

# Challenges Faced by Learners with Partial Hearing Impairment in Lubombo Mainstream High Schools: A Wellness Perspective

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## Abstract

This study sought to explore the challenges faced by learners with partial hearing impairment (LWPHI) in Lubombo mainstream high schools. The study used a social constructivism research paradigm and a qualitative research method. A phenomenological research design was utilised to find out how mainstream high school environment can handicap the LWPHI from reaching the vital and most cherished goal of independent living. Participants in the study were selected using purposive criterion sampling and they were 14 (n=14) in total. The data collection process entailed utilisation of individual semi-structured interviews and conducting of non-participant observation. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings suggest that restrictive school environment robbed LWPHI equalized opportunities for meaningful participation in educational activities. Hence, modified instructional strategies and social environment are pertinent if the education sector really needs to combat academic discrepancies between the 'normal' and the LWPHI.

**Keywords:** hearing impairment, inclusive education, learners, mainstream schools.

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## 1. Study orientation

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is a milestone in the history of human rights. Drafted on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1948, in Paris, by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all corners of the world, the proclamation set out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected (World Health Organization, 2014).

Partial hearing impairment is a disability. According to the World Health Organisation (2012), the term disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Thus, disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. According to Social Security Administration (2013), some people are born with a disability, while some acquire disabilities as a result of an illness or injury.

Though the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 1997, established the right of LWPHI to a free appropriate public education, including special education related services and transition services, LWPHI still belong to one of the most vulnerable groups of children (Gravell, 2014). Azanor and Adighn (2013) define LWPHI as learners encountering difficulties in their hearing system and who need classroom adaptations and implementing communication strategies that will ensure success in their academic and social life. Although LWPHI have residual hearing, which allows some linguistic information to be processed orally with or without amplification, partial hearing impairment immensely affects their educational performance (Beard, Carpenter & Johnson, 2011). In the past, they have endured centuries of educational inequality (Matthews, 2011), hence they qualify to receive special education.

According to Alsalem (2017), LWPHI constitute the largest sub-group of learners with hearing impairment. They are the least understood and most neglected of all learners with disabilities. This observation may be attributed to the hidden nature of the impairment they have (Dalton, 2011). They have been marginalized because the impairment places them on the borderline between the learners who are hearing and those learners who are deaf. The learners who are partially hearing impaired are not fully accepted by either the learners who are hearing or the learners who are deaf members of the society. In essence, regarding their status, these learners basically lack a sense of identity.

With the notion of inclusion, LWPHI in Kenya can attend mainstream schools alongside the learners who are not partially-hearing impaired. This is possible with the assistance of sign language interpreters, note-takers and/or hearing aids (Kigotho, 2016). Utilisation of these learning assistive devices has to a larger extent eradicated some of the educational discrepancies, thus ensuring maximum attainment of educational goals.

In Nigerian education system, inclusive education has since witnessed some tremendous improvements in the last decade despite cultural, social-economic and political constraints (Eskay, 2009). The improvements have provided support mechanisms for learners with disabilities, those with partial hearing impairments inclusive (Michale & Oboegbulem, 2013). In adherence to Section 8 of the National Policy on Education, the Nigerian

government thus puts forth resources to facilitate education of LWPPI.

In Zimbabwe, teaching LWPPI and those without hearing impairment together in mainstream schools is a strategy which is believed to give LWPPI equal access to opportunities for learning and ‘normal’ models in society (Musengi & Chireshe, 2012). It is believed that by using sign language as a medium of communication, teaching the LWPPI together with those who are without hearing impairment promotes equity for the LWPPI, with special regards to removing educational disparities.

In Eswatini, LWPPI have been for a long time confined to special schools like the School for the Deaf (Mabuza, 2014). These LWPPI were kept in special schools because in terms of Eswatini culture, having any nature of disability has since time immemorial been viewed as a taboo. This stems from the ancient general belief which still exists in modern day EmaSwati that people who have a disability are bewitched or inflicted by bad spirits, thus they deserve to be devalued and dehumanized. As a result, parents of children with hearing impairment (both the deaf and partial hearing impaired) would at most react to such cruelty by hiding their children from public knowledge and eye (Eschnebeck, Gille, Heim-Dreger & Schock, 2017).

