

LEARNER SUPPORT EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS WITH LEARNING
DIFFICULTIES AT A RESOURCE SCHOOL IN WINDHOEK

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the learner support experiences of learners with learning difficulties at a Resource school in Windhoek, Namibia. The study was informed by Vygotsky's Social cultural-historical theory of development, specifically the Zone of proximal development. The researcher employed a phenomenological research design to explore the participants' experiences of learning support from their point of view. The sample was conveniently drawn, and participants' views were explored through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Participants' responses were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that learners receive different types of learning support delivered through individualised learning instructions and cooperative learning. Furthermore, findings showed that teachers provide a conducive environment for learning, and they employ various learning strategies to accommodate all learners with their various learning styles, such as visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. Although learners receive learning support to ease the learning difficulties they experience, the findings of the study reveal that learners are finding it difficult to develop long-term mechanisms that will help them cope with learning independently. The study recommends that teachers teaching at resource schools should collaborate with professionals and paraprofessionals to share expertise and resources that can be utilised in the classroom to maximise learning for learners with learning difficulties. The study further recommends that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture should provide resource schools with the necessary learning devices and financial resources to provide and promote effective teaching and learning environments for learners with learning difficulties.

Keywords: learner support, learning difficulties, resource school, zone of proximal development

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This thesis is dedicated to my mom, Mee Helena Natangwe “Gwaahелеle”
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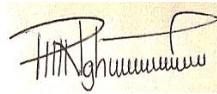
DECLARATIONS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study, including its background and the research questions it seeks to answer. Additionally, it discusses the study's rationale, limitations, delimitations, and key term definitions.

1.2 Background of the study

Education is a fundamental human right, and everyone has the right to a high-quality education (Shiimi, 2018). Ahammed (2021) concurs that education is a fundamental right of all children, especially young children. As a result, programs aimed at supporting learners with learning difficulties, including inclusive education, are being implemented worldwide to address the various educational needs of learners with various learning difficulties.

Globally, learners' support programmes for children with learning difficulties were introduced with the realisation that every child has unique emotional, social, physical and intellectual characteristics. This movement embraces the idea of what is termed inclusive education. Inclusive education aims to improve all learners' education quality (Yoro et al., 2020). The aim of inclusive education is to remove obstacles to learning. It is about every learner's right to a meaningful education in mainstream schools. The Ministry of Education (2014) highlights that inclusive education is built on the understanding that all learners have the right to be educated in their neighbourhood or local community, among their friends, family, and peers.

In a typical inclusive education classroom, diverse children experience problems with learning for various reasons. These learning needs emanate from a range of factors, such as "intrinsic factors such as impairments and differing abilities, and extrinsic factors such as life experiences, poverty, negative attitudes, inflexible curriculum, language of instruction/learning, inaccessible or unsafe environments, issues relating to policies and legislation, and education managers' and teachers' lack of skills or inappropriate skills" (MoEAC, 2018, p. 11). Some children have problems keeping up with their peers due to their inability or difficulty to grasp concepts and understand what they are taught. These children are what Ferrell (2012) refers to as children with learning difficulties. Learners with learning difficulties can learn slower than other learners of the same age (ibid).

Pertinent to this study, the researcher must differentiate between learning disabilities, learning disorders and learning difficulties. The usage of these terms differs in different parts of the world. The Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation (DSF) Literacy & Clinical Services (2018) noted that the unexpected and persistent learning difficulties that some students experience in particular academic domains are referred to as "learning disabilities" or "learning disorders" in the United States, while "learning difficulties" is preferred in the United Kingdom.

DSF Literacy Services (2018) explicitly differentiated between learning difficulties and learning disabilities. The DSF Literacy Services (2018) stated that, due to underlying neurodevelopmental abnormalities, which are influenced by a combination of hereditary, epigenetic, and environmental variables, children with learning disabilities struggle in particular academic domains. On the other hand, learners with

learning difficulties “underachieve academically for a wide range of reasons, including factors such as sensory impairment (weaknesses in vision or hearing); severe behavioural, psychological or emotional issues; English as a second language or dialect; high absenteeism; ineffective instruction; or, inadequate curricula.” (DSF, 2018, para. 4). The crucial distinction that should be concluded from these two terms is the fact that learning disabilities are inherent to the student and it is lifelong; the difficulty continues to exist despite appropriate instruction and intervention (DSF Literacy Services, 2018). On the other hand, learners with learning difficulties can achieve age-appropriate levels as long as these students are provided with programs that embody appropriate support and evidence-based instruction (DSF Literacy Services, 2018).

In the context of this study, the term learning difficulties will be used to refer to “children who underachieve academically due to a wide range of factors such as sensory impairment (weaknesses in vision or hearing); severe behavioural, psychological or emotional issues; English as a second language or dialect; high absenteeism; ineffective instruction; or, inadequate curricula” as defined by the DFS Literacy & Clinical Services (2018, para. 4). The population of learners at a resource school from which the sample of this study was drawn fits the definition of learning difficulties as adopted by the study because these learners struggle to make adequate academic progress (underachieve academically) for a range of factors in the mainstream schools; hence, they were referred to this resource school.

The phrases learning difficulties, learning disability and learning disorders are utilised a lot in literature pertaining to Inclusive Education, and some authors and researchers

have used these terms interchangeably. Hence, it is of the utmost importance that this study emphasises the definition of learning difficulties it adopted and of which the study population fits. According to Kaur and Padmanabhan (2017), the terms learning disorder and learning disability are used interchangeably to explain neurodevelopmental disorders that inhibit a child's learning abilities. Kohli, Sharma, and Padhy (2018) posit that although these phrases, learning disorder, learning disability and learning difficulties are used interchangeably in some literature, they differ in many ways. They described learning disorder as a medical term that refers to notable problems children face in academic areas, yet it is inadequate to validate an official diagnosis (Kohli et al., 2018).

Learning disability is a legal term that is mentioned in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (which Namibia has ratified); it refers to an official clinical diagnosis where the learner meets specific criteria as assessed by a professional such as a psychologist (Kohli et al., 2018). Kohli et al. (2018, p.399) referred to learning difficulties as a phrase that is used to describe “children who underachieve academically due to various factors such as behavioural, psychological, and emotional issues; English being their second language and not their mother tongue; ineffective instruction; high absenteeism; or inadequate curricula.”

In Namibia, the sector policy on inclusive education (MoEAC, 2013) refers to children with special educational needs (but not limited to) as those with learning difficulties. Furthermore, the MoEAC acknowledges that every child needs educational support and that this support should be fundamental to every school and every teacher's effort. Therefore, the mission of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture is to develop an

enabling, supporting environment in every school for all learners and teachers (UNICEF, 2014). However, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture of Namibia (MoEAC, 2018), in its pursuit to implement Inclusive Education, fully acknowledges that there will be learners who might not benefit from mainstream education, and the population for this study is one of these groups of learners. Learners who cannot benefit from mainstream schools should be referred to a school setting that caters for their individual needs, such as a resource school (MoEAC, 2013). According to the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education (MoEAC, 2013), resource schools are "to cater to learners with severe special educational needs and learners needing intensive educational support" (p.9).

The Sector Policy on Inclusive Education (MoEAC, 2013) did not provide the scope of what learning difficulties entail, nor did it provide the scope of what "severe special educational needs" comprise. However, learners with learning difficulties are accommodated in Resource schools because their learning needs cannot be met in the mainstream school. Learners with learning difficulties accommodated in resource schools in Namibia have an academic performance below the average expected of their age group. At the resource schools, they are taught a specialised, more vocational curriculum while receiving learning support.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Studies on inclusive and special education (Henry, 2013; Sesay, 2018) focused on the perceptions and experiences of teachers and parents of children with special educational needs, including learners with learning difficulties. Although the number of children with special educational needs in Namibia is significantly high, ranging

between 10% and 15% of the national population (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018), the subject of learning support for children with learning difficulties is barely studied, particularly in the context of Namibia. According to Peltopuro, Ahonen, Kaartinen, Seppälä, and Närhi (2014), learning difficulties are an everyday problem in the education spectrum. However, it appears that limited research on this subject exists, particularly in Namibia. More so in Africa, the literature is silent on whether these learners receive the learning support that addresses their learning needs. This gap in research may hamper the effective implementation of Inclusive Education in Namibia. This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap in the literature by exploring, from their point of view, the learning support learners with learning difficulties experience at a resource school in Windhoek.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Given that the main aim of the study was to explore the lived experiences of learners with learning difficulties regarding the learning support they receive at school, it focused on these specific research objectives:

- To identify the types of learning support learners with learning difficulties receive in their classroom.
- To explore learners with learning difficulties' experiences with the learning support they receive in the classroom.
- To find out how learning support for learners with learning difficulties can be strengthened.

1.5 Significance of the Study

From the researcher's perspective, a study has yet to be conducted that explores the experiences of learners with learning difficulties in resource schools. The literature reviewed revealed that no study has been conducted on the learning support rendered to learners with learning difficulties in resource schools in Namibia. Hence, in this regard, this study is unique and it will contribute to the global body of knowledge pertinent to the experiences with learning support of learners with learning difficulties who are accommodated in resource schools. The study's outcome will inform the relevant stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Education, on what learners with learning difficulties deem to be their experiences with learning support rendered to them. Teachers can use the findings to facilitate lessons for learners with learning difficulties in inclusive settings, in special education, and at resource schools in Namibia to ensure that the integration of these learners into mainstream schools is adequate.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study's results applied only to the participants at this resource school, and the outcome may need to be generalised to what learners in other resource schools may experience regarding learning support. Learners in resource schools are often negatively labelled and could have developed apprehensiveness toward professionals (including researchers) and para-professionals. As a result, the researcher might need to work hard to gain their trust.

1.7 Delimitations

The study was delimited to the experiences of learning support that learners with learning difficulties receive at a selected Resource school in Windhoek, Namibia.

1.8 Definition of concepts

Dreyer (2015, p. 21) defined **learning support** as “all activities that contribute to the capacity of a school to respond to the diversity of its learners.”

Inclusive Education is “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of need of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from the education system” (MoEAC, 2013, p4).

Learning difficulties is a term that is used to describe “learners that underachieve academically due to a wide range of reasons such as sensory impairment (weaknesses in vision or hearing); severe behavioural, psychological or emotional issues; English as a second language or dialect; high absenteeism; ineffective instruction; or, inadequate curricula.” (DSF, 2018, para. 4).

Learners with learning difficulties in the context of this study, learners with learning difficulties are those “learners who experience significantly more difficulties in learning compared to same-age peers due to factors such as sensory impairment (weaknesses in vision or hearing); severe behavioural, psychological or emotional issues; English as a second language or dialect; high absenteeism; ineffective instruction; or, inadequate curricula.” (Kohli et al. 2018, p.399).

Resource schools in the context of this study, refer to "segregated schools that accommodate children that require high levels of support" due to learning difficulties (MoEAC, 2018, p.11).

1.9 Summary of the chapter

This chapter introduced the overall idea of the study, starting with the background of the study. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the study's problem statement, objectives, and significance. The next chapter (chapter 2) will present and discuss the literature reviews from various sources on the same subject.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Teachers are overwhelmed with many children in a class, making attending to every child's needs practically impossible while simultaneously keeping pace to complete the syllabus content at an appropriate time. It is paramount to understand the theory behind understanding learners with learning difficulties and how they can be supported to learn in schools. This chapter, therefore, reviews the literature on the concept of learning difficulties and the challenges faced by learners with learning difficulties. The chapter further provides detailed content on the concept of Inclusive Education in Namibia, the concept of learning support and a discussion of the theory that informs this study; Vygotsky (1978)'s theory of socio-cultural development.

2.2 The Definition of Learning Difficulties and its Symptoms

The performance of national education systems is a topic that continues to temper people's interest (World Bank, 2020). However, it is worth understanding that multiple factors affect the performance of learners in their educational endeavours, including learning difficulties. It is imperative to understand the term learning difficulties to enable education policymakers to derive policies that address and speak to the needs of learners who experience learning difficulties and thereby benefit from these policies. As such, it is well documented that learning styles play a crucial role in the learning process (Awla, 2014; Moussa, 2014; Gudnason, 2017) and acknowledging that learners prefer different styles of learning is part of creating a conducive learning environment and increased metacognition in learners (Gudnason, 2017).

Chung, Patel and Nizami (2019, p.47) are of the view that the following symptoms, if persistent for at least six months in the context of appropriate interventions, can cause learning difficulties; “inaccurate or slow and effortful word reading, difficulty understanding the meaning of what is read, difficulty with spelling, difficulty with written expression, difficulties mastering number sense, number facts, or calculation and difficulties with mathematical reasoning”. Similar to this, Halliwell (2003) contends that even when they receive the right instruction and learning opportunities, students with particular learning disabilities continue to struggle with the development of literacy and numeracy skills, particularly with regard to precise and fluent reading and spelling.

The study of Kavkler *et al.* (2015) further indicated that “children with learning difficulties show delays and deficits in attention, memory, thinking, coordination, communication, social skills and emotional maturity” (p.36). Their reduced ability to retain and retrieve information stored in their memory is the leading factor in reducing their academic performance in school. In order to avoid issues such as dropping out due to poor performance, children with learning difficulties require learning support to enable them to improve their learning. Cortiella and Horowitz (2014, as cited in Thuketana, 2020) stated that learning difficulties are neurological in nature because children with learning difficulties find it difficult to store, process and retrieve information as required.

Learning difficulties might seem out of control from the learner's point of view, but they can be solved through support from the management of Education (Ahammed, 2018). The educational needs of children, including those with learning disabilities,

are addressed by international conventions and documents that set forth requirements that must be fulfilled for systems to guarantee quality education, participation, and learning outcomes for all children (Deluca, 2012). These standards consider the strategy of inclusive education.

When they start school, many children are always excited about discoveries regarding learning, especially how to read and write (Ahammed, 2018). With adequate instructions from the primary school teachers, appropriate support and continuous motivation to learn, many children in the foundation phase of school learn basic skills and more complex skills required to read, write and calculate. However, despite attending school regularly and receiving sufficient support, some children need help to acquire essential academic skills. These children may experience what is known as learning difficulties (DSF Literacy Services, 2015).

2.3 Terminologies used to describe learners with learning difficulties

Learners who experience learning difficulties have been given various terms in the past. Westwood (2011) identified these terms as 'dull', 'educationally subnormal', 'slow learners', 'low achievers', 'at risk', the 'hard-to-teach' and 'learning disabled'. Westwood (2008) noted that students with learning difficulties are characterised mainly by their failure to acquire adequate proficiency in reading and writing. Failure to acquire sufficient literacy and numeracy skills tends to have a negative impact on the student's progress in almost all areas of the school curriculum (ibid).

Kavkler, Babuder and Magajna (2015, p. 36) referred to children with learning difficulties as “a diverse group of children with various cognitive, social, emotional

and other features, and they have significantly greater learning difficulties than most of their peers”. Despite their average or above-average intellectual abilities, children with learning difficulties experience difficulties in reading, writing, spelling and numeracy (DSF Literacy Services, 2015). Kavkler *et al.* (2015) caution that even though the intellectual ability of children with learning difficulties is average or above average, their learning achievements in some learning domains are moderate, and these learners are often poorly integrated into their social environments, which often results in their discrimination. This idea is substantiated by the study of Hasiana (2017), who states that learning difficulties are not directly related to the level of intelligence of the individual who has difficulties. However, these individuals need help mastering the learning skills and carrying out specific tasks.

