need a special lesson which needs specialised training. Sometimes my lesson might work with the other student. It might be easy, but it might, would not work with the other students.*

None of the training received adequately prepared them for teaching students with learning disabilities. Most participants revealed that as FET college lecturers, they are not professionally trained as educators, let alone on inclusive education. Participant SV indicates: *“lecturers at FET Colleges in particular are not professionally trained educators as such. They are mostly from the industry who most of them have not done didactics, so in that regard I would say that’s where the challenge would be”*.

In South Africa, FET colleges are tasked with the responsibility of improving the skills shortage in the country. They are expected to skill the youth of the country by providing qualifications in various skills. The best people for this is people who have industry experience that the FET college lecturers possess. If youth with learning disabilities at an FET college cannot be accommodated in terms of their learning disability it impacts on the careers and their possibility of not finding future employment. This is supported by Lerner and Johns (2012) who postulate that learning difficulties are not limited to childhood, but they are likely to continue into adult years. In adult years, learning difficulties are most likely to hinder career development. This calls for the need to train FET college lecturers in order that they build a skilled and a capable workforce with or without disabilities.



#### 4.2.2 .2.2 Lack of resources

Lack of resources refers to the unavailability of necessary resources that the lecturers felt were needed when teaching students with learning disabilities. The majority of the lecturers that were interviewed indicated that lack of resources impede the provisioning of full support to students with learning disabilities. The response from participant X elaborates:

*When you write on the chalkboard there are those students sometimes who do not understand in terms of spelling, reading the information on the board, so that's why I say sometimes I might say yes we do have limited resources. We also need some pictures, we can record our lesson then give it to the students so that they can also listen and not read from the chalkboard.*

This statement reveals that the resources that are currently available at the FET college are not sufficient in providing support to students with learning disabilities. This finding is consistent with the findings in the research conducted by Engelbrecht et.al (2003) who found that teachers experienced stress in locating suitable educational resources for their classrooms. According to lecturers, students with learning disabilities require specific resources that will enable them to learn despite their disability. This finding is further confirmed by Minister Blade Nzimande (2014) in his speech that FET colleges lack capacity to cater for the needs of students with disabilities. Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler and Shevitz (2002) argue that there should be student- centered classrooms that are purposefully planned for interdisciplinary instructions. These classes should be well resourced and have multiple tools that may assist the learning disabled such as tape recorders, electronic spellers and calculators, graphic organizers, software

products, large print books and a variety of reference materials that might be of benefit to students with learning disabilities. Marino et al. (2014) further commends the use of video games as a way of enhancing learning.

#### **4.2.2.2.3 Lack of special support programmes**

Most participants raised concerns about the FET's lack of special support programmes for students with learning disabilities. Participant P indicates that students with learning disabilities need their own specialised programmes at an FET College, the same way that these students are catered for in basic education:

*Just to have their own special class because they do have their own school which is a special school, even at an FET, they are supposed to create FET special classes for these particular people who have disabilities because if they are together as a group, nobody is going to laugh at them.*

The above testimony reveals that the FET College lacks the necessary specialised support programmes that enable students with learning difficulties to be able to learn in a mainstream classroom. This statement also reveals that lecturers have an opinion that students with learning disabilities should not be mixed with students without learning disabilities because they are not trained and lack knowledge and expertise to cater for their needs. Ring and Trevers (2005) argue that educational institutions ought to have a specific model of integration of students with learning disabilities into a mainstream learning environment as they have specific educational needs. Learners with learning disabilities require special accommodation that caters for their

difference in academic studies, difference in learning strategies and how they cope with examinations. As Broderick et al. (2005) argues, teachers need to plan lessons that are responsive and that cater for the needs of all the students bearing in mind their strengths and abilities. This suggests that lecturers should assess their students so that they can be aware of the strengths and assets (Landsberg et al., 2010).