Inclusive Education has emerged and has been adopted as a strategy to eradicate all forms of inequality suffered by these LWPPI. Therefore, to foster inclusive schools which accept, value and celebrate differences among the learners who are ‘normal’ and the learners with disabilities, LWPPI inclusive, the Kingdom of Eswatini, through the Ministry of Education and Training introduced Inclusive Education in 2010. Inclusion, in a school set up can be defined as a process of reorganizing schools to be responsive to the needs of all its learners (Ainscow, 2010). Inclusion is a continuous process of school ethos and change (Makoelle & Van der Merwe, 2014). Inclusive education aims at increasing participation of all learners in education while preventing segregation and alienation in schools (United Nations International Children Emergency Fund, 2008).

In light of the above, inclusive education implies progressive increase in the participation of learners, in reduction of their exclusion from the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools (Ibrahim, El-Zraigat & Smadi, 2012). Worth noting is that advocates for inclusion postulate that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (United Nations International Children Emergency Fund, 2000). Furthermore, advocates of inclusive education postulate that this paradigm shift from segregatory schools to inclusive schools would help LWPPI by emerging them into a school community that mimics a mini society (Miller, 2011).

Resilience refers to the ability to do well in the face of adversity (Ungar, 2016). Importantly, a biological condition, like disability on its own does not represent adversity, trauma or challenge to the LWPPI. Rather, what represents adversity is the social disadvantage associated with the partial hearing impairment (Hartley, 2013). This means that for LWPPI, resilience is the complex interplay between them and their school environment. Without an effective transition regarding how to live with disability, the experience of disability is often ambiguous and confusing (Hartley & Stuntzner, 2014). Some of the LWPPI may seem to succumb to minor stresses, while others seem to cope successfully with even the most terrible experiences. In that perspective, resilience is an asset-based approach that can help LWPPI respond successfully and creatively to their partial hearing impairment (Hartley, 2013).

## 2. Statement of the problem

In 2010, the Kingdom of Eswatini, through the Ministry of Education and Training introduced free primary education in all public primary schools and inclusive education in all public schools. Inclusive education mandates LWPPI to receive quality education in their neighbouring schools, alongside their hearing counterparts. It aims at rectifying the tendency of treating LWPPI as misfits in the education fraternity. Research studies reveal that underlying the process of inclusion is the assumption that the general classroom teacher has certain knowledge and understanding about the needs of different learners, teaching techniques and curriculum strategies (Donnelly, 2010). As per the dictates of the Eswatini Inclusive Education Draft Policy (2008), the researcher expects that LWPPI should be retained in mainstream schools. However, observations have reflected that there is still evidence of LWPPI who travel long distances to segregatory schools like Siteki School for the Deaf Primary and Matseta High School for the Deaf. Often times, these LWPPI leave the comfort of their families. Taking into consideration the sensitivity of the issue, the researchers found a gap which necessitated them to conduct a study to explore the challenges faced by LWPPI in Lubombo mainstream high schools of Eswatini.

## 3. Research questions

The study was guided by the following sub-research questions:

- How does curriculum offered in mainstream high schools impede learning for LWPPI?
- To what extent are instructional strategies employed during teaching in Lubombo mainstream high schools a hindrance to LWPPI’s learning?

- How does the social environment enhance learning for LWPHI?

#### 4. Methodology

The study utilized a social constructivism paradigm. This paradigm assumes that understanding, significance and meaning does not only take place within an individual, but also occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities, such as interaction and collaboration with other human beings. Social constructivism was an ideal paradigm for the study on the premise that it believes in language as the most essential system through which humans construct reality. Hence, if LWPHI are to acquire optimally in terms of educational goals, room for active and meaningful participation for them should be provided.

This study utilized a qualitative research approach. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological tradition of enquiry, that explores a social or human problem where the researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyses of words, and reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in the participants' natural setting. As stated by (Bailey, Hennink & Hutter, 2011), qualitative research allowed the researcher to explore the challenges faced by LWPHI in Lubombo mainstream high schools from multiple perspectives, that is, through the utilization of interviews and observations. In each mainstream high school, a high level of authenticity of data collected was ensured through conducting the interviews in private rooms, as such minimized chances of destruction to both the interviewer and the interviewee.