It is worth noting in this study that the literature reviewed has shown that various researchers have identified two types of learning difficulties: general learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties. Some parts of the world use the terms learning difficulties and learning disabilities interchangeably. Kaur and Padmanabhan (2017) defined specific learning difficulties as neurodevelopment disorders that inhibit a child's learning abilities, and these difficulties include Dyslexia (reading difficulties), Dyscalculia (difficulties in numbers and calculations) and Dysgraphia (writing difficulties). Hasiana (2017) validate this definition by making use of the term learning disabilities to refer to Specific Learning Disorder (SpLD) as a disorder in one or more of the psychological processes that include understanding and use of the language that may appear in the form of listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or counting. However, this study adopted the term learning difficulties to refer to children who underachieve academically due to various factors.

Numerous studies cited in Kaur and Padmanabhan (2017) indicate that 70% of SpLD results from genetic, hereditary and neurological factors. According to research, environmental factors such as psychological stressors, hunger, poverty, bad parenting, and ineffective teaching-learning practices might also contribute to SpLD (Ahammed, 2021).

2.4 Challenges Faced by Learners with Learning Difficulties

The challenges faced by learners with learning difficulties are overwhelming. Allam and Martin (2021) asserted that some of the problems that learners with learning difficulties face are difficulties with their reading fluency and passage comprehension. For this reason, they will require a high level of support in their academic subjects to enable them to develop mechanisms of grasping subject content at the same pace as learners of the same age. Although they struggle to be at the same level as their peers academically, learners with learning difficulties may be good at other activities, such as sports (Allam & Martin, 2021). Low achievement persists because teachers believe that students with learning difficulties lack the necessary learning techniques to effectively complete the assignments they are given (Westwood, 2008).

A study by Kavkler, Babuder and Magajna (2015) revealed that many problems experienced by children with learning difficulties in schools are aggravated by the growing concern that many educators lack knowledge of the different types of learning difficulties experienced by children in school. Similarly, Shumba and Moodley (2018) noted that teachers need to be adequately trained in solving problems related to learning difficulties, and the lack of partnership commitment between teachers, parents and children worsens the need to improve the learning abilities of children with

learning difficulties. Therefore, educators need to be trained on the different types of learning difficulties and learning challenges that learners may experience, and this will enable teachers to give appropriate learning support and refer learners to the appropriate professionals who can attend to those learning difficulties. Training of teachers can be done through continuous professional development activities.

A study conducted by Katiti (2021) on the effectiveness of inclusive education in Namibia revealed that while inclusive education is welcome in Namibian schools, there appears to be insufficient teaching and learning resources to support learners with special educational needs. As a result, teachers need to properly implement the differential teaching method to cater to the various learning needs, and the curriculum needs to be more inclusive (Shiimi, 2018). In developing countries such as Namibia, the ability of learners with learning difficulties to catch up may be worsened due to problems of classroom overcrowding, lack of teaching and learning resources and lack of knowledge on how to assist learners with learning difficulties effectively (Mbongo et al., 2016). Hence, this study aimed to explore, from the point of view of learners with learning difficulties, their experiences with learning support in the classroom at a resource school.

2.5 The Concept of Inclusive Education in General

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (UNESCO, 2004, p. 21); cited in Skrebneva (2010, p. 7) states that "inclusive education is about ensuring the rights to education of all learners, regardless of their characteristics or difficulties, to build a more just society." The education white paper by UNESCO (2004) provides a framework for systemic change for developing

inclusive education. It emphasises that “inclusion is about supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met” (Skrebneva, 2010, p. 8).

Inclusive schools in Namibia, according to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) (2018, p. 11), refers to “schools that welcome and accommodate all learners in the same classrooms regardless of the level of support needed, and all are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school”. The former special schools are renamed resource schools and refer to schools that cater to children requiring high support (MoEAC, 2018) because of learning difficulties due to a variety of factors. However, the MoEAC did not specify what this high level of support entails. Despite the fact that the MoEAC has clearly defined what inclusive schools entail and what former special schools, now resource schools entail, learners with learning difficulties who should be accommodated in inclusive schools, according to the sector policy on inclusive education, are still accommodated in resource schools.

In developing countries such as Namibia, where problems such as classroom overcrowding, lack of teaching and learning resources, and lack of knowledge on how to effectively assist learners with learning difficulties exist (Möwes, 2008), the ability for learners with learning difficulties to catch up, especially in mainstream schools is worsened. Integrating learners with learning difficulties into mainstream schools creates a challenge, which calls for exploring best practices and evidence-based instructions that could assist mainstream schools in accommodating learners with learning difficulties effectively. However, Farooq and Aslam (2017) believe that the achievement of learners with learning difficulties is usually depressing, so they need

help from other people. This idea is substantiated by Goudeau and Cimpian (2020), who believe that learners with learning difficulties may be psychologically demotivated students who need a little push from their teachers and peers.

The integration of learners with learning difficulties in inclusive schools may not benefit learners with learning difficulties due to various factors highlighted in the literature. Chaula (2014) points out a general global need for knowledge towards inclusive education. The same is true for the support given to learners with learning difficulties. The lack of knowledge in this aspect can be attributed to poor knowledge of inclusive education, poor quality training, lack of teaching aids and equipment, parents not being involved, lack of support by the government and poor teachers' collaboration. These aspects can create barriers to learning for students with learning difficulties in an inclusive classroom (Chaula, 2014).

Starcic (2010) opines that teachers need to be aware of e-learning environments and their potential for individualised instruction that they can implement in their inclusive classrooms to cater to all learners with various learning needs effectively. Thus, learners with learning difficulties might experience challenges in realising their full potential if accommodated in Inclusive schools until these challenges are addressed. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that countries such as Namibia that embrace inclusive education invest sufficient resources to prepare teachers for inclusive environments and provide the necessary resources to support schools' teaching and learning process.

2.6 Legislative and Policy Framework on Inclusive Education in Namibia

Skrebneva (2010, p. 3) stated that “the inclusive paradigm requires that learners with learning difficulties be supported to enable them to master new skills, encouraged to strive for greater achievements, and assisted in developing healthy and positive self-concepts.” The MoEAC (2018, p. 10) indicated that “Namibia is a signatory to, and has also ratified, several international conventions and agreements, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and the 2015 Education Agenda including the Millennium Development Goals (2000) which speak of a right-based education and inclusion. For instance, the CRPD indicates that persons with disabilities and corresponding special educational needs (SEN) should have the opportunity to be educated in the general educational system and should not be excluded because of their disabilities (Krämer et al., 2021).

The Government of the Republic of Namibia, through the Ministry of Education in 2013, enacted a Sector Policy on Inclusive Education which certifies that all learners should be educated in the least-restrictive education setting and schools in their neighbourhood to the fullest extent possible (Ministry of Education, 2013). The Government of the Republic of Namibia “remains committed to creating an education system that is inclusive, sensitive and responsive to the needs of all children, including those with disabilities” (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018, p. 10). The MoEAC (2016), in one of its policy documents, stressed that all teachers should possess foundation knowledge of Inclusive Education and Learning support.

Inclusive education can only be implemented by ensuring that teachers in mainstream schools are fully trained on how to effectively support learners with learning difficulties. Otherwise, the implementation of inclusive education can birth an educational catastrophe, whereby learners with learning difficulties will not get the support they ought to get in mainstream schools, which might lead to these learners being disadvantaged in obtaining quality education. Hence, the MoEAC (2016) calls for every school in Namibia to have teachers trained in the field of Inclusive Education, and this training can be done through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs. Through CPD, teachers can then acquire knowledge of how to identify various learning needs and offer the necessary support to all learners, irrespective of their individual learning needs (Shumba & Moodley, 2018).

Several challenges have been encountered in Namibia regarding primary and secondary education, of which Resource schools are part. These challenges include the medium of communication between stakeholders in education, poor collaboration, lack of equity in inclusive education and lack of adequate preparation before launching the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education (Shumba & Moodley, 2018). Shumba and Moodley (2018 p. 6) further maintain that "notwithstanding these challenges, efforts have been made to enable implementation of the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education in Namibia at the primary and secondary school levels, through the provision of free education, sign language training, the appointment of class assistants for the deaf and advocacy by national organisations of persons with disabilities." Despite efforts to draw up the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education to guide the realisation and implementation of Inclusive Education in Namibian schools, the MoEAC has faced

challenges such as a lack of disability knowledge in implementing Inclusive Education fully (MoEAC, 2018).

In the study by the MoEAC (2018, p. 43), the results indicated that “there seems to be a significant shortage of resource schools and learning support classes available for learners with disabilities across Namibia, and few of the existing ones are located in rural areas.” Furthermore, a study by Shiimi (2018) revealed a lack of accessibility to buildings in some Namibian schools, which leads to some learners with physical disabilities being lifted and moved by fellow learners, which is very unsafe and undignified. A lack of accessible toilets and washing facilities results in learners without physical disabilities having to assist those who need assistance (Katiti, 2021). Thus, these findings call for research studies to be carried out to explore learners' experiences, including learners with learning difficulties in Namibian schools.

Several studies conducted in Namibia reveal that most Namibian schools and educational centres are faced with challenges of inadequate learning materials and assistive devices for learners with impairments (Skrebneva, 2010; Mokaleng, 2019; Uusiku, 2020; Katiti, 2021). A study conducted by Shivute (2018) on the support rendered to teachers of learners with visual impairments revealed that 80% of the teachers who participated in the study indicated that they do not receive support from the MoEAC. This is a serious concern on the efforts of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) in rendering support to teachers to enable them to execute their duties fully. Consequently, teachers need to be given the support they ought to get from the MoEAC to maintain the ability of learners with learning difficulties to achieve academically.

Katiti (2021) advised teachers to be dynamic, competent and innovative in their teaching and learning methods to accommodate learners' various learning styles. Mphahlele and Nel (2018) state that teachers use a wide range of appropriate teaching materials that are visual, audio and kinaesthetic in order to meet the heterogeneous needs of learners experiencing learning difficulties. Teachers are encouraged to diversify their methods of lesson presentation in such a way that they respond to the diverse needs of learners in their classroom, thereby ensuring that the support rendered is adequate and that learning will take place in their lessons.

Skrebneva (2010, p. 2) stated that “providing support to individuals is only one way of making learning contexts and lessons accessible to all learners, including learners with learning difficulties.” Resources and infrastructure support occur when schools evaluate their culture, policies and practices in terms of the degree to which they meet the individual needs of educators, parents and learners (Katiti, 2021). In order to realise Inclusive Education in our Namibian schools, schools need to adjust their teaching and learning modus operandi to cater for all learners with their various learning needs (Skrebneva, 2010).

In order to ensure full inclusion of learners with diverse needs, a study by Shiimi (2018) suggested that teachers need more time to plan their teaching activities, intensive training on how to cater for a diversity of learning needs effectively, classroom assistants and support from specialised people, adequate learning support materials and suggest that class size should comprise of 20 learners or less. Based on these teachers' requests, one can surmise that more support in terms of resources is

needed from the public and the private sector to ensure that learners are included effectively.

2.7 The Resource Schools and Learning Support in Namibia

2.7.1 Status of Resource Schools in Namibia

According to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2018), special schools in Namibia have been renamed resource schools as per the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education of 2013. In 2013, before the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education was enacted, special schools in Namibia were defined as schools offering education to learners with disabilities, i.e. separate from their peers and general school settings. While some parts of the world view special schools as a form of segregation for children who are enrolled at such schools, other parts of the world embrace the existence of special schools in support of the well-being of their children.

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2018) conducted a study assessing inclusive education practices in Namibia. The study revealed that although resource schools in Namibia were facing various challenges, such as a lack of training among teachers who are teaching in these schools, a few of the learners that attend school there are happy to be taught in resource schools because they have a vital role to play in developing their self-esteem and confidence. The study also revealed that parents of the children accommodated in resource schools are happy that their children are schooling there because they feel that teachers in these schools better understand how to accommodate them.

Ainscow and Miles (2013) believe that most special schools are characterised by a tendency to engage learners in individual activities. This idea may need to do better with cooperative learning or constructing knowledge through social interaction. Intellectual stimulation comes from our ability to engage with others who support us (Ainscow & Miles, 2013). Contrary to advocating for inclusive schools, a study by Mambo (2011) revealed that parents are generally optimistic about their children being educated in special schools. This finding by Mambo (2011) is consistent with the views of the Namibian parents of learners in resource schools. Parents noted a fully accessible physical environment, better behavioural management, and access to external specialists, amongst others, as the benefits of their children being educated in special schools (MoEAC, 2018).

2.7.2 Conceptualising Learning Support

The National Promotion Policy Guide for junior and senior primary school phases (MoEAC, 2018, p. 15) defines learning support as "the physical, social, emotional and intellectual support given to learners that may experience barriers to learning to enhance a learner's capabilities". Thomas and Whitten (2012) defined learning support as measures taken by the school to support learners who have learning difficulties, such as specific practices, facilities, staff, assessment tools and learning resources.

Additionally, the Learning Support Teachers' Manual (NIED, 2014) states that learning support involves planning teaching methods and learning materials that will help learners who are experiencing learning difficulties to achieve the essential basic competencies in various subjects and skills. Similarly, Thomas and Whitten (2013)

believe that well-thought-out support activities delivered to students inside and outside the classroom can increase their abilities to achieve their learning goals.

The syllabus guides teaching and learning in Namibian schools, a document that outlines all the learning objectives of each subject that learners must be able to achieve at the end of each topic and sub-topic. In order to ensure that all learners achieve these learning objectives, teachers are encouraged to give individualised learning support, that is, considering the different learning strategies and learning styles to meet diverse learning needs. NIED (2014) spells out that learning support should entail well-planned teaching methods and materials that will enable learners with learning difficulties to achieve essential competencies in the different subject areas.

Learning Support in Namibia is not only for children experiencing learning difficulties nor especially for children in resource schools, but it is a call for all school-going learners, including gifted children. The idea is to support all learners to perform to their best (Thomas & Whitten, 2012). Therefore, learning support is not limited to learners who experience learning difficulties or barriers but should be provided to all learners regardless of their learning abilities. Suppose learners such as gifted children (high-ability learners) are not given support during their learning process. In that case, they might get bored during lessons, negatively affecting their potential output.

Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2013) highlight that for teachers to support learners with learning difficulties in an inclusive classroom effectively, they should have sound knowledge of learning disabilities and the necessary developmental skills needed to achieve expected learning outcomes. Every child comes to class with unique learning

needs and experiences that teachers need to know to support learners and maximise their learning experiences (Bojuwoye et al., 2014). One of the approaches to adequate support for learning is understanding the different types of learning styles and strategies. It is very crucial for educators to know and be aware of different learning strategies and learning styles utilized by learners with learning difficulties; this will enable teachers to align their lesson presentations in such a way that all learners' preferred style of learning is catered to and thereby ensure maximum participation and engagement of learners with learning difficulties in the lesson.