#### **4.2.2.2.4 Lack of proper diagnostic tools**

Lack of proper diagnostic tools refers to the unavailability of suitable assessment tools that are utilized in order to detect learning disabilities. Most participants indicated that the college currently does not have learning disability assessment tools and that there is a need for an adequate diagnostic tool that can be used to assess learning disabilities in all students who enter the college. Lecturers indicated a challenge in the early identification of students with learning disabilities when they first come to register at the college as students do not always disclose this information. The FET college uses a selection and placement entrance test for students who want to be enrolled for the NCV level 2 programmes. According to the participants, the selection and placement test used at the college is insufficient to detect students with learning disabilities. Participant S explains:

*I know we currently have a selection and placement test, but it cannot only be a multiple choice because even students who do not know the answers can just guess. They need to be able to read and work it out. I think learning disabilities should be assessed even if they write an entrance exam.*

Participant S indicates that there is a need for a proper diagnostic tool because: *“the students themselves do not know if they have a learning disability”*. These findings suggest that learning difficulties cannot be easily detected as some students do not declare when they register with the college that they have such a difficulty. Moreover, there may be some students who are not aware that they are having such a difficulty. This finding is similar to that of Savvidou (2011) who indicates that it is particularly difficult to determine students with learning disabilities, more especially because the responsibility to inform the higher education institution about the disability relies on the students. The FET college selection and placement test is found by most lecturers not designed to identify students with learning disabilities. Smith and Strick (2010) argue that testing for learning disabilities is necessary. They argue that it is necessary that learning disabilities are identified early. The most common measures of learning disabilities should include both verbal and non-verbal assessments.

#### **4.2.2.2.5 Teaching time challenges**

Time challenges refer to constraints with time when teaching students with learning disabilities. Most participants raised concerns about time constraints when trying to address the needs of students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities require more extra time with the lecturers to explain concepts and to carry out class tasks and assessments when compared to other students in the classroom. The statement from participant E highlights this: *“there is no time to go over to make sure that they totally understand....time is the issue. If you are creative you need time because you realize that the student is struggling”*. Participant M explains how time is a challenge:

*He just needs extra time. I mean if you have a one hour lesson you need to give him a two hour lesson. It's kind of difficult with the timetable that we are given because technically with them I think they do not have a free lesson.*

These findings reveal that students with learning disabilities require extra time with the lecturers to help them understand the lessons. However, time challenges at an FET college are evident in the way the time table is structured. Students are compelled to attend all seven subjects per day and there is usually no free period. Lecturers therefore found it difficult to provide more time to students with learning disabilities exclusively. This finding differs from the findings by Nketsia and Saloviita (2013) who found that teachers provided additional time to meet the needs of students that required extra time. This finding suggest that there may be a need to review how time could be used efficiently to benefit both the student with learning disabilities as well at the lecturers.

#### **4.2.3 Strategies employed by lecturers to address the needs of students with learning disabilities**

Interviews with lecturers gave data that suggest that they employed a variety of strategies to ameliorate the situation of having students with learning disabilities in their classrooms, despite their lack of adequate training. This was further confirmed during a class lesson observation that took place when participant X was lecturing. Below are strategies that were used by lecturers to try and include students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.

#### 4.2.3.1 Flexible Practices

Flexible practices means that lecturers were able to change their teaching methods and techniques in order to accommodate students with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Lecturers implemented flexible practices in numerous ways: Participant S had to be flexible at times and allow for oral exercises instead of written exercises:

*I always try to allow them to participate, even if it's more oral in the class. It might not always be a written text in written exercises, but I may ask the students for an oral. I think that helps in including them otherwise they feel excluded.*

She also had to match her teaching methods to the learning styles of the students:

*I try to make the classroom a bit more visually appealing. It helps....just to try and obviously accommodate all the students, not the dyslexic student staying behind and it's not always him having trouble to read. He can address the class. So by having more visual charts it helps.*

The above statements reveal that the participants are aware of the needs of students with learning difficulties. Written work seemed to present challenges for some students with learning disabilities. Lecturers had to adjust and be flexible to other classroom teaching methods in order to accommodate these learners. The use of visual charts was found to stimulate class discussions where students with dyslexia were able to contribute their opinions on the subject matter. This finding is similar to the study by Nel et al. (2011) who also found that learners have unique preferences of learning styles that help them to learn best, thus teachers must adapt their teaching strategies to fit the learning styles of students.

