

**ASSESSING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORT
SERVICES FOR LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN
THE MAINSTREAM JUNIOR SCHOOLS IN ERITREA**

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A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Education in the Department of Curriculum Development and Instructional Methods,
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September 2003

DECLARATION

I declare that **Assessing Educational Resources and Support Services for Learners with Visual Impairment in the Mainstream Junior Schools in Eritrea** is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other University and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Nasser Mohammed Fitwi

Signature: _____

Date: 01 September 2003

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Keywords:

- **Education**
- **Eritrea**
- **Visual Impairment**
- **Mainstream**
- **Inclusive Education**
- **Disability**
- **Learners**
- **Special needs**
- **Resources**
- **Blind/Partial sighted**
- **Braille**



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ACRONOMIES

ACSET: Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers.

EHRD: Eritrean Human Resource and Development.

EPFJD: Eritrean Peoples Front for Justice and Democracy.

ERNAB: Eritrean National association for the blind.

IDEA: Individuals with Disability Education Act.

MOE: Ministry of Education of Eritrea.

NCSNET: National Commission of Special Needs Education and Training.

PTA: Parent and Teacher Association.

SANCB: South African National Association for the Blind.

Tigrigna: One of the dominant linguistic groups in the highlands of Eritrea.

Tigre: One of the dominant linguistic groups in the lowlands of Eritrea.

Zoba: Region or province.



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ABSTRACT

In Eritrea, the educational resources and support services for learners with visual impairment are not adequately addressed. The Department for Special Education Needs under the MOE is disorganized and ill-equipped with necessary qualified staff and material resources. Thus there is an inadequate support service, and there are not enough materials for learners as well as for their regular teachers in mainstream schools.

The aim of this study was to investigate an appropriate support system for blind and partially sighted pupils and to develop relevant skills among regular teachers in the mainstream education system.

This study was conducted in three Zobas (regions) of the six administrative regions of the country. The participants involved in this study include teaching staff, pupils, parents as well as authorities of the MOE.

Both a literature review and empirical data were used in this study. In the literature review section, the notion of inclusive education is conceptualized. The key barriers to the development of relevant support services for regular teachers and the major obstacles to strengthen the material resources for blind or partially sighted learners are discussed. Strategies to address barriers to learning and development which are used internationally and in developing countries with particular reference to the experience of South Africa and Zimbabwe have been discussed in detail.

Qualitative research methods were employed to gain in-depth information about the teachers' and parents' attitudes towards the inclusion of blind or partially sighted learners to the mainstream schools as well as their special needs, especially with regard to material and support services in the Eritrean context. The data instruments implemented in this study are individual interviews, group interviews, class observations and document analyses. Individual interviews were conducted with regular teachers; group discussions were held with blind school teachers; and class observations were arranged for regular teachers. In addition, documents were obtained from the blind school and the Eritrean National Association of the Blind (ERNAB).

The data gathered through the above instruments has been coded according to patterns or themes which emerged. The themes developed have been organized into different aspects of such topics as teachers' attitudes, insufficient educational resources, barriers to adapt the curriculum, parents' attitudes and roles and financial constraints to enhance the inclusion of blind or partially-sighted pupils into the ordinary schools.

In general, this study provided evidence for the need of strong support for teachers in training and for establishing resource centers, equipping learners with necessary devices, involving parents in contributing to the empowerment of their children's education, as well as a need for planning to allocate a separate budget for the inclusion of such learners.

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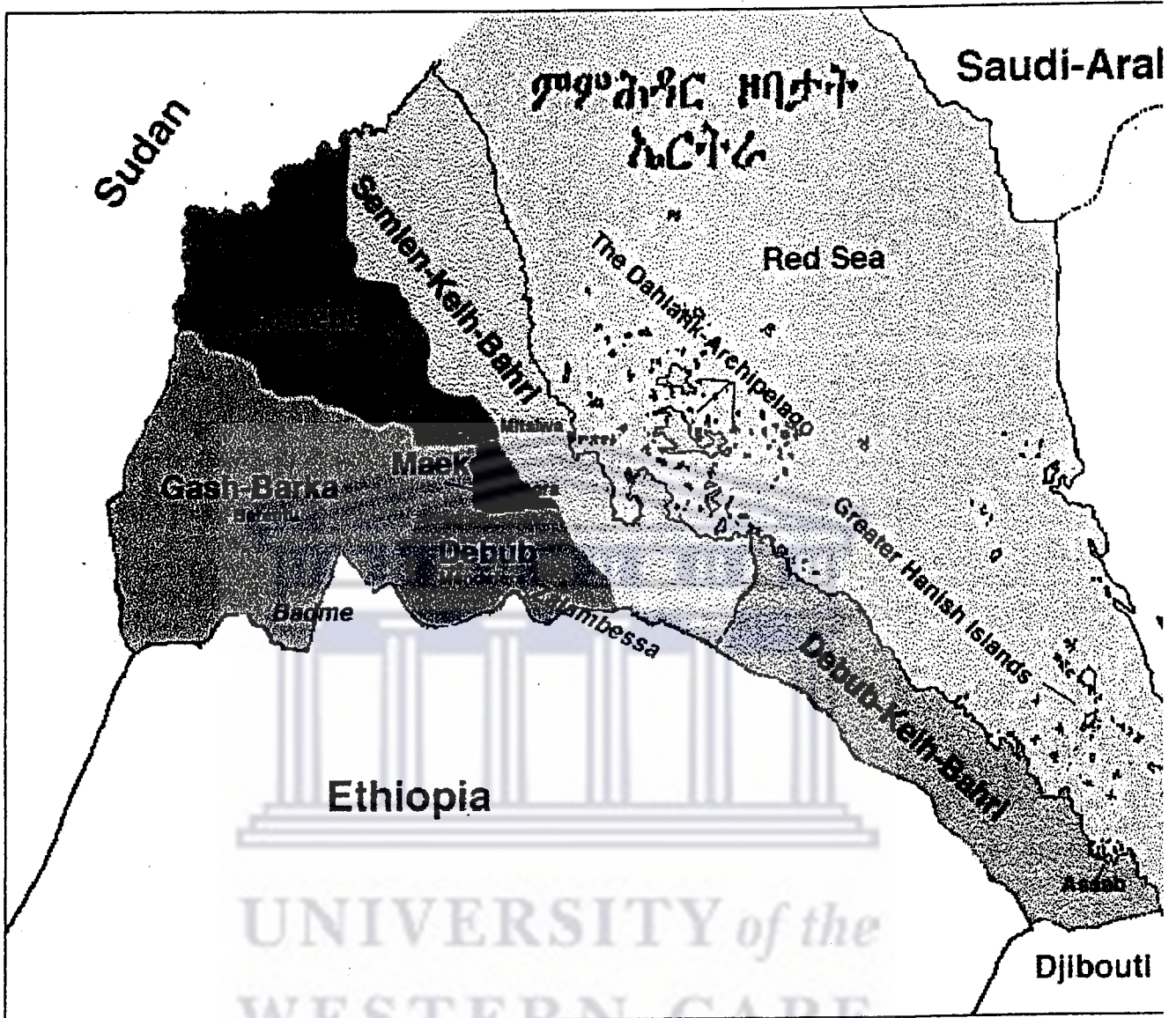
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Chapter I

Introductory Orientation

1.1. Introduction

Like other African countries, Eritrea inherited its educational system from different forms of colonial legacies. The education system was used to reflect the ideological interest of the colonising powers of that time.

In Eritrea, formal education was introduced during the reign of the Italian colonialists (1889-1941). However, indigenous Eritreans were not allowed to progress beyond four years of primary education which was only sufficient to recruit a semi-skilled labour force that was required to serve the needs of the colonial administration. Such low paid labourers were employed as junior civil servants, clerks and policemen.

In 1932, an education head office was opened to control schools' activities in the country under the Italian colony. In the meantime there were two racially-based categories of school systems. There were schools reserved only for the Italian learners. On the other hand there were also schools exclusively admitting only Eritreans, or as the Italians called them, schools for Habesha.

Discrimination in the school system was expressed in the provision of educational service. The Italian schools were equipped with well-trained teachers, sufficient teaching materials as well as up-to-date libraries. In contrast, the Eritrean schools were filled with poorly trained teachers, poor learning materials and ill-resourced libraries (MOE, 1987).

The foundation for a formal educational system was laid during the British administration (1941-1951). The British increased the number of schools in the country to more than double and the languages of instruction were Tigrigna and Arabic at primary school level (Grades 1 - 4), while English was the medium of instruction from Grade 5 - Grade 8. The

content of the curriculum in the British education system in Eritrea was English, British history and geography, basic mathematics and an elementary level of vocational training, in order to satisfy the high labour demand of the Italian small-scale industries.

During the federation, the number of schools in Eritrea was increased. In 1955, there were about 398 schools from primary level up to university level. During the Ethiopian occupation (1962-1991), the curriculum was changed to reflect Amharic cultural values and political aspirations as part of a long-term strategy to undermine the Eritrean identity and high motive for independence. The standard of education that was relatively achieved during the British administration deteriorated into a worse situation. The following quotation from the UNICEF Document cited in Hagos (2001:2) of Women and Children in Eritrea, briefly describes the state of the education system: "The school system declined steadily, classes were very large, textbooks, exercise books, pencils, chalk and chalkboards were scarce. Standards were low and assessment procedures were inadequate. Buildings were razed or converted into barracks for the Ethiopian army. By 1991, only 15% of the primary schools were in a serviceable condition."

1.2. Background of the Development of Visually-Impaired Education in Eritrea

Educating the blind in the context of Eritrea started in 1968 with the establishment of the special school for the blind with the goodwill of Emperor Haileselesie I. This unique and only special school for learners with visual impairments was founded by philanthropic organisations in collaboration with individual volunteers. It was transferred to government control in 1976 with the coming to power of the Socialist-orientated government in Ethiopia.

In 1973, when this special school of the blind began to integrate visually impaired learners into the mainstream at Grade 6 level, the inclusion programme was by default and spontaneous, which resulted in a negative impact on the blind learners as well as their teachers in the mainstream schools. The only explanation for this sudden and uninvestigated inclusive programme was that the special school did not have the capacity

to provide education beyond Grade 5. That is, there were constraints to recruiting more skilled teachers and get enough educational resources to accommodate Grade 6 learners.

Until recently, little is known about the policy of the Ministry of Education of Eritrea (MOE) regarding learners with visual impairments in the mainstream. Even in the first few months of 2003, in the General Education Department, the head of the Special Education Needs Unit said: “Still, we are drafting the policy of special education needs. I can say little as to when it is going to be adopted.” (Personal Communication)

The Ministry of Education in South Africa confirmed its commitment to address the special needs of learners with disabilities in the White Paper 6 (2001). In this paper the Minister of Education states the issue as: “I hold out great hope that through the measures that we put forward in this White Paper, we will also be able to convince the thousands of mothers and fathers of some 280,000 disabled children who are younger than 18 years and are not in schools or college, that the place of these children is not one of isolation in dark backrooms and sheds. It is with their peers, in schools on the play grounds, on the streets and in places of worship where they can become part of the local community and cultural life, and part of the reconstruction and development of our country.” (Department of Education in South Africa in White Paper No. 6, 2001: 4)

Prior to this, the Salamanca statement (1994) confirmed ‘the right to education of every individual’ as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and renewed the pledge made by the world community at the 1990 World Conference on “Education for All.” To ensure the right for all regardless of the individual differences, the statement also recalls the “United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which urge States to ensure that the education of differently-abled people is an integral part of the general education system.”

1.3 Significance of the Study

The prolonged war of independence, which was continued for three decades, the recent border war of 3 years with Ethiopia, as well as poverty and disease, has caused incalculable hardships and multiplied disability in Eritrea. According to the survey conducted in 2001 by the Eritrean National Association of the Blind (ERNAB), there are about 10 419 persons visually impaired in the country. Of this, the children of school-going age (7-12 years) make up about 170 of this figure, which is 1.63% of the grand total. Of these 170 children of school-going age, only 68 learners with visual impairments are currently enrolled in the Abraha Bahta School of the Blind. This means that only 42.2% of the children of school-going age have access to the special school. The cause for this low enrolment will be discussed later in the following chapter.

The only possible way for the nation to use the above significant human resources in building the economy is to make the learning environment in the mainstream more suitable so as to enable it to accommodate the visually handicapped learners. Since the heroes of independence who lost their vision are between the 18 and 40 years old, it is not appropriate to keep them in the special schools to continue their studies. Rather, it would be more appropriate for them to proceed with their studies in the mainstream and let them be free from dependency through the policy of Education for All.

Since this research is the first and only investigation into the special needs of learners with visual impairments at a mini-thesis level, it may have significance in indicating the best means on how to address the educational resources for learners with visual impairments in the general education system. Moreover, since the MOE is in the preparatory stages of drafting the policy on special needs of learners with disabilities in Eritrea, this research may be a useful term of reference for the policy to be adopted in the near future. Furthermore, by indicating an appropriate means to meet the special needs of education of learners with visual impairments in the mainstream, the number of dropouts and the failure rate in the junior as well as secondary schools may be reduced.

Another striking point that makes this study more significant is that junior schools in the mainstream in Eritrea have not yet developed a suitable means of assessment for the visually impaired student in the ordinary classroom setting. Therefore, this research may open up a way to more investigation on this issue.

1.4. The Aims of this Study

This research study may emphasise the following aims:

1. To investigate the lack of support services and related teacher training in special needs for visually impaired learners in the mainstream schools.
2. To find out the teachers' attitude towards the inclusion of learners with visual impairments in the ordinary classes.
3. To analyse how far the MOE is supporting learners with visual impairments in the mainstream financially.
4. To discover parents' reactions to the inclusion of their visually handicapped children in regular schools.

1.4.1. Research Question

My main question is to what extent are educational resources, support services and teachers' in-service training available to support learners with visual impairments in the Eritrean mainstream schools.

1.4.2 Sub-questions of the Study

In this study, the following challenges and barriers to education will be thoroughly discussed:

1. What are the barriers facing learners with visual impairments with regard to their resources in the mainstream?

2. What is the teachers' attitudes towards the presence of a blind or visually impaired learner in the regular classroom situation?
3. How far teachers in the mainstream schools are able to accommodate the special needs education of the learners with visually impairments?
4. What will be the attitude of the parents towards the inclusion of their children to the regular schools?
5. How far are regular teachers skilled enough to adapt the curriculum to accommodate learners with visual impairment?
6. How far is the support of the MOE to strengthen the inclusion of the learners with visual impairment?
7. Lastly, how can the assessment procedure be developed for blind learners in the mainstream?

1.5 How to Advocate for the Promotion of Special Needs Education in Eritrea

The development of support services and the provision of resources for learners with special education needs in Eritrea, is slow. Starting in the late 1960s, there were two types of special schools in Eritrea. One was the blind school in Asmara and the second was the school for hearing impaired learners in Keren and in Asmara. The one and only School for the Blind was funded by the Eritrean government, whereas the schools for the deaf are fully financed by Norwegian Church Aid.

In 1974, both the schools for the blind and the school for the deaf in Keren accommodated 49 learners only. In 1987, the total number of learners in these schools grew to 147. This means that the enrolment rate increased to 200% (MOE, 1987: 25). According to the 2003 report of the blind school in Asmara, there are 68 learners up to elementary school level, while the school for the deaf in Keren consists of 74 hearing impaired learners in the same year. This amounts to a total of 142 learners. This shows a decrease in the enrolment rate compared with that of 1987. The figures indicated above do not include the data of the school for the deaf in Asmara, because it is not a boarding school and it has only been founded recently.

Despite the fact that these schools have been preparing their learners for the general mainstream education system for the last 25 years, the learners have been faced with persistent academic challenges in the middle and the secondary levels in the mainstream school system. The principal of the deaf school in Keren states that, “Although many of our learners have been included in mainstream schools after Grade 5 level, few of them have gone on to enrol at university.” (Personal Communication).

Even after independence, although the government has been striving to enhance access and quality of the general education system, little effort was made towards the development of special educational needs of the learners with learning difficulties. However, unless the special education needs of differently-abled learners are adequately addressed, the intended goal of promoting opportunity in terms access, equity, quality and continuity of “Education for All”, cannot be achieved. Educational resources for learners with visual impairments in the mainstream schools in Eritrea are quite scarce and outdated.

One of the most significant barriers to learning remains the inability of learners to access the existing educational services and their inability to access other services which contribute to the learning process. In most instances the inability to access education that is provided is a result of inadequate or non-existent services and resources which are key to participation in the learning process (Department of Education in South Africa in White Paper No.6, 2001).

Another serious constraint, which holds back resilience of visually impaired learners in the mainstream schools in Eritrea, is the lack of trained teachers. Mainstream remediation is a process of helping learners with disabilities or difficulties in learning within the mainstream classroom. The role of giving support services will always remain critical, and no education support services can work without teachers’ training and active co-operation (Donald and Lazarus, 1997: 41).

In Eritrea, another barrier to the enhancement of meeting the special education needs of learners with difficulties, is the inflexible curriculum. Even in the new proposal for the

formative transformation of the curriculum in Eritrea which was published in July 2002, hardly anything has been mentioned about the special education of learners with diverse needs. In Eritrea the content of the curriculum (what is taught), the method of instruction (how classroom discussions are conducted), the educators' lesson plan (to what extent the teacher prepares various special teaching aids), the amount of time in which to complete the curriculum, the size of the classes and the assessment mechanisms for learners with visual impairment, must be taken into consideration in any proposal for the transformation of the general curriculum.

The most important way of addressing barriers arising from the curriculum is to make sure that the process of teaching and learning is flexible enough to accommodate different learning needs and styles. The curriculum must therefore be more flexible across all the bands of education so that it is accessible to all learners, irrespective of their learning needs (Department of Education In South Africa in White Paper No.6, 2001:19).

In the Eritrean context, support services for learners with visual impairments means services such as the library services. Learners access reference books and textbook services in the form of loans and are able to use the library in their spare time. Hence textbook services can also be categorised under support services. Learners also receive typing training before they join the mainstream schools, which can also be said to constitute support services.