Learning support, according to Mashau et al. (2008), as cited in Bojuwoye et al. (2014), consists of extra, remedial, or supplementary instruction in the classroom; curriculum guidance; academic mentoring; helping students work in groups; fostering study and note-taking skills; school psychological services; medical and social work services; and feeding programs. This includes all other services for meeting learners' unique needs and preventing learning difficulties (Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2013). A study conducted by Bojuwoye et al. (2014) on the experiences of learners on the learning support they received revealed that “supplementary or extra class instructions, additional or extra notes, additional learning time for numeracy and literacy subjects, assistance in accessing information from books and other learning materials, assistance in developing study skills, peer mentoring or study groups and teacher behaviours” (p.8) are some of the actions that support effective learning.

2.7.3 Types of Learning Support

Yoro, Fourie and Van der Merwe (2020) found that teachers employ strategies such as cooperative learning, peer learning, ability grouping, extensive visual aids and

curriculum differentiation to support learners with learning difficulties. To render learning support to learners who experience learning difficulties effectively, teachers need to know the different types of learning support and demonstrate confidence to apply such knowledge in their everyday lessons (Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2013).

Westwood (2011) suggested that the learning needs of learners with learning difficulties can be addressed by adapting the curriculum to respond to the diverse needs of learners, modifying the teaching instructions to suit the different learning styles of learners, differing the teaching materials, peer tutoring, additional support teacher to give individual assistance and through the provision of supplementary teaching. Wearmouth (2016) opines that learning occurs when we can make sense of the information (text) we are engaged in. Thus, children can only make sense of new ideas or information presented by relating that information to their prior knowledge. Therefore, teachers and other adults in schools are encouraged to find ways to support learners by connecting the new learning material and what learners already know (Wearmouth, 2016). It is believed that learning support services should be aimed at preventing, minimising and eradicating barriers to learning and thereby optimising a child's chances of achieving an independent level of learning and personal growth (Westwood, 2011).

Learning strategies are invaluable tools for teachers seeking to enhance learning support in their classrooms. By incorporating diverse strategies tailored to different learning styles and needs, teachers can create conducive learning environments where all learners thrive. Woolfolk (2014) defined learning strategy as a special kind of procedural knowledge on approaching learning tasks. Thus, every individual has a

unique way of approaching learning tasks. It is very crucial for teachers to be aware of various learning strategies and learning styles utilised by learners; this will enable them to align their lesson presentations in such a way that all learners' preferred style of learning is catered for and thereby ensure maximum participation and engagement of learners in the lesson.

A study by Yuhan (2013) on learning support received by learners in schools revealed that learners were supported in their learning through additional class instructions, learning time for numeracy and literacy classes, assistance in developing study skills and peer mentoring, among others. Psychologists and social workers who work in schools can help students with emotional needs and personal issues that might be impeding their ability to learn (Bojuwoye et al., 2014).

2.7.3.1 Peer Learning

In some inclusive schools, peer support interventions exist whereby learners with learning difficulties receive peer support. Scheef and Buyserie (2020) suggest that to support and promote inclusive classrooms and culture, schools may implement peer support arrangements to provide students (with and without learning difficulties) with opportunities to promote inclusion in schools. This peer support initiative offers alternative opportunities to offer classroom support for students with special educational needs who may have only been supported by adult paraprofessionals to achieve academic and other individualised goals (ibid). This implies that students with learning difficulties can benefit mainly from peers without learning difficulties, not only limited to academics but also from social-related goals (interactions with a wider variety of peers).

In special education, peer tutoring is a strategy in which higher-performing students work with lower-performing students or students with disabilities to review or teach academic material. This strategy has been shown to assist students (on both sides) in mastering content and developing self-confidence in specific skills (Touliiaa et al., 2021). Although peer tutors need to be trained, monitored, and graded, which often takes time and energy away from other essential classroom tasks, tutors increase their understanding of the learning material and learners with learning difficulties get more individual attention and build relationships, which builds communication and social skills (ibid).

2.7.3.2 Collaborative learning

Working in a group can offer a wide range of benefits to group members in acquiring knowledge in a classroom. Burke (2011) maintains that because of the different backgrounds and experiences of those who belong to them, groups have a greater well of resources to draw from and more information available. Learners working in small groups are prone to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same material is presented in other methods of instructions (ibid). This implies that learners working in a group can inspire, motivate and help each other by sharing ideas and knowledge in order to complete their learning task.

However, working in a group can also be a stumbling block in learning because an individual might dominate the discussion, and this may lead to other group members needing a chance to contribute or gain knowledge from the learning task (Burke, 2011). He further stated that some of the group members may also rely heavily on others to carry out the task, which will disable them from acquiring the necessary skills

and achieving the basic competencies that the task requires them to obtain (ibid). In order to make group work effective, teachers need to plan carefully, make it clear to learners the importance and aims of working in a group and be present to guide learners during their discussions. This will ensure that all learners participate and contribute to the learning task.

A study by Chiriac (2014) on the students' experiences working in a group revealed that most participants in the study (97%) responded that working in a group somehow promoted learning, academic knowledge and collaborative abilities. The study also found that when students worked in groups, they learned more or different things than when they worked alone (ibid). Thus, group work might be an effective pedagogic strategy teachers in resource schools can employ to support learning for children with learning difficulties.

2.7.3.3 Learning materials

Teaching learners with learning difficulties and possessing the knowledge of how to teach and support them in their learning is a crucial aspect that every teacher should possess. Teachers need to be trained to support learners with learning difficulties effectively. This can be achieved by acquiring knowledge on how to develop appropriate teaching and learning materials that suit the needs of their learners and by possessing sound knowledge of the different learning difficulties that learners can have.

Coúkuna, Tosuna and Macaroglu (2009) recommend that teachers use the appropriate materials to make the learning process solid to practice and revise, increasing the

student's participation in the learning process. While it is paramount for the Ministry of Education to support and provide teachers in resource schools with learning materials, teachers do not always have to wait for the Ministry of Education to provide them with learning materials. However, they can also make up their learning materials by using locally available raw materials to develop classroom learning resources that respond to their learners' diverse needs.

Nyavor (2020, p.1) states that “teaching and learning materials are materials in various forms ranging from pictures, real objects, models, specimens, printed materials like textbooks, workbooks, computers which could be used to influence the participation and understanding of students in learning.” “Other materials include chalkboards, flannel or felt boards, felt pens, spectacles, handheld magnifiers, braille machines, hand frames and stylus, braille sheets and bulletin, still pictures like photographs and illustrations, charts, graphs, maps, large print books and globes, posters and diagrams, reading stand. It can be concluded that instructional materials can be classified as prints, audio, audio-visuales, visuales and electronic interactive” (ibid).

2.7.3.4 Curriculum differentiation

A differentiated classroom, according to Tomlinson (2001), provides different avenues for acquiring content, processing or making sense of ideas, and developing products so that each student can learn effectively. Anderson (2007, p.50) posited that "differentiation may be made by the teachers based on what they know about students' learning preferences (i.e., intelligence, talents, learning styles), allowing students' choices in working independently, with partners, or as a team; or providing varied workspaces that are conducive to various learning preferences (i.e., quiet workspaces,

workspaces with tables instead of desks)." This signifies that differentiation of instruction in the classroom plays a vital role in ensuring that lessons are tailor-made to suit learners' various educational needs. Teachers must apply varying teaching strategies and adapt the instruction by modifying their assessment tools. This can be achieved by allowing learners with writing difficulties to be examined orally instead of writing their assessment tasks. However, teachers should still coach their learners and foster their writing skills to ensure that their writing skills are developed fully.

2.7.3.5 Classroom environment

Paramount to providing adequate learning support is the classroom environment in which learning is taking place. According to Tomlinson (2001), the tone of any classroom has a significant impact on those who use it and the learning that occurs there. Indeed, Editorial Team (2021) defined a positive classroom environment as one in which students feel comfortable sharing their ideas, taking risks, asking questions, and confronting learning challenges. They further argued that teachers can create this environment by ensuring clear classroom expectations, providing opportunities for learners to improve their social skills, fostering good relationships with their students and offering relevant content (ibid). In addition, the physical climate of the classroom should be filled with resources that are inviting and stimulating learning. The walls should be covered with appropriate, colourful learning resources.

2.8 Support strategies for learning difficulties

In this section, the researcher will present what the literature suggests as the strategies to support learners with learning difficulties to help them manage their difficulties in

learning. The section will discuss support strategies for reading difficulties, support strategies for writing difficulties, and support strategies for numeracy difficulties.

2.8.1 Support strategies for reading difficulties

Reading difficulties in children can be addressed when teachers find evidence-based practices to help learners with learning difficulties manage their reading tasks. According to Wixson et al., (2019), reading difficulties among children can be addressed or even prevented as long as teachers apply appropriate instructions and interventions. Research has shown that reading instruction aimed at individual students' specific needs can significantly reduce the incidence of reading difficulties (Wixson et al., 2019). For that reason, learners with learning difficulties require individualised instructional plans to help address their individual learning needs.

Mphahlele and Nel (2018, p3) indicated, “reading difficulties experienced by learners in South Africa are, among others, poor phonics skills, poor comprehension, limited vocabulary, poor spelling and slow processing of words”. Akyol, Temur and Eror (2021) strongly believe that reading and writing skills can seriously affect the education life of individuals. They believe that students who cannot develop reading and writing skills may not succeed in most other subjects (ibid). Consequently, the absence of appropriate intervention to support learners with learning difficulties to overcome difficulties in reading may result in academic underachievement.

Sheyapo (2017) and Mphahlele and Nel (2018) revealed that in parts of the world, such as the Czech Republic and Scotland, teachers employ learner-centred approach methods such as peer support, cooperative learning and scaffolding in order to assist

learners with reading difficulties. According to Mphahlele and Nel (2018), South African teachers use support strategies such as response to intervention, co-teaching and integrating ICT in their lessons to address reading difficulties. In Namibia, Nepando (2018) revealed that besides using textbooks and newspapers, teachers do not have additional resources to aid learning (reading) at their schools. The absence of materials to aid reading in Namibian schools may compromise the ability of learners with learning difficulties to receive the learning support they ought to receive.

Westwood (2008, p. 31) defined reading comprehension as “an active thinking process through which a reader intentionally constructs meaning to form a deeper understanding of concepts and information presented in a text.” For learners to understand what they are reading, they have to use information they already possess (prior knowledge) to filter, interpret, organise and reflect upon the new information they are reading in a text (Westwood, 2008). This implies that, for learners to interpret and draw meaning out of the text effectively, they should possess word recognition skills and be able to relate the new information to what they already know. Therefore, teachers should always link their lessons to learners' prior knowledge in order for them to make connections, question, and engage the text for easier comprehension.

Research suggests that learners who struggle with reading may be supported by clearly writing keywords on the chalkboard and splitting long words into syllables with a pencil line (Reid, 2009). One of the challenges that learners with learning difficulties face in reading is reading comprehension. Westwood (2008) suggests that readers who read with comprehension utilise various cognitive skills during reading; when they process the written material, they create mental pictures and reflect critically on the

relevance of their reading. Effective readers can assemble information, make connections, remember and retell facts, evaluate what they read, and substantiate their opinions, conclusions and predictions (ibid). Learning support teachers can utilise these cognitive skills with struggling readers to help them improve their reading comprehension skills.

Teachers should ensure that every student who studies at primary school should gain reading and writing skills at an appropriate level, and should teachers detect difficulties in these skills. The support of all stakeholders (family, special education teacher, school administrator, lecturer, etc.) should be taken to solve the problem (Akyol et al., 2021). Wixson et al. (2019, p. 3) identified areas that are specifically crucial to reading development: "phonemic awareness (discriminating individual sounds in words), phonics (linking letters and sounds), fluency (reading words automatically with understanding), comprehension (making sense of text), vocabulary (knowing what the words mean), and writing (composing and spelling)". These strategies can help teachers design appropriate instructional tools to assist learners who experience difficulties in reading.

2.8.2 Support strategies for writing difficulties

Vlachos and Avramidis (2020) believe that children experience writing difficulties when their writing skills are below those expected for a person's chronological age or ability despite receiving appropriate education. These difficulties contribute significantly to a child's learning difficulty. These children have difficulty forming letters and phrases when writing. They also have difficulty with expressive writing, so they require assistance in putting their thoughts and opinions on paper.

In some cases, learners with learning difficulties experience difficulties with spelling consistency throughout their written text. Additionally, they experience challenges correctly copying letters and words from written material. Further, they experience challenges with consistency and neatness of writing (Reid, 2009). Chung, Patel and Nizami (2019) suggested modifications to students' academic programs, especially concerning written work. They suggested that teachers can minimise written assignments, break down larger projects into smaller ones and accommodate the extra time permitted for homework, class assignments and tests (ibid). When teaching reading and writing in regular schools, teachers may employ the following methods. For example, teachers may allow students who struggle with writing to copy work from the chalkboard (Integra, 2009). Learners with learning disabilities require modified written tasks in inclusive classrooms due to their difficulties with writing.

Teachers may also assign oral activities rather than written tasks to students who struggle with writing. Furthermore, teachers must allow students with reading and writing difficulties to work with textbooks open. This allows them to concentrate on the assigned reading and writing activities. Furthermore, teachers must give children who have difficulty writing front-row seats in the classroom. They are closer to the teacher in this manner, and thus receive faster assistance than students sitting in the back of the classroom (Reid, 2009).

Cowley (2012) asserts that children are naturally drawn to items and objects in their immediate surroundings. Teachers can use classroom displays to draw students' attention and encourage them to read and write. Displaying written work/resources in a classroom may imply bringing the outside environment closer to children who

struggle with reading and writing. Thus, classrooms in resource schools should be dressed with learning resources as this will enhance learning for children with learning difficulties.

2.8.3 Support strategies for numeracy difficulties

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2007) cited in Harris (2019) posited that learners with numeracy learning difficulties struggle with learning mathematics regardless of their motivation, past instructions and mathematical knowledge. These learners are characterised by their inability to recall basic arithmetic facts, difficulties representing mathematical concepts mentally, and poorly developed number sense (ibid). According to Cowley (2012), children are naturally drawn to items and objects in their immediate surroundings. Classroom displays can be used by teachers to draw students' attention and encourage them to read and write. Displaying written work/resources in a classroom may imply bringing the outside world closer to children who have difficulty reading and writing. Additionally, The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2007) suggested using structured peer-assisted learning activities and visual representation during numeracy instructional support (as cited in Harris, 2019).

2.9 Theoretical Framework

The education field in recent years requires educators to have a paradigm shift that emphasises how learners learn and acquire knowledge. This paradigm shift will occur when educators understand theories underpinning learning and how children acquire knowledge. Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, and Miller (2003) believe that a theory of learning that spells out how intellectual capabilities are developed is vital. Teachers

may only provide effective support for effective learning if they know how learning occurs. Therefore, the researcher will discuss the theoretical framework that guides this research study to understand the support learning that learners with learning difficulties ought to receive.