A phenomenological design was utilized to conduct this study. A phenomenological research design is a qualitative research design that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understanding of a particular situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The phenomenological design enabled the researcher to collect data using triangulation; a multiple data collection technique, by employing interviews and observations (Creswell, 2014).

Participant for this study were fourteen purposively sampled LWPHI from Lubombo mainstream high schools; a composition of eight boys and six girls.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants (N=14)

Participants	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
LWPHI	Boys	8	57.1
	Girls	6	42.9
Total		14	100

Data was collected using interviews and observation. Individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to immerse herself into the research setting with an open mind, unoccupied with pre-conceived ideas. While conducting interviews, the researcher sensed when the conversation was drifting in an unproductive direction and she gently guided it back on course ((Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Furthermore, interviews gave the researcher an opportunity to study non-verbal behaviour of each participant. Since participants were available to clarify immediate concerns and unclear statements, interviews allowed acquiring of in-depth information, through probing deeper into the participants' opinions and emotions (Creswell, 2012). The researcher guarded against subtle, yet meaningful cues in participants' expressions and side tracks (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). While conducting the interviews, the researcher also used verbatim. Verbatim is capturing direct quotations of participants (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007), which in this case was done through an aid of an audio-recording system.

During break time, when the learners were at liberty to choose who to interact with, observation was conducted to find out how the rest of the learner population mingled with LWPHI. For instance, observation entailed finding out if there were common games shared between the LWPHI and those without partial hearing impairment. Field notes were recorded during and immediately after observation, so that departure from the research site could not interfere with authenticity of information. In essence, recording the notes soon was meant to help the researcher not to lose or forget important details obtained during the observation period.

Parents and participants of the study were provided with sufficient information about the study in a format that was comprehensible to them. For instance, they were made to be aware that there would be no financial gain for participating in the study. Before the commencement of administering interviews and observation, participants and their parents were required to sign consent forms as written evidence for their understanding of what the study entailed. Participants were told that they had the right to pull out of participation at any stage of the research process and such a withdrawal would be accepted without any penalty. In compliance with Creswell (2009), the researchers protected all participants from all sort of harm, be it physically, psychologically, emotionally or otherwise. Anonymity of participants was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, and schools were labelled A, B, C, D and E. In a bid to ensure a high degree of confidentiality, information which was divulged by each participant to the researchers were at that particular participant's comfort, and after data collection, at no circumstance was the information revealed to other people.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Curriculum complexities

The Lubombo mainstream high schools were characterized by a curriculum that is inflexible to address the shortcomings of LWPPI. Recognition of the inclusion of LWPPI has not been followed up with curriculum modifications to suit their needs. This covered the issue of total collection of subjects and the actual content of the syllabi per subject. Participants raised concerns and admitted that they had challenges in logic subjects such as mathematics and science since cognitive concepts which involved specific language related to volume, shape, size, comparisons, measurement and reasoning were particularly difficult for them to grasp. One participant interviewed strongly objected to the curriculum design thus: *The curriculum is designed to benefit normal learners and I do not see anything done with my condition in mind. I wish that subjects and content that address my needs should be incorporated in the curriculum* (Participant 1, Male, Form 3, School E).

Another participant added that: The curriculum is complicated and because of that it is difficult for me to study on my own or ahead of the teacher. Something is not proper about it and I hope it will be investigated and be rectified before my years in school are put to waste (Participant 2, Male, Form 4, School A).

The limited scope of practical and vocational subjects mounted LWPPI with unwarranted pressure. As a result, participants had much interest in practical and vocational subjects since exposure to such allowed for the utilization of compensatory senses, like, the sense of sight. This unwarranted pressure gave birth to fear of an uncertain future. A majority of the participants lamented the narrow scope of vocational subjects and alluded that: *The government of Eswatini should consider establishing more vocational subjects at high school* (Participant 2, Female, Form 5, School E).

Most participants also expressed wish that the government of Eswatini should create opportunities for them at tertiary institutions of learning by introducing more vocational programmes at least up to degree level. A participant stated that: *As for me, I like Fashion and Fabrics. I am capable in that subject and I wish to further my studies there* (Participant 2, Female, Form 5, School E). When asked to list the vocational institutions she knew, the participant just said: *They are too few because a lot of the 'normal' learners who will not get good marks will also apply to those institutions* (Participant 2, Female, Form 5, School E).