The resource centre in the School for the Blind was set up during the armed struggle and was intended to provide preliminary educational services to the fighters who encountered loss of sight during the war. According to Dawit, Head of the Public Relations Office in the War Veterans Association: "During the liberation struggle, there were about 200 fighters with eye injuries who were studying in Braille from Grade 1 to Grade 8." (Personal conversation). This Braille resource centre, which fell under the management of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), was merged with the Braille resource room in the Abraha Bata School for the Blind in 1992 immediately after independence.

According to the researcher's personal experience, teachers in the regular schools in Eritrea are also deprived of receiving any support services from the resource centre at the School for the Blind. In the provinces as well as in the capital city, blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream schools are provided with their exam questions orally. In general, due to poorly-trained staff and uncooperative authorities, the resource centre at the School for the Blind provides few support services and materials to the regular teachers. Since the blind teachers in the blind school are inadequately trained with regard to special needs education, regular teachers in the mainstream are not adequately provided with guidance consultation from highly qualified personnel who have sufficient knowledge and experience on how to accommodate learners with visual impairments in the mainstream.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

In this section, the theoretical underpinning on which the study is based, are discussed. This study is based on the eco-systemic perspective which has in similar features to constructivist theory.

1.6.1 The Eco-systemic Perspective

Donald and Lazarus (1997: 40-41) state that although remediation and intervention can reduce educational problems and the special needs of differently-abled learners, it is unlikely ever to eliminate them. Mainstream remediation or intervention is a process of helping learners with learning difficulties to alleviate their learning impairments within the mainstream classroom.

The means of addressing the support services and educational resources for learners with special needs is always open to question. Its implementation varies according to the socio-economic context of each society. According to Lazarus et al. (1999):

The eco-systemic perspective carries the characteristics that individuals are shaped in their social context. The way in which we feel, think and develop as an individual person is linked to socio-economic structures, cultures and political forces which make our environment. What is true in one social context may not be so in another social context. Similarly, the special education needs and interventions in one socio-economic context may not necessarily be applicable in the other.

One can see different levels of groupings of a social context as a system where the functioning of the whole is dependent on the interaction of all parts. A fundamental principle of systemic thinking is that cause and effect relationships are not seen as taking place in one direction only. Rather, they are seen as circular interactions (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwane, 1997).

The presence of educational resources for learners with special education needs cannot be practical without having trained educators. On the contrary, building a well-trained teaching staff cannot be successful without adequate provision of support services, resources and positive participation of parents. Hence, in the implementation of any remediation or intervention programme for learners with special education needs, each factor impacts on the process in one way or another.

Taking into account the diverse historical, social, economic and cultural backgrounds and, attitudes to mainstreaming of learners with visual impairment, there is much variation with regard to the different socio-economic levels in different countries and societies. Concerning this, Meijer, Pijl and Hegarty (1994:136), conducted research on six countries and concluded that there is no educational practice that can be a standard or a generally accepted example of mainstreaming. Furthermore, after studying mainstreaming experiences in the United Kingdom, the United States and Italy, Clark et al. (1992) have attempted to conceptualise at least three strategies to address special education needs of learners with visual impairments as follows:

- (i) Support for developing an appropriate curriculum and pedagogy within which all learners are able to learn effectively;
- (ii) Support for the classroom teacher to enable him or her to manage a class with

- learners of profound and severe visual impairment;
- (iii) Support for individual learners enabling them to function within a regular classroom curriculum which would otherwise be inimical to their learning

Based on the various experiences in meeting the special needs of learners with learning difficulties, attempts will be made to assess the material input, support services and interventions for learners with visual impairments in the mainstream in respect of the unique social, economic and cultural status of Eritrea.



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Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Visual Impairment/Mainstreaming and Inclusion

Despite the fact that the term “visually impaired” has a broad and deep connotation, the educational definition given by Halahan and Kauffman, (1986:288) was taken for the purpose of this research. They classify the term “visual impairment” into two broad categories: (1) those who depend on Braille to read; and (2) those who depend on limited vision to read the print. The Braille users may be totally blind or even able to perceive some light or identify objects and/or colours but will not be able to read print. The partially sighted may have some visual impairment but are able to read the print with special aids such as magnifying glasses and large-typed books.

According to the South African Department of education, White Paper 6 (2001:17-18) mainstreaming is about getting learners to fit into a particular kind of system or integrating them into this existing system. Whereas inclusion is about recognizing and respecting the differences among all learners about building on similarities. Mainstreaming is about giving some learners extra support so that they can be integrated in to the mainstream classroom setting. Inclusion is about supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met. Here, the focus is on teaching and learning factors, with the emphasis on the development of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learners. Mainstreaming focuses on changes that need to take place in learners so that they can fit in. Here the focus is on the learner, while inclusion focuses on overcoming barriers in the system.

From the above comparison, one can deduce that mainstreaming emphasises on the change in the individual “learner”. Whilst, inclusion deals with the change in the learning system “school environment”. Therefore, inclusion is the logical development from the mainstreaming. Although, this study emphasizes on the mainstreaming of learners with

visual impairment in the Eritrean schools, it can serve as springboard for the introduction of the inclusion policy in the country.

2.2 The Conceptualisation and Development of Inclusive Education

No one can deny that 'inclusion' is amongst the hottest topics in education today. It is almost impossible to pick up an education journal without finding at least one article dealing with the subject. Everyone seems to agree that 'inclusion' is an important and critical issue. However, the problem lies in defining exactly what it means. Among the varied range of definitions, the simple and vivid one says that: "Inclusion' embraces the idea of keeping special education learners in regular education classrooms and bringing support services to the child, rather than bringing the child to the support services" (Department of Education in South Africa in White Paper No.6, 2001:9).

Smelter, Yudewitz, and Rasch in their article, *Thinking of Inclusion For All Special Needs Students* (1994) introduced the related term 'full inclusion' which refers to the practice of having regular education teachers teach both regular education learners and special education learners together without the assistance of a special education teacher. Taking this definition into account, Eritrea currently practices a 'full inclusion' programme for learners with visual impairments into the mainstream in the middle school level where there are no trained teachers in special education needs. Smelter et al. (1994) call for governments that endorse 'full inclusion' to extend special training to the regular educators.

They debate about the controversial issue of 'full inclusion'. The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) used the phrase 'least restrictive environment' to describe our obligations as educators to place children with special needs in a regular classroom setting whenever appropriate for their educational growth. However, where a child's needs can be better served in a pullout programme, educators have the legal responsibility to place the child elsewhere.

Continuing their argument, these educators disagree with three points, which they call 'inclusionist principles'. Firstly, they accused the 'inclusionists' of saying that children may learn better in a larger regular class than in a small, self-contained, special class. Secondly, they blame the 'inclusionists' for placing more emphasis on social aspects than on academic performance. Thirdly, they criticise the 'inclusionists' of being more like politicians than educators.

At the other end of the debate, in defence of 'full inclusion', Haas in her article, "Inclusion is happening in the Classroom" (1993:34), states that the practice of segregating children with disabilities from those without disabilities fails to serve the individualised needs of each student with disabilities. Such removal has resulted in a fragmented approach to special and regular education. To substantiate her stance, Haas continues her debate against the proponents of pullout programmes by suggesting that segregation promotes dependence and isolation and limits opportunities for learners to learn the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance independent living and full social participation. In order for 'full inclusion' to work, Haas says additional support in the form of human knowledge and physical resources, must accompany the child with disabilities who is integrated into the regular education programme.

Finally, Haas concludes by saying that children with disabilities can teach those without disabilities valuable lessons such as patience, the importance of trying to do one's best and the development of an understanding for children who learn differently.

2.3 Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Learners with Special Education Needs

In this section the study reviews teachers' attitudes towards the learners with visual impairment in the mainstream schools in developed as well as developing countries.

2.3.1 Teachers Attitudes in European and American Countries

Teachers attitudes to disability and more specifically their willingness to teach pupils with special needs depends on many factors, of which some are the nature of society, prevailing conceptions of disability and the schools' financial capacity. The nature of society is a general concept and it is difficult to draw a clear link between the nature of a society and the teachers' attitudes. Meijer et al. (1995), state that in societies where the principles of special education provision has gained widespread acceptance such as in England and Denmark, teachers are more likely to be positively disposed towards mainstreaming. Namely, to accept the presence of learners with special needs in the regular classroom as part of the normal general education system.

On the contrary, in societies such as the Netherlands where a traditional view prevails, children with physical or sensory impairments are labelled as defective and are categorised for enrolment in special schools that meet the special education needs of such particular groups in a more targeted way. In a society where this traditional view holds true, regular teachers are more likely to regard special schools as a natural place for learners with learning difficulties.

Another factor that may affect teachers' attitudes in receiving learners with special needs into the regular classroom is the manner in which schools are financed. Learners with special education needs, such as blind and deaf children, require more resources in terms of time and material. If regular schools are not equipped accordingly when they admit learners with learning difficulties, it is extremely difficult to build up positive attitudes on the part of teachers. Thus, Denmark, Italy and Sweden which are all characterised by high levels of inclusion of learners with impairments into the mainstream, also have resource allocation systems which are conducive to arousing positive teacher attitudes. In Italy, a class containing a learner with a sensory impairment may not have more than 20 learners in total and no class may have more than two learners with special education needs.

The current educational trend in the USA is to serve learners with special needs in an inclusive setting together with the learners who have no disabilities, as much as possible. The research reported by Slavin (1990), demonstrates that learners with disabilities improve their social interaction and academic performance in inclusive settings. West and Idol (1991) reported that learners with disabilities in the regular education settings require collaboration on the part of all persons who serve the learners. Davis (1989) suggested that for the implementation of the concept of 'full inclusion' to take place, everyone including parents, teachers, administrators and related service staff must buy into the concept of 'full inclusion'.

A study was designed in South Carolina by Monahan, Sheiba, and Mitler (2000) to evaluate teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with special needs into a regular school in South Carolina. 364 questionnaire surveys were randomly distributed to teachers throughout South Carolina. Out of these 364 questionnaires, 340 (94%) were returned and responded to. The survey was made up of 25 statements to which the respondents evaluated each item on a 5-point scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". Major areas addressed in the survey included regular teachers' rights, performance or skills and perceptions.

The findings as reported by Monahan et al. (2000) are as follows:

- (a) 72% of the respondents indicated that inclusion of learners with special needs will not succeed because of too much resistance from regular education teachers.
- (b) 75% of the respondents felt that regular education teachers do not have the instructional skills and educational background to teach learners with special needs.
- (c) 67% of the respondents indicated that regular education teachers prefer sending learners with special education needs to special education classrooms rather than having special education teachers deliver services in the regular classrooms.
- (d) 51% of the respondents felt that regular teachers have the primary responsibility of educating learners with special needs in the regular classroom.

From the above findings, one can conclude that most (more than 50%) of the regular education teachers resist the presence of learners with special education needs in the regular classroom. This is due to a lack of proper training and poor educational backgrounds in order to accommodate and help these types of learners. Besides, most of the regular teachers in the survey indicated that they were opposed to the presence of a special teacher in their regular classroom. Instead, they feel comfortable if learners with learning difficulties go to the special classroom or resource room and get the necessary support from their special teacher on an extra-curricula basis. The above indicates that there is a difference in the role of a regular teacher and special education teacher in South Carolina.

The findings in the study, in South Carolina also indicate that 51 % of the respondents agreed that regular teachers have “the primary responsibility” to teach learners with special needs in the regular classes. In Eritrea, it is not “the primary responsibility” of a regular teacher to do so, and usually he or she is the only available teacher for the learners with special needs in the regular classes. This is due to the fact that it is not yet economically viable to have a regular teacher as well as a special education teacher in the regular classes simultaneously. This means that the regular teacher will have to receive special training in order to meet the diverse needs of learners with different learning abilities.

Another striking point among the responses in this research is that 68% of the regular teachers confirmed that learners with special needs improve their social skills and academic performance when they are placed in a regular class. This evidence leads inclusionist educators to assert the idea that learners with special education needs benefit from inclusion.

Finally, Monahan et al. (2000) conclude this short but credible research with the following recommendations: Teacher education programmes should contain appropriate information about the inclusion of all children throughout the entire curriculum instead of relying on one course in the area of special education to address the diverse needs of

learners. Moreover, these authors advise that there should be continuous pre-service and in-service training, focussing on methods that enable all teachers to work effectively with learners who may have learning difficulties or special education needs.

It was mentioned above that teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with special needs are improving in England, Italy and Denmark by pumping more resources and support services into regular schools that accommodate learners with special needs. In addition to this, classes which accommodate learners with learning difficulties are limited to only twenty learners. This limit may be encouraging in building a positive attitude for teachers who teach only twenty learners of which only two may be learners with disabilities.

They also maintain that in South Carolina (USA), teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with special needs in the regular classroom are not total rejection. Rather, they encourage merging of special education learners into the regular education classroom.

2.3.2 Studies of Primary School Teachers' Attitudes in Africa - A Comparison between Zimbabwe and Eritrea

The research conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, by Mushoriwa (2001) is more relevant and helpful as comparison and contrast to the findings in Eritrea on which this mini-thesis is based. This research conducted in Harare and Eritrea is quite similar, because both deal with the inclusion of blind learners into the regular mainstream education system. Female and male teachers in a wide sphere around Harare were involved in this study. There were 400 teachers involved in the survey. Questionnaires were distributed and interviews were conducted in order to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with visual impairments into the regular classroom at primary school level. The results of the survey impacted on the inclusion debate in developing countries particularly in Zimbabwe as well as in Eritrea.

Booth and Ainscow (1998) contend that in studies involving inclusive education, it is absolutely imperative for the investigator to specify the type of special need which is being focussed on, because teachers' attitudes have been found to vary according to the type of disability and the extent of instructional adaptations required in order to accommodate such learners.

In this regard, the Hararean study focussed on the blind children. Booth and Ainscow (1998) also argue that it is essential that the elements of inclusiveness should be considered. That is, the child must be included in the environment of the school physically, socially and instructionally. The present study conducted in Harare examined the inclusion of blind children into the mainstream education system in the context of the above three elements.

Regecki (1982) states that attitudes include desires, convictions, feelings, views, opinions, beliefs, hopes, judgments and sentiments. In that study the author assumed that teachers have attitudes which can affect the way in which they perceive, value, judge, interact with and teach blind children in the regular classroom.

In many countries, including Eritrea, inclusion of learners with special education needs into the mainstream school system has been introduced before thorough studies of the acceptability of inclusive education were conducted. In this case Mushoriwa (1998:9) expresses her personal observations as follows:

In some African countries such as Uganda, Kenya and Malawi where itinerant teaching programmes to support children with visual impediment have been established for many years, there is little evidence of change in teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of such students into mainstream schools.

Even in some developed countries, there are indications that some teachers do not welcome children with certain disabilities. Wilezenski, cited in Booth and Ainscow (1998) conducted a study in Australia on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and found out that teachers were more accepting of learners with physical disabilities than those who necessitated academic modifications. Obviously, by observing these kinds

of findings, one may conclude that the type of disability and the demands it eventually imposes on the teacher will influence teacher's attitudes towards including a child with such a disability in a regular classroom.

In the research conducted in Harare, after the questionnaires were returned and the interviews were gathered, the data analysis indicated that most of the respondents, who were made up of teachers from Harare, that is 86 %, responded negatively towards the inclusion of blind learners into the mainstream. For analytical purposes items in the questionnaires and interviews were regrouped into social aspects, academic aspects and regular teachers' competence and willingness to teach blind learners in a regular class.

Based on the above categories the responses were as follows:

1. *Social aspects.*

90 % stated that including a blind student in a regular class will not increase his or her circle of friends. The primary reasons given for this response was that peer pupils will shun him or her, since he or she can be a nuisance in terms of seeking assistance from them, for example, when moving around the school. Thus, 92 % say that inclusive education does not automatically make a sighted child willing to interact with a blind child. Instead, 85,5 % responded that inclusive education can increase the amount of social rejection of the visually impaired child by his or her sighted peers. These responses show that the majority of teachers felt that blind children are not socially accepted in regular places. This social rejection has serious repercussions on the social, psychological and intellectual development of the blind learner.

In contrast, according to the unpublished case study done in Eritrea by Tsegab (2001), all the blind and partially sighted pupil participants responded that inclusion into the mainstream enabled them to have the opportunity for social integration. Unlike the study in Harare, the pupil participants in the mainstream junior schools in Eritrea, stated that inclusion created an opportunity for them to expand their circle of friends with their

sighted peers and helped them to express their unique problems to their sighted peers. Steward (1997) citing Article 33 of the UN (1989), Convention of the Rights of the Child, agrees with the idea of blind and partially sighted pupil participants in schools: "The rights of children with disabilities to enjoy a full and decent life opportunities should be designed so that the child achieves the fullest possible social integration." Moreover, inclusion enabled the visually impaired pupils to favourably change the attitudes of their sighted peers, teachers and administrators towards them. In this regard, Steward (*ibid*) suggested that successful integration dealt far more with attitudes than reducing school expenditure.

All three visually impaired pupil participants believed that their teachers treat them the same as their sighted peers and that their teachers' attitudes are very positive. However, an included learner participant in Group C commented that although their teachers treat them equally, they do not make provision for extra time in order to assist the blind and partially sighted learners; and that they do not make an extra effort to elaborate on the diagrams which for the visually impaired, are difficult to understand. Regarding the welcome to a learner to a school, Higin and Ballad (2000:168) noted that welcoming attitudes towards all children in the school enables each child in the school community to value his or her own uniqueness.

2. *Academic aspects.*

According to the research conducted in Harare, the majority (92,5 %) of the respondents felt that inclusion would limit the child's level of academic performance. In being rejected socially, the child would have difficulties in discussing and sharing ideas with others. This would negatively affect the child's academic performance, and in the end he or she would loose confidence in his or her academic ability.

According to Tsegab, most of the blind and partially sighted pupils in the mainstream schools in Eritrea maintain a good standard in their academic achievements. This conclusion was substantiated by one of Tsegab's teacher respondents in School A.