This study is embedded in Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Social Cultural Historical theory of development, informed explicitly by Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's (1978) Social Cultural Historical theory of development implies that an individual's mental development, such as thought, language and reasoning process, results from his or her culture (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011). According to Silalahi (2019), culture and social environment are the most important factors that influence someone's development; the presence of others, such as parents, peers, and teachers, is required in the Social Cultural Historical theory.

The Social Cultural Historical theory of development emphasises that an individual develops through social interactions with others, such as parents, peers and teachers. This notion has implications for the classroom environment that will help understand the importance of creating a conducive learning environment. Teachers provide learning support to assist learners who experience difficulties in learning because it strongly emphasises that development (learning) is socially constructed.

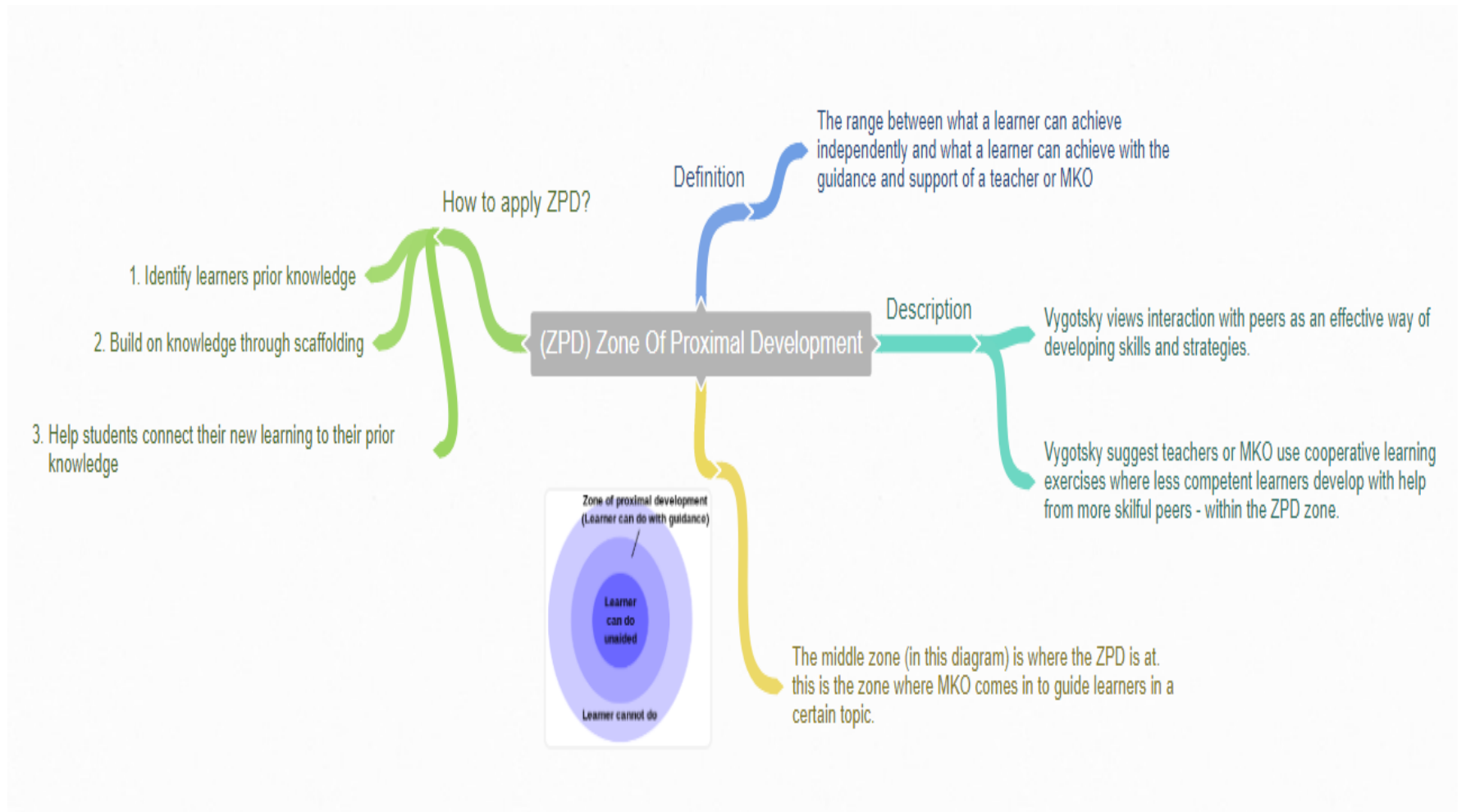
Vygotsky (1978), cited in Sarker (2019), defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peer" (p. 86). Thus, the ZPD refers to what a

child can do on his/her own and what he/she can do with the support or assistance of more capable significant others. Figure 1 provides insight into how the model of the ZPD has implications in the classroom.

The ZPD model in Figure 1 shows how a more knowledgeable adult, in this case, a teacher, can provide support to learners in the classroom through social interactions in order for them to reach their full learning potential. "The motive is that individuals learn best when working together with others during collaboration, and it is through such collaborative endeavours with more skilled persons that learners learn and internalise new concepts, psychological tools, and skills" (Shabani et al., 2010, p. 238). Therefore, the level of development is achieved when children engage in social behaviour – interacting with one or more knowledgeable others. (Fani and Ghaemi, 2011).

Figure 1

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)



The study by Sarker (2019) notes that the ZPD can either grow or shrink depending on the quality of support a child receives. This study aims to explore learners with learning difficulties' perceptions of the learning support they receive at school. This theoretical framework will inform the study in its quest to determine whether or not learners with learning difficulties receive adequate support to allow their learning and development to grow. In other words, the theory informed this study on whether or not these learners' ZPD are growing or shrinking due to the learner support they receive or do not receive at school.

The study of Kozulin et al. (2003) further cautioned that although a competent teacher is crucial for learning, the ZPD notion primarily focuses more on the importance of more competent assistance. The emphasis of the ZPD is on ensuring that the type of support given to children to help them do tasks independently should be of quality and tailor-made to address the specific needs of the children.

2.10 Summary of the Chapter

The chapter discussed literature from various sources supporting learners with learning difficulties in Namibia and elsewhere. The concept of special education, the umbrella of the support of learners with learning difficulties, was also defined and discussed. Finally, the chapter also discussed theories about the concepts of learning difficulties. The next chapter (chapter 3) will discuss the methods.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive review of the relevant literature to the study. This chapter is about research methodology. According to Lune and Berg (2017), research methodology entails the overall description of the research procedures and strategies. This chapter will, therefore, discuss the lenses through which the researcher looks to construct knowledge. The chapter will further discuss the research design, the methods utilised to collect data, the description of the sample, sampling techniques, procedures followed to collect the required data and the methods the researcher used to analyse the data. Finally, the researcher will discuss the trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations before undertaking this study.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, and its nature dictated employing the descriptive phenomenological design to explore and understand the learning support experiences of learners with learning difficulties at a resource school in Windhoek. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) posit that the type of research design is informed by the purpose of conducting the research, which in turn informs the methodology of the study.

Qualitative research emphasises that knowledge is constructed after engagements, observation and making (exploring) meanings of participants' experiences and perspectives of phenomena (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Qualitative study is an appropriate approach for this study because, the study aimed to explore from their point of view through engagements (semi-structured interviews) the learner support

experiences of learners with learning difficulties within their natural settings (at school). According to McMillan (2016), the qualitative research approach assumes that multiple realities exist in the perspectives of participants, and the context is critical in exploring and understanding the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, a qualitative research approach to this study enabled the researcher to collect in-depth information regarding the experiences of the key informants, learners with learning difficulties, of learning support at their school (within their natural setting).

Research design is defined as a plan of how the researcher will systematically collect, analyse data and communicate the findings (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 28; Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). Similarly, Labaree (cited in Cohen et al., 2018) define research design as "the overall strategy that you choose to integrate the different components of the study coherently and logically, thereby ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data."

The main purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of learners with learning difficulties regarding the learning support they receive/ do not receive at a resource school. The nature of the study to explore participants' experiences can best be understood by employing a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology, as defined by Cohen et al. (2007), is the description of an individual's or a group of individuals' conscious experience of a phenomenon, in this case the phenomenon is learning support at school. Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined phenomenological research as an inquiry design in which the researcher describes individuals' lived experiences about a phenomenon as narrated by participants.

Therefore, this study explored the phenomenon of learning support from the perspectives of learners with learning difficulties at a resource school.

3.3 Population

A target population, according to Alvi (2016), is defined as all members who meet the specific criterion specified for a research investigation. According to Rahi (2017), population involves selecting a sample of units from a data set to measure people's characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes. The target population for this study was all learners with learning difficulties at a resource school in Windhoek. The current population of learners with learning difficulties at this resource school is estimated at 182. The school has 13 learners with learning difficulties per class, totalling 14 classes.

3.4 Sample and sampling techniques

Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison (2007) believe that the quality of research is determined not only by the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation, but also by the appropriateness of the sampling strategy used. A sample, according to Alvi (2016), is a group of a relatively small number of people chosen from the target population for the purpose of investigation. For this study, the researcher utilised a non-probability convenience sampling method. Convenient sampling allows the researcher to draw a sample from the population close at hand (Bryman, 2012). The researcher selected 5 learners from each class for a total sample of 20 learners with learning difficulties who participated in the study. These learners were chosen based on their proximity to the researcher in the class and their willingness to participate in the study after the researcher has introduced the purpose of the study.

3.5. Research Instruments

Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that qualitative researchers typically collect data by conducting face-to-face interviews with participants or engaging in focus group interviews that comprise six to eight interviewees in each group. The interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number, and they are intended with the sole purpose of eliciting views and opinions from participants (ibid). For that reason, data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix F) for individual face-to-face interviews, and an unstructured open-ended questions guide (Appendix G) was used to engage participants in two focus group discussions. The two research instruments will be discussed in detail below.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are used to learn the opinions, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and so on of individuals on various subjects and their possible reasons (Akyol et al., 2021). Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to explore participants' thoughts and feelings to elicit the essence of an individual's experience (Bryman, 2012). According to Adams (2015), semi-structured interviews are conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time; they use a mix of closed- and open-ended questions, which are frequently accompanied by follow-up "why" or "how" questions. This data collection method was appropriate for this research study because the participants are children and adolescents. In order to draw as much information from them about their experiences with learning support in the classroom as possible, it was appropriate to utilise an open-ended question interview guide (see Appendix F.) This guide allowed the researcher to probe and tap more information about their experiences with learning

support from their teachers, especially when they gave abstract answers about their reading and writing experiences that would require further explanation.

3.5.2 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are an effective method of data collection utilised by qualitative researchers in order to learn the social norms (regarding a particular phenomenon) of a community or subgroup as well as to obtain a wide range of perspectives that exist within that community or subgroup (Mack et al., 2005). Lune and Burg (2017) posited that an ordinary focus group discussion comprises a small number of participants guided by a facilitator, usually called a moderator. The role of the researcher during focus group discussions appears to be a challenging one. A skilled moderator can effectively draw out the feelings and ideas of the members of the group involved in the focus group interview (Lune & Burg, 2017).

The researcher should be able to control the discussion process by ensuring that all participants can express themselves; he or she needs to ensure that the discussion is not dominated by one or a few people, ensure that introverted participants are encouraged to speak and ensure that all essential topics are covered in the discussion (Mertens, 2015). The researcher conducted focus group discussions guided by the focus group discussion guide (Appendix G) with learners with learning difficulties to obtain a wide range of perspectives regarding the learning support at their school.

3.6 Data collection procedures

Subsequent to permission being granted by the school principal, the researcher made arrangements with the Life Skills teacher to schedule appointments with learners. First,

the researcher obtained informed consent from the parents of learners with learning difficulties and the learners themselves who were old enough to give consent (above the age of 18). Second, the researcher conducted individual face-to-face interviews in the classroom after school, and these interviews were spread across four days. Appointment schedules were set for after-school hours at a time convenient to the participants. Individual face-to-face interviews lasted between twenty and thirty-five minutes.

Last, the researcher conducted two focus group discussions in order to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. Each focus group discussion comprised 6 learners with learning difficulties who were selected conveniently based on their availability and were not part of the individual face-to-face interviews to allow the diversity of responses. This sample is inspired by Creswell (2017), who suggests that the ideal number of focus groups for a single study is between 2 to 4 groups, of which each focus group discussion comprises 4 to 6 participants. Focus group discussions lasted for two days and the discussions took place in the classroom after school hours, and the discussions lasted for about one hour.

3.7 Data analysis

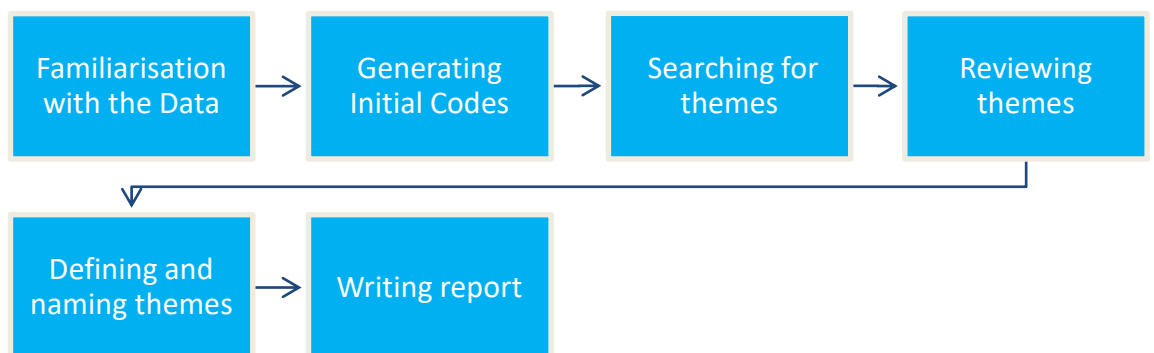
There are various methods that qualitative researchers utilise to make meaning out of data collected in the field to explain a certain social phenomenon. This study adopted a deductive approach to data analysis. Dawadi (2020) posited that a deductive approach to data analysis can be used when the researcher begins to analyse the data based on the themes that the researcher derives from the research objectives or themes that emerged during the literature review.

For this study, the researcher drew up the main themes from the research objectives; after that, the researcher identified the sub-themes that emerged from the data and categorised them according to the existing themes from the research objectives. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) assert that deductive data analysis works from specific observations to broader generalisations and theories. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), data analysis in qualitative research involves organising, accounting for and making sense of the data based on participants' definitions of the phenomena under study, noting patterns, themes and categories within a set of data.

The researcher followed the thematic analysis processes identified by Dawadi (2020). Figure 2 shows a simplified diagram of the process the researcher followed to analyse the data using the thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis examines all of the data to identify, analyse and report recurring common issues and main themes that summarize all of the collected views (Kruger & Varpio, 2020). Audio recorded raw data were transcribed; transcribed data was organised in order to determine the sub-themes. The emerging themes from the data were coded, and data was displayed in extended texts; this will enable a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of learners with learning difficulties on the learning support at school.