Participant X indicated that he makes use of role plays in trying to accommodate students with learning disabilities in the classroom:

*I've got my own tactics on how to help them deal with those difficulties, for an example the simplest one, let's say they are not understanding what I tell them, I usually call some of my brighter students to come and do a role play and demonstrate to them how things should be done.....or sometimes I even do it myself.*

Through analysis of observation notes, I confirmed that the participants also make use of role plays in order to demonstrate certain tasks. The role plays were thereafter followed by class discussion. Again this was found to stimulate teaching and learning and students with learning disability were able to contribute during the class discussions. These findings are similar to the findings by Supple & Abgenyenga (2011) who found that students benefited from the flexible practices of teachers. The use of more verbal and clear instructions, role plays and providing extra time when required was found to be benefiting to student with learning disabilities (Supple & Abgenyenga, 2011). The findings reveal that lecturers are recommended to adjust their methods of teaching in order to accommodate the learning strategies of students with learning disabilities.

However, the findings indicate that there is no uniform way used by all lecturers to include students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms. Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to the macro systemic level as the predominant institutional patterns of the culture or the subculture such as the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems. At this level of the ecological systems theory, the findings indicate that there is no established disability framework

that guides both staff and students on disability matters. There are no set procedures that are followed to identify, assess and support student with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. The findings indicate that lecturers who discover that students have learning disabilities whilst in the mainstream classroom, employ a variety of unprescribed strategies that they think might help and support students with learning disabilities while teaching in the mainstream classroom. However, it has been found to be a common trend by lecturers to arrange for such students scribes during examinations. Other types of support, other than this has not yet been established.

#### **4.2.3.2 Adapting teaching methods to learning styles**

This refers to the lecturer's ability to identify and understand the learning styles of students with learning disabilities so that they adapt their teaching methods to suite the students' learning styles. Most participants indicated that they often have to adapt their teaching methods and styles in order to accommodate students with learning disabilities. An example of this is demonstrated by participant S:

*I try to make the classroom a bit more visually appealing. It helps....just to try and obviously accommodate all the students, not the dyslexic students staying behind and it's not always him having trouble to read. He can address the class. So by having more visual charts it helps.*

Participant X makes use of role plays:

*I usually call some of my brighter students to come and do a role play and demonstrate to them how things should be done.....some of them will understand theory more than the other one and some of them will need practical examples so that they can understand.*



These findings reveal that participants learnt to identify learning styles that are preferred by the students with a learning disability. They identified that some students with dyslexia preferred visual styles of learning while some students learnt by doing practical examples in order to understand theory. Nel, Kempen and Ruscheinski (2011) argue that learners have a unique preference on learning styles and their preferred learning styles help them to learn best and to achieve learning outcomes.

The findings of this study are also consistent with the findings by Heiman and Precel (2003) who found that lecturers in higher education encouraged students with learning difficulties to employ learning strategies that accommodated their difficulties with learning such as singing, chanting, using diagrams and sketches in order to memorize their work, thus accommodating their learning strategies. Based on this, FET College lecturers may benefit from employing a variety of teaching instructional strategies when teaching students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.