According to this teacher, despite a number of educational barriers, learners with visual impairments in their junior school, were performing far better than the sighted learners. For example, in the 2001 academic year, 10 blind and partially sighted pupils were eligible to write the national examination for Grade 7. Each one of the candidates obtained good results and were promoted to Grade 8 (secondary school). The following suggestion is made at the end of Tsegab's finding: "Since blind learners use Braille as a mode of reading, they cannot grasp concepts at the same pace as their sighted peers". In terms of the researcher's personal experience, the above statement is invalid. I disagree, because the sense of touch from one's fingertips as well as the sense of sight from one's eyes reach the brain faculty at almost the same time, that is, within a split second. As a result, both the use of touch for Braille and the use of sight for reading is interpreted into meaningful words. Hence, it is not logical to conclude that blind learners grasp the concepts at a slower pace due to the fact that they use Braille as a mode of reading. In my personal experience, if a blind or visually impaired student received adequate training in the third grade Braille system, and with regular practice, he or she would be able to read and understand at the same speed as his or her sighted peers under normal circumstances at any grade level.

2.3.3 Aspects Related to Teacher Competence regarding the Teaching of Blind Learners in the Regular Class

In the Hararean study, it was noted that although regular teachers understand the problems associated with blindness, 58 % of them do not make the appropriate educational provisions for blind learners in regular class. This is due to heavy workloads and lack of resources. Among the reasons given by teachers for the poor performance of blind learners in regular classes, one of them is the lack of individual attention by teachers as a result of large class sizes and sizeable workloads. Large class size is one of the characteristics of developing countries like Zimbabwe and Ghana where there are more than 50 learners per class. This also holds true for Eritrea where there are about 70 learners per class.

Finally, the research conducted in Harare is concluded with a reminder, namely that it is important to note that the views expressed by the majority of regular teachers should not be interpreted to mean that blind pupils will not ultimately benefit socially, academically and in other ways in inclusive settings. Current opinions do not reflect the outcomes which may be obtained in effective inclusive settings in the future.

2.4 Parental Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Learners with Special Education Needs

The collaboration of parents with the schools has a significant advantage for learners with special needs. However, Hegarty (1993:152-170) raises another controversial issue regarding parental attitudes towards the placement of their children with disabilities. The debate on the relative merits and demerits of special schools and mainstream schools is in many ways a political one. Parental attitudes and wishes have become an important element in the debate. When special schools remove children with disabilities from the local community and insist on providing them with education apart from the mainstream the underlying effect is that the children are regarded as special and different.

Inclusion or mainstreaming can dispel this because it enables children with special needs to attend local neighbourhood schools alongside peers and be part of the local community. Parents are well aware of the need for specialist attention, but the way in which it is given, makes a big difference. If it is in the context of mainstream schools, where the child engages in activities alongside his or her sighted peers, parents benefit at least from knowing that their child is one amongst many children.

On the opposing side of the argument, Hegarty mentions that one can raise a question about the mainstream schools where the child who is different 'stands out like a sore thumb' and the fact that he or she is different, is marked out at every turn. Some may ask whether by placing learners with special needs in an mainstream school, we are not ensuring that their singularity is emphasized? Whereas, if they went to a special school,

they would be indistinguishable from children who have comparable special needs with them.

In contrast, Jones, Thorn, Chow, and Wild. (2002:624) in their article, state that research studies have begun to address parental attitudes towards inclusion because of the likelihood that they may potentially play an even more active role in determining the fate of inclusion rather than learners' attitudes. Assessing this parental factor is especially crucial, considering that parents are becoming more active participants in making educational and placement decisions for their children. Moreover, special needs learners' parents as well as regular learners' parents are now more concerned about the context of instruction for their children.

Leaving aside the debate, the author believes it is better to look for ways of encouraging parents to collaborate with mainstream schools and help them to contribute to the effort of seeking appropriate means of elevating learning barriers in the general mainstream educational system.

Palmará cited in Berglund (1995) mentioned that parents' perceptions of their child with impairment is influenced negatively by the attitudes of society, because they have not had any previous experience in this regard. Parents must learn to demand educational rights for their child with a disability in the same way as they do for their children without disabilities. As far as possible, parents should treat their visually impaired child in the same way that they treat their other children. They should protect but not overprotect their blind child. The child needs support, but not too much that he or she is unable to do anything on his or her own. Parents themselves need support to have the strength and determination to fight for their child's development. Very often parents lose faith in the educational improvement of their visually impaired child. In this case, they need help to regain the faith that their child can develop his or her potential skills through proper education and training. Parents have to be aware of their child's development and must be assured that the impairment can be treated and be reduced to a lesser degree so that it may not be an obstacle in the child's development.

Birgulang (1995) also mentions something about an organization that she established in 1992 to create close contact between parents who have children with disabilities. The “*Pahidos*” which was founded in 1992 in Mexico, is a parents’ organization consisting of 180-200 parents of children with special needs. The purpose of the work within this organization is to make it possible for the children to be part of society and to be accepted in it. In the organization, parents work for their children’s rights to education and demand the integration of their children into the mainstream. Most of the parents who have visual and hearing-impaired children wanted their children to attend regular elementary schools in regular classes. Unlike the problem with the hearing impaired children, the visually impaired children are doing well using Braille.

With regard to parental attitudes towards visually impaired children in the mainstream in South Africa, Kapp (2002) stated that all the blind and partially sighted children in South Africa are obliged, almost without exception, to attend special residential schools. Parents often express requests for the admission of visually impaired children to the regular schools in the mainstream. Kapp also discusses the issue and elaborates on the merits of inclusion for the blind learners by indicating that although mainstream education for blind and partially sighted learners is being implemented on a limited scale in many parts of the world, the greatest advantage is the opportunity these children are offered to attend schools from their parents’ homes and to remain in the seeing community.

In contrast, in Eritrea, there is no legislation which provides parents with the option to decide on the placement of their visually impaired children. In Eritrea, there is an association of parents and teachers which is usually known as the PTA (Parents – Teachers Association). The PTA is established to follow up school activities and to search for solutions with regard to school resources such as the maintenance of buildings, classroom desks, compound fences and facilities such as the libraries and lavatories for all learners in general. However, the PTA has hardly done anything regarding the special needs of learners with learning problems such as the blind, the deaf and learners from the marginalized communities (personal conversation school principals).

Since parents in Eritrea are more familiar with the inclusion of learners with visual impairments into the mainstream system, they have positive expectations that their children will show good academic performance when they are blessed in the mainstream regular schools with their sighted peers, than when they are being excluded by having to attend a special School for the Blind. However, what creates concern for the parents, is that an additional economic burden has resulted from the inclusion of blind students in mainstream schools. A special School for the Blind is a residential government school where food, lodging and health services are provided to the blind learner free of charge. Therefore, a special School for the Blind is regarded as an economic relief for parents with visually impaired children. The question of funding the inclusion programme which is high on the agenda among the parents of blind children in Eritrea, will be discussed in detail later in Chapter IV.

2.5 Inadequate Teacher Training and Resources

The factors that create barriers are inadequate teacher training and resources. In Eritrea, teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with visual impairments into the regular schools is not as negative as that of teachers in Harare, Zimbabwe. Even though most of the regular teachers accept blind learners into the regular classes with goodwill, they do not have the necessary skills and training to meet the special educational needs of these learners. This issue was clearly indicated by Meijer, et al. (1994:132), that positive and willing teachers are not enough. As the old proverb says, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions". Teachers must not only be willing but must also be able to deliver education of a high quality and differentiate according to individual needs. The main factors that should be tackled to meet the special needs of learners with visual impairments, are teacher competence, support services and the curriculum.

2.5.1 Barriers to Learning and Development

Meijer et al (1994) and Hegarty (1993) suggest two important ways in which to upgrade teachers' skills and knowledge with regard to the special education needs of learners in

the mainstream schools. The first is the initial teacher training which is usually called pre-service training in Eritrea. Nowadays, in most countries, pre-service teacher training follows a common course for all teachers, regardless of whether or not they are likely to work with pupils with special education needs in their future careers. Some training courses offer options on aspects of special education which help to prepare some teachers to teach pupils with learning difficulties. In most cases however, all trainee teachers are introduced to the fundamentals of special education.

The second means of uplifting the competence of regular teachers in order to meet special needs of learners in the mainstream schools, is in-service teacher training. Hegarty (1993) mentions that initial or pre-service training is the initial solution to the problem, and can be regarded as an investment in the future. Teachers in schools at present have already been trained, but this training has not been in the field of special needs education. Hence, most practicing teachers for many years to come, will not be affected by the current initial or pre-service training in special needs education. Precisely those teachers who have been in service for many years and who are experienced, are able to take crucial decisions regarding the curriculum and academic organization of any school. A move away from special schooling towards inclusion will lead to a training gap that must be filled by in-service training. The in-service training of regular teachers in the mainstream schools who teach learners with special needs can be undertaken by educational institutions such as universities, poly-technikons and colleges of higher education, by offering short-term workshops or extended courses on special education during summer vacations. In-service training in special education would be ideal in Eritrea, as learners leave for vacation during the summer, leaving teachers free to attend courses.

Concerning teachers who teach blind learners in their ordinary class, Kapp (2002) states that it obviously requires a suitably trained teacher to teach a blind student. Education authorities throughout the world place a higher premium on in-service training, and school principals and senior personnel are expected to train new staff in the daily practical teaching situation. In some instances such teacher candidates are also sent to blind schools to observe the teaching there and to undergo practical training for teaching

blind learners in the mainstream schools. Some universities and institutions offer specialist courses which may be followed either on a full time or part time basis.

However, Hegarty, (1993), opposes this type of specialization on one type of special education need. Bowman and UNESCO (1989) cited in Hegarty indicate that there were a number of courses in the past, geared to the teaching of pupils with severe learning difficulties such as the deaf. However, a report from the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers (ACSET) in Great Britain in 1984 recommended that such courses should cease, and in fact they were phased out as from 1985. Teachers/students in training should not specialize exclusively in one type of special education need, but rather all regular teachers should have a thorough grounding in teaching in the mainstream where diverse needs of learners could emerge. It is only if teachers develop their skills in actual practice, that they should specialize in teaching the learners with different special needs.

The abovementioned literature on interventions is relevant to the current Eritrean situation, where there is no course coverage on special needs in education in the teacher training institutes, college and universities. Currently, teachers in Eritrea are crying out for at least short-term courses or extended courses during summer time in order to accommodate learners with visual impairments in the mainstream education system (This information was gathered in personal conversations with teachers). According to the principal of the Blind School, 'the number of learners with visual impairments in the mainstream in Eritrea has significantly increased and their distribution has extended recently to two provinces where they have never been enrolled before. The schools situated in *Zoba Anseba* and in *Zoba Debub*, which have recently admitted blind learners at junior and secondary level, have made repeated requests to the Ministry of Education to provide, at the very least, preliminary training for teachers in order to accommodate these learners with visual impairments who are very unique and new to the ordinary teachers as well as to sighted learners" (personal conversation).

2.6 Remedial Procedures for the Special Needs of Learners with Visual Impairments in the Mainstream

All remedial or intervention initiatives to address the barriers to learning of learners with visual impairments in Eritrea, should stem from the Ministry of Education in Eritrea. The Department of Education in South Africa in the National Commission for Special Needs Education and Training (NCSNET, 1997) recommends that materials should enhance the avenues for expression and demonstration of learners' knowledge. Materials should therefore be evaluated and developed to ensure that they are appropriate for the educational needs of all learners. Learning materials may have to be modified to cater for different disabilities. For example, the visual nature of learning materials may be unsuitable for use with learners with visual impairments. Consideration should be given to the establishment of structures at national level to ensure that materials are non-discriminatory, reflect the diversity of learner population, and that the possibility of designing specific materials for learners who experience barriers to learning and development, are fully addressed.

The report of the NCSNET / NCESS (1997) repeatedly confirms its recommendation by specifying the resources required to reduce barriers by reiterating that departments need to ensure that materials are bias free and non-discriminatory. Departments that do not have the capacity to develop, customize and produce specific learning and teaching materials such as Braille and enlarged print, should investigate outsourcing via the same tendering procedure used for other learning materials. Moreover, assistive devices which help in the adaptation of the curriculum, such as mobility devices, hearing aids, Braille writers, adapted computers, magnifying glasses and voice synthesizers, must be used optimally in order to meet the special needs of learners with visual impairments.

As already mentioned in Chapter I, the Salamanca Statement (1994) has made it clear that children with special needs have the right, not merely to education, but also to an enhanced level of educational provision. Provision for pupils with special needs is not totally separate from mainstream provision, nor does it belong within an isolated circuit.

Rather, it should be conceived and delivered within a comprehensive framework that takes account of the normal educational provision made for all pupils.

Hegarty (1993) maintains that, in a resource centre model support provision can come from the schools own resources, which are either from individual staff members or a resource area. The Resource Centre is perceived to be an efficient means of providing support for special education needs. It has particular advantages when there are a number of learners on the roll who have similar special educational needs, for example, learners with visual impairments.

The resource model entails a concentration of the specialist equipment and materials within a single area of the school where an educator can investigate what is available, and receive advice on what to use, and to borrow what is needed. It is also a place where individual or small groups of learners conduct their work when they are out of mainstream classes. There are particular advantages in the case of learners with visual impairments when bulky equipment such as closed circuit television cannot easily be transported around the school, or when individual blind learners need a quite space to do a tape-recording or to practice Braille using a Braille machine. The resource model is appropriate in the context of the Eritrean situation. Learners with visual impairments live in small groups and all the members of the same group study together in the small mainstream school. According to the researcher's personal observation, since ordinary junior schools do not have enough itinerant teachers to serve blind learners individually, learners with visual impairments can go to the resource centres in groups or individually after class hours and make use of it. According to Hegarty (1993), in England, some special schools acted as resource centres by profiling information and providing consultant services to neighbouring mainstream schools as well as contributing to in-service training activities. The link between special schools and mainstream schools enables the schools to develop mutual support arrangements to meet special educational needs and to provide a focus for the deployment of support services. This in turn encourages the development of local resource centres which is an important step in developing the process of mainstreaming. White Paper 6 (Department of Education of

South Africa, 2001) also recommends that special schools should become Resource Centres.

When learners with special education needs are enrolled in mainstream schools, the schools must arrange their physical structures, such as buildings and mobility infrastructures, for learners with physical or sensory disabilities. This can be done in cooperation with the special schools. In this case, special schools for the blind could help tremendously in giving mobility training, so that blind learners can easily be introduced to the new compound and the new classrooms of the mainstream schools. Moreover, special school teachers may act as a general source of information on teaching learners with special educational needs. They are familiar with relevant literature or curriculum materials and may also know something about local support services for the learners having difficulties. Besides, they can give advice pertaining to particular learners who face learning breakdown with regular teachers in the regular class. They can also provide an important aspect of in-service training for their mainstream colleagues, either formally through lectures and workshops, or informally when they discuss an individual learner's case or when they engage in other professional interactions.

In the same way, in South Africa, the White Paper No.6 (DOE, 2001:21) elaborates on the procedures to alleviate barriers to learning amongst learners with visual impairments, by indicating that a special school has specialised skills available amongst its staff and has developed learning materials to assist learners, specifically with visually impairment. The professional staff at this school, as part of their role in the district support team, could run training workshops in their district for other regular schools' educators on how to provide additional support in the classroom. The special school could also produce learning materials in Braille and make them available through a lending system to other neighbouring regular schools in the district

2.7 Financial Constraints in Addressing Special Needs of Learners with Visual Impairments in the Mainstream in Eritrea

In general, Eritrean schools have no consistent and substantial budgets to provide quality education for all learners. According to the researcher's personal experience, the only known source of funding for the schools in the general education system is the little money raised from learners once a year as school fees. That is, each primary school student is required to pay about twenty to forty Nakfa per year (10 to 20 Rand). This amount increases to sixty Nakfa (30 Rand) per year in the higher secondary schools. In addition the teachers' salaries are paid from the government budget.

In such financially constrained schools it is impossible to conceive that special educational resources for learners with visual impairments in the mainstream would be adequately addressed. Despite the above financial deficiencies, attempts are being made by the MOE to support learners with visual impairments in the mainstream. According to the unpublished annual report of the School for the Blind (2003), the MOE provides 250 Nakfa (125 Rand) for each student per month as a living allowance for those who are included in the mainstream. Besides, the administrator of the School for the Blind confirms that blind learners in the mainstream receive Braille books, Braille paper, Braille writing materials and white canes from the school. Since the school is administered by the MOE, these services could be considered to be government expenditure in order to support the inclusion of learners with visual impairments into the mainstream (personal conversation). The issue of resources and the financial capacity of the mainstreamed learners will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

Dyson (1998) states that segregated special education in the post-war years has proved to be costly. It usually demands a low pupil teacher ratio, the provision of highly trained staff and specific specialised teaching materials and equipment. Furthermore, special education usually takes place in special schools, which are typically smaller than regular schools, and therefore incur disproportionately large overhead costs in maintaining buildings and administrative costs to convert them into residences. Sometimes the costs

involved in obtaining the provisions required for special schools double due to the distances in rural and low populated areas. Therefore, developing countries have increasingly come to realise that the establishment of such special schools are financially unrealistic options. Thus, Dyson and Forlin assert that different forms of inclusive provision seem to offer the prospect of providing services to a wide range of learners with diverse needs, while keeping costs minimal and fair. The principal resources required for an inclusive approach are the time, energy and skills of regular teachers. The Salamanca Statement (1994) claims that inclusion is not only cost efficient but also cost effective.