### 5.2 Restrictive instructional strategies and classroom environment

The findings of the study also revealed that LWPPI were not provided with modified teaching strategies, teaching aids and questioning techniques. They were exposed to the curriculum which suited the learners who are 'normal'. One participant lamented that the teachers in her school mainly relied on the lecture method of teaching: *In special schools the teachers are qualified to teach the kind of learners they deal with. But here, the teachers do not help us that much. They depend on lecturing and that creates a huge gap between the LWPPI and those who do not have it. So only in that regard LWPPI who attend special schools are advantaged* (Participant 4, Female, Form 2, School A).

The findings of the study also indicated that unavailability of individualised education programmes is a huge impediment towards helping the LWPPI to optimally reach their academic goals. The subject content was sometimes too much for them to deal with at the pace expected by the teachers. Most participants alluded that: *The teacher may give us a classwork to do now yet I would need time to do individual reading so as to add to the little I picked in class with my residual hearing before I get evaluated* (Participant 2, Female, Form 5, School E).

The study also established that during teaching, participants were concerned with the physical environment. They cited noise from other learners, inside and outside the classroom as contributing to their missing of much of what teachers said. The distance from the teacher greatly affected how much the participants grasped during the lessons, and as a result, most participants felt that they should not be far away from the teacher. One participant was so irate about it and burst out: *I feel so angry when I tell my colleagues to stop making noise during class because it makes me not to hear the teacher. It is so disgusting when they ignore me and some even say 'tell the teacher to speak up'. Another thing is that our classroom windows are so low lying and with missing panes. This brings outside noise to the classroom and I am greatly affected* (Participant 2, Male, Form 3, School C).

Most participants also raised the point that the majority of subject teachers were unable to augment their verbal teaching with gestures to narrow the gap between what they intended to impart and what actually is decoded by the learner. When most teachers tried to use gestures, to the learner and to the teacher, the gestures would mean different things. Such affected the participants' understanding. Actually, in most cases, it made them miss the point the teacher was trying to put across. Some participants opened up and said: *Teaching strategies not supplemented with effective body language keep us well behind normal learners. Background noise and my condition leave me with very little from the teacher if the teacher doesn't use gestures when emphasising his points. It is worse when teachers use incorrect or inappropriate gestures* (Participant 1, Female, Form 4, School D).

### 5.3 Lack of competent teacher-counselors

Most mainstream high schools have been found to be characterised by lack of competent teacher-counselors. The introduction of sign language at schools was proposed by participants as a good step towards enriching their understanding of lessons and overall academic performance. Participants hoped that if the government of Eswatini could empower teacher-counselors, the introduction of basic sign language would be an effective way of filling the gap created by the use of spoken language during class time and play time. However, some participants had concerns that sign language lessons should not be limited to LWPHI, but it should be compulsory for all learners. A participant had the following to say: *I think the school has to introduce sign language lessons. I think that can help us minimise the gap in communication (Participant 2, Male, Form 2, School D).*

When probed further as to who deserved to be taught sign language, most participant stated that it was essential that all learners, that is, with or without hearing impairment, should be equipped with sign language. One participant alluded that: *Learning sign language should be compulsory for all learners. Teaching it to LWPHI may result in stigma and isolation (Participant 2, Male Form 2, School D).*

*Worth noting is that* despite a considerable number of LWPHI in mainstream high schools in the Lubombo region, some of the participants displayed ignorance of such a thing as a teacher-counselor in their schools. This is irrespective of the fact that teacher-counselors are professionally trained to go beyond normal teaching duties, as they are also entrusted with performing duties that include imparting social and emotional competencies to all learners. Engulfed with such ignorance, some participants decried that the set up in their schools showed that of the teachers available, very few were willing to put extra effort in addressing the learners' social and emotional matters stressed them and affected their academic performance. Many responses from participants included: *We do not have such a teacher at our school (Participant 1, Male, Form 4, School C) / I have no knowledge about what you mean by teacher-counselor (Participant 3, Female, Form 3, School C) / I am still to see such a teacher at my school (Participant 1, Female, Form 4, School D).*