#### **4.2.3.3 Cooperation amongst lecturers, support staff and parents**

This refers to the lecturers' ability to identify and make use of other people within the FET college community in order to support a student with a learning disability. Most lecturers indicated that they do approach some other lecturers and college support staff on matters that concern them about students with learning disabilities. According to Nel, Engelbrecht, Nel and Tlale (2013) and Savvidou (2011) collaboration is necessary in order to make inclusive education effective. Lecturers cannot work in isolation. There is a need for the lecturers to work

in collaboration with other important stakeholders. The statements below indicate how participants engaged with other stakeholders in order to support students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Participant M gives an example:

*Initially I thought it's because of my subject and mathematics is not an easy subject to grasp. It is not only me who has picked it up that there is something wrong, the computer teacher has picked it up that there is something wrong because with the computers it's not about the amounts.*

Participant S gives another example: *“We have approached the SLO and management to do something about it and the most that they can do is to get a scribe”*. Participant M adds:

*To an extent that I spoke to my senior lecturer and the senior lecturer told me that I have to speak to his mother and his mother is trying to take him to a different school or do something about it, but she must try. Apparently school X refused to take him. I don't know if a special school can refuse to take a student, but yeah that what the mother said.*

These statements reveal that lecturers could not rely on themselves only for interventions that will assist students with learning disabilities. Participants were able to discuss matters of concern with other lecturers. They were able to refer matters of concern to college senior lecturers that assisted and guided them. They have also engaged the senior management to intervene in order to assist the students with learning disabilities. Parents are also not left out because both lecturers and parents have had meaningful engagements with one another in order to explore alternative solutions of helping students with learning disabilities.

Most participants also indicated that they refer students with learning disabilities to the Student Liaison Officers (SLO) from the Student Support Services Department of the college so that they

can arrange a scribe (a person appointed by the examination office to write for students who have difficulties with writing during college examinations). The use of other support staff at the college was expressed in the following testimonies: Participant M: *“she was allocated a scribe and that made her life easier when it comes to exams.* Participant S:

*It’s only in recent years that lecturers have actually identified students with learning disabilities and have approached the SLO and management to do something about it and the most that they can do is to get a scribe. They have not offered anything else.*

These statements reveal that despite the college’s insufficient provisioning of resources to support students with learning disabilities, at least the college’s current human resources are useful to offer support to students with learning disabilities. Currently, lecturers, senior lecturers, students support staff and scribes are the main resources that these students have access to. At a meso -systemic level, linkages and connections between the microsystems were evident in supporting the students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Lecturers under study demonstrated that they had relationships between themselves, other lecturers, support staff of the college and parents in support of students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Bronfenbrenner (1979) indicate that the meso- systemic level is the level where micro systems interact for a better good. Though not consistent, a few lecturers also involved parents on discussions about the students’ challenges in the FET mainstream classrooms.

Shevlin, Kenny and Mcneela (2004) argue that participation of students with disabilities in higher education is enhanced and dignified by the provision of assistance by staff. These findings are similar to the findings of Finn (1999) who found that disability support programmes at college were beneficial to the students with learning difficulty. However, as indicated earlier on,

much is left to be desired at FET colleges as there is still a lack of adequate interventions to cater for the needs of students with disabilities.

#### **4.2.4 College-based intervention strategies to assist lecturers to address the needs of students.**

The findings indicate that there are not many college –based intervention strategies that are designed to assist lecturers in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. However, the findings indicate that the college has done something in this regards, although the college can still improve a great deal.

##### **4.2.4.1 Staff development**

Staff development refers to attempts by the college management to build the capacity of lecturers by training them on learning disability issues. Most participants indicated that there is still very little that the college has done in order to equip lecturers with skills to address the needs of students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Below are statements expressed by lecturers. Participant M:

*There is training that we went to that the college took us to. They give you games and then you ask the student to build a square, to build a triangle. Apparently the lady who was explaining she said even the child who has a special need, it helps them use their brain more often. If they use it often they are able to learn easily.*

However, this kind of training was found insufficient as lecturers feel there is a need for more training. This is expressed by one of the participants:

*So even if it's a week training of telling me how to deal specifically with special children. You will find that there is a special need student in my class that I don't know about because I don't know how to see that the student has a special need. Maybe someone who has that knowledge might help me in terms of these things. ...so it will be the training of the lecturers , training of students, training of management”.*

Participant M recalls that the college did offer some kind of training at some point even though it was not consistent. This training was a once-off thing .Only one lecturer indicated that the FET college once offered training that might assist lecturers when teaching students with learning disability. This reveals that lecturers lack adequate capacity and training around the area of inclusive education and the college has done little about it. At times they are unable to identify students with special needs and they also lack adequate capacity to assist students with learning disability. These findings are consistent with findings by Nketsia and Saloviita (2013); Supple and Abgenyenga (2011) and Engelbrecht (2004) who also found that lack of knowledge and training on learning disabilities becomes a barrier to learning for the teachers.