The Government of Eritrea, National Constitution of Eritrea Article 21 (1997), entitled Socio-Economic Rights and Responsibilities, states that every citizen shall have the right of equal access to publicly funded social services. The state shall endeavour within the limit of its resources to make available to all citizens: health, education, cultural and other social services. This provision is broad and vague. Yet it has nothing to do with the rights of the special educational needs of learners with learning difficulties. When learners with special education needs are included in the mainstream, additional modifications such as training new staff, new or modified buildings, additional curriculum materials, equipment ranging from cassette recorders to adapted microcomputers and special transport arrangements, are needed. All of these can run up the levels of expenditure in the mainstream schools. However, Hegarty (1993) argues that children's needs are paramount and that the issue of costs should not be a decisive factor in determining how these needs are met. That is, once a particular package of resources has been identified as necessary for a student with special needs, all efforts must be made to ensure that the package is supplied, regardless of the cost involved.

Unlike in Eritrea, in South Africa, the Department of Education, through the report of NCSNET (1997), has expressed its commitment to fund the special needs of education in a clear statement. The report in reference to international organisations states that UNESCO isolates resources and funding as key areas for investigation in monitoring the meeting of special education needs throughout the world. The needs for countries to re-

prioritise resources for education for the learners with special educational needs, was addressed by the Salamanca Conference. Such prioritisation is also highlighted as key factor in the creation of equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1994). On the basis of the above rules, the NCSNET/NCESS (1997) report notes that 1 % of learners in any system require cost intensive additional resources engendered by a range of organic disabilities and impairments. The level of additional resources required would relate to the impact of these disabilities and impairments, which may have an effect on the learners' access to the curriculum and support services. This impact will be ascertained via learner profiles, based on key indicators of need for additional resources. A guaranteed budget allocation has to be set-aside in order to access additional resources so as to provide support for these learners and thereby address barriers to learning and prevent a learning breakdown. The White Paper No.6 (DOE, 2001) recommends three levels of support. Low intensity support will be provided by mainstream schools. Medium intensity support will be provided by establishing full service schools, and high intensity support will be provided by special schools. Special schools will acquire new roles in implementing the inclusion programme, by converting themselves into resource centers. These new roles entail providing particular expertise and support, especially professional support in implementing the curriculum, as well as the dissemination of instructions as part of their contribution to support the neighboring full service/inclusion schools.

Additionally, full service schools are schools which will provide medium intensity of support. They should be equipped to provide a full range of support services to learners with special education needs. Thus, full service schools will receive assistance from special schools to develop their capacity to provide support and to address barriers to learning. Special attention will be given to developing flexibility in teaching practices and styles through training, capacity building, and providing support to learners and educators in mainstream schools.

The inclusive approach requires changes in mainstream education, so that learners experiencing barriers to learning can be identified in the early stages, in order for the appropriate support to be provided. It will also necessitate changes to special schools, so that learners who experience mild to moderate disabilities can be adequately accommodated within mainstream education through appropriate support from special schools. Once again this will entail that the quality of the services provided by the special schools be upgraded so that they can deliver a high quality service for learners with severe and multiple disabilities. Therefore, all the above degrees of support, from high intensity, medium intensity to low intensity, require certain fiscal allocations from the government budget.

2.8 Educational Consideration for Learners with Visual Impairments in the Mainstream

There are a number of educational factors that impact on the cognitive development of the learner with visual impairment. This study concentrates on four major aspects of educational attributes for learners with visual impairment. However, before mentioning the essential characteristics, it is necessary to refer the definition of “visual impairment” in the context of this study, as stated at the beginning of this chapter.

2.8.1 Academic Achievement of Learners with Visual Impairments

Very few studies have been done on the academic achievement comparing visually impaired children and sighted children. Many professionals agree that direct comparisons are questionable, primarily because the two groups must be tested under different conditions. Nolan and Ashcroft cited in Halahan and Kauffman (1986), mention that learners with visual impairments are usually allowed to spend more time on the tests because reading Braille is an inherently slower process than reading print. Also most low vision learners, who do read print, read at a slow pace. Despite the problems involved in evaluating academic tests of learners with visual impairments, Bateman cited in Halahan and Kauffman (1986), suggested that “there is more than a little evidence to suggest that

those partially sighted and blind children are behind their sighted peers, when equated on mental age.”

Based on the classification of the concept of blindness and partial sightedness, Snyman and Bloem (2001:178) have identified four areas of educational considerations for learners with visual impairments. These aspects are: Braille, the use of remaining sight, listening and mobility. Braille, the use of remaining sight and listening skills, relate directly to academic or educational issues, in particular to reading.

2.8.2 Braille

The basic unit of Braille is a quadrangular cell ranging from one to six dots. The different forms of Braille vary primarily in the number of contractions used. Grade 1 Braille for example, contains no contractions. Grade 2 Braille, on the other hand, makes considerable use of contractions and the short hand forms of words. Grade 1 Braille is easier to learn because it is more literal. Grade 2 Braille is the popular choice because it requires much less space and can be written and read much faster (Halahan and Kauffman, 1986:318). It should be kept in mind that it is much more difficult to learn to read and write Braille than it is to learn, read and write print.

2.8.3 Using the Remaining Sight

Although many learners with visual impairments still have enough residual vision that can enable them to read the print, educators such as Snyman and Bloem (2001: 71-87) suggest that children with low remaining vision must be encouraged to use their sight with some aids such as large type lenses, bright light and high contrasting colours, for example, a yellow chalk on the blackboard.

The misconception on the use of remaining sight as being harmful, has proved meaningless today. Experts have approved that there is no harm in holding a book closer to the eyes. The belief that the use of powerful lenses will injure the residual vision, has

been vigorously disproved. Hence learners with visual impairments with low vision must be encouraged and supported to use their residual sight optimally, using all the available means such as large type or big fonts, for example, 18, magnifying lenses, a bright room etc.

2.8.4 Developing Listening Skills

The less a learner with a visual disability is able to rely on vision for information from the environment, the more crucial it is that s/he becomes a good listener. Listening is an important skill that must be acquired by the visually handicapped. Some materials, which are useful in developing listening skills, are recorded materials which are quicker and easier to use than Braille. However, although listening is the best model of communication, it does pose some disadvantages. Namely that recorded material is limited. Also, listening to recorded materials requires a great deal of concentration or else important information may be missed. Furthermore, the increased use of listening may cause learners not to use their remaining sight optimally.

2.8.5 Mobility

Although mobility is not directly an educational consideration, it does help to facilitate the learners' mobility around the school and home. There are a variety of mobility guides to help learners with visual impairments to discover their environment and walk independently. This includes human guides, guide dogs, a long cane and electronic devices. Since human guides make the blind more dependent, they are not ideal. On the other hand, guide dogs and electronic devices are more expensive, resulting in visually handicapped people from lower social classes not being able to afford them. Therefore the practical guide which can effectively help blind learners, is the use of the long white cane.

The cane is swept in an arc lightly touching the ground in front. Using the cane, the visually impaired person receives information about the surface under the feet and is

forewarning about steps. It also protects the lower part of the body against collisions. The additional advantage of a cane is that it is reliable, long lasting, it requires no accessories and very little maintenance. Although it seems easy to use, blind people need training to use a white cane properly.

2.9 School Level Interventions for Learners with Visual Impairments in the Mainstream

Support services and material resources for learners with visual impairments in mainstream schools can be divided broadly into those that provide specialist teachers in the school, and those that offer peripatetic services of support, advice or teaching. According to Best (1992), school-based support services usually take the form of a resource room used by the specialist teacher and, on occasion, by the learners. Alternatively, a unit facility may be provided in which the teachers and the learners are based. The provision of a resource room appears to be favourable as it allows the learners to be registered in a mainstream regular class together with a learner receiving support in this class with his or her sighted peers.

Best (1992) again mentions that the resource room may be used for teaching special subjects, the preparation of special materials, for individual studies and for the storage of equipment and books. A modern resource room could be equipped with a wide range of support equipment such as low vision aids, desk lights, closed circuit television, large print type writers, brightly coloured writing paper, speech tape recorders with cassettes, Braille packing, Braille duplicators, Braille text books, computers, mathematical equipment and map making apparatus.

2.9.1 Classroom Level Interventions for Learners with Visual Impairments

With the increased enrolment rate of learners with visual impairments in regular classrooms, teachers have to learn to handle special problems related to the learners'

needs. Hannine cited in Halahan and Kauffman (1986) has made a number of suggestions which have been summarised in the following six points:

- 1 Visually handicapped learners should be required to care for their own materials as part of an effort to foster a sense of independence.
- 2 A sighted learner in the class can at times act as a guide as long as the visually handicapped learner does not become too dependent on him or her.
- 3 Blind learners should be treated like their sighted peers. The same general expectations should be established for all learners.
- 4 Interpersonal interaction between the blind and the sighted learners should be encouraged.
- 5 Blind learners should be encouraged to participate in as many activities as possible. Alternative activities should be arranged if it is not possible for them to join in with the rest of the class.
- 6 Learners with visual impairments should be given the same kind of special tasks (such as watering plants), which are given to other learners.

Again Hannine cited in Halahan and Kauffman (1986) has a number of suggestions relating to the physical environment of the partially sighted learner. Adequate illumination and seating placement are very important. The learner should be seated in front, so that she/he can see the chalkboard. The teacher should ensure that she/he writes in large clear letters on the chalkboard. Sighted peers can help learners with visual impairments by taking notes for them or making carbon copies of the notes. It is beneficial for the learners when the teacher says out loud what she/he is writing on the chalkboard. Science and Geography are problematic areas, because they are visually orientated. Rhary, Cohen and Weiss (1979) cited in Halahan and Kauffman (1986) have published an exciting idea for a Science curriculum for learners with visual impairments. For Geography, embossed maps from the American Printing House for the Blind are made available. In interaction with the learners, the teacher must take care in remembering that the non-verbal cues used with sighted learners are inappropriate for the visually impaired. It is important to verbalise one's intentions.

Snyman and Bloem (2001:181) have also recommended some accommodations that could be performed by the regular teacher to address the educational needs of learners with visual impairments in the regular classroom setting. According to these educators, these accommodations will enhance the quality of education for learners with visual impairments. Some of these recommendations are the following:

- Special care should be taken to ensure a safe classroom environment for the learners with visual impairment. That is, there should not be any obstructions in the path of the learners.
- Any change in the classroom should be brought to the attention of these learners. The learners who are totally blind must always be told who is addressing them, and what is new.
- Generally, the learner with low vision is best placed in the centre of the front row in the classroom.
- The chalkboard should be cleaned regularly, and writing should be large and uncluttered.

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher has attempted to define the concept of the term 'visual impairment' and has analysed the word "full inclusion". Teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with visual impairment in regular classes, in developed as well as in developing countries, has also been discussed broadly. Moreover, parents' attitudes towards the inclusion of their children in mainstream education and what their role could be in elevating learning barriers, was indicated. Besides, inadequacies with regard to human as well as material resources, were pointed out in this chapter. Finally, financial constraints in the area of special education needs and their remedies, were highlighted in detail. In the next chapter, the qualitative methodology followed in this study, is described.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research methodology which was applied in this study and includes a description of the research problem, research design and the research methods utilised in carrying out the study.

3.2 Rationale for this Study

This study researches the current status of the provision of support services and educational resources, as well as teachers' skills and preparation to accommodate learners with visual impairments in the mainstream schools. As it was already stated in Chapter I, the inclusion of learners with visual impairments into the mainstream in the Eritrean context, was implemented by default, because of the influence of more educationally advanced Western countries. Visually impaired learners in Eritrea in the mainstream have been encountering a number of barriers resulting from inadequate resources and support services provided through the Abraha Bahta School for the Blind (hereinafter referred to as "School for the Blind"). *Ato* (Mr.) Tinsae said, "Our visually impaired learners in the mainstream education system are struggling to succeed without any proper provision of support services and poor educational resources (Quote by teacher from the School for the Blind)."

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lack of support services and related teacher training in special education needs for visually impaired learners in the regular schools in Eritrea.

The main research question is to what extent are educational resources, support services and upgrading of teachers' skill provided to support visually impaired learners in mainstream schools in Eritrea?'

3.3 Scope of the Study

From the six *zobas* (provinces) of the country, the study was conducted in three *zobas*. Namely, *Zoba Maekel*, *Zoba Debub* and *Zoba Anseba*. The reasons for this selection were firstly that almost all the visually impaired learners in the mainstream are distributed in these provinces. Secondly, had the researcher taken only the junior schools in *Zoba Maekel*, the results of this study would not be generalizable, nor equivalent to that of an investigation and recommendations at national level.

Since the only resource centre for the blind and partially sighted learners is at the School for the Blind, which is in *Zoba Maekel*, selecting only the sample junior schools in the mainstream in this *Zoba*, would have automatically affected the results in a positive manner. This is because the resource centre is more accessible to the visually impaired learners who study in this *Zoba*. Therefore, to validate this study and to make it more representative, the researcher had included the other two *zobas* in the study regardless of financial and time constraints. The junior school selected in *Zoba Maekel* (Asmara) has been enrolling visually impaired learners from Grade 6 and upwards for approximately 20 years. The second junior school cited in the study, which is situated in *Zoba Anseba* only recently began admitting learners with visual impairments in the 1998/1999 academic year. The third junior school in *Zoba Debub* only commenced with the registration of learners with visual impairments in the 2001/02 academic year.

TABLE 3.1: DISTRIBUTION OF LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN THE MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS - GRADES 6 TO 11 - BY ZOBA (PROVINCE) AND GENDER

ZOBA	2002/2003		
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
MAEKEL	21	19	40
DEBUB	22	6	28
ANSEBA	3	10	13
TOTAL	46	35	81

Source: Financial Document of Abraha Bahta - School for the Blind (February 2003)

3.4 The Subjects

The subjects were stakeholders of education, that is, regular teachers, learners, teachers from the School for the Blind and an administrator and parents who participated in the interviews.

3.4.1 Regular Teachers

A total of ten regular teacher participants were selected from these three schools. Since visually impaired learners at junior school level take only five subjects (English Language, Geography, General Science, History and Civics), five teachers who teach these courses may teach a minimum of one or two visually impaired learners in his or her regular class in each school. Hence the total number of the teacher population who would have had contact with visually impaired learners in class in the three schools, was fifteen. Of these fifteen teachers, ten teachers were selected for a sample to participate in the individual interviews for the purpose of this study. The criteria for selecting three out of

five in each school was dependent on the teachers' availability, experience and willingness to participate in the interview. This purposeful sampling allows the researcher to be indifferent to the age and gender composition of the participants. Thus, there were eight male and two female regular teacher participants in the interviews. Ages ranged from 30 to 63 years. Teaching experience varied from 10 to 39 years. See the level of qualifications of regular teacher participants in Table 3.2 below.

TABLE 3.2: QUALIFICATIONS OF THE TEACHER PARTICIPANTS

QUALIFICATIONS	NUMBER OF TEACHERS			
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	%AGE (%)
TEACHING DIPLOMA (2 YEARS)	4	1	5	50
TEACHING CERTIFICATE (1 YEAR)	4	1	5	50
TOTAL	8	2	10	100

3.4.2 Learners

The total number of learners with visual impairments in the three schools, was 17. Although all of them participated in the first round of interviews, to keep the reliability and validity of the questions going, nine of them were selected to participate purposefully in the second, or final round of interviews. The purpose for selecting nine learners was based on the learners' ability to express their ideas, because some of them were shy and intimidated. Moreover, there were learners who were purposely excluded from the interviews for the reason that their mother tongue was not Tigrigna, the language which the researcher had used for the questions. In contrast, there were learners who were purposely selected to participate in the interview for the sake of including partially sighted learners. In meaningful sampling, the researcher must be sure that any informants are selected as far as possible on the grounds that they are typical representatives of their group (Hitch and Hughes, 1995). Based on the above notion, the researcher selected the

participants on grounds of being able to answer specific questions or for the purpose of using purposeful sampling instead of random sampling.

TABLE 3.3: INFORMATION REGARDING THE LEARNER PARTICIPANTS

LEARNERS	GENDER	AGE	GRADE	LEVEL OF SIGHT
Student 1	Male	13 Years	7	Totally Blind
Student 2	Male	14 Years	6	Totally blind
Student 3	Male	15 Years	6	Totally blind
Student 4	Female	12 Years	6	Totally blind
Student 5	Female	15 Years	6	Partially sighted
Student 6	Female	15 Years	6	Totally blind
Student 7	Female	14 Years	7	Partially sighted
Student 8	Female	13 Years	7	Low vision
Student 9	Female	15 Years	7	Totally blind

3.4.3 Teachers from School for the Blind and the administrator

Four teachers were participants, three of them blind, while one was sighted. The blind teachers have themselves passed through the mainstream education system during their studies at junior and secondary levels. The sighted teacher on the other hand is a mobility teacher who received mobility training in Malawi several years ago. The administrator of the blind school is a qualified professional appointed by the MOE in charge of financial and administrative aspects of the school.

The gender composition of the group was as follows. There were two male and two female teachers. Their ages range was between 40 and 50 years, whilst their teaching experience ranged from 15 to 20 years. The qualification status of the group of participants was as follows. 3 of the teachers had teaching diplomas from the Teachers' Training College (TTC), while the remaining participant received her teaching certificate from the Teacher Training Institute (TTI).

Based on the above advantages and purposes of groups interviews, a group interview was conducted with the teachers from the School for the Blind where there were 4 participants. Three of them are blind teachers who themselves have passed through the mainstream education system in their junior and secondary school studies. Three of the participants have received two years training and were awarded diplomas from the Teachers' Training College in Ethiopia. The remaining participant is a sighted female teacher, who had one year's training and was awarded a teaching certificate from the Teachers' Training Institute in Eritrea. In addition to this, the female teacher had received mobility training in Malawi several years ago and is currently a mobility teacher at the School for the Blind. Therefore, the selection of participants was based on their experience and familiarity with the special educational needs for the blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream education system.

3.4.4 Parents

As was indicated in the limitations of the study in Chapter One, the researcher was limited to conducting interviews with the parents from only one region (Zoba Maekel). This was due to inadequate time and finance. There were four parents involved in this study. Among these, the three each have two children with visual impairments, while the one mother has three partially sighted children.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The aim of the research was explained to all participants, either in an individual interview or in a group interview. Permission to tape-record the interviews was obtained from all participants. Thus they were informed that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. Therefore, the names of schools and individuals is not mentioned.