Figure 2

The process of thematic data analysis



Step 1: Familiarisation with the data

Firstly, the researcher familiarised herself with the data. This was achieved by organising data by preparing all the field notes captured during the interviews and transcribing the audio-recorded data into words.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Secondly, the researcher reduced the data by going through all the responses. Data was then coded by selecting (highlighting) relevant phrases and sentences within the data or responding directly to the research question.

Step 3: Searching for themes

Thirdly, the researcher opted for a deductive thematic analysis method. This method entails deriving themes from the research objectives. The researcher started clustering codes that were talking about a similar issue (common themes) and categorised them into the main themes that the researcher derived from the research questions. This implies that the main themes were derived from the research objectives, and the sub-themes were the highlighted phrases that emerged from the participants' responses. Cohen et al. (2018) assert that “data reduction does not mean disregarding data; instead, it means refining the critical points of the phenomenon from the rich text of the findings without violating it, catching the essence of the issue or the situation, enabling the researcher to identify things such as patterns, key issues, causal processes and sequences” (p.643).

Step 4: Reviewing themes

During this step, the researcher looked at all coded data placed under each theme and ensured that they all fit, and those that did not fit were then placed under the theme that fit best. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) listed several questions worth noting that the researcher should try to answer to ensure that the themes are reviewed and refined appropriately. These questions include:

“Do the themes make sense? Does the data support the themes? Am I trying to fit too much into a theme? If themes overlap, are they really separate themes? Are there themes within themes (subthemes)? Are there other themes within the data?”

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

During this step, the researcher refined the final themes. This step involves "identifying the essence of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

Step 6: Writing report

Finally, the last data analysis phase was to write down the research findings, which the researcher wrote in Chapter 4.

3.8 Ethical consideration

According to Ramrathan, le Grange, and Higgs (2016), ethics is closely related to morals and involves embracing moral issues when working with humans. Society has become sensitive to the idea that people's rights, particularly those who are vulnerable,

should be protected (ibid). According to Ramrathan et al. (2016), researchers must ensure the integrity of the entire research process, which includes ensuring that their research is trustworthy (valid and reliable) and that their findings are based on evidence. The researcher will, therefore, address the issues of validity and reliability to maintain (or establish) the integrity of this research study. One of the fundamental concepts which contribute to the bedrock of ethical procedure is informed consent (Cohen et al., 2007), which this study applied.

The researcher obtained the Ethical Clearance Certificate from the University of Namibia Decentralized Ethics Committee (DEC), (see Appendix A). The researcher then applied for permission to conduct research from the University of Namibia Centre for Research Services, and permission was granted (see Appendix B). The researcher further applied for permission from the MoEAC through the office of the Director of Education of Khomas Region, and permission was granted to conduct the research at a resource school in Windhoek (see Appendix C). The researcher further wrote a letter to the school principal of the resource school where the study was conducted to seek permission to conduct interviews. Once permission from the school principal was granted and participants were selected, participants who were above the age of 18 consented themselves (see Appendix D) and below the age of 18 were given consent forms to take to their parents (see Appendix E). Participants and their parents/guardians signed an informed consent and informed assent letter, respectively, before participating in the study (see Appendix C and D). Participants were reminded that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Participants were assured that their responses were treated as anonymous and confidential, and they were assured that data would not be shared or published, and that access to data was restricted to the researcher and the supervisor. Ramrathan et al. (2017) state the researcher is obliged to indicate how the data will be managed once collected. All participants were assured that data will be stored in a hard drive protected with a password (Bit Locker encryption). After five years, all the information would be deleted from the hard drive.

3.9 Summary of the chapter

This chapter focused on providing an in-depth discussion of the research process the researcher followed in order to collect data. The chapter specifically focused on the methods the researcher utilised to collect data; it detailed the process the researcher followed to analyse the data and the ethical protocols followed to ensure that the research was in line with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results/ findings of the study. Data analysis of the transcriptions from the interview schedules and field notes was guided by the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1. The first section of the chapter starts with a description of the research area and an introduction of the participants. Secondly, the results are presented according to the themes and subthemes that emerged during thematic data analysis. Finally, a conclusion to the chapter.

4.2 Context of the study

4.2.1 Description of the research area

The Resource School where the data will be collected is a government school that it caters for learners with learning difficulties. The school is situated in Windhoek, Khomas Region, Namibia. The school has about 450 learners between the ages of 14 and 19 and a staff complement of over 30. The school offers grades 5 – 7 and two vocational streams, namely pre-vocational and vocational.

The school has well-maintained sports facilities for learners to participate in various sports activities. The school also has a well-equipped library, a science laboratory lab and a workshop where learners do their projects for the vocational subjects. Classrooms are well-ventilated; some classrooms have single desks, while in others, learners sit on a dual desk.

4.2.2 Introduction of the participants

Participants were assigned names (L1 until L20) in order to keep their anonymity. The first participant to be interviewed was named L1; the second was named L2, etc. Table 1 shows a summary of the respondents, their age and their class placement at this resource school. Table 1 further displays the different types of learning difficulties experienced by learners.

This study focused on the experiences of learners with learning support at a resource school, and the researcher did not establish whether teachers teaching at this school are professionals in the field of inclusive education (and have knowledge and skills working with learners with learning difficulties and disabilities). Learners who are enrolled at this resource School come from mainstream schools and are referred to this school because they cannot keep up with the academic demands of the mainstream school.

Learners at this school are placed according to their abilities. Those learners who lack the fundamental skills of reading and writing and arithmetic/ numeracy skills are placed in Learner Support 1 (LS1). They then progress to Learner Support 2 (LS2) after a period of 1 year when they achieve the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy. When they complete LS2, they are placed in the two vocational streams: Pre-vocational (Pre-voc) for those still struggling to read and write and Vocational (Voc) for learners with basic reading and writing skills.

Table 1*Summary of the participants' information*

Learner name	Age	Class	Learning difficulties experienced
L1	13	LS1	Reading, Writing, Numeracy
L3	13	LS1	Reading, Writing, Numeracy, Poor memory, easily distracted
L4	13	LS1	Reading, Writing, Numeracy, Poor memory, poor concentration
L8	14	LS1	Reading, Writing, Numeracy, Poor memory
L2	15	LS1	Reading, Writing, Numeracy, Poor memory
L6	15	LS2	Reading, Writing, Numeracy, Poor memory
L7	15	LS2	Reading, Numeracy, poor memory
L5	16	LS2	Reading, Numeracy
L12	16	LS2	Reading, writing, poor memory
L14	16	LS2	Reading, writing, lack of concentration
L13	17	PRE-VOC	Reading, writing
L16	17	PRE-VOC	Reading, lack of concentration
L18	17	PRE-VOC	Reading, writing
L19	17	PRE-VOC	Reading, poor memory
L20	17	PRE-VOC	Reading, poor memory
L9	18	VOC	Reading, poor memory
L10	18	VOC	Easily distracted, poor memory
L15	18	VOC	Reading and Writing
L17	18	VOC	Writing, poor concentration
L11	19	VOC	Poor memory, Easily distracted

It was established in chapter 3, under the section titled Population, that the population of learners with learning difficulties at this resource school is estimated at 182, with a total of 14 classes. The study sample comprised 20 learners. The words "Almost all" mean more than 17 of the participants (85% - 99%), "most" means more than half of the participants (50% – 84%), and "some" means less than half of the participants (1% - 49%).

Table 2*Learning difficulties and the number of times they appeared from participants.*

Type of learning difficulty	Number of times	Percentage (%) of times
Reading	Almost all	85 and above
Writing	Most	50 – 84
Numeracy	Most	50 – 84
Poor memory	Most	50 – 84
Easily distracted	Some	1 – 49
Lack of/ poor concentration/ poor attention	Most	50 – 84

4.3 Themes that emerged from the findings

Research objectives and themes that are generated from the research objectives are presented in Table 3 for a clear presentation.

Table 3

Themes that emerged from data collection

Research Objective	Theme Emerging from Data Collected/ Themes Generated
Identify the types of learning support learners with learning difficulties receive in their classroom.	<p>Learning difficulties learners experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor memory • Attention span • Numeracy difficulties • Reading difficulties • Writing difficulties • Easily distracted <p>Types of learning support learners receive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading aloud • Writing activities • Objects as Learning materials • Conducive learning environment <p>Types of learning support learners do not receive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual attention • Assistive devices
Explore learners with learning difficulties experiences with learning support they receive in the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences of learners with learning support in the classroom
Make recommendations to the school administration on best support practices for their learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations for learners with poor memory • Recommendations for learners with reading difficulties • Recommendations for learners with writing difficulties • Recommendations for learners with numeracy difficulties

4.4 Types of learning difficulties experienced by learners.

Participants were asked to narrate the types of learning support they received at school. To get the types of learning support learners receive, firstly, I enquired about the type of learning difficulties they experience. Participants revealed different types of learning difficulties (see Table 1) that they experience, and how these difficulties hinder them from performing to their optimum.

Some participants perceived that they experience learning difficulties based on their performance (scores) in standardised tests and examinations they went through since their early years of schooling. For example, L1 said, *"I came to this school because I'm a slow learner. I know I have learning difficulties because I don't pass my tests well. When I was in primary school, I used to fail my grades, and I have repeated grades because I failed at the end of the year...that makes me think that maybe I have learning difficulties."* The findings of the study revealed that some of the participants have little understanding of the learning difficulties that they experience, and they have concluded that they experience learning difficulties merely on the basis that they do not achieve good marks/ scores in their assessment tasks.

One of the participants appeared not to have been aware that they experience learning difficulties: *"I don't think that I have a learning problem, I can't read, I don't do well in school, and it's normal to be like that because other children also fail like me."* This finding shows that some children with learning difficulties might not be aware of the problems they encounter with learning; they might perceive poor academic performance as 'normal', and there is nothing wrong with achieving low grades in school.

Based on the definition of learning difficulties defined by this study in Chapter 1 under the definition of terms, almost all participants were aware of the learning difficulties they experienced in school. The findings from the semi-structured interviews revealed that participants experience various difficulties that influence their learning, such as poor memory, short attention span, reading difficulties, writing difficulties, difficulties with numeracy skills and getting distracted easily during lessons (as summarised in Table 1). These difficulties will be presented below as narrated by participants (learners).

4.4.1 Poor memory

Most of the participants (60%) revealed that they experience difficulties recollecting information/ content that they were taught during lessons presented to them when they are performing a learning task or being assessed in various subjects. The inability to recall information taught to them from long-term memory compromises their ability to perform assessment tasks, causing learning difficulty. For example, L3 said, *“Sometimes I read through my book or in the papers the teacher gives me, and when I go to the next page, I forget what I read on the previous page.”* L4 said, *“I mostly struggle with remembering the things that the teacher talks about in class; even at home, I’m just like that; even my mother knows that I forget things...every morning, my mother will tell me what I need to do otherwise I’ll forget... when it’s time to study for the exam I study the same things over and over again until I know it, but when it’s time to write the exam then I forget everything that I studied...sometimes I panic when I see the test, and my mind just go kaput [blank]”*

All learners in Namibian schools are subjected to standardised tests. These standardised tests do not constitute clinical diagnosis; they are assessment tasks on which learners are tested to see if they have achieved the basic competencies of a particular subject and grade. This finding (by L3 and L4 stated above) shows that learners sometimes struggle with retrieving information from their short-term and long-term memories in order to respond to questions, and this may result in low scores in standardised tests such as the English Second Language test, which will eventually result in poor academic performance. If this problem is not detected earlier so that interventions can be applied to improve their memory retention, the problem may escalate and such a learner may experience difficulties in their learning.

The findings of the study revealed that sometimes learners struggle to grasp new information that is presented to them. This could result from a lack of prior knowledge and their inability to create mental images associated with the new information. Example L5 said, *"I mostly struggle taking in new topic information. Sometimes it's a lot of information which I struggle to remember"*. I asked him what he does to overcome this problem, and he said: *"When I go for learner support classes, the teacher just goes through the work in the book with me and explains and helps me read. sometimes, I understand, but I still fail to do it on my own...I forget the stuff easily."* This response reveals that L5 does not get the assistance that he needs because it appears that the intervention employed by the teacher of "explain the work" does not solve the problem he experiences, which is poor memory retention.

4.4.2 Attention span

Some participants (20%) revealed that they experience difficulties in paying attention during lessons, which may contribute to their low achievement in school. Example: L10 said, *"Yes, I find it difficult to focus sometimes."* L2 said, *"When the teacher is teaching, I listen, sometimes I listen, and sometimes I think of other things. I try to listen, but I get to think of other things...I get lost in my thoughts. I hear what the teacher is saying, but I'm not paying attention."* This finding reveals that learners struggle to concentrate during lessons, which may cause them to miss essential lesson instructions and lose direction in completing tasks successfully during the lesson.

4.4.3 Numeracy difficulties

Some (40%) of the participants have expressed their struggles with mathematics. For example, L8 said, *"When the teacher teaches maths, the example is always easy, and when I get the classwork, then I just don't know how to solve that question...math is not easy...I always have low marks in math...on my report, math is the one with always low grades..."* Some of the learners who experience difficulties in numeracy remarked that they get assistance from their siblings at home, some participants get help with their homework from their parents, and a few of the participants said they have private tutors that help them with mathematics. Example L8 said, *"Most of the time, my mother helps me with my maths homework..."* L4 said, *"At primary school, I attended an afterschool care where I had a private tutor that helped me with maths, but now, I don't go there anymore."*

4.4.4 Reading Difficulties

The findings of the study revealed that almost all participants (85%) expressed that they experience difficulties with reading. Participants from the Learners Support Class 1 and Learner Support Class 2 (aged between 13 and 16) are still struggling with letter recognition and letter sounds. This problem emanated from the early years, and it appears that before they were referred to this resource school, they could not achieve the basic skills of reading from the early years of school. Example L5 said, "*...before I came to this school, I used to school at [name withheld]. That is where my problem with reading started; I did not like to read [loud] in class because the children used to laugh at me. I did not like reading...*". This finding reveals that this participant was demotivated by the claim that other learners used to laugh at him, and this might have negatively affected his self-esteem and his willingness to learn how to read. Another participant, L19, claimed, "*When I came to this school, I could not read, but now I can read...*"

The findings of the study revealed that participants with reading difficulties also experience other difficulties associated with reading other than letter-sound awareness. These problems include reading fluency and reading comprehension. Example L18 said, "*Sometimes I read through my things [the content], and I just do not understand what is written down; I try to understand the [content], but it's just not sticking in my head...*" L11 said, "*I struggle mostly with the difficult words in the book; those [vocabulary] words sometimes make it difficult for me to understand what I am reading about...*" These findings reveal that this learner experiences difficulty in constructing meanings out of the text; he has difficulties in making relevant connections among facts read.

Participants who experience reading difficulties reported that when they read their notes or study in the textbook, they usually do not understand what they are reading; some, therefore, switch to memorising the text, which does not even help them during the test because they tend to forget what they have memorised. L20 said, "*...sometimes I just have to memorise the things, but in test when I just forget that big [complicated] word, then I just forget everything I [have] memorised...*" This finding reveals both difficulties in comprehension of text, which cause the learner to resort to memorisation of text. This finding further indicates that some learners tend to resolve to memorise the text as a learning strategy; however, this strategy does not benefit them during tests because of a lack of comprehension of what they studied.