These findings suggest concerns by lecturers at an exo systemic level which is a level that is beyond the student's immediate environment, but has influence and impact on their wellbeing and development (Donald et al., 2002). At this level, lecturers demonstrated that they had limited control in terms of supporting students that are included in the mainstream classroom at an FET college due to issues that are beyond their control. The findings indicate that these impacted

negatively on the lecturers as at times they did not know how to help the students and lacked the necessary resources needed when teaching and supporting students with learning disabilities.

According to the participants, students and management all need training on learning disabilities. This is supported by Ntombela (2006) and Engelbrecht et al. (2003) who indicate that teachers are not adequately trained to sustain an active learning environment for learners with intellectual disabilities in a mainstream classroom. Inclusive education requires interventions such as continued teacher professional development in the area of inclusion in the classroom. This involves an ability of lecturers to be able to identify and address barriers to learning in a mainstream classroom (Schoeman, 2012). In my opinion, FET College lecturers can benefit from in-service and pre-service training in preparation for teaching students with learning disabilities at an FET college mainstream classroom.

### **4.3. Conclusion**

This chapter analysed and discussed the findings that were derived from the in-depth interviews and classroom observation notes. Data was analysed thematically. Four main themes emerged from the data. The first theme focused on the lecturers' understandings of learning disabilities. This theme revealed that it is not easy to understand learning disabilities. They are a difficult condition to explain as there is no single way of understanding them. The second theme focused on lecturers' experiences of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. This revealed that lecturers had both positive and negative experiences of inclusion. The third theme focused on how lecturers address the needs of students with learning disabilities

in the classroom. This theme revealed that even though having not received any formal training on inclusive education and on addressing learning disabilities in particular, lecturers nevertheless tried their outmost best to accommodate the needs of students with learning disabilities. Finally, the forth theme focused on college-based intervention strategies to equip lecturers to address the needs of students with learning difficulties. Data revealed that the college is minimally equipping lecturers to address the needs of students with learning disabilities. The lecturers are currently implementing various individualised strategies to include these students.

Strategies employed by the lecturers seem to be unstructured as there is no one uniform procedure that is followed by all the lecturers when accommodating students with learning disabilities. Moreover, the findings indicate that the participants are incapable of creating a fully supportive environment to support students with learning disabilities due to various impediments as related in their negative experiences. Lecturers are not fully conversant with EWP6 (Department of Education, 2001) and as a result have a limited understanding of learning barriers and support of students with learning difficulties. They lack the necessary training; hence there is a need for in-service training for college staff in order that they are better equipped to address the needs of students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

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

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of FET College lecturers of including students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. This chapter is going to outline the summary of the findings, recommendations and conclusion of the study. The conclusion is based on the critical questions that were raised in chapter 1. A conclusion and recommendations for further research will be outlined.

#### **5.2 Summary of findings**

In line with EWP6 (Department of Education, 2001) which commends higher education institutions such as FET colleges and universities into having flexible curriculum and assessment policies that accommodate all learners regardless of the kind of learning need , the FET college under study is playing its part even though inclusive activities at the college are not formally coordinated. The findings indicate that there is no policy with specific procedures to be followed when teaching and supporting students with learning disabilities at the FET college. There is currently no disability framework that guides lecturers on how they are expected to accommodate students with learning disabilities. Moreover, there is no standardized procedure



on resource provisioning to support both students and lecturers who teach students with learning disability. Much is still left to be desired. The summary of the findings will be focused on:

- College lecturers' experiences of addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities.
- Strategies employed by lecturers to address the needs of students with learning disabilities.
- College-based intervention strategies to assist lecturers to address the needs of students.