### 5.4 Poor representation in leadership positions.

Involvement in leadership roles at school was an important aspect raised by participants concerning their experiences in the mainstream school. Self-perception can define their belief in their capabilities in various facets of life. A majority of participants felt that they were not involved in most of the leadership roles at school, hence their capabilities in various facets of school life was hidden. Very few of the participants were involved in leadership roles which were mostly peripheral or deputising other learners who are 'normal'. In rare cases where participants led, it would be by co-option by teachers since roles based on merit and by election by other learners were mainly 'won' by learners without impairments. On whether the LWPHI were keen to be involved in leadership roles, the majority affirmed that such would actually boost their self-perception and they hoped they would yield positive results. A participant re-affirmed his position by stating that: *I feel that I am a natural leader. At home I am the first born and my parents delegate a lot of leading roles to me. I can still do it here at school if given a chance (Participant 2, Male, Form 3, School C).*

## 6. Discussion of findings

### 6.1 Curriculum complexities

The finding of the study on participants expressing keen interest for exposure to more practical and vocational activities is an area which needs to be addressed. The narrow ratio of practical subjects which dwindles their span of future career choices by not considering their capability of utilization of compensatory senses, like the sense of sight, was cited as a huge hindrance towards maximum educational goals attainment. This finding echoes Kwame (2009) whose findings revealed that practical subjects like basketry, wood work, leather work, metal work, jewellery and design were boosting academic performance for LWPHI.

The complicated nature of the curriculum is one of the plethora of challenges which participants raised and commented that they felt if the curriculum remained as it was, their years of school would not benefit them much. This finding seems to be in line with a study conducted by Manchishi (2015) in Lusaka which indicated that LWPHI had low achievement levels in mathematics and to a certain extent, they were unable to take part in group discussions because they did not have the language required. Instead of conforming to the request by participants for focus on vocational subjects, which the participant also lamented that there were few tertiary institutions at which they could be further studied, authorities in the education fraternity can put in place policies to navigate ways of building confidence in the learners so that they cannot be associated with a single line of profession or occupation. Gudyanga, Wadesango, Eliphanosi and Gudyanga (2014) say that 'the earlier the hearing loss happens in a child's life, the greater the impact it will have on the child's cognitive level. Therefore, the impact can be minimised if interventions can be availed at an earlier stage.

## 6.2 Restrictive instructional strategies and classroom environment

The inefficiency and incompetence of regular teachers, manifested by the communication gap which is a result of teachers' failure to augment their verbal teaching with gestures acts as a gigantic drawback to the LWPHI's struggle to self-reliance. The unavailability of individualized education programmes, which is a means to cater for the exceptional needs of LWPHI is a huge impediment towards helping the LWPHI to optimally reach their academic goals. Participants decried that subject content offered in the mainstream schools was too much for them to deal with at the pace expected by the teachers. Most participants alluded that before lesson evaluation, they needed additional time to enrich their class lesson. This finding validates a study which was conducted by Musengi and Chireshe (2012) which revealed that in the mainstream school, lack of linguistic access appeared to exclude LWPHI from meaningful learning.

Furthermore, the finding on unavailability of an individualised educational plan has also been recorded in a study conducted by Kalenga and Fourie (2012) in South Africa which established that although Inclusive Education policies often work on the assumption that mainstream schools should be supported by specialist services, LWPHI are inadequately served by the school systems. Instead of viewing modification of instructional materials and teaching methods as tiresome, as well as cumbersome, Vygotsky Scaffolding Theory (1978) advocates that teachers and capable learners should assist LWPHI to unlock their potential, hence combatting perpetuation of the dependency syndrome.

This finding above further concurs with Michael and Oboegbulem (2013) in Nigeria whose study indicated that in the classroom, teachers were not concerned about the presence of LWPHI. The teachers did not bother themselves about the level of academic achievement of LWPHI on subject matter. Additionally, in that study the LWPHI lamented that their teachers were not willing to assist them by providing them with extra assistance after the class. This finding is in contrary to one which was conducted by Liu and Hong (2007) which indicated that LWPHI were provided with learning care after classes through smart phones and the general packet radio service network. The state of the education sector in Eswatini was not user friendly to the learners, hence the motive of trying to meet the unique educational needs of LWPHI through assistive devices remained rhetoric. In a nutshell, such a practice throws the LWPHI into a limbo of abnormality where their existence in the mainstream school is not acknowledged.