3.6 Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative methodology was employed in this study, as qualitative methods allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of issues, or of particular phenomena, by drawing both the researcher and the subjects of the research closer together. Qualitative research is about the reality of life in an educational context and the immediate cultural milieu which surrounds the reality (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995).

In the case of this research, the data gathered in the area of educational resources and support services for the visually impaired learners in the mainstream schools in Eritrea, will be compared to the experiences of different countries and societies in the literature in Chapter II. This is a base to investigate and develop a possible appropriate model for enhancing educational resources and support services for inclusion in programmes in social and educational development, which will be unique to Eritrea.

The findings of the data were expressed in percentages which are termed “quantifying qualitative data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:18)”. However, the analysis and the discussion of the findings are reported in descriptive form. The ideas which appeared to be more similar, frequent and related to each other, are grouped together in categories known as clusters, according to recurring patterns or themes.

3.7 Data gathering Instruments

To collect the necessary information, different instruments were used. Among these individual interviews, group interviews, classroom observations and document analysis are the major ones.

3.7.1 Individual Interviews

Interview is a 2% conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining relevant information and focused by him or her on the content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation (Cohen and Manion, 1989:307).

Questions were prepared with the intention of investigating the barriers to learning experienced by learners with visual impairments in the mainstream schools. Secondly, the teachers' repertoire and skills in adapting to the curriculum and meeting the special needs of learners was investigated. Thirdly, the questions were intended to reveal parental attitudes and perceptions to inclusion of their visually impaired children in mainstream schools. In addition the study intends to determine the role of the MOE in encouraging the inclusion of the blind and partially-sighted learners into mainstream schools.

Semi-structured interviews were used with the teachers, learners, parents and MOE officials. Semi-structured interviews were also used to obtain or capture opinions and suggestions to address the lack of educational resources and support services for the blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream education system in Eritrea.

The semi-structured interview provided the subjects with the freedom to express themselves in detail. As Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) state:

The main quality of semi-structured interviews is that it allows the researchers to understand issues to which they give special emphasis and to conduct in-depth interviews by providing the opportunity to probe and expand the respondents' responses.

The interviews with teachers, learners, parents and officials of the MOE were aimed at gaining a feel for the attitudes, beliefs, values and feelings concerning the current educational resources and support services for the learners with visual impairments in the inclusive education system in ordinary Eritrean schools. According to Tuckman cited in Cohen and Manion (1989): “*Interviews provide access to what is inside a person’s head, to understand the values, preferences, attitudes and beliefs.*”

3.7.2 Group Interviews

A group interview was conducted with the teachers from the School for the Blind in order to find out rational and concrete information about the current availability of educational resources and support services provided for the learners with visual impairments in the mainstream education system. Since the School for the Blind is the only institution that closely follows the educational sustainability and support services for blind and partially sighted pupils in the mainstream, it is of paramount importance to include teachers from the School for the Blind, administrators as well as the Principal, in the data-gathering process. “When you have a data-gathering process which needs a group of people who have input, the group interview may be a viable approach (Horwitz and Kimble, 1998:52-53).” Group interviews can be a wealthy resource of data and have many advantages. Again Horwitz and Kimble (*ibid*) have put some of the advantages of group interviews as follows:

1. They can support data not previously reported in individual interviews.
2. They take less time than a series of individual interviews and enable the researcher to include more responses in a study.
3. They can provide greater scope, depth and insight than the individual interview, because the interviewees can build on each others’ comments and observations.

Furthermore, Horwitz and Kimble (*ibid*) state that the purposes of group interviews are as follows:

1. to get participants to react to a point, to move the discussion along,
2. to pursue an important area and gather more details, and

3. to assess different feelings or opinions between participants.

3.7.3 Classroom Observation

Observation involves watching, but collateral information is usually supported by information received through other senses such as hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. These senses are very important to the blind and partially sighted learners, because information from these various senses is often combined, processed and interpreted in complex ways to form observations and images about the world, and what is in it (Foster; 1993).

Non-participatory observation was used to check the credibility of teachers' actions to accommodate learners with visual impairments in the regular class discussion in respect of the information given by them during the individual interviews. The type of observation was "covert", since the researcher himself is visually impaired. As a result these teachers may have put in a conscious effort to emphasize their considerations towards learners with visual impairments if they had been informed of the real purpose of the classroom observation. Such a "covert" operation was justified by Foster (1993:45):

"On occasions, however, the account of the research given may be selective or involve an account of deception, as I explained earlier, part of my research was conducted where the teachers gave more attention in the classroom to the learners from certain ethnic groups. When negotiating access to classroom observation for this part of the research, I didn't tell the teachers about that specific purpose. I thought that if I did, teachers would make a conscious effort to distribute attention equally to all the learners. So, I made my explanation of the purpose of the observation very vague."

Hence, the researcher of this study chose Foster's trend which is "covert observation". This is similar to the study of the teachers' actions to adapt the curriculum to meet the special education needs of the blind and partially sighted learners in the regular classroom in Eritrea. As mentioned earlier, the observations were conducted in six classes

and these teachers also participated in the individual interviews. To make the findings more reliable, free of bias, and to subvert certain limitations that may have been caused due to the lack of sight of the researcher, an assistant who is a candidate teacher from the University of Asmara, was used to write the observed phenomena in the classroom setting together with the researcher. In addition, this enables the researcher to interpret non-verbal cues, such as body language, expressions of the subjects under observation. Since all the issues raised in the observations were inherently related to the questions raised in the individual interviews, data was analysed and discussed together with the data obtained through individual interviews.

Non-participatory observation was conducted in six classes with the full consent of the teachers. Observation was conducted with the support of the sighted assistant. Therefore, data for the purpose of this research was gathered using individual interviews, group interviews, classroom observations and documents in order to collect in-depth information in a triangulation method.

3.7.4 Documents

Specific documents which could provide information about the visually impaired learners in the mainstream, was accessed. Most of these documents were obtained from the School for the Blind, Eritrea National Association for the Blind, the Human Resource Development Department in the MOE, and to some extent from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Thus, detailed data was gathered through the triangulation method using individual interviews, group interviews, classroom observations and documents to validate the research.

3.8 Designing Interview Questions

Group and individual interview question design, was based on the main question and sub-questions of the study in relation to the literature in the area of educational resources and support services for learners with visual impairments in the mainstream in Eritrea.

Moreover, the questions for classroom observation were also prepared in a manner which verified the information obtained from the individual interviews with regular teachers.

All the questions for individual as well as group interviews, and questions for classroom observations, were prepared in November 2002, prior to the researcher's departure from South Africa to Eritrea to begin the data gathering process. All the questions were first checked by the head of the Unit of Students with Disabilities at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). After preliminary language and spelling errors were corrected, the questions were carefully examined by the researcher's supervisor. Based on the supervisor's constructive comments, the necessary modifications were made. In order to gather information about the current status of educational resources and support services provided for the blind and partially sighted learners in mainstream schools in Eritrea, the questions posed to the different types or groups of participants were interrelated and supplementary, so as to answer the main question of the research. For example, the information obtained from the regular teacher respondents, was counter-checked with the responses from the pupil participants in the interviews. Similarly, the information gathered through classroom observations was compared and contrasted with the information obtained from the same teachers who participated in the interviews.

3.9 The Data Gathering Process and Duration

Written permission for this research was received from the Department of Human Resource Development and the Ministry of Education. Collection of the data took place within a two-month period, from mid-December 2002 up to mid-February 2003. After explaining the purpose of the study to the school principals, permission was requested to conduct the research in their schools. All three principals consented and arrangements were made for contacting the teachers in their respective schools. The individual interviews with the regular teachers were conducted in a quiet room within the school compound. Since the blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream schools live in groups, especially in the provinces, the interviews with the learners in Schools B and C were conducted in their homes which is nearer to their schools. The interviews with the

learners in School A, were conducted in a quiet room within their school compound. Individual interviews with the administrators of the School for the Blind and officials of the Special Education Unit under the General Education Department, were conducted in their offices.

After permission was requested from the principal of the School for the Blind, an appropriate time was negotiated for conducting the group interview. The group interview was conducted in a quiet room and the participants sat comfortably in a circle while the researcher sat in the middle monitoring the tape-recording. Moreover, the assistant was writing short notes so as to support the information recorded. Questions for the group interview were distributed among the participants one week in advance in order to give the participants enough time to ponder on them. All individual and group interviews commenced after the purpose of the research was explained to the participants. With the full participation of the participants all information was tape-recorded in a clear and audible manner. Furthermore, permission was asked from six regular teachers to conduct classroom observations. After a suitable time was negotiated with each teacher, an agreement was reached to observe two teachers everyday. Thus three days were assigned to observe 6 teachers who were also participants in the individual interviews. Due to the reasons explained in the topic titled Limitations to the Study in Chapter I, observation was limited to six teachers despite the fact that it was intended to be conducted with a total of ten teachers.

All the individual, as well as the group interviews, were conducted in Tigrigna in accordance with the preference of the participants. Therefore, questions were translated into Tigrigna without changing the fundamental meaning of the English version. In the same vein, all data was also translated from Tigrigna into English, taking great care not to make changes in the meaning and substance of the Tigrigna version. All the translation was done with the assistance of the researcher's spouse who is an English graduate and a teacher at School A.

3.10 Data Analysis

The data gathered through the individual interviews and the classroom observations was discussed and analysed together. The data gathered from group interviews and the learners' individual interviews was discussed and analysed separately. Information gathered from government documents was inserted from the start, commencing from Chapter I, up to the end of this study, wherever relevant.

The data was analysed qualitatively. Patterns that emerged from the data have been grouped into categories and sub-categories according to various themes. Firstly, data collected from individual interviews with teachers and data collected from the classroom observation, was transcribed. In analysing the data, the specific information received was transcribed and analysed, based on the information which emerged from the responses. Meanings were derived through contextual interpretations of the raw data. As stated by Kvale (1995): *“The researcher has a perspective on what is investigated and interprets the interviews from this perspective. The interpreter goes beyond what is directly said to work out structures and relations of meaning not implied apparently.”*

An examination of this initial analysis led to a categorization of each area according to themes and categories which emerged from the transcripts. The number of responses in each theme or category have been reported in percentages.

Chapter Four

Findings and Analyses

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned earlier in Chapter III, in assessing the educational resources and support services for the blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream in Eritrea, interviews were conducted with regular teachers. Classroom observations were also conducted in order to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with visual impairments into regular classes. In addition, interviews were conducted with parents to discover their perceptions towards the inclusion of the children in mainstream schools. Finally interviews were done with officials of the MOE and documents were analysed in order to gather the necessary information on how much the MOE support the inclusive program. The following factors were taken into account: teacher ability to adapt the curriculum in order to accommodate blind and partially sighted learners, the teachers' role in empowering partially sighted learners to use their residual vision, and an attempt to discover teachers' perception of the current method of assessing learners with visual impairments through an oral reader. Furthermore, questions regarding parents attitudes and their roles in strengthening the inclusion of their children as well as the official's and learner's view towards the financial support of the MOE, were also raised.

The abovementioned factors were extracted from the transcribed texts designed to facilitate the responses obtained from the interviews conducted with the regular teachers. These factors were categorised into the following themes, which will constitute the topics under discussion in this Chapter:

1. The attitudes of regular teachers towards the inclusion of blind and partially sighted learners into mainstream schools,
2. The skills of teachers and their eagerness to accommodate the special education needs of learners with visual impairments in the mainstream schools,

- 3 The efforts of regular teachers in encouraging partially sighted learners to use their residual sight,
- 4 The perceptions of teachers regarding the current assessment methods for monitoring progress of learners with visual impairments in the mainstream,
- 5 The feelings of the parents towards the inclusion of their children,
- 6 The views of the learners towards the financial as well as material support of the MOE.

The responses of the participants to the aforementioned themes were taken from the transcribed texts. These responses were organised and analysed into substantive findings. Finally these findings were calculated in percentages, and will now be discussed under the relevant themes.

4.2 Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Blind and Partially Sighted Learners in Eritrea

The majority of the regular teacher respondents (60 %) agreed that learners with visual impairments should join the mainstream education system. The reasons provided for this support centred around the socialisation of learners with visual impairments, and around fostering an attitude of respect towards their right of education in regular mainstream schools. As to the issue of gaining social acceptance, one of the teacher respondents from School C stated:

I support the inclusion of learners with visual impairments into the mainstream. In my opinion, inclusion may afford blind and partially sighted learners the opportunity to introduce their values to the greater community. I believe that learners can acquire more knowledge and are able to develop a long term objective pertaining to their future in a less restrictive environment rather than in an exclusive special school.

Notwithstanding the fact that the teacher respondents were unable to cite any specific legislation or articles regarding the right to education for the blind and partially sighted learners, in order to substantiate their opinion, they remarked informally that inclusion

would help learners to acquire a sense of equality and respect within society. In this regard, a teacher from School (A) stated:

Placing blind and partially sighted learners in the special school may cause them to feel inferior. Whereas if they are placed in a regular school they can play, socialise and occupy their time with their sighted peers. This cultivates a sense of equality and may give them the emotional courage to become an essential part of the community.

The majority of the teacher respondents also agreed that the special school leads to the segregation of the blind and partially sighted learners, thereby infringing on their rights to an education. This notion was reflected in one of the teacher respondents from School C who stated:

When blind and partially sighted learners are excluded and attend the special school, they may feel segregated, whereas, inclusion into the mainstream will enable them to develop a sense of equality and belonging.

This view was clearly highlighted by one of the teacher respondents from School A, who mentioned the following: "It is better if we do not confine blind and partially sighted learners to a separate special school because I believe that they can gain a lot of knowledge from their sighted peers." Similarly, the above idea was again strengthened by a female teacher from school A saying: "When these learners are excluded from the special school, they may feel segregated. However, when they are included in their sighted peer groups, they can feel a sense of equality and can acquire a lot of knowledge through informal chatting and communication." Thus, the positive attitudes of the teacher respondents can be summed up in the following views. That is, regular teachers conceded to the inclusion approach as a means of developing social acceptance, building a sense of equality and respect, and ending segregation for the learners with visual impairment.

On the other hand, 40 % of the teacher respondents maintained that blind and partially sighted learners should continue their studies separately in the special School for the Blind. The reason given for this was that teachers do not give proper attention to learners

with special needs, due to a lack of adequate skills and a heavy workload. One of the respondents tried to rationalize his opinion by saying:

We deal with 60-70 learners in one class. This means that we have a hectic schedule. We as regular teachers cannot properly transmit the required knowledge to learners with special needs. In addition to this, it is the first time that we have admitted blind and partially sighted learners to this junior school. Moreover, none told us about their special education needs.

In the same vein, a Geography teacher in School B said that regular teachers cannot accommodate blind and partially sighted learners in regular classes, due to the fact that teachers have large class sizes, that is, 60-70 learners in one class. Hence in such busy working conditions, regular teachers cannot address the special needs of such learners. Therefore, in his opinion, blind and partial sighted learners should remain in the School for the Blind. Another teacher from the same school also displayed a negative attitude towards the inclusion of blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream schools, but from a different perspective. This teacher suggested that when blind and partially sighted learners are placed in the regular schools, the sighted peers disturb them and interfere with their ability to listen and concentrate. Since learners with visual impairments are good listeners, they should attend a special school where they can learn in a silent classroom. As an English teacher, he claimed that he does not have problems when faced with having to explain pictures, tables and columns in the textbook to his sighted learners because they can easily describe the pictures and diagrams. These activities however, create problems for the blind or partially sighted learners. Therefore, according to this teacher, it is better if they remain at the School for the Blind where their teaching material is converted into Braille or into some tactile form.

4.3 Inadequate Teacher Skills and Training to Accommodate Pupils with Visual Impairments in Mainstream Classes

All the teacher respondents (100 %) admitted that regular teachers in the junior schools do not deliver the necessary educational support or provisions for the blind and partially sighted learners in the regular classroom setting.

The reasons for the shortcomings mentioned by the teachers can be attributed to inadequate skills and training of the regular teachers. Although the phenomenon of including blind or partially sighted learners into the mainstream education has been practised for a relatively long time in Eritrea, regular teachers have never been involved in either short-term workshops or in summer training courses on the special needs of education for learners with learning difficulties. A teacher from School B says:

I do not think that the regular teachers have the know how to prepare support teaching aids for the blind and partially sighted learners. Even the department heads are not more knowledgeable than the teachers in this regard. It is thus better for the Ministry to conduct short-term workshops for regular teachers.

This comment clearly demonstrates that regular teachers lack the required training to address the special needs of learners with visual impairments in regular classes.

Another teacher from School B provided a corresponding opinion, which gives substance to the issue regarding the lack of knowledge and training among regular teachers:

We teachers do not have the know how to deal with the problems of these particular learners. It is the first time that blind and partially sighted learners have been enrolled at this school. No one informed us about his or her special needs. I want to let the Ministry know that it is not sufficient to simply bring the learners and include them into the regular classes. In conjunction with inclusion, there should be workshops for the regular teachers on how to accommodate these learners in the mainstream schools.

The above statement shows that regular teachers in School B were not psychologically or mentally prepared to accommodate learners with visual impairments who were suddenly allowed to enrol at their school. This illustrates that the inclusion of these learners was implemented without the necessary planning for the accommodation of the specific needs of these learners.

The researcher was involved in a momentous occasion pertaining to the teachers' lack of expertise and training. When the researcher conducted the interviews with the teachers from School B, which only began enrolling blind and partially sighted learners in the 2002/03 academic year, all the teachers made a request to the researcher that at the very least, short term workshops should be conducted in order for them to familiarise themselves with the special needs of such learners. The researcher communicated their request to the School for the Blind. As a result, the authorities at the School for the Blind conducted a one-day workshop providing a preliminary orientation about the special needs of the blind and partially sighted learners who were included in that junior school. This workshop was the first of its kind to be conducted in the long history of the inclusive programme for the learners with visual impairments in the country. After the workshop, the researcher had a conversation with the principal of the School for the Blind who expressed the following: "All the regular teachers in this junior school were pleased with the workshop and they called for another contact session."