### **5.2.1 College lecturers' experiences of addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities**

Based on the lecturers' experiences, the results of the study indicate that there is no prescribed procedure that the lecturers follow when they address the needs of students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms. Despite formal training in the area of inclusive education and in particular on dealing with students with learning disabilities some great consistency was found on both their positive and negative experiences of including students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom. FET college lecturers used a variety of ways in trying to accommodate the needs of students with learning disabilities as there is no one standardised or prescribed procedure set by the FET college.

Lecturers have both positive experiences and negative experience in trying to address the needs of students with learning disabilities at an FET College. Positive experiences are those that

lecturers believe enabled the students to participate meaningfully during the class lesson and have helped the students to learn and to have a sense of belonging in the mainstream classroom. These included giving individual attention, using assistive technology and involving peers in the classroom to assist students with learning disabilities. However, lecturers also had negative experiences as they also encountered challenges when including students with learning disabilities. These negative experiences included not knowing how to help the students at times, lack of resources, support programmes, diagnostic tools and inadequate time to properly address the needs of students with learning disabilities.

### **5.2.2 Strategies employed by lecturers to address the needs of students with learning disabilities**

The findings demonstrate that lecturers use a variety of strategies to address the needs of students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom. Strategies used included use of flexible practices, adapting teaching methods to suite the learning styles of students and cooperation amongst lecturers, support staff, management and parents. This means that despite inadequate training on inclusive education, and on learning disabilities, lecturers were able to find ways that can be used to cater for the needs of the students whilst in the mainstream classroom.

### **5.2.3 College-based intervention strategies to assist lecturers in addressing the needs of students**

The findings indicate that lecturers are not professionally trained to address the needs of students with learning disabilities. College based initiatives to equip lecturers on addressing the needs of students were found to be minimal. Lecturers do not have adequate knowledge of how to help, support or do referrals for students who are experiencing learning disabilities in class. Attempts by the college to train staff on the area of learning disabilities were found to be very minimal. Lecturers demonstrated a need for specific training in the area of learning disabilities so that they will be able to better address the needs of students with learning disabilities.

### **5.3 Limitations of the study**

Cohen et.al (2011) indicate that the case study design has its limitations, one being unable to generalize the findings of the study to a larger population because of its use of smaller samples. This study used only seven participants. This study is also not immune to this limitation and as a result it cannot be generalized to a larger population because of its limited sample size. However, the reliability and validity of the study was guarded through the use of a triangulation method which involved an observation of a class lesson as indicated above.

Another limitation of the study is that I conducted the study at a college where I am currently employed. That might have influenced the manner in which the participants responded because they knew me and have referred some of their students for support in the department where I work. Lastly, another limitation was that I finally conducted 7 interviews instead of 8 interviews

that were initially planned. One of the lecturers that initially committed to take part in the interviews had many other responsibilities at the college and had to cancel the planned interviews. I could not get any other lecturer who met the requirements of the study.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for addressing learning disability at the FET College**

- A majority of college lecturers indicated a lack of knowledge on how to teach and support students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Formal training of lecturers through workshops and in-service training of both lecturing and support staff is recommended.
- Newly appointed staff need an induction programme that will focus on teaching and supporting students with or without disabilities in line with EWP (Department of Education, 2001).
- There is a need for an improved college entrance assessment test that will be able to assess and identify students with learning disabilities early. The scope of the current selection and placement test should be broadened to enable early detection of learning disabilities.
- The FET College needs to invest in facilities, resources and programmes that will enable lecturers to better accommodate students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.
- The college needs to invest in specialised on-course support programmes for students with learning disabilities.
- There is a need for the provision of specialised psychological support for students with learning disabilities.