Most of the participants who expressed that they have difficulties with reading experience problems of reading fluently. Example L7 said, "*I have a problem reading fast; I read very slow because I try to first check the letters and make a sound in my heart because I say it loud...that is what my teacher told me.*" Another challenge experienced by learners with learning difficulties is 'difficult questions.' Example L11 stated, "*I struggle a lot with more complicated questions or difficult questions; when I read the questions, I just don't understand what I should do*". This finding revealed difficulties in applying knowledge learnt in class to address the question asked and difficulties with comprehension of text.

4.4.5 Writing Difficulties

The study's findings revealed that some participants lack interest in writing tasks and use various tactics to avoid writing in class. During the focus groups discussions, L12 said, "*our teachers like giving us a lot of work to write, like copying notes from the*

chalkboard... or from the textbook, and I don't like that" L13 said, *"sometimes when we are given work to write I ask my friend to write for me...because the words are sometimes difficult to read so I don't finish my work"*, L14 said *"I just tell my teacher that I forgot my book at home I will write later...I can ask my friend to write for me sometimes I will not write"*, L15 said *"I ask for permission to go to the toilet, and there I will take my time..."* L16 said *"I have a problem of writing [formation of the letter, I write veeery slow..."*

During focus group discussions, participants also expressed difficulties in spelling words correctly. Example L20 said, *"spelling is a problem miss...at my previous school, I did not like to write, but now my teacher is learning me."* According to Peter, Patel, and Nizami (2015), handwriting issues can have an impact on self-esteem, ability perception, and peer relationships. One of the participants in the focus group discussions L19 said, *"miss, sometimes the children don't know how to write, you will not even read the letters they are writing...but for me, I'm fine, I can write nxa [properly]."*

4.4.6 Easily distracted

During the focus group discussions, some participants (15%) revealed that they get distracted easily whenever teachers are busy explaining the topic, and there are learners making noise. Whenever teachers attend to disciplinary issues that arise during the lesson, some learners lose concentration, and 'getting their brain back' to the task is a challenge. Example L12 said, *"Some children like to make funny stuff in the class, and we just laugh; we are always waiting on someone to make jokes, then we laugh..."* This finding reveals that more attention is directed to jokes during lessons,

and this may distract learners who would prefer to learn in a quiet classroom environment.

4.5 Types of learning support that learners receive

The study did not focus on determining whether teachers at this resource school received professional training in special education in order to work with learners who experience learning difficulties. In addition, the study did not focus on establishing whether teachers at this resource school base their intervention methods on clinical or empirical data. In this section, the researcher asked learners with learning difficulties to narrate the type of learning support they receive at school.

Most participants (85%) revealed they were happy to be schooling at this resource school because teachers give them enough individual attention and are helpful and friendly. Participants also said that the extra learner support classes they attend in the afternoon have helped them improve their learning. For example, L16 said, *"Miss, we are happy to be schooling here; the teachers help us a lot more than at our primary school,"* L13 *"They [teachers] are friendly, and there is no beating"*. The findings of the study also revealed that participants (especially learners in their second year or more at this school) improved their reading, writing and arithmetic skills. For example, L19 said, *"When I came to this school, many of us did not know how to read and count numbers, but now we know the teachers helped us a lot."* L17 said, *"Like now, miss, I can write and read my stuff [work]."*

Participants revealed that their teachers allow them to help each other in areas one learner might have mastered while another has difficulties. Example L9 said, *"...the*

teacher will just tell you to go help [a classmate] with reading..." L14 said, *"sometimes the teacher will give me chalk to go show other children [calculation of number]."* This finding revealed that teachers utilise methods such as peer teaching and group work to support learners struggling with certain topics.

The findings of the study revealed that teachers also made use of peer teaching in their lessons by allowing learners who understand a particular aspect of the topic to explain it to others in the class. Most participants preferred this form of learning support, whereby another learner/ peer takes up the role of the teacher and explains to other learners. Example L20 said, *"...in the math class for example our teacher asks a learner who scored the highest marks to explain how [the method they used] they get the answer to all of us...and we all like it because then you will just hear also the children in the class saying oooo ah easy..."*. This finding shows that learners can also learn from their peers, and it's another form of support for learners with learning difficulties.

Most participants (85%) revealed that they struggle with paying attention during teaching and learning sessions; they get distracted easily. I asked them, *"What do your teachers do to help you with the problem of losing focus easily in your learning support classes?"* Participants responded that whenever their teachers give them work, there are breaks between completing the tasks that enable them to stand up from their chair, stretch and go back to completing the task. This shows that the teacher's mechanism to aid learning allows learners time out of their task to take a break and refresh their minds before continuing.

The findings of the study reveal that participants utilise multiple learning styles. Some (30%) of the participants revealed that they prefer their lessons to be presented using

visual aids such as watching videos (visual), other participants revealed that they prefer their lessons to be practical (kinaesthetic), and few of the participants preferred to learn by hearing the teacher (auditory). During focus group discussions, participants revealed that their teachers employ multiple learning styles in their lessons. *“Our teachers play videos on the projector and yeah we watch how things work...”* *“Sometimes we get group work to construct a model and it's always fun to work with our friends...”* *“Our teacher walks around the class reading an English passage to us, and I like it when the teacher is the one reading; then I don't have to read the passage on my own again...”* This finding shows that teachers differentiate their teaching styles in order to accommodate the various learning styles preferred by learners with learning difficulties as a form of supporting their learning.

4.6 Types of learning support learners do not receive

One of the strategies for providing learning support to learners with learning difficulties is to give them individual attention on every learning task. The findings of the study revealed that learners do not always receive learning support during their lessons. Example L9 said, *“Sometimes the teachers walk around our tables looking at what we are doing when we are like doing classwork; usually they go to those learners who make noise in class to check if they are really doing the work, but sometimes they don't walk around our tables to check if we are really doing the correct things.”* L10 said *“even when we are given homework, sometimes the teacher will just check a few books and then give correction on the board...yes, sometimes I stand up and go to the teacher to ask if I'm on the right track and sometimes I just write the corrections.”*

During the focus group discussions, participants revealed minimal support from teachers when learners are given work they must complete as a group. Participants revealed that whenever there is a project they have to complete as a group, not all group members contribute towards completing the task. *"Some group members just contribute money to buy the materials [poster], and maybe one person will do the project...the teacher will think it's all of us that did the project...the teacher will just give us the same mark, but it's not everyone that did the project...sometimes we just let the person who is good to do the project, and we benefit like that..."* Group work promotes peer-to-peer learning; however, if learners working in a group are not supervised, then group work might not yield the results they ought to yield.

In contrast, one participant perceives group work to be a good way of learning from one another; for example, L13 said: *"I learn so much from my friends whenever we are given work to do as a group; every group member always has something to say, and we explain to each other why we think something should be done in a certain way...the teacher does not see us when we gather answers and discuss what to write in the final project, but we really do learn from one another."*

4.7 Experiences of learners with learning support

Table 4 summarises the responses from participants regarding their experiences with learning support in the classroom. Participants were asked to narrate their experiences with learning support in the classroom. Participants were asked whether they were satisfied with their learning support and what they think constitutes a good lesson that helps them learn. The responses are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of learners' preferred learning style and what they perceive should constitute a good lesson

Learner name	Preferred learning style	Are you satisfied with learning support you receive	What constitutes a good lesson
L1	Kinaesthetic	Satisfied	Reading aloud
L2	Kinaesthetic	Satisfied	Reading and writing
L3	Visual,	Satisfied	Reading with peer
L4	Kinaesthetic	Satisfied	Reading
L5	Auditory,	Satisfied	Helping each other to read
L6	Visual,	Satisfied	Reading aloud
L7	Visual	Satisfied	Reading and writing
L8	Auditory	Satisfied	Teacher tell stories
L9	Kinaesthetic	Satisfied	Writing
L10	Kinaesthetic	Satisfied	Working with hands to build
L11	Kinaesthetic	Satisfied	Writing
L12	Auditory	Satisfied	Working in groups
L13	Auditory	Satisfied	Listening to the teacher reading
L14	Visual,	Satisfied	Helping each other in math
L15	Auditory,	Satisfied	Doing work in a group
L16	Auditory	Satisfied	Writing
L17	Kinaesthetic	Satisfied	Building objects
L18	Visual and Kinaesthetic	Satisfied	Doing practical work
L19	Visual	Satisfied	Working at the workshop
L20	Visual	Satisfied	Building things

The main research finding regarding the experiences of learners with learning difficulties with learning support revealed that although most of the learners were satisfied with the type of learning support their teachers offered them in the classroom, they continue to struggle with developing long-term mechanisms that will enable them to cope with school work and take their learning independently. The findings of the study revealed that teachers assist learners in various areas in which they experience difficulties. Most of the participants indicate that they are satisfied with the way their teachers assist them in grasping the learning content. However, they still need help whenever they have to solve academic problems independently. This implies that learners with learning difficulties at this resource school still struggle to learn independently, especially in written work.

4.8 Recommendations on best support practices for learners with learning difficulties

In order to gain insight on what learners recommend that their teachers do to support them in their quest for learning, I asked the question, *"In your opinion, what do you think should be done by your teachers to make up a "good lesson" as a form of learning support to address your learning needs?"* Participants narrated what they deemed necessary for their teachers to do to support them with their learning.

4.8.1 Recommendations for learners with poor memory

Learners who experience poor memory narrated some recommendations of what, in their opinion, will help them improve their learning and minimise the difficulties they experience in learning. L13 has a problem with focusing and remembering what was taught in class. He recommended that *"our teachers should give us a lot of notes to copy in our summary books because when I write things over and over, then I remember better..."* Most of the participants with poor memory suggested that their teachers give them many question papers to work on.

Other participants who experience difficulties with recalling information suggested that they need constant reminders in order for them to remember what they have to do. For example, L4 said, *"My mother always reminds me every morning of what I have to do, and it helps; otherwise I just forget, like I won't remember what happened if my mother does not remind me..."* Although the participant is referring to the mother, teachers can utilise this same technique to remind their learners on a regular basis regarding their learning tasks and instructions to complete certain learning tasks.

During the focus group discussions, it emerged that most of the participants prefer working more on question papers as this strategy helps them recall answers during assessment tasks: *"Sometimes you think you know, but when questions come then eish you just don't know what to answer..."* *"...maybe we should do more and more question papers so that we practice and get used to the questions."*

4.8.2 Recommendations for learners with reading difficulties

The findings of the study revealed that some of the participants struggled with reading comprehension, reading with understanding, and making meanings out of the text. Example L18 said, *"teachers can read to us the things [work] and maybe explain the difficult words then maybe it will help us."* This suggest that, learners with learning diffulcties prefer teachers reading out loud instructions to them and explaining diffiuckt words that they may find difficult to interpret during their assessment sessions such as tests and examination.

4.8.3 Recommendations for learners with writing difficulties

During data collection, the researcher discovered that teachers read out loud questions to learners during examination time. Teachers read the instructions clearly and explain questions to learners to ensure that learners with learning difficulties are provided with the necessary support to interpret the questions correctly. Participants who experience difficulties with writing suggested that sometimes assessments can be carried out orally. Example L7 said, *"...I can talk nice, sometimes I know the things, but the problem is to write...maybe I can just say the answer..."* Data analysis revealed that learners with learning difficulties prefer using devices to complete certain learning tasks, such as writing. Example L9 said, *"Miss, I wish I could just talk and say the*

answers instead of writing; I don't like writing, miss." L16 "...or miss we can just talk [oral testing] then we don't need to write..."

4.8.4 Recommendations for learners with numeracy difficulties

Learners recommend that their teachers try to explain using different methods of getting to the answer in subjects such as mathematics; this will enable them to choose a method they find easier to use to solve numerical problems. During focus group discussions, participants suggested that they continue with peer learning and peer teaching strategies because this also helps them learn numbers and basic numeracy skills such as subtraction, multiplication and addition.

4.8.5 Recommendations for learners who get distracted easily

Most participants revealed that they find it difficult to concentrate during the lesson or when completing an assessment task. Participants revealed that they experience difficulties to concentrate when they have to study because sometimes the notes are a lot and they find it difficult to remember when they are being assessed through tests and examinations.

4.9 Conclusion to Chapter 4

This chapter presented the data findings of the experiences of learners with learning difficulties on the learning support they receive at a resource school. The chapter presented the data according to the themes that were derived from the following main research objectives:

- To identify the types of learning support learners with learning difficulties receive in their classroom.

- To explore learners with learning difficulties' experiences with the learning support they receive in the classroom.
- To find out how learning support for learners with learning difficulties can be strengthened.

The findings of the study were analysed under the main three themes: learning difficulties learners experience, types of learning support learners receive, types of learning support learners do not receive, experiences of learners with learning support and the recommendation for the different learning difficulties. The researcher incorporated direct quotes from the participants in order to provide a qualitative description of the themes. Data was presented and interpreted according to the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This is the final chapter of the study, which aimed at exploring the experiences of learners with learning difficulties regarding learning support at a resource school. Firstly, the researcher will present a discussion of the findings per the available scientific research on the different types of learning difficulties learners can experience and the appropriate ways to support these learners. Secondly, the researcher will provide a summary of this research study. Thirdly, the researcher will present concluding remarks linked directly to the main objectives of the study. Finally, the researcher will present recommendations informed by the main research findings presented in Chapter 4 of this study.

5.2 Discussions

The experiences of learners with learning difficulties in schools are a topic that is not widely explored. There is limited research conducted from the Namibian perspective that explores the learner support experiences of learners with learning difficulties in the classroom. Thus, this study aimed to explore the experiences of learners with learning difficulties on the learning support received at school. The study intended to identify the types of learning support that learners with learning difficulties receive in the classroom and establish how the learning support for learners with learning difficulties can be strengthened. This section will discuss and summarise the findings in view of the research objectives and the literature reviewed.

5.2.1 Types of learning support that learners with learning difficulties receive in the classroom

The study established that learners with learning difficulties schooling at a resource school are aware of the learning difficulties that they experience. The findings revealed that learners experience difficulties in the areas of reading, writing and numeracy. Other difficulties that hinder them from realising their full potential in school include difficulties with memory retention and difficulties with paying attention to a task. These findings are in line with the definition of learning difficulties; ‘factors that cause learners to underachieve academically such as sensory impairment (weaknesses in vision or hearing); severe behavioural, psychological or emotional issues; English as a second language or dialect; high absenteeism; ineffective instruction; or, inadequate curricula’(DFS Literacy & Clinical Services, 2018, para 4).

Participants who experience difficulties paying attention to the task for extended periods revealed that their teachers allow them to have break periods where they can move away from the task to relax and return to complete the task after a few minutes of relaxation. According to Cicekci and Sadik (2019), lack of attention during the lesson can be caused by students' lack of preparedness, learning difficulties, being in adolescence, a lack of interest in the lesson, aimlessness, and no motivation, as well as coming to school without sleep, hungry, and tired, making it difficult for them to garner their attention in the classroom.