One of the paramount factors in the inclusion of LWPHI in mainstream schools is enhancement of their social wellness, which is evident by according them a sense of belonging and acceptance. The concern from participants of a nurturing physical environment during the learning process as a situation which educators need to adhere to echoes Gudyanga, Wadesango, Eliphanos & Gudyanga (2014) in Zimbabwe. Gudyanga et al, (2014) assert that the ideal learning classroom for LWPHI should have carpeted floors, treated windows, acoustical wall or ceiling coverings to absorb sound and reduce noise from furniture scrapping on hard surfaces. They posit that noise can be minimised by attaching rubber shoes to the legs of learners' desks and chairs. Therefore, non-compliance, from colleagues to minimize noise to the level which LWPHI could tolerate greatly interfered with participants' exceptionality, hence it puts them into a classroom where they are viewed as misfits. Serious consideration of their need for a welcoming physical environment would mean demystifying disability misconceptions which view them as abnormal. The paradigm shift would mean eradicating discrimination and prejudices (Avoke, 2005), thus treating participants as learners who have special education needs, which mainstream schools, as miniature societies should celebrate and uncompromisingly accommodate.

For LWPHI, hearing aids amplify the external sound for better hearing. The finding on financial constraints for procurement of orthotic devices, like hearing aids and their batteries seems to validate findings of a study conducted by Drame and Kamphoff (2014) in rural and urban schools of Senegal. Worth noting is that while some of the participants had managed purchasing the hearing aids, these devices were no longer in good functioning order, and to get doctors who monitored their condition, participants had to travel long distances. It is crucial to note that with the introduction of Free Primary Education and Inclusive Education in 2010, learners' enrolment in classes rapidly increased. With the financial challenges, which had earlier on being hindering them from enrolling into school, integrating such learners with disabilities into mainstream schools without the means to increase their participation in educational activities seems is viewed as robbing them equalization of opportunity to participate in learning, as such denotes increased numbers in classrooms while ignoring nurturing these learners to acquire most in academic goals. The present situation, where LWPHI are dumped in the mainstream classroom to celebrate the success of learners without hearing impairment, which is evident by governments' failure to provide them with orthotic devices is a matter of concern which needs to be accorded the urgency it deserves.

## 6.3 Incompetence of teacher-counselors

Incompetence of teacher-counselors featured prominently in both responses obtained through interviews and from the researcher's observation. A teacher-counselor should be professionally trained to go beyond execution of normal teaching duties. The cry from all participants in one of the school that they had never heard of a

teacher-counselor may imply that in some mainstream high schools there was no dedicated teacher to deal with social and emotional issues affecting the learners. It is imperative to mention that if participants had some pending social and emotional problems, most participants had no one to talk to, thus their social and emotional wellness was kept at stake. This finding aligns well with a study carried out by Mlay (2010) in Norway where findings revealed that LWPHI often feel apprehensive about communicating about themselves. The apprehension made them feel that their interaction with the learners who are hearing was less satisfactory, hence they chose to be quiet or withdrawn. In the absence of competent-counselors, the participants suffered emotional strain and to a larger extent, their struggle to self-actualization was crippled by lagging behind in the social dimension of wellness as posited by Hettler Holistic Wellness Theory (1976). Hettler Holistic wellness theory, posits that lagging behind in any of the six wellness dimensions (intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual, occupational and physical dimension) impedes LWPHI from reaching self-actualisation, thus LWPHI should be fully supported in all the six dimensions.

While the introduction of sign language in some schools may be applauded, one should mention that putting emphasis for its need to LWPHI may be tantamount to discrimination. This perspective sheds light that such would equate exclusion of LWPHI at its highest extent, thus mirroring the idea of special schools which amongst their criticisms is that their existence somehow accommodates those learners who are misfits in mainstream schools.

In light of the incompetence of the teacher counselor, who in most Eswatini schools may be just one per school, one may say that even if he or she would be proficient in native sign language, making a sensible monitoring of the LWPHI would somehow prove to be an insurmountable task for him or her because the LWPHI were in different classes. As a matter of fact, therefore, although teacher training institutions such as Ngwane College, Southern Africa Nazarene University and William Pitcher College, to mention but a few, have introduced a dose of inclusive education, which amongst other things comprises of sign language lessons, the challenge that inclusive education is a pedagogy which has emerged a few years ago still leaves one with a dire need to see a fully-fledged paradigm shift which would adequately capacitate in-service teachers about this new trend in their profession. Sufficient capacitation of all teachers would call for using sign language as an equally legitimate language in all mainstream schools, for closing the communication gap, thus LWPHI would get the best accommodation services alongside their hearing counterparts.