## **5.5 Recommendations for further research**

- The study focused on the experiences of FET college lecturers on the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Further research on the overall TVET sector's preparedness in including students with learning disabilities is needed.
- A further study on the capacity of Student Support staff on addressing the needs of students with disabilities at an FET college is needed.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The study indicates that the FET college lecturers have never received any formal training in inclusive education and in particular in teaching students with learning disabilities. The college does not have adequate resources and programmes that cater for the needs of students with learning disabilities in particular. All lecturers that were interviewed have professional qualifications, however they indicated that they have no educational qualifications that specifically equip them to teach students with learning disabilities. They all felt a need for training in the area of teaching and supporting students with learning disabilities. Formal training in the form of workshops can assist in building the capacity of the lecturers in this area. The college management can also assist at great length in the provisioning of necessary resources, facilities and a skilled workforce in the area of disability support. Strengthening FET colleges such as the one under study, will enable the achievement of the Department of Higher Education's goal of developing a skilled and a capable work force. This goal can be achieved for both students with and without disabilities.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1



# Elangeni College

For Further Education and Training



An ISO 9001 and OHSAS 18001 certified organisation.

25 August 2014

Ms Sibongile Mafu

Dear Madam

**RE: REQUEST FOR USING COLLEGE AS SITE OF RESEARCH**

Your email dated 25 August 2014 refers:

Elangeni College has no objection to you using our campuses as sites of research for an investigation into the experiences of FET college lecturers in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities.

However, the following conditions for external research apply:  
The college will have the right to approve content with regard to research instruments and research analysis.

- The relevant documents must be forwarded to the Rector and approval of usage will be given by the Rector in writing
- The name of the college or any of its sites cannot be used in any documents.
- The name/s of staff employed by the college cannot be used.
- The use of any findings that reflect negatively on the College, its partners or any related body must be approved in writing by the Rector.

Please note that failure to comply with all of the above conditions will result in the necessary legal action being taken against you.

Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated

Yours sincerely



\_\_\_\_\_  
M.M. Peters  
ACTING RECTOR

I have read the contents of this letter and I accept the conditions

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

FFET – Letterhead template – MAC – 2009 – r002 20140825 Page 7 of 7

General Enquiries	Administrative	Financial Services	Information Services	Marketing	Operations	Support Services
031 261 1111	031 261 1111	031 261 1111	031 261 1111	031 261 1111	031 261 1111	031 261 1111

## Appendix 2



2 September 2014

Ms Sibongile Happiness Mafu 982172844  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Mafu

Protocol reference number: HSS/D486/014M

Project title: The experiences of FET college lecturers in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities

**Full Approval – Expedited**

This letter serves to notify you that your application in connection with the above has now been granted Full Approval

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project; Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

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

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol

Yours faithfully

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

/pm

cc Supervisor: Henry Muriwathoho  
cc Academic Leader: Professor P Morojele  
cc School Admin: Mr Thoba Mthembu

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3567/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: [simbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:simbap@ukzn.ac.za) / [snvmanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snvmanm@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunb@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunb@ukzn.ac.za)  
Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



## Appendix 3



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Nomangisi Ngubane

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref.:24/8/324

Ms S Mafu  
36 Seaforth Road  
Highland Hills  
PINETOWN  
3600

Dear Ms Mafu

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

Your application to conduct research entitled: "INVESTIGATING FET COLLEGE LECTURERS' EXPERIENCE OF THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN A MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 December 2014 to 31 December 2015.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehogile at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (Elangeni College for FET).

**Nkosingathi S.P. Sishi, PhD**  
**Head of Department: Education**  
**Date: 24 November 2014**

#### KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa ...dedicated to service and performance.  
PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004 beyond the call of duty  
EMAIL ADDRESS: [kehogile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:kehogile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za) / [Nomangisi.Ngubane@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:Nomangisi.Ngubane@kzndoe.gov.za)  
CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363; Fax: 033 392 1203 WEBSITE: [WWW.kzndoe.gov.za](http://WWW.kzndoe.gov.za)



## Appendix 4: Language clearance certificate

25 Maple Crescent      Phone 031 - 7075912  
Circle Park            0823757722  
KLOOF                   Fax 031 - 7110458  
3610                     E-mail:  
                              [svtsankar@telkomsa.net](mailto:svtsankar@telkomsa.net)  
                              [sathsagovender@gmail.com](mailto:sathsagovender@gmail.com)

**Dr Saths Govender**

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30 JANUARY 2015

### LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

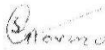
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to inform that I have read the final version of the dissertation titled:

'Investigating FET college lecturers' experiences of the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom' by S. Mafu.