5.2.2 Learners with learning difficulties' experiences with learning support in the classroom

The findings of the study revealed that sometimes learners do not receive the individual attention they would like to receive. Although, in most cases, teachers offer individual support during feedback sessions in the classroom, there are times when teachers do not check all learners' individual work. This finding shows that although teachers, during lessons, make an effort to move around the classroom in an attempt to offer individual support to learners who might be struggling with completing a given task on their own, they do not do so all the time. This finding is consistent with what the MoEAC (2018) in consultation with parents and NGOs recommended, that children in Resource Schools need classroom assistants and carers who can assist them with reading and writing as well as helping them with understanding instructions from teachers. This call for the MoEAC to avail sufficient resources that will enable the provision of learning assistants in every classroom other than the regular teacher.

The findings of the study divulged that some learners with learning difficulties benefit from doing work in a group. In contrast, others do not prefer group work as a method of learning because sometimes not all members are actively involved in group projects. They end up benefiting from the score mark only without actual learning. This was an ambiguous finding, which means it is two-sided because some participants revealed that they benefited from the cooperative assessment method, and some did not learn; they only benefited from the score with no actual learning that the task intended for.

Similarly, to those who prefer group work, Ainscow and Miles (2013) suggests that resource schools can thrive when learners construct knowledge through social

interactions. This is in line with Chiriac (2014), whose study revealed that working in a group promotes learning, academic knowledge and collaborative abilities. In parallel to those learners who do not prefer to work in a group, Burke (2011) indicates that working in a group can be a stumbling block, because some learners may rely heavily on others to complete the task, disabling them from acquiring the necessary skills and basic competencies that the task requires them to obtain. Some learners might not benefit from group work because there is no clear guidance and instructions on the responsibility of each group member. The intentions of the teacher to give group work might be because the teacher wants to emphasise social interaction and learning among peers, which is another form of supporting learning; with minimum supervision of a teacher, such collaboration might not benefit all learners as they allow the one they perceive to be more knowledgeable in the group to do all the work.

Some of the participants who experienced difficulties with writing said that they struggled with written work. They write very slowly and copy letter by letter whenever they are given a written task. Peter, Patel and Nizami (2015) corroborate these findings by noting that writing difficulties include difficulties in letter illegibility, slow rate of writing, difficulty spelling, and problems with syntax and composition. This study found that writing difficulties can be managed when teachers minimize written work and permit extra writing time for class assignments and tests, (Reid, 2009.)

This study found that learners with learning difficulties find remembering everything they are taught difficult because the information appears to be a lot to process. These findings are in line with a study conducted by Cicekci and Sadik (2019, p. 19) on the “teachers’ and students’ opinions about students’ attention problems during the

lesson”, which revealed that factors such as students' lack of readiness, learning difficulties, adolescence, lack of interest in the lesson, aimlessness, and lack of motivation, as well as coming to school without sleep, hungry, and tired, make it difficult for them to gather their attention in the classroom. The study revealed that some of the factors that cause students to lose attention during the lesson may be attributed to the students themselves, such as low level of readiness, going to school without preparation, attention deficit, disliking the course and having health problems. In contrast, others may be attributed to teachers, such as the teaching method utilised and failure to apply class rules (ibid).

The findings of the study revealed that learners previously suffered from low self-esteem and a lack of motivation to go to school because they could not read and write while schooling at mainstream school. However, they have regained their confidence due to their ability to read and write as a result of the support they have been receiving from their teachers at this resource school. This finding is consistent with the findings of Akyol, Temur, and Eror (2021), who state that problems with reading and writing can have a negative impact on students not only academically but also socially. Akyol et al. (2021, p280) opine, "students who have problems in reading and writing develop a negative attitude towards reading and writing because they cannot overcome these problems after a while, and because of this negative attitude, students avoid works that require reading and/or writing, thus they fall behind their peers academically".

5.2.3 Strengthening the learning support for learners with learning difficulties

The results of this study shows that most (85%) of the participants experienced difficulties with reading. Learners with learning difficulties suggested that teachers

should help them with more assessment materials in order to practice more as they prepare for formal assessments. Westwood (2008) believes that if a learner has difficulties in understanding what they are reading, it is imperative to consider whether there is a mismatch between the learner's knowledge of word meanings and the words used in the text. He, therefore, suggests a greater need to teach new vocabulary or explain vocabulary during teaching to strengthen comprehension (ibid).

In order to support learners in improving their reading comprehension skills, Westwood (2008, p. 43) suggests that teachers can use the techniques of 'thinking aloud' and 'self-questioning' while processing a typical passage of text and reflecting upon its meaning. This signify that learners need to be taught how to read a text at the same time, apply thoughts and meanings to the text. This can be achieved through discussions and engaging various texts to increase learners' ability to analyse texts and thereby ensure text comprehension.

Participants also suggested that they try to overcome the problem of reading comprehension by studying in a group, asking each other questions and reading out loud; they feel that this strategy helps them improve their reading fluency, and it also boosts their confidence when they help each other read as a team. Westwood (2008) advised teachers to give learners abundant time to practice the reading strategy. Wixson et al. (2019) advocated for teachers to develop a comprehensive instructional approach that includes oral language development, writing and spelling, and a focus on comprehension, all of which are deemed necessary tools for supporting and assisting students in becoming independent readers.

Learners with learning difficulties make the best progress in academic subjects when the teaching methods are direct, explicit and well-structured (Westwood, 2008). Therefore, for all learners to benefit from each other's knowledge, the task instructions should clearly outline each member's role in completing the task. There should be supervision by a more knowledgeable other to guide and ensure that each participant contributes to the task.

The results of this study further shows that learners experience difficulties in recalling information; poor memory. Westwood (2008) suggests using graphic organisers to summarise and consolidate critical points before, during and after reading as a strategy that helps strengthen the recalling of information. Teachers should also incorporate in the lessons peer-to-peer explanations, whereby learners explain what they have learned to peers; this strategy allows fading memories to be reactivated, strengthened and consolidated (ibid). Some of the participants reveal that they are satisfied with the way their teachers teach, however they recommend that teachers speak much more slowly and louder in order for them to grasp the lesson content as this may help them with memory retention.

Gerschler (2012) suggested that teachers should try to minimise distractions in their lessons, maximise the interests and understanding of students and differentiate their teaching styles to accommodate the various learning styles that learners possess; this will help increase student information retention. Gerschler (2012) further suggested that teachers should make an effort to maintain a positive, energetic classroom environment, which helps to keep students actively involved in the lesson, thereby minimising shifting focus to events beyond the lesson.

5.2.4 The findings concerning the theoretical framework

The findings of the study indicate that learners engage in peer-to-peer teaching and group work in order to assist their peers who might be struggling in certain learning areas. The findings further reveal that some learners preferred working in groups when completing a learning task. The idea of learners working in groups is in line with Vygotsky's notion that “individuals learn best when working together with others during joint collaboration, and it is through such collaborative endeavors with more skilled persons that learners learn and internalize new concepts, psychological tools, and skills” (Shabani et. al., 2010, p. 238.). Similarly, Silalahi (2019) believe that social constructivism is an appropriate approach to understanding learning and development, thereby enhancing optimal learning in the Zone of proximal development.

In agreement with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, participants' perceptions regarding their experiences with the types of learning support they received in school were influenced by their trust in teachers as their catalyst in ensuring that they get the necessary support in class. The extra learning support teachers provide to their learners in the classroom setting is helpful and benefits learners who might have struggled with keeping up and managing their studies.

5.3 Summary

One of the main aims of education is to ensure that individuals acquire knowledge and skills in order to become functional beings in society. The experience of learners with learning difficulties is a topic that is not fully explored from the Namibian perspective. This study aimed to explore learning support from their point of view, the personal feelings, needs and expectations, among others, of learners with learning difficulties

at a resource school in Windhoek. The study is viewed through the lens of Vygotsky's Social Cultural Historical theory of development, specifically Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development concept.

The ZPD is an area between what a child can achieve independently and what they can achieve with the guidance and support of the teacher or a more knowledgeable other. The ZPD helped in understanding the role played by teachers in rendering support to learners with learning difficulties in the classroom. Vygotsky emphasised that teachers can utilise the ZPD by building on learners' prior knowledge through scaffolding and assisting learners by connecting new knowledge to existing knowledge in order to learn new information.

The data collected through semi-structured interviews provided insight into the experiences of learners with learning difficulties on learning support in the classroom. The focus group discussions provided insight to validate the findings from the individual semi-structured interviews. During the focus group discussions, participants could share ideas on what their teachers can do in order to help them realise their full potential. The researcher used a deductive approach to analyse the data. Thematic data analysis allowed the researcher to identify and organise the themes that emerged from the data by grouping the themes based on the objectives of the study.

Thematic data analysis revealed that learners with learning difficulties experience various learning difficulties, such as reading difficulties, writing difficulties and difficulties with arithmetic. However, their teachers offer them learning support in order to manage the difficulties they face in the classroom. They receive learning

support in various ways, such as peer teaching and more collaborative activities like group work.

5.4 Concluding remarks

5.4.1 The types of learning support learners with learning difficulties receive in their classroom

The findings of the study revealed that learners with learning difficulties put so much trust in their teachers as agents of learning and development. Participants are satisfied with how their teachers support them in learning. According to the participants, teachers utilise various means of supporting them in their learning. This includes allowing them to work in groups to assist each other with reading activities, developing and improving their numeracy skills and checking each other's written work. Participants are well pleased with teachers at this resource school because they make the lessons flexible by allowing their learners to have mini-breaks between the activities, which helps learners who experience difficulties with paying attention to tasks for more extended periods than their brain can handle.

5.4.2 The experiences of learners with learning difficulties on the learning support they receive in the classroom

The findings of this study revealed that participants are satisfied with the learning support they receive in the classroom at this resource school. Most of the participants revealed their teachers employ various teaching methods that cater to their different learning styles. Based on the findings of the study, it is clear that teachers at this resource school create a conducive learning environment in the classroom that fosters learning and promotes the emotional well-being of learners with learning difficulties.

It can also be concluded from the findings of the study that teachers promote peer teaching, which can also contribute to the social development aspect of learners while engaging with peers in the classroom.

5.4.3 The type of learning support learners with learning difficulties would like to receive in the classroom

Despite the fact that all participants, based on the findings of the study, were satisfied with the way their teachers support them with learning, they still have recommendations on what they deem necessary for their teachers to do in order to help them manage their learning difficulties in their quest for learning. Participants suggested that their teachers should give them more attention by always checking their work and ensuring that every participant in activities such as group activities contributes towards completing the activity. While teachers at this resource school put in effort in giving individual attention to some tasks, it is worth acknowledging that due to time constraints and the demand of completing the syllabus, paying individual attention at all times is not attainable.

5.5 Recommendations

5.5.1 Recommendations to teachers who teach learners with learning difficulties

Teachers play a vital role in rendering learning support within the classroom to learners with learning difficulties. While this study did not establish whether teachers are trained in the field of special education, it is recommended that all teachers who teach learners with learning difficulties should be trained in the field of special education in order to offer the required support that will help learners with learning difficulties realise their full potential. This study recommends that teachers teaching at resource

schools should collaborate with other professionals and paraprofessionals who know how to best support learners with learning difficulties. This collaboration will allow teachers to share their expertise and resources that can be utilised in the classroom to enable learners with learning difficulties to be exposed to various beneficial learning materials that respond to their learning needs.

5.5.2 Recommendations to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture

This study recommends that the MoEAC should provide resource schools with special teaching and learning resources, equipment and tools that teachers can use in the classrooms to enable them to render the necessary support that will help learners with learning difficulties realise their full potential. The MoEAC should also provide financial resources for continuous professional development activities to enable teachers to learn new skills and keep pace with the current standards and best practices they can apply in their teaching and learning process, thereby ensuring effective teaching and learning environments.

5.5.3 Recommendations for further research

This study recommends that further research should be conducted to find out if teachers who are working in resource schools are trained in the field of special education. Further research should also establish how teachers in resource schools base their intervention and learning support measures. Further research can probe whether teachers in resource schools base their intervention measures on particular theoretical perspectives and clinically proven or evidence-based intervention methods.

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Appendix A



ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: SoE-DEC-W28/10/21/04

Date: 09 November 2021

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Decentralized Ethics Committee (DEC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the **School of Education (Windhoek & Khomasdal Campuses) Decentralized Ethics Committee**.

Title of Project: Learner support experiences of learners with learning difficulties at a resource school in Windhoek.

Researcher: Paulina Nghiihwamo

Student number: 200624237

Take note of the following:

1. Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the ethics committee. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
2. Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the ethics committee
3. The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the ethics committee (through the Chairperson) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by the ethics committee
4. The ethics committee retains the right to:
 - i) Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected,
 - ii) Request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research.

The ethics committee wishes you the best in your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Job U. Hengari'.

Dr. Job U. Hengari (Chairperson, Windhoek & Khomasdal Campuses Decentralized Ethics Committee)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Davis Mumbengegwi'.

Prof. Davis Mumbengegwi
(Head, Multidisciplinary Research)

Appendix B

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH SERVICES

Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor: Research, Innovation & Development

University of Namibia, Private Bag 13301, Windhoek, Namibia
340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneers Park, Office F223 - Fblock, Second Floor
☎ +264 61 206 4673; E-mail:kmbulu@unam.na; URL.: <http://www.unam.edu.na>



RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER

Date: 11/02/2022

Student Name: Paulina Nghiiuwamo

Student Number: 200624237

Programme: Master of Education in Inclusive Education

Approved Research Title: Learner support experiences of learners with learning difficulties at a resource school in Windhoek.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

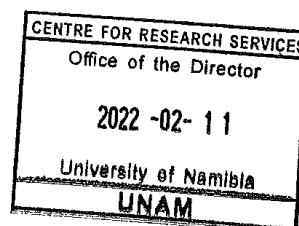
I hereby confirm that the above mentioned student is registered at the University of Namibia for the programme indicated. The proposed study met all the requirements as stipulated in the University guidelines and has been approved by the relevant committees.

The proposal adheres to ethical principles as per attached Ethical Clearance Certificate. Permission is hereby granted to carry out the research as described in the approved proposal.

Best Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "AEE Shikongo", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. AEE Shikongo
Head: Postgraduate Support Services
Tel: +264 61 206 3129
E-mail: aeshikongo@unam.na



Appendix C



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**KHOMAS REGIONAL COUNCIL
DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION, ARTS, AND CULTURE**

Tel: [09 264 61] 293 4356
Fax: [09 264 61] 231 367/248 251

Private Bag 13236
WINDHOEK

28 March 2022

P. O Box 16
Ondangwa
Namibia

For Attention: Mrs. Paulina Nghilwamo

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH INTERVIEWS WITH SELECTED
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN WINDHOEK, KHOMAS REGION**

Your letter date 23 February 2022 on the above topic is hereby acknowledged.

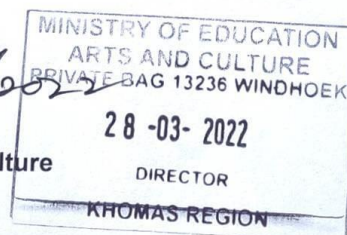
Permission is hereby granted to you to research "*Learning support experiences of learners with learning difficulties at a resources*" at Pioneer Boys School in Windhoek, Khomas Region under the following conditions:

- ❖ The Principal of the selected school to be visited must be contacted in advance and an agreement should be reached between you and the Principal.
- ❖ The school programme should not be interrupted.
- ❖ The teachers and students who will take part in this exercise will do so voluntarily.
- ❖ The Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture should be provided with a copy of your thesis/ findings.