#### **6.4 Absence of identification and monitoring mechanism for LWPHI**

During the interviews it transpired that some learners were failing to disclose their disability to their teachers. The researcher was shocked to the core to discover that one of the participants was her ex-learner, whom she had taught for two years at primary school level. This finding is consistent to an act of one teacher which sent the researcher to a heart-breaking mode, whereby equipped with information from regional education offices that that particular school had the nature of learners the researcher was anxious to study, the arrival of the researcher sent the 'teacher-counselor' to hunt for LWPHI. The absence of an identification and monitoring mechanism hugely impacted on the interaction between the teachers, as curriculum implementers and participants, as recipients of the curriculum. The relationship between the learner and the teacher sometimes showed some false portrayal of the learners' intellectual capability. It is of paramount importance to note that this is the same school where most participants reported that they suffered false interpretation from the teacher, like being labelled as noise makers, while in actual fact, they would be seeking for clarity from the learners who are 'normal', thus, the greatest obstacle facing LWPHI was not the hearing impairment, but the failure of professionals to understand the LWPHI (Adoyo, 2008).

#### **6.5 Poor representation in leadership positions.**

Physical wellness is essential for the execution of tasks: In the study, participants showed keen interest in having more practical learning experiences. The finding echoes the finding of a study by Reich and Lavay (2009), as well as Musengi and Chireshe (2012) where learners were found to be participating in soccer and volleyball. However, having few LWPHI as leaders would imply that teachers should uproot all stereotypical attitudes towards LWPHI, as well as inculcate more confidence in LWPHI to go beyond being ordinary members of the activities, but to climb further to leadership positions.

### **7. Conclusion and recommendations**

The study explored the challenges faced by LWPHI in Lubombo mainstream high schools of Eswatini. The challenges from teachers were found to be more significant as compared to those from other learners. Apart from the physical impairment, the social environment at school affected LWPHI psychologically, and consequently, that had a considerable bearing on LWPHI academic performance. Through the utilization of a multi-disciplinary approach, external intervention from various quarters of society including school authorities, education administrators, government and well-wishers can device broad range of ways to close that 'natural' gap between

learners who are 'normal' and those with partial hearing impairment.

In the face of these excruciatingly painful challenges, the following recommendations are suggested to education policy makers, administrators, as well as school authorities and teachers: The Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini should consider formulating a policy that incorporates a more comprehensive curriculum that addresses the limitations of LWPHI so as to enhance their chances of benefiting from the learning processes in mainstream high schools. Educational policies should include provision of more vocational subjects to give an option to LWPHI to focus on the subjects they are good at and interested in. The policies should, however, not appear to target the learners living with impairments, since that on its own can be also tantamount to exclusion, but must be presented as optional for both 'normal' and learners with impairments. Equipped with such a policy, the Ministry of Education and Training should capacitate in-service teachers, as key curriculum implementers, to go an extra mile in giving out-of-class assistance to LWPHI. Furthermore, the government of Eswatini, through the Ministry of Education and Training should have a database of LWPHI in different parts of the country and establish their needs so that a budget can be set aside to assist those from underprivileged families with procurement of crucial things such as hearing aids and batteries for the aids. If LWPHI are known, the government of Eswatini, through regional educational offices, should organise periodic awareness workshops for teachers on how to manage stereotypical and segregatory attitudes towards LWPHI. Over time, a semblance of acceptance of LWPHI at school and conformity of the same learners to their environment can be improved and performance can be boosted. In addition, the study recommends introduction of basic sign language in the Eswatini education system. This can enable the LWPHI to overcome the communication gap and thus be able to communicate effectively with both the teachers and the learners who are 'normal'. Finally, the Ministry of Information Communication and Technology in Eswatini should consider joining hands with the Ministry of Education and Training to introduce computers and internet connection to all mainstream high schools in Lubombo region, so that during their studies, LWPHI can have access to internet resources.

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