To the best of my knowledge, all the proposed amendments have been effected and the work is free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am of the view that the quality of language used meets generally accepted academic standards.

Yours faithfully



**DR S. GOVENDER**  
B Paed. (Arts), B.A. (Hons), B Ed.  
Cambridge Certificate for English Medium Teachers  
MPA, D Admin.

## **Appendix 5: Interview Schedule**

### Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of the term learning disabilities?
2. Have you ever taught students with learning disabilities?
3. What kind of learning disabilities do the students in your classroom present with?
4. How do you address the needs of students with learning disabilities in your classroom?
5. Do you think you accommodate or cater for students with learning disabilities in your class? How so?
6. Do you think your college caters to the needs of students with learning disabilities? How so?
7. If students have difficulty understanding (grasping) content, do you try different techniques? Which techniques?
8. What kind of teaching styles do you use when teaching students with learning disabilities? Why so?
9. Do you think that your training prepared you to teach students with learning disabilities? How? Why do you say so?
  
10. In your opinion, what are the needs of students with learning disabilities at an FET college?
11. In your opinion, how should the needs of students with learning disabilities be addressed at an FET college?
12. What are the challenges that impact on accommodating the needs of students with learning disabilities at an FET college?
13. How do you think the college can improve in order to effectively accommodate students with learning disabilities?

**Appendix 6: Class Lesson Observation checklist**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Aspects Observed</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	Lecturer accommodates student with LD in lesson plan?			
2	Teaching methods used accommodate student with LD?			
3	Lecturer uses more than 3 examples to demonstrate a point?			
4	Lecturer uses a variety of teaching aids?			
5	Lecturer checks and gives individual attention to student with LD?			
6.	Lecturer repeats and summarizes lesson at the end?			
7.	Students participate by asking questions?			
8.	Lecturer gives students time to take notes?			
9.	Lecturer demonstrates good understanding of content?			
10.	Language usage: clear and unambiguous?			
11.	Instructions: Clear and unambiguous?			

## Appendix 7: Information and consent form

Education Studies, College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Edgewood Campus,

Dear Participant

### INFORMATION SHEET & INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is (Ms) Sibongile Mafu. I am a Master of Education candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa.

I am interested in investigating the experiences of FET College lecturers on teaching learners with learning disabilities. The study will be conducted at an FET college in KZN province. Your college is one of the institutions I chose for this study. To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions.

The study will involve a forty five (45) minutes interview followed up with a classroom observation where you interact with learners with different learning disabilities.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for about forty five (45) minutes and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- You will be given copies of transcripts of the interview for you to read so that you get a chance to validate or to change information captured.
- Data will be stored in a secured storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- The research aims at knowing about the experiences of your community in teaching students with learning disabilities.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: [Sibongile.mafu@elangeni.edu.za](mailto:Sibongile.mafu@elangeni.edu.za)

Cell: 0832947760

My supervisor is Mr. Henry Muribwathoho who is located at the School of Education studies, Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: [Muribwathohoh@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Muribwathohoh@ukzn.ac.za) Phone number: 031 2607011.

You may also contact the Research Office through:

Ms Phumelele Ximba

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 3587 E-mail: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

#### DECLARATION

**I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.**

**I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.**

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

**DATE**

.....

.....

## Appendix 8 : Turnitin Originality Report

### Turnitin Originality Report

FET college lecturers' experiences of learning disabilities by Sibongile Mafu

From Research projects (Educational Psychology)

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