The issue of the lack of expertise and inadequate training of regular teachers was also highlighted in the junior schools that have had experience in admitting blind or partially sighted learners into regular classes. This was emphasised by one of the teachers from School A:

I believe that the current course content in the pedagogic teachers' training colleges does not even make mention of learners with learning difficulties, but now teachers are confronted with different teaching constraints arising from the diverse needs of learners with various learning difficulties.

Some of the other teachers also conveyed their desire to learn to read and write in Braille. A teacher from School (B) said that he had already commenced learning Braille through his learners with visual impairments in Grade 7 because he was experiencing problems in marking the Braille answer scripts of his visually impaired learners. Two other teachers, one from School (B) and the other from School (C), explained the need for them to learn to read and write in Braille. The teacher from School (C) expressed his interest as follows: “The Ministry is conducting computer training for all regular teachers. Why not do the same in Braille? I think that the training to learn Braille will not take longer than three months.” Similarly, the teacher from School (B) said: “I need to know Braille because I believe that it will enhance my professional development.”

On this issue, teacher’s perception has been derived from the lack of pre-service training, unavailability of in-service training and inadequate awareness regarding the accommodation of special education needs of learners with visual impairment.

4.3.1 Barriers to Curriculum Adaptation

In Eritrea, the sole source of educational support services and materials for the learners with visual impairments and their regular teachers in the inclusion programme, is located at the resource centre of the Abraha Bahta School for the Blind. Although this resource centre is equipped with some special devices such as Braille printers, voice synthesiser computers, Braille writers and thermo-forms, it has not yet fully addressed the educational requirements of the learners with visual impairments and regular teachers in mainstream schools. Semi-skilled staff runs the resource centre. The only staff member who has received adequate training, is a female. who said: “I received short-term training for three weeks in South Africa on how to repair Braille machines.” In addition to this, she has also undergone a three-month computer-training course in Eritrea. Aside from this, the resource centre teacher in the School for the Blind has never had any experience in preparing tactile models or any other teaching materials for the regular teachers to use in the regular classrooms.

The majority of teachers (70 %) responded that they failed to deliver the appropriate instructional services to their blind and partially sighted learners in the inclusion programme. The curriculum is not adapted in the prescribed manner. However, these teachers differed in the reasons behind their inadequacies. The teachers' rationale can be divided into two groups that will be analysed under the sub-topics 4.3.1.1 and 4.3.1.2.

4.3.1.1 Inadequacies due to Heavy Workload

30 % of the respondents tried to rationalise their shortcomings by mentioning heavy workload. They remarked that they have insufficient time to prepare teaching aids, even from available materials, for their blind and partially sighted learners, due to large class sizes. To validate this, a Science teacher from School (C) said that teachers, including himself, do not prepare special support materials for learners with visual impairments because they have 60-70 learners in one class. A single teacher can teach up to ten classes in one grade. This totals the number of learners taught by the teacher to 600-700 learners. Moreover, teachers under the age of 40 years are enlisted in the national service in Eritrea. That is, they are not paid a regular income. To support their income, they teach part-time classes in the evenings instead of preparing teaching aids that can assist them in modifying their teaching methods to meet the special education needs of learners.

Some of the teachers who stated that a heavy workload was caused by large class sizes, claimed that they also shoulder the responsibility of preparing the support teaching aids required to adapt the curriculum. These teachers made a call to the Ministry for the establishment of a resource centre with a specialist teacher who can provide them with the necessary support services and materials. In this regard, a Science teacher from School (B) said: "I have two visually impaired learners in my classes, but why should I prepare special support materials for only two learners while I have to deal with educating an additional 60-70 learners?" This viewpoint is a direct violation of the right to education of learners with visual impairments. Two other teachers, one a Geography teacher from School (B) and another, a Science teacher from School (C), expressed their need for the provision of the necessary support services and materials from any resource

centre or special department. They stated: “We regular teachers cannot cope with the special needs of these blind and partially sighted learners. We already have to concentrate on educating 600-700 sighted learners.” Therefore, the above teacher respondents associated their shortcoming to adapt the curriculum with heavy workload resulted from large class size.

4.3.1.2 Inadequacies due to Lack of Resources

40 % of the 70 % of teachers believe that regular teachers are not equipped to adapt the curriculum to accommodate blind and partially sighted learners in the regular classes, attribute their inability to do so to a lack of resources and support services from a special department or resource centre. On this issue, two English teachers from School B commented that in their textbooks there are diagrams, columns and mathematical expressions that are inconvenient for the blind and partially sighted learners to comprehend and to describe. These teachers simply omit them. From their statement, one can easily deduce that regular teachers are experiencing a shortage of support services and resources used in the preparation of teaching materials such as diagrams and other numerical expressions, into tactile forms. A general Science teacher from School (C) similarly confirmed the above impediment. As a Science teacher he requires tactile teaching aids, especially when he discusses the parts of a flower or the heart or animal organs. He says that he does not understand why the Ministry of Education does not establish a special unit to convert those things into tactile form. In the same way a Geography teacher in School (C) explained that a lack of resources is the main barrier. This teacher said that as a researcher he could offer advice about the use of embossed Braille maps for the blind and partially sighted learners. However, at the moment, even the map, which he uses for the sighted learners, is very old and parched in places.

In general, there is a serious constraint in support services and educational resources among regular teachers. This impedes them in the adaptation of the curriculum and puts pressure on them in trying to cope with the special needs of the learners with visual impairment in the regular junior schools in Eritrea. Despite the fact that the School for the

Blind provides Braille textbooks to the blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream, the Braille texts do not contain diagrams, tables or numerical graphs. To make matters worse, the School for the Blind does not avail any services for the preparation of tactile teaching aids from the environment to support the neighbouring mainstream schools. This may be the result of the misconception of the administrators, which emanates from an opinion, which says: “The School for the Blind is only responsible for the blind learners at elementary level who attend the school and board there” (Group Interview with the Blind School Teachers). According to the researchers experience, however, with the use of modern technology such as Braille printers, computers and Braille embossers, as well as trained personnel, the prescribed material - diagrams, tables, mathematical symbols and graphs - can be converted into Braille. Nevertheless, this requires a significant amount of finance from the MOE.

Notwithstanding these barriers, in junior schools in Eritrea, 30 % of the regular teachers were observed to make a concerted effort to adapt the curriculum to include blind or partially sighted learners in class discussions. One general Science teacher, for example, was observed “bringing three different types of soil from the school grounds and to demonstrate to his two completely blind learners how to discern from touch, the unique characteristics of the soil.’ Similarly, a Geography teacher in School (C) brought an egg and a pumpkin to class in order to demonstrate his two female learners with visual impairments to comprehend the oval shape of the earth and to feel the texture of these objects. From the analysis one can conclude that 70% percentage of regular teachers in the junior school felt that they failed to adapt the curriculum to accommodate blind and partially sighted pupils in the regular classroom, either due to a lot of work or a lack of resources.

4.3.2 Teachers’ Intervention to Ensure Learner’s Participation in Classroom Discussion

As discussed earlier, despite the fact that most of the regular teachers have inadequate training and are working with below average support materials and services, most of

them (80 %) agreed that they put maximum effort into supporting their blind and partially sighted learners. This was also confirmed during the classroom observation, when 83 % of the teachers who were observed, dealt with their blind and partially sighted learners in a participatory manner in class discussions. This statement can be substantiated by the fact that most of the teachers called learners with visual impairment by their names and encouraged them to participate. Furthermore, most of the teachers were noted to avoid non-verbal communication in classes which had blind or partially sighted learners in them. It was observed that most of the teachers wrote on a clean blackboard and read what was written on the board in a loud, clear voice. Most of them also seated the learners with visual impairments in the front seat in the middle row. This helped the totally blind learners to listen to the discussion without any difficulties and enabled those with low vision to see the blackboard from close-by.

Most of the regular teacher participants also conceded that they explain the lesson on a one on one basis when there is a problem in keeping up with class discussion. Pertaining to this, an English teacher from School (A) said: "I first ask myself whether my learners with visual impairments are keeping up with the discussion. Then I ask them if there are any problems. Then I repeat the lesson to them on an individual basis at the end of class. This idea was corroborated by a female Geography teacher from School (B). She said: "I call on my blind or partially sighted learners in my free time before the regular class starts, and I brief them about the lesson that will follow. The regular class discussion then becomes revision for them."

Two teachers, one from School (A) and the other from School (C) also discussed their attempts at contributing to the participatory behaviour of the regular teachers towards blind and partially sighted learners in the regular classroom. The History teacher from School (A) said:

I have been teaching for almost 22 years. I ask the learners with visual impairments if they are experiencing any problems in understanding the lesson. If they are, I will explain the lesson again on my own time in a tutorial form. I am fond of my learners with visual impairments. I do not

think that they should go back to the School for the Blind. This year we have a pupil with a visual impairment in Grade 7. His academic performance is excellent. He ranked first out of all the 25 classes in Grade 7.

Similarly, the Geography teacher from School (C) showed support for the above opinion from a different perspective. He said:

I have been teaching learners who are visually impaired for a number of years. I do not believe that these learners are inferior to their sighted peers in their academic achievement. I see sighted peers who want to sit at the same desk with the blind and partially sighted learners. I think that this is because learners with visual impairments are better in the English language than their sighted peers when they come from elementary school.

Although 80 % of the teacher participants agreed that regular teachers tend to display a positive and participatory demeanour towards their learners, and despite the fact that

83 % of the teachers who were observed, acted positively towards the learners with visual impairments in the class discussion, 20 % of the respondents as well as 17 % of the observed teachers reacted negatively towards the blind and partially sighted learners in their regular classes. This negativity was emphasised by one of the teacher respondents suggesting that levels of participation varies amongst the learners in one class. Thus teachers must not only pay special attention to these learners, but must engage all learners on an equal basis so that learners with visual impairments are not denied this opportunity. Nevertheless, the teacher stated that he did not believe in special attention or support. Likewise, another teacher from School (C) expressed a similar view, but he explained that he does not believe that learners with visual impairments have inferior IQs (Intelligence Quotients) when compared to those of their sighted peers. Hence there is no need to give special support or to provide the opportunity for the participation for such learners. In addition to this, one Science teacher, was seen in a classroom observation as having an indifferent attitude to the presence of a pupil with a visual impairment in his class. He did not encourage the learner to participate at all. The observer (researcher) could also not determine whether the teacher knew the learner by name.

The issue of the behaviour of teachers towards the learners with visual impairments in the regular classes was also raised with the learners who were interviewed for this study.

80 % of the regular teachers had a positive demeanour towards learners with visual impairments and furthermore, 83 % of the teachers under observation were noted to act positively in paying special attention and providing special support for learners with special needs. Despite this, only 50 % of the learners who participated in this study confirmed that the teachers were positive in encouraging their participation in class discussions. Most of the learners who participated, corroborated that the teachers explained the lesson again after class in a tutorial form when the learners asked them to do so. On the contrary, 50 % of the pupil participants responded negatively towards the behaviour of teachers in class discussions. They stated that teachers merely explained the lesson without paying special attention to the learners with special needs. Although some teachers afforded equal opportunities to their learners with visual impairments participating in class with their sighted learners, there is no specific action taken, or support given, by the regular teachers to assist learners with visual impairments to keep up with class discussions. Some of the learners also accused a few teachers of “labelling them as blind”.

4.3.3 The Role of Teachers in Assisting Partially Sighted Learners to Use their Residual Sight to Read Print

Almost all (100%) of the teachers who were observed, lit the room in such a way as to obtain optimum light and all of them wrote their notes on a clean blackboard in a legible manner. All of them let the partially sighted learners sit in the centre of the first row. These endeavours show that almost all of the teachers, who were observed, encouraged learners with partial sight to read the print from the blackboard. However, this issue still needs to be addressed in detail.

Although all of the teachers did their best to help the partially sighted learners to use their residual sight, this assistance is only intended for those learners with low vision who have

been previously enrolled at the regular schools. The support is given to those learners who did not pass through the School for the Blind first. Notwithstanding the above, 90 % of the teacher respondents admitted that they do not use any enlarged type of writing nor do they use contrasting coloured chalks to assist the partially sighted learners who first attended the School for the Blind and who joined the mainstream afterwards. This is because 90 % of teachers know that the partially sighted learners from the School for the Blind read Braille. They blame the School for the Blind in this regard. The partially sighted learners who attended the School for the Blind joined the mainstream schools as Braille readers. The School for the Blind does not encourage the partially sighted learners to use their residual sight at elementary level. This provides the regular teachers in the junior schools with an excuse not to encourage the partially sighted learners to learn the alphabet in print.

Furthermore, 90 % of the regular teachers believe that holding a book close to the eyes in order to read may harm the sight. They believe this to be especially true for the partially sighted learners who come from the School for the Blind. However, the regular teachers are more cooperative towards the learners with visual impairment who are already in the mainstream. The teachers believe that their visual problems are minor compared to that of the learners who come from the School for the Blind. That is the reason why most of them were observed to ensure the availability of light in the room, to encourage the learners to sit in front, to keep the chalkboard clean and to write legibly.

Regarding the issue of assisting partially sighted pupils in the mainstream schools to use their residual sight, a History teacher from School (A) says:

It depends on the degree of vision they have, if I believe that their visual problem is minor and if they come through the regular elementary school, I give them the necessary assistance to use their remaining sight that is, I let them sit in front, I write my notes on a clean chalk board and I make sure that there is an optimum light in the room.

Despite the above misconception, 10 % of the regular teachers conceded that they know that holding a book close to the eyes does not harm one's vision. However, their opinion

was overshadowed by the misconceived views of the majority of teachers. The above perception was elaborated on by a Geography teacher from School (A) who stated: “I nominate a sighted learner who has a good hand writing and tell him or her to give his exercise book to the partially sighted learners so that they can copy it by holding it close to their eyes. I also make an effort to write my notes on the blackboard in large print and encourage my partially sighted learners to read using their remaining sight. But since the other teachers do not encourage them to do so, the blind and partially sighted pupils from the blind school often tend to use Braille.”

A principal from School (C) mentioned that he prepares 18-font computer print in order to assist an ex-fighter learner who has an eye injury resulting from his participation in the war for independence. This principal did not form part of the teacher participants in the interview, but the information was obtained through personal conversation.

In addition to this, 75 % of the teacher respondents at the School for the Blind admitted that they tell partially sighted learners to cover their eyes with a handkerchief, so as not to see the Braille while they study. To further justify employing this method, the teachers believe that using one’s residual vision will harm the eyes and this will create problems for the partially sighted learners when they join the mainstream school at junior level.

In contrast to the above understanding, 25 % of the teachers responded that they know that using the remaining sight does not affect one’s vision. This statement was substantiated by one of the blind school teachers as follows:

I heard an eye specialist spread the word that using of residual sight to read print does not harm one’s vision. But sometimes one cannot convey the truth to people whose minds are already filled with preconceived notions and therefore refuse to consider one’s opinion.

As the above respondent tried to elaborate, there is a serious misperception concerning the use of remaining sight at the School for the Blind. This was confirmed by one of the partially sighted learners from School (C) who pointed out that, at the School for the

Blind, they were taught to cover their eyes and not to look at the Braille dots while they were studying, thereby discouraging them to use their sight to its full capacity.

4.3.4 Assessment Procedures for Learners with Visual Impairments

Almost all (100%) of the teacher respondents agreed that there are a number of disadvantages in conducting oral reading assessment procedures. The above viewpoint is based on the following reasons:

- Most of the respondents pointed out that blind and partially sighted learners are not able to maximise their allotted time. In this regard, a teacher from School (C) said that their blind and partially sighted learners are not able to use their time constructively during their examinations and tests. For example, they cannot tell the reader to skip a difficult question and to go onto the next question. Similarly, they cannot tell the examiner to go back again and read any questions that were skipped. This means that learners with visual impairments are compelled to answer the questions immediately.
- The second reason mentioned by most of the teacher participants about the assessment procedure, is that the questions are not read to the blind or partially sighted learners in the manner prescribed. To reinforce this notion, most of the teachers expressed that the reader (teacher) refuses to read one question more than twice.
- Some of the teachers also pointed out that there is a pronunciation barrier such as in the case where the reader is an Indian teacher. Some of the students also commented that they feel discomfort when the oral reader in the examination room smokes cigarettes.

Aside from the problems indicated above, when a blind or partially sighted learner writes the answers in Braille, the teachers experience problems in marking these scripts. As a result, almost all of the regular teacher respondents demanded the assistance of a

specialist teacher to read the Braille. Currently, regular teachers exchange the Braille answer papers amongst the learners themselves. Thus Student (A) reads the Braille answer script of Student (B) to the teacher and vice versa. This “solution” results in mistrust among the learners. Naturally learners compete with each other and as a result, they cannot trust one another to read their answer scripts in order for them to be marked. This mistrust was strongly emphasised by one of the learner participants as follows: “I disagree with the idea of my friend reading my Braille answer script to my teacher. As learners, we are competitive, therefore I do not trust my friend and she may not trust me to read her answer script honestly.”

The procedure of conducting examinations or tests orally was also rejected by the majority of the blind or partially sighted learner participants. 66 % of the learners expressed their dissatisfaction with the oral-reading assessment and demanded that the question papers be converted into Braille. The reasons furnished by the learners for their dissatisfaction are similar to those given by the teacher respondents. Most of the learners complained that they are not maximising their time. They also complained that the readers refuse to read the questions more than twice and that learners are not given adequate time to conclude their examinations or tests.