We wish you success in your research.

Yours sincerely

Paulus D. Nghikembua
Director of Education, Arts and Culture



Appendix E

UREC Annex 5C: Informed Parental Consent for
Qualitative Studies

INFORMED PARENTAL CONSENT FORM



Informed Consent for Parents of Learners with Learning Difficulties

Name of Principal Investigator:	Paulina Meameno Nghilwamo
Name of Sponsor:	N/A

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- **Information Sheet (this section, to share information about the study with you)**
- **Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)**

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form.

PART I: INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

I am Paulina Meameno Nghilwamo, pursuing a Master's degree in Inclusive Education at the University of Namibia. I am doing research which might help school teachers provide learners with the learning support they will need in order to perform to their optimum best. In this research I will talk to many learners at the school and ask them a number of questions. Whenever researchers study children, we talk to the parents and ask them for their permission. After you have heard more about the study, and if you agree, then the next thing I will do is ask your son for their agreement as well. Both of you have to agree independently before I can begin. You do not have to decide today whether or not your child will participate in the research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain.

Purpose of the Research

I am conducting a research on the experiences of learners with learning difficulties on the learning support services they receive at school. The main aim of the research is to explore their experiences and find out from them how best they want to be supported by their teachers. I will invite them to share their knowledge and understanding with me so that I can find ways of meeting their learning needs at school.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your child's participation in a group discussion that will take about one and a half hour, and an interview that will take about one hour.

Participant Selection

I would like to talk to learners at a selected resource school; a school that cater for learners with learning difficulties about their experiences of the learning support services they receive at school. I would like your child to participate because he is schooling at this selected resource school and the researcher believe that he possesses rich information that may be of great importance towards the study.

Voluntary Participation

You do not have to agree that your child can talk to me. You can choose to say no and that does not change the admission status of the child at the school. I know that the decision can be difficult when it involves your children. You can ask as many questions as you like and I will take time to answer them. You don't have to decide today. You can think about it and tell me what you decide later.

Procedures

1) The following applies only to focus group discussions:

Your child will take part in a discussion with 6 other children who attend school at the same Resource School. This discussion will be guided by me.

The group discussion will start with me, making sure that the participants are comfortable. I will also answer questions about the research that they might have. Then I will ask questions about the types of support services they receive at this school. I will also ask them about the types of learning support they would like to receive at the school.

The discussion will take place in the Life Skills classroom at school, and no one else but the people who take part in the discussion and I will be present during this discussion. The entire discussion will be recorded, but no-one will be identified by name in the recording. The recording will be kept in a safe. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except I will be allowed to listen to the recordings. The tapes will be destroyed after the whole research study is concluded.

2) The following applies only to interviews:

Your child will participate in an interview with myself.

If your son does not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, he may say so and I will move on to the next question. The interview will take place in the Life Skills classroom at school and no one else but the interviewer will be present unless your child asks for someone else to be there. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except I will be allowed to listen to the recordings. The tapes will be destroyed after the whole research study is concluded.

Duration

I am asking your child to participate in an interview which will take about 1 hour of his time. We can do this outside of school hours.

Risks

There are no risks involved in participating in this research.

Benefits

Your child's participation in this research will help the research find out more about their experiences regarding the types of learning support they receive and hear from them what they recommend be the best practices for them to learn. The outcome of the study will therefore help teachers employ the best support strategies to ensure that learners perform to their optimum best.

Reimbursements

Your child will not be provided with any payment to take part in the research.

Confidentiality

I will not be sharing information about your son. The information that I will collect from this research project will be kept confidential. Information about your child that will be collected from the research will be put away and no-one but the researchers will be able to see it. Any information about your child will have a number on it instead of his name. Only the researcher will know what his number is.

Sharing the Results

At the end of the study, I will be sharing what I have learnt with the participants. I will do this by meeting with the participants at school. Nothing that your child will tell me today will be shared with anybody, and nothing will be attributed to him by name. I will also publish the results in order that other interested people may learn from this research.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You may choose not to have your child participate in this study and your child does not have to take part in this research if he does not wish to do so. Choosing to participate or not will not affect either your own or your child's future treatment at the school in any way. Your child may stop participating in the discussion/interview at any time that you or he wish.

Who to Contact

You can contact Dr Vei Kazuvire at Tel: 061-206-4565 if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the relevant Ethics Review Committee at the University of Namibia, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. The committee reports to the University's Centre for Research Services. If you wish to contact this Centre, please call +264 61 206 4673 or send an e-mail to research@unam.na.

You can ask me any questions about any part of the research study if you wish to. Do you have any questions?

PART II: CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked, have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily for my child to be a participant in this study

.....

Name of Parent/Guardian (print) Parent/Guardian	Signature of
--	--------------

.....

Date (day/month/year)

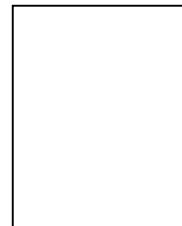
If illiterate

[A literate witness must sign. (If possible, this person should be selected by the participant and should have no connection to the research team.) Participants who are illiterate should include their thumb print as well.]

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

.....

Name of Witness (print)



Thumb print of

Participant

.....

Signature of Witness

.....

Date (day/month/year)

Statement by the Researcher/Person taking Consent

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the parent of the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

1. Participating in the study is entirely voluntary and participant can withdraw at any time.
2. Interviews and discussions will take place at school, outside school hours.
3. All participants’ names remain anonymous and all information will be treated confidential.

I confirm that the parent was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

.....

Name of Researcher/Person taking Consent (print)	Signature
--	-----------

.....

Date (day/month/year)

If Assisted by an Interpreter: Statement by Interpreter

I have accurately interpreted the information sheet to the parent of the potential participant in (insert name of target language), and to the best of my ability made sure that the they understand that the following will be done:

1. Participating in the study is entirely voluntary and participant can withdraw at any time.
2. Interviews and discussions will take place at school, outside school hours.

3. All participants' names remain anonymous and all information will be treated confidential.

I confirm that the parent was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the parent have been interpreted correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

I declare that I will not divulge any information that I interpret during this research intervention to a third party outside this study.

.....

Name of Interpreter (print)

Signature

.....

Date (day/month/year)

Appendix D

UREC Annex 5D: Informed Assent for Children/Minors

INFORMED ASSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN/MINORS



Informed Assent for Learners with Learning Difficulties

Name of Principal Investigator:	Paulina Meameno Nghiihwamo
Name of Sponsor:	N/A

This Informed Assent Form has two parts:

- **Information Sheet** (gives you information about the study)
- **Certificate of Assent** (this is where you sign if you agree to participate)

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Assent Form.

PART I: INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

My name is Paulina Meameno Nghiihwamo and I'm a teacher. The reason why I'm conducting this research is that I would like to find out your experiences with learning support services at your school.

I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of a research study. You can choose whether or not you want to participate. We have discussed this research with your parent(s)/guardian and they know that we are also asking you for your agreement. If you are going to participate in the research, your parent(s)/guardian also have to agree. But if you do not wish to take part in the research, you do not have to, even if your parents have agreed.

You may discuss anything in this form with your parents or friends or anyone else you feel comfortable talking to. You can decide whether to participate or not after you have talked it over. You do not have to decide immediately.

There may be some words you don't understand or things that you want me to explain more about because you are interested or concerned. Please ask me to stop at any time and I will take time to explain.

Purpose: Why are you doing this research?

I am conducting a research on the experiences of learners with learning difficulties on the learning support services they receive at school. The main aim of the research is to explore their experiences and find out from them how best they want to be supported by their teachers. I will invite them to share their knowledge and understanding with me so that I can find ways of meeting their learning needs at school.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in a group discussion that will take about one and a half hour, and an interview that will take about one hour.

Choice of Participants: Why are you asking me?

I would like to find out your experiences of the learning support services you receive at this school because you are a learner here and I believe that you possesses rich information that may be of great importance towards the study.

Participation is Voluntary: Do I have to do this?

You don't have to be in this research if you don't want to be. It's up to you. If you decide not to be in the research, it's okay and nothing changes. This is still your school, everything stays the same as before. Even if you say "yes" now, you can change your mind later and it's still okay.

Confirmation	Initial
I have checked with the child and they understand that participation is voluntary.	P.M.

Procedures: What is going to happen to me?

The group discussion will start with me, making sure that you are comfortable. I will also answer questions about the research that you might have. Then I will ask questions such as the types of support services you receive at this school. I will also ask you about the types of learning support that you would like to receive at the school.

The discussion will take place in the Life Skills classroom at school, and no one else but the people who take part in the discussion and I will be present during this

discussion. The entire discussion will be recorded, but no-one will be identified by name in the recording. The recording will be kept in a safe. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except I will be allowed to listen to the recordings. The tapes will be destroyed after the whole research study is concluded.

Confirmation	Initial
I have checked with the child and they understand the procedures.	P.M.

Risks: Is this bad or dangerous for me?

There are no risks involved in participating in this study.

Discomforts: Will it hurt?

Participating in this study will not cause any harm to you.

Confirmation	Initial
I have checked with the child and they understand the risks and discomforts.	P.M.

Benefits: Is there anything good that happens to me?

By participating in this study, you will get to express your views regarding the type of learning support that you receive and suggest possible measures/ alternatives that your teachers can do to enable you to perform to the best of your abilities in your academics.

Confirmation	Initial
I have checked with the child and they understand the benefits.	P.M.

Reimbursements: Do I get anything for being in the research?

You will not be provided with any payment to take part in the research.

Confidentiality: Is everybody going to know about this?

I will not tell other people that you are in this research and I won't share information about you to anyone. Information about you that will be collected from the research will be put away and no-one but I will be able to see it. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name. Only I will know what your number is.

Sharing the Findings: Will you tell me the results?

When I finish with the research, I will sit down with you and I will share with you the results but the confidential information will remain confidential.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Can I choose not to be in the research? Can I change my mind?

You do not have to be in this research. No one will be mad or disappointed with you if you say no. It's your choice. You can think about it and tell me later if you want. You can say "yes" now and change your mind later and it will still be okay.

Who to Contact: Who can I talk to or ask questions to?

You can ask me questions now or later. If you choose to be part of this research, I will also give you a copy of this paper to keep for yourself. You can ask your parents to look after it if you want.

You can ask me any more questions about any part of the research study if you wish to. Do you have any questions?

PART II: CERTIFICATE OF ASSENT

I understand the research is about expressing my views on the learning support services I receive at school. I understand that the whole process is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time of the interview/ discussion.

I have read this information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked, have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in the research.

OR

I do not wish to take part in the research and I have not signed the assent below.

..... (*Initialled by child/minor*)

Only if child assents:

.....
Name of Child (print)
Signature of Child

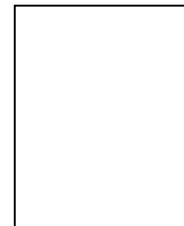
.....
Date (day/month/year)

If illiterate

[A literate witness must sign. (If possible, this person should be selected by the participant, not be a parent, and should have no connection to the research team.) Participants who are illiterate should include their thumb print as well.]

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

.....
Name of Witness (not a parent/guardian) (print)



Thumb print of

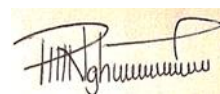
Participant
.....

Signature of Witness
.....

Date (day/month/year)

I have accurately read or witnessed the accurate reading of the assent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given assent freely.

Paulina Meameno Nghiilwamo.



Name of Researcher (print)

Signature

.....

Date (day/month/year)

Statement by the Researcher/Person taking Assent

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

1. Participating in the study is entirely voluntary and participant can withdraw at any time.
2. Interviews and discussions will take place at school, outside school hours.
3. All participants' names remain anonymous and all information will be treated confidential.

I confirm that the child was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

.....

Name of Researcher/Person taking Consent (print)

Signature

.....

Date (day/month/year)

Confirmation	Initial
Copy of IAF provided to the participant	

Confirmation	Yes (X)	No (X)	Initial
Parent/Guardian has signed an informed consent.			

If Assisted by an Interpreter: Statement by Interpreter

I have accurately interpreted the information sheet to the child in
 (insert name of target language), and to the best
 of my ability made sure that the child understands that the following will be done:

1. Participating in the study is entirely voluntary and participant can withdraw at any time.
2. Interviews and discussions will take place at school, outside school hours.
3. All participants' names remain anonymous and all information will be treated confidential.

I confirm that the child was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by them have been interpreted correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

I declare that I will not divulge any information that I interpret during this research intervention to a third party outside this study.

.....
 Name of Interpreter (print) Signature

.....
 Date (day/month/year)

Appendix F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

TOPIC: Experiences of learners with learning difficulties with learning support at a resource school in Windhoek.

PART A: Particulars of learners with learning difficulties

- (a) Age:
- (b) Current grade:
- (c) What is the reason why you were referred to this school?

PART B: Main interview semi-structured questions

1. Objective 1: Identify the types of learning support learners with learning difficulties receive in their classroom.

- 1.1 What type of learning support do you receive regarding your learning difficulty that you experience (e.g. reading difficulty, writing difficulty etc.)?
- 1.2 Are you happy/ satisfied with the learning support you receive?
- 1.3 How do you manage with the curriculum (if you do not receive any learning support)?
- 1.4 Is your learning support sessions given/ presented in a group or on an individual basis?
- 1.5 Does your learning support teacher utilise your preferred style of learning (e.g. kinaesthetic, auditory, and visual)?
- 1.6 In your own opinion, what constitutes a ‘good lesson’ presented by your teacher(s) as a form of learning support to address your learning needs?

2. Objective 2: Explore learners with learning difficulties' experiences with learning support they receive in the classroom.

2.1 What are your experiences with the learning support regarding your learning difficulties?

2.2 Are you happy/ satisfied with the learning support you receive?

2.3 In your opinion, what would be a conducive set up (e.g. on-on-one intervention/ counselling, group intervention/ counselling) that would address your learning difficulty?

2.4 Any other experience you would like to share with me about the learning support you receive in the classroom?

3. Objective 3: Make recommendations to the school administration on best support practices for their learners.

3.1 What would you recommend your teacher(s) do differently in order to help you learn best?

Appendix G

Focus group discussion guide with learners with learning difficulties

1. Objective 1: Identify the types of learning support learners with learning difficulties receive in their classroom.

1.1 What type of learning support do you receive in your classroom?

1.2 What are your views on the following regarding learning support?

Group work (classwork, assignment, project), Peer mentoring and Learner support teacher

1.3 What type of learning support would you like/ have liked to receive at this school?

2. Objective 2: Explore learners with learning difficulties experiences with learning support they receive in the classroom.

2.1 What are your experiences of being at this (Resource) school regarding learning support?

2.2 Do you have any other comment related to your classroom experience and learning?

3. Objective 3: Make recommendations to the school administration on best support practices for their learners.

3.1 What would you recommend your teacher(s) do differently to help you learn best?