Oral reading examinations or tests deprive the learners of their right to choose the manner in which they will be assessed. In this regard, a pupil participant from School (A) said: “Had our examinations been prepared in Braille, we would have asked for extra time. But when an examiner reads the questions, then it is not up to the learner to determine the time allocation. Instead, it is left up to the examiner to do so.” This indicates that learners with visual impairments are obliged to move at a pace which is decided by the reader. Despite the above impediments facing learners which arise from oral reading during examinations or tests, 34 % of the learner participants preferred orally read questions to questions in Braille form. This choice was made in exceptional cases, that is, where there are blind or partially sighted learners who are unable to adequately read Braille

4.4 The Attitudes of Learners Towards their Inclusion in the Mainstream

In this study issues related to learners attitudes towards their inclusion, were raised in the interviews. Thus, the majority (66%) of the blind and partially sighted pupils in the mainstream responded positively to their inclusion to the mainstream schools. That is, most of them agreed that inclusion develops a sense of equality among the learners with visual impairment. The participants or respondents agreed that when they are placed in a separate school, they might feel inferior, whereas if they join the mainstream, they feel emotionally that they are on equal ground with their sighted peers. This would again create a sense of hard work and competition not to be out of the seeing world. Blind and partially sighted pupils in mainstream schools use their inclusion to attract the attention of the community to their special values. That is, they become involved in poetry competitions, in school debates and in music shows. They do this during school closing days or through cultural entertainment organized by the extra-curricular school clubs. Regarding this, a partially sighted female from School (B) explained “when we were in the special school, we only gained academic knowledge, however, in the mainstream schools, we develop new experiences and more knowledge by interacting and uniting ourselves with the sighted peers.” Not only did they develop feelings of equality, but also most of the pupil respondents suggested that inclusion paved the way for the pupils with visual impairment to have the opportunity to develop new experiences and expand their knowledge. To substantiate the above comment, a pupil respondent from School (A) said:

In the special school of the blind, one has limited knowledge or experience, because he or she is in contact with pupils of the same needs, ideas and problems. Whereas in the mainstream schools one can gain different experience and knowledge from various sighted peers through debate or literature competitions etc. So it is better to be included to the mainstream rather than being excluded in the special School for the Blind.

Some of them also took inclusion as a means of introducing their values to the community. Concerning this issue, a female pupil respondent from School (B) says, “Inclusion helps us to end our isolation and it is a good instrument to introduce our values to the community”.

On the contrary, (34%) of the pupil participants responded negatively towards inclusion. The assumptions of this unfavourable attitude towards the inclusion approach can be summarized as follows. The first reason arises from the notion that the same types of learners must learn in the same learning environment and under similar conditions. This point was justified by one of the pupil participants saying: "Since we blind or partially sighted pupils have similar needs and the same problems, it is better for us to study in the same or in a separate blind school". The second reason given for favouring the special school rather than a regular school, emanated from the inadequate resources and untrained teachers in the mainstream schools. A statement which confirms the above frustration has been forwarded by a pupil who mentioned "We, the blind and partially sighted learners, have difficulties in taking short notes in classroom discussion or taking exams or tests. Therefore it is better for us to go to the special school for the blind." The third reason for not favouring inclusion of learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools, is based on the perception that society's awareness of the special education needs of learners is minimal. In support of this, a pupil respondent from School (C) suggested that "since the society has little awareness of visual impairment, blind and partially sighted pupils face different pressure from such indifferent or negative attitudes. Moreover, inclusion shoulders the responsibility of daily life activities on the learner."

4.4.1 Educational Resources and Support Services

The MOE, through the School of the Blind, caters for learning materials in the regular junior schools. Such materials include Braille books, Braille papers, writing frames (slates) and white canes. Although these materials are indispensable for a learner with visual impairment, 90% of the pupil participants agreed that support materials and services catered for them through the Blind School is not adequate for their studies. This was substantiated by the fact that, for instance, Braille textbooks which were provided, were shared by two or three learners. According to most of the pupil respondents, Braille papers are not enough to write assignment or to take short notes. This shortage was elaborated on by one of the pupil responses from School (A). The pupil explained that it was not enough to take notes and he mentioned that he tries to recall (memorize)

important points of the lesson by heart, rather than taking short notes. This was due to lack of Braille papers. Besides, most of the respondents agreed that a slate or stylus is not replaced in case of damage or loss. Only a single white cane is provided for a learner until he or she finishes his or her secondary school studies. In spite of the fact that almost all the pupil respondents believed that the mobility training offered in the blind school is indispensable, in the mainstream schools especially in the provinces, when a white cane is broken, there is neither a replacement nor a maintenance service provided.

Finally, almost all teachers of the School for the Blind who participated also agreed that the pupils with visual impairment in the mainstream junior schools are struggling with inadequate resources and support materials, for example the use of a Braille machines or tape recorders is unthinkable. The inadequate educational resources and support materials for pupils with visual impairment in the mainstream was supported by regular teachers who witnessed that their blind and partially sighted learners have shortages of textbooks, because they usually see that they fetch and take books from one class to another every period. This analysis will end with the researcher's personal observation that Braille textbooks which are distributed to the pupil in a form of a loan, are not complete, because they do not contain the diagrams, figures and other numerical expressions which are common in the print copy.

Though most of the respondents (90%) suggested that resources and support services for pupils with visual impairment are not satisfactory, a few of the participants (10%) agreed that the educational resources and support materials are enough for their studies. This statement was supported by one of the pupil respondents from School (A) saying that, "Since I am alone in class, I get all the books for myself. I don't share textbooks with other learners, so I don't have any problem studying during exam weeks." Continuing her suggestion, the learner also commented, "If I lost my stylus, I would get substitution, though this would be through a long bureaucratic process."

4.4.2 Sighted Peers' Attitudes Towards Learners with Visual Impairment in Mainstream Education

Almost all (85%) of the pupil respondents agreed that at the early stage of their inclusion, the sighted peers attitudes towards them was complex and different in nature, but later on all of them agreed that attitudes of the sighted peers developed to be more cordial and friendly. The above idea was supported by most of the pupil respondents. But they gave different reasons for their agreement with the above statement. For example some of them explained that at the beginning of their inclusion, sighted peers regarded them as if they were a burden, and unproductive citizens of society. But later on, having seen their class activities, they tended to be more friendly towards them. Even with the passage of time, sighted peers began to understand that they could gain knowledge from their friends with visual impairment.

Some of the respondents also expressed the same process from different perspectives and elaborated their experience of sighted peer's attitudes towards them as follows,

When we first joined the mainstream education, sighted peers look at us with great amazement on how we write and read in Braille and they were gathering around us in large groups to see the magic nature of Braille mode of writing and reading. Later on they became more friendly towards us.

However, 15% of the pupil respondents related sighted peer's attitudes towards learners with visual impairment to academic performance. To support these perceptions, a learner from School (A) said, "If you excel in academic performance, sighted peers approach you in a friendly manner, whereas if your academic performance is poor, they tend, to isolate you." This justification might have emerged from personal bias, i.e. from the fact that all of the 15% of the respondents have good academic achievements. According to the information gathered from their teachers through informal conversation, some of them stood first in their classes. One among them also stood in the first rank in all of the grade 7 classes in his school. So this might have influenced the learners to feel that for the

simple fact that they achieve good academic results, the sighted peers approached them in a friendly manner.

Besides this, the facts that peer sighted learners treat their blind and partially sighted peers in a friendly and helpful manner, was also assured by some of the regular teachers in the junior schools. In a conversation held with two teachers in School (C), a teacher expressed this fact in an exaggerated manner as follows; “Even if pupils with visual impairment asked their sighted peers to carry them on their shoulders, I am quite sure that they will do it for them.” The second teacher also repeated the same idea in different words saying; “Really, sighted peers love their blind or partially sighted friends. I usually see them carrying their Braille books from one class to another and they always accompany them time around the school compound during break.”

4.4.3 Parental Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of their Children with Visual Impairments

To some extent Eritrean society stigmatizes visual impairment. In this regard a mother of two children with visual impairments says: “Our neighbours took it as though we as the parents are cursed by our forefathers for sin or other wrongdoing.” In the same way, a father of three children with visual impairments repeated the same perception of society. The father said, “When I visited the eye specialist repeatedly looking for a medical solution to solve my daughters visual problems, the specialist told me that he cannot help my children, because it is a curse”. The doctor then said, “Maybe your grandfather or your father have sinned, so your lineage is spoilt. This has come to be a hereditary phenomenon in your family.” From the above information obtained from the parents, the incident of having a child with a disability is usually attributed to a curse or sin in Eritrean society. As one father said: “How the people in the neighbourhood consider my having children with disabilities is hereditary, while I have three other sighted children.” Another mother of two children with visual impairments also expressed her worries especially about her daughter: “I am worried about my daughter because I ask myself what she is going to be in the future, I mean her marital prospects later on.”

Concerning the inclusion of learners with visual impairments into regular schools, almost all (100%) of the parent respondents agreed that learners should stay in the Abraha Bahta Special School for the Blind at least till Grade 7, upon the completion of junior school. This view emerged from the economic aspect. Because when blind or partially sighted learners are in the special school, their expenses are covered by the MOE. In this case parents are not asked to contribute anything for their children. All food, boarding, educational and medical services are provided to the learners in the School for the Blind free of charge. However, when learners join the mainstream schools, they receive a limited amount of money, namely 250 Nakfa (the equivalent of R125) per month as a living allowance. At this point, parents have to assist their children financially. In principle almost all the parent respondents of learners with visual impairments agreed that parents should treat their children with visual impairments on an equal basis with their sighted children, but the problem lies with their economic capacity. Regarding this issue a father of two partially sighted learners says:

Those who live in the city of Asmara find it easy to earn a living. So it is our duty to help our children. We pay for their transport to school; we have to clothe them like their sighted peers. But for those learners with visual impairments in the provincial towns living in small groups, their parents are from the disadvantaged community. Most of them are peasants in the rural areas; they cannot contribute anything towards their children's education. Especially this year, due to the drought, the harvest was very bad. The drought together with the war has increased the cost of goods. That is the reason why I say that learners with visual impairments should stay in the special school until the completion of the junior school level.

The same idea was reflected by two mothers who each have a child with visual impairments in the junior schools in Asmara. The first mother said that they are economically better off than the parents who are marginalized in the remote rural areas, because they can support their children in the mainstream.

We have to feed them, clothe them and we also have discussions with their regular teachers when there are sometimes problems in their examinations or tests. You see, some teachers do not give the examination or tests on time, or they give them in the times that are convenient for

them. Sometimes our children are not told to prepare for an examination or test. The children with visual impairments, who live in the provinces, are denied this kind of assistance by their parents

For example, in the town of Keren, which is coded as School (C) in this study, female pupils with visual impairments burned their faces and hands when preparing food using firewood. The families do not have money to employ a housekeeper or it is too expensive to use an electric stove. So taking these problems into account, it is better for children with visual impairments to remain in a special school at least until they complete junior, says the mother respondents.

Most of the parent respondents place a great deal of hope in their children and they expect them to grow up as productive citizens, like their sighted counterparts. The above notion was strengthened by one of the mothers, a respondent, of two children with visual impairments in Asmara:

I am very happy to see my children learning and interacting with their sighted peers. I believe that one day they will become self-sufficient and help themselves. Their academic performance is good. When there is a problem with the regular teachers, I visit the school and straighten the matter out by talking to the teacher involved. However, since I have been deported from Ethiopia due to the border conflict, I do not have a good job now. Even though the MOE is supporting my children with 250 Nakfa per month and 300 Nakfa per year for their clothing, it is still not enough. I try to buy cheaper clothes for them. The quality of the food is not good.

Finally, positive attitudes of parents towards their children and their economic constraints to support them, were pointed out by a learner from Keren, (School C):

Our parents have the goodwill to support their children with visual impairments from the minimum that they have; For example, my parents bring me some corn from the rural area. However, since it is also not enough for them they cannot provide the amount that they would like to give me. It is good for a blind or partially sighted learner to obtain assistance from his or her parents, it boosts one's morale. Those who are from the well-to-do families get some assistance, but most of us in this group are from poor families.

Therefore, though the parents respondents conceded that inclusion helped their children to maximize their academic performance, they proposed for them to stay in the School for the Blind at least until they completed junior school, this is because of an economic problem.

4.5 Financial Constraints of Pupils with Visual Impairments in the Mainstream

According to the information obtained from the administrator of the Blind School, The MOE, through the School for the Blind, provides 250 Nakfa per month for each learner as a living allowance. In addition to this, every learner in the mainstream gets 300 Nakfa per year as a clothing allowance, as well as 130 Nakfa per month rental: The MOE's support of the learners includes payments of the support materials and services for the School for the Blind. These materials include Braille books, Braille paper, writing instruments and a white cane. Finally the administrator also mentions:

Although it is not constant, the PFDJ (the ruling political party in Eritrea) has donated some amount of funds especially to the learners in the mainstream. The learners shared these funds and each learner received 100 Nakfa per month for the 2001/02 academic year. For 2003 we are expecting the same aid. (Taken from the individual interview with the Administrator)

To sum up, every learner with a visual impairment in the mainstream receives 4,360 Nakfa (2,180 in Rand) annually. This does not include donations and other financial contributions.

Although the MOE contributes 4,360 Nakfa annually for each learner, 77% of the learner respondents agreed that this amount is not sufficient for their living expenses. The reasons suggested by the participants for the above dissatisfaction is that the cost of living is high and the devaluation of the Nakfa is a problem. To substantiate, most of the participants commented that 360 Nakfa (180 Rand) per month is not enough, because food, electricity and water are very expensive. According to these learners, if one takes into account the cost of fuel and the salary of the housekeeper, then it is very expensive.

For example, if one takes medical expenses for an individual into account, it costs 18 Nakfa (9 Rand) for a consultation fee, excluding the costs of any tests that have to be run, which cost about 60 Nakfa (30 Rand). When one includes the cost of medicine, the monthly budget will be more than the cost of a once-off treatment. Most of the pupil respondents also tried to justify their financial constraints as follows: Although the MOE provides 300 Nakfa (150 Rand) per annum for clothing, a pair of trousers costs about 150 Nakfa (75 Rand) and a shirt costs 50 Nakfa (25 Rand). Then if one wants to buy the cheapest jacket, it will cost about 200 Nakfa (100 Rand). This makes the budget for clothing more than 300 Nakfa. Regarding this, a student from Zoba Debub (School B) emphasised: “We are forced to live without a jacket or shoes and without soap to wash our trousers and shirts.” Likewise, a student from Zoba Anseba (School C) also expressed a similar idea: “We prefer to go barefoot to sitting at home, due to a lack of funds to buy shoes. Because we do not have any other alternative than finishing our studies no matter what it costs.”

Likewise, a female learner participant and a male learner participant tried to justify their reasons as follows. The female participant from School (B) says: “Of course our parents might have helped us with our living expenses but the harvest was not very good last year. The price of consumer goods is soaring because of the aftermath of the war on the economy which has not yet recovered. As females, we need to purchase hair food, soap and to pay for the hairdresser. So 250 Nakfa per month is not enough.” The male participant from School (C) also expressed similar ideas. He says: “The cost of food is rising continuously. This might be due to the devaluation of the national currency as a result of the war. We learners in the mainstream have no trousers or shirts to change into. Our nutrition is very poor.” Here, according to the researcher’s personal observation from frequent visits to the group of learners who live in Asmara, the pupils were not receiving a variety of food in the year 2000. Their housekeepers also explained their concerns about their feeding system to the researcher who was their teacher at the time. Even though the MOE has attempted to increase the allowance of the learners from 150 Nakfa in 2001 to 250 Nakfa in 2002, the majority of the learners still responded negatively towards the monthly allowance they receive from the MOE. The reasons for their

dissatisfaction can be summarised as (1) the high prices of goods due to the war which resulted in the devaluation of the national currency; (2) the high prices of food items resulting from the low availability of food stuffs in the market due to the drought.

On the other hand, 23% of the learners with visual impairments in the mainstream responded that 250 Nakfa per month is enough for their living expenses. Concerning the above, two learners from Asmara stated that since they have additional support from an NGO, the allowance given by the MOE is enough for our living expenses. But those who live in the provinces need additional funds. These learners who live in groups in Asmara, get food support from the Hansanian Organisation, which is an organisation that provides support for lepers. Therefore, even though these learners tried to indicate that the allowance is enough for them due to the fact that they are receiving additional support, they confirmed that the current financial support of the MOE is insufficient for the majority of learners in the mainstream.

4.6 Solutions for Barriers to Learning amongst the Learners with Visual Impairments in the Mainstream

All the regular teacher respondents suggested that in order to upgrade their skills and expertise, in-service workshops and short-term training should be provided. They recommended that a course covering special education needs be included in the pre-service teachers' training institutions, colleges or universities. The teacher respondents also called for the MOE to establish a resource centre at national level that is staffed with specialists and equipped with the necessary instruments so that regular teachers may receive the necessary support teaching materials and advice on how to accommodate the special needs of learners with visual impairments in the regular classes. All the regular teachers, together with the pupil respondents demanded that examination and test papers for the learners with visual impairments be converted into Braille and that these learners be allocated extra time.

All the teacher respondents at the School for the Blind suggested that there should be a specialised education department headed by the MOE to follow up on the educational conditions of the learners with visual impairments in the mainstream. In addition to this, the teachers made a recommendation that the library at the blind school should be upgraded in such a way that it is able to accommodate the needs of learners who are included in the mainstream. The teacher respondents also called for the MOE to organise regular workshops so that they can share their experiences with the regular teachers in the mainstream.

The pupil participants demanded that the extent to which the materials are provided by the School for the Blind, be maximised and that the financial support provided should be viable to cover all their living expenses.

In conclusion, all the parent respondents recommended that learners with visual impairments should remain in the special School for the Blind, at the very least, upon completion of Grade 7 (at junior school).

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, from the interviews, class observation and the documentation, important information was gathered. As a result, categories of similar patterns were developed into themes by the concepts taken from the transcribed text and empirical findings were converted to percentages. The findings were analyzed by bringing complementary ideas as a form of substantiation. In the next chapter all the findings of this study will be discussed and compared in the light of the literature, and in respect of other findings obtained from a study conducted in similar topics in other countries.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Three the researcher described how information pertaining to the educational resources and support services for the learners with visual impairment in the mainstream schools in the Eritrean context, which was gathered through interviews with the three stakeholders i.e. educators, pupils and parents. In Chapter Four, the information concerning the ideas, opinions and feelings of these stakeholders was analysed in detail and findings were expressed as percentages.

Hereafter, in this chapter all the ideas, opinions and constraints of the teachers, pupils and parents will be thoroughly discussed in the light of the literature. In line with a systematic approach the researcher gained information from the various levels of the system-broaden society, the MOE, the families, schools, class teachers and learners themselves. This shows that in the Eco-Systemic Perspective what happens in one member of the continuum may affect or influence the other in one way or the other form. Thus, to investigate the learning difficulties of the learners with visual impairment, it was essential to treat the problems in relation to all the stakeholders of education because what happens in the community may affect the parents and this in turn may influence the school community. In the same way, a change on the attitude of educators may affect the learners in the school with in the community.

5.2 Teacher's attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with visual impairments

In the findings, 60 % of the regular teachers responded in favour of the inclusion of learners with visual impairment into the mainstream schools in the Eritrean context. These positive attitudes of regular teachers towards the inclusion of learners with visual

impairments into the mainstream schools may, in one way or another, can be aligned to the ideas of Haas. As mentioned before in the Literature Review (Chapter II), Haas in her article “*Inclusion is happening in the Classroom*” (1993:34), states that if the goal of special education is to help learners with disabilities so that they can function in everyday society, then these learners must not be totally segregated from peers without any disabilities”. Most of the respondents in the junior schools in Eritrea responded positively to the inclusion of blind and partially sighted learners into the regular classrooms from the point of view that knowledge is acquired and constructed in a social setting. Thus, inclusion enables learners with special needs to acquire skills and knowledge within the sphere of their community. This is because knowledge is acquired and constructed through informal communications such as learners chatting with friends during their breaks in the school compound.

Haas (*ibid*) echoes the above notion: “The appropriate place for learners with disabilities to develop social communication skills, is in regular education classes and activities in a mainstream school setting. Segregation promotes dependence and isolation and limits opportunities for learners to learn skills that enhance independent living and social participation.”

On the other hand, the teachers who responded unfavorably to the inclusion of blind or partially sighted learners in the mainstream schools (40 %), suggested that if inclusion is inevitable, then they need at least one blind teacher or a specialist in their school. Such a person would provide guidance or assistance on how to accommodate learners with visually impairment especially when conducting examinations or class tests. In addition to this, all such teachers expressed the need for the facilitation of a workshop on special education needs. They also called on the Ministry of Education to coordinate the establishment of a special education department that would assist them in preparing teaching materials for the blind and partially sighted learners in their classes. This gives an indication that if support services, training and resources are improved upon and if the teachers’ workload in the regular schools is reduced, then the attitudes of teachers might

become more positive towards the inclusion of blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream.

When examining the attitudes of regular teachers in Harare, Zimbabwe, towards the inclusion of blind learners in regular junior schools, and that of Eritrean teachers, then one would find that 40 % of the Eritrean teachers responded negatively in comparison to a staggering 86 % in Harare, who responded unfavorably towards the inclusion of blind learners. This vast incongruity may result from the fact that mainstream schools in Eritrea have a fairly long history in admitting blind and partially sighted learners.

Hence, an important observation that one cannot fail to mention in this discussion is that the minority of those who responded negatively towards the inclusion of learners with visual impairments in regular schools, are from the same school. This school, which is labeled School (B) in this study, has commenced with the admission of blind or partially sighted learners quite recently, that is, at the beginning of the 2002/03 academic year. In contrast, 60 % of the respondents from School (A) and School (B) responded positively towards the inclusion of blind or partially sighted learners in regular schools. These two schools have been accommodating learners with visual impairments for the past 20 years. This shows that regardless of the other factors, the attitudes of teachers may be influenced in relation to their experience or their association with learners with special education needs.

In the Literature Review (Chapter II), it was stated that some countries have introduced certain mechanisms which would have a positive impact on the attitudes of teachers towards learners with disabilities. For example, in Italy, certain strategies aimed at positively influencing the attitudes of teachers toward the inclusion of learners with special education needs in the mainstream, were implemented. In the Italian context, a limit of twenty learners per class is imposed where the class accommodates two learners with disabilities. Thus, the class will be comprised of two learners with disabilities plus eighteen other learners without disabilities. This limitation can be considered as an incentive. However, in Eritrea, where there is a serious shortage of teachers and

inadequate resources to meet the demands of fast growing number of learners, it is not currently possible to even consider one or other form of incentive for teachers who teach blind, or partially sighted learners, in regular schools.

Although a great deal of effort and dedication is yet to be pledged by the educators in order to advance the special education needs of the blind and partially sighted learners in mainstream schools, a considerable degree of tolerant attitudes from the regular teachers towards the inclusion has been cultivated thus far in Eritrea. According to Lomofsky, Roberts, and Mvambi (1999), to support the inclusion of learners with special education needs, teachers have to be sensitive not only to the particular needs of individual learners, but also to their own attitudes, feelings and perhaps, needs. Over and above practical skills, teachers need to develop a critical understanding of common stereotypes and prejudices related to disability and reflect on how these have influenced their attitudes. Clarity on their strengths, vulnerabilities and needs, is a necessary step in preparing teachers for inclusion. Only when this has been achieved are they in a position to work as change agents who can make an impact on the attitudes of the school community, staff, parents and other learners towards learners with disabilities.

5.3 Inadequate teachers skills and training to accommodate learners with visual impairments in the mainstream schools.

In Chapter Four, in analysing the findings of the regular teachers regarding skill and know how, all the regular teachers agreed that they don't have the necessary skills and training to meet the special education needs of learners with visual impairment in regular classes.

Despite the fact that regular teachers in junior schools have shown positive attitudes towards inclusion of learners with visual impairments in regular schools, all of them contend that they cannot meet the special education needs of these learners. This issue was clearly noted in the Literature Review. Meijer, et al. (1994:125-132) state: "Positive and willing teachers are not enough." As the old proverb goes: 'The road to hell was

paved with good intentions'. So, unless the goodwill of the regular teachers in the Eritrean junior schools is accompanied by an appropriate action, barriers to learning may impact negatively on the academic performance of the blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream.

When the teachers' suggestions, feelings and comments are thoroughly examined, it can be deduced that there is a wide gap between launching an inclusion programme and teacher's practical preparation for its implementation in the real regular classroom setting. Since there is no educational support that can work without the full participation of teachers, in-service as well as pre-service training for teachers is of paramount importance so as to address the diverse needs of learners of different origins. Perhaps Hegarty (1993) offers a viable recommendation in this regard: "Precisely, those teachers who have been in-service for many years and who are experienced, are able to make crucial decisions on the curriculum and academic organisation of any school. Any move away from special schooling towards inclusion, will lead to a training gap. In-service teachers' training must fill this gap. That is, to give training to the regular teachers who are already in service." This recommendation by Hegarty (1993) highlights the necessity for the expansion of teachers' skills and expertise in order to adapt their teaching styles in accordance with their learner's needs.

In Eritrea, there is an overwhelming commitment to deliver the appropriate educational services to learners with visual impairments by the regular teachers. However, the inability to do so lies in the lack of formal and relevant training for teachers. Teacher development involving in-service and pre-service training programmes are essential in Eritrean schools. Unless all educators in schools, training institutes, and educational administrative departments and in policy-making departments take on this responsibility, no progress will be made. Developing ownership of their own professional training includes the active participation of all teachers in deciding on the content of the training and the purpose thereof. This is of particular importance in achieving education for all in Eritrea.

Similarly, 75 % of the teacher respondents in the study conducted in South Carolina felt that regular education teachers do not have the instructional skills and educational background to teach learners with special education needs. Both the findings in Eritrea (100 %) and the findings in South Carolina (75 %) have the same reason, that is, a shortcoming of the regular teachers to accommodate learners with special needs in the regular classroom setting are due to inadequate training and know-how.

Finally, the issue relating to inadequate training and lack of expertise among regular teachers can be encapsulated by citing Chena (1996:46) who mentioned China's experience in developing teacher's skills and awareness relating to the special education needs for learners with disabilities. China's experience may add some value to developing countries like Eritrea in the provision of suitable educational services for learners with visual impairments. According to Chena, in order to develop teachers' competence, performance skills and expertise on how to better serve the learners with disabilities in the mainstream schools in China, a number of strategies have been adopted. They are amongst others: (1) the provision of courses in the regular teachers' training institutes dealing with special educational needs; (2) the running of regular workshops, seminars and meetings on special education needs for teachers in the regular schools; and (3) the recruitment of teachers from the regular education system and providing them with in-service training on special education needs.

5.4 Barriers to adapting the curriculum to accommodate pupils with visual impairments in regular classes.

In the findings in Chapter 4, the majority (70 %) of the regular teachers tried to rationalize that their shortcomings in adapting the curriculum to address the special education of blind or partially sighted learners are due to workload and lack of educational resources and materials. Though the question of workload seems rational, for some teachers this may take much time and expense, if they are to do it well. However, other teachers who have access to woodwork tools, may take less time. No one denies the

advantage of having a well-resourced centre that provides the necessary support services and teaching materials for the teachers, even if it is in the form of a loan.

Whether this is due to workload or due to inadequate resources and educational support services, when this 70 % figure is compared with the findings obtained from the study in Harare, Zimbabwe, 58 % of the regular teachers in Harare conceded that they failed to deliver appropriate educational services to blind learners in the primary schools. They attributed this failure to a heavy workload, large class size and lack of resources.

In the findings of the study conducted in Eritrea, although they are in the minority (30 %), some of the regular teachers were observed to enter their class with some locally available tactile teaching models so as to adapt the curriculum to suit the learners with visual impairment. So, the majority of regular teachers who teach learners with visual impairments in the mainstream schools can take their cue from these committed teachers. The activities of the innovative teachers reinforce the idea of Dyson (1998) who stated “The principle resources required for the implementation of the inclusive approach are: the time, energy and skills of regular teachers.”

With regard to the unavailability of a resource centre which was a complaint of the majority of teachers. Hegarty (1993) says that in the resource centre model, support provision can come from the regular schools' own resources, either from individual staff members or a resource area. In Eritrea, the resource centre is perceived to be an efficient means of provision for the special educational needs for learners with visual impairments if it is established within the mainstream schools. The resource centre can also serve as an information centre for storing special equipment in the school compound. Here regular teachers can inquire into what material is available, as well as receive advice on what material to use or to borrow from the specialist for blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream class. Moreover, the resource centre may provide certain benefits for individual or small groups of learners with visual impairments. Due to the fact that these learners cannot carry their bulky materials such as a closed circuit television around the school, the resource centre can serve as a laboratory where they can carry on with their

work when they are out of the mainstream class. The resource centre is also essential for the blind and partially sighted learners because they need a quiet room where they can do tape recordings or practice writing in Braille using a Braille machine.

The kind of resource centre described by Hegarty is suitable for the Eritrean situation. Most of the learners with visual impairments live together in small groups and all the members of the group study at the same school. In terms of the researcher's personal observation, since the Ministry of Education does not employ enough itinerant teachers, it is preferable for the regular teachers to have access to a resource centre where they can receive advice as well as borrowing the necessary teaching aids or support materials for the blind and partially sighted learners. The learners with visual impairments can also make optimal use of the resource centre outside the mainstream class.

The majority of the regular teachers criticized the poor relationship between the School for the Blind and the ordinary junior schools in their comments. The Department of Education in South Africa's White Paper No.6 (2001) recommends that the special School for the Blind should give support services and the materials to neighbouring mainstream schools so that the inclusive education program can be implemented satisfactorily. In other words, special schools should serve as resource centres utilising their trained staff and modern equipment to convert learning materials into Braille, as well as preparing tactile teaching materials and larger typed notes to be used by the partially sighted learners in the regular schools (White Paper 6, 2001). Regarding the use of tactile teaching aids Kapp (2002:368) suggests the following:

Schools for the blind should have a good tactile centre on the same basis as a resource centre. Here, a collection of objects that can be manipulated or touched should be kept and loaned on request to teachers who teach in the mainstream schools or they have to be available to visiting learners with visual impairment from the regular schools either as individual or in class groups. Some of the concrete collections which regular teachers may use to explain specific subject matter include natural products such as trees, seeds, birds' nests and eggs. Mathematical forms such as sphere, circle, triangle, pyramid, scale models (air plains, ships, cars, buildings, etc). Raw materials (wool, cotton, wood, fibres). And also stuffed animals

bodies such as reptiles and birds. A tactile centre can also be expanded into a more compressive sensory centre by adding recorded materials for auditory stimulation and auditory discrimination.

In addition to this, according to Hegarty (1993), the linkage of special schools with the regular schools enables the schools to develop mutual support arrangements to meet the special educational needs and provide a focus for the deployment of support services. Moreover, teachers at the special school may act, as a general source of information on teaching learners with special education needs. Teachers at the School for the Blind can offer advice on particular learners who face learning breakdowns with the regular teachers in the regular class. They can also provide an important aspect of in-service training for their mainstream colleagues, either formally, through lecturers or workshops, or informally, in discussion groups. These constructive ideas and suggestions made by Kapp and Hegarty, as well as the information taken from the White Paper No.6 can be solutions for the inadequate support services and resources for learners with visual impairment in Eritrea. As mentioned earlier, most of the respondents complained that their inadequacies in implementing the curriculum or adapting their teaching styles to address the educational needs of learners with visual impairments are due to the absence of a resource centre with qualified staff which can prepare a full text of Braille books with its diagrams, tables, graphs and numerical expressions. Moreover, the regular teachers also blamed the MOE for the lack of trained staff, who can prepare tactile teaching models such as a flower, the heart and embossed maps. Despite the fact that the School for the Blind, through its resource centre, provides Braille textbooks and Braille paper for the blind and partially sighted learners in the inclusive schools, there is still a wide gap between what is provided and the demand thereof. The reasons for the above constraints are that the resource centre at the School for the Blind is run by one semi-skilled staff member and another two experienced, but semi-trained staff members. According to the researcher's observation, even though the Braille library at the School for the Blind has an audiotape service, it is non-functional because the recorded materials are only verbalised in English drills for elementary school learners. Almost all of the teachers at this school said that the unique Braille library is primarily aimed at serving the blind learners who attend the school and board there.

Although that resources centre offers typing and computer training for learners with visual impairments, most of them forget these skills when they are included in the mainstream schools. Concerning this issue, the majority of the teachers at the School for the Blind concurred that it is not possible for the other blind and partially sighted learners to make use of the typewriters or computers in order to work on their assignments or homework. The teachers suggested that this prohibition could be attributed to either a lack of reliable and affordable transport to the school or the School for the Blind may just be unwilling to give permission for use of the resources by the learners in the mainstream schools.

Moreover, there are teachers at the School for the Blind who have not received special training, yet they have considerable experience in teaching blind and partially sighted learners. Half of them (50 %) are blind teachers who were enrolled at mainstream schools while they were learners at junior, secondary or at college level. 30 % of the sighted teachers at the School for the Blind have mobility training and 20 % have gained vast experience in teaching at School for the Blind. In respect of their contribution to regular schools, almost the entire teaching staff responded that they could have provided professional support services by conducting workshops for their regular colleagues in mainstream schools. However, the Ministry of Education, nor the special education unit under the Ministry has ever arranged these kinds of programs before.

5.5 Regular Teacher's interventions to ensure the learning and participation of learners with visual impairment in the regular class.

Despite the fact that there are a number of educational barriers, regular teachers show a reassuring sense of commitment in welcoming blind and partially sighted learners to the inclusive classes. Some of the regular teachers supported their welcoming and participatory behaviour by suggesting that they admire their blind or partially sighted learners in their regular classes. They confirmed that the blind and partially sighted pupils have a better mastery of the English language than their sighted peers, and explained the lesson to them. These comments made by the teacher participants converge with the

stance of Haas, which states that learners with disabilities can teach those without disabilities valuable lessons such as patience, and the importance of hard work, etc.

The opinions of regular teachers that denote pessimistic attitudes towards the enrolment of learners with visual impairments in their classes, needs to be scrutinised in depth. A few of the teacher participants believed that class participation by the learners varies according to their personal educational backgrounds. Hence, a teacher must use a general approach rather than varying the style of teaching in order to accommodate the special needs of learners. However, the respondents should have been aware of the fact that learners with visual impairment can cope with class discussions, but just that the use of slightly different teaching methods is required. The other few respondents felt that there is no need for special support, since the IQs of learners with visual impairments are equivalent to that of their sighted peers. This viewpoint seems quite naive. In principle, most of the educators believe that learners with visual impairments do not have inferior IQs compared to those of their sighted peers. The way in which these learners perceive ideas and concepts, can be different in terms of the time that they take, the way in which the message reaches the brain and in terms of the number of times that the concept or the idea has to be repeated before it is understood. All of these are different ways of grasping ideas and concepts by the blind and partially sighted learners when compared to the way their sighted peers perceive ideas and concepts. Therefore, by having to make a minor adaptation in one's teaching style (method) to help learners with special education needs, does not mean that they lag in the ability to participate in the classroom discussion.

This indicates that while teachers believe that they are boosting their efforts in order to meet the special education needs of the learners in class discussions, the learners with visual impairments are not completely satisfied with the behaviour of teachers in accommodating their special learning difficulties.

5.6 The role of regular teachers to assist partially sighted pupils in the mainstream schools to use their residual sight to read the print.

The majority of the regular teachers are unaware of encouraging blind or partially sighted learners from the blind school to use their residual sight. The experience of some teachers combined with the information obtained from the principal, demonstrates that although not much has been done to assist the partially sighted learners in the mainstream junior schools in Eritrea, with the necessary training and the necessary assistive devices, it will not be long before the special educational needs of the partially sighted learners are met. In spite of the fact that Braille should be read using the fingertips rather than the eye, it would have been better if the School for the Blind taught the partially sighted learners both Braille and the print alphabet. This would have doused the teachers' fears that partially sighted learners will lose their residual sight when they join the mainstream schools at junior level.

The majority of the teachers at the School for the Blind expressed their concern that if partially sighted learners use their residual sight at elementary school level, then they may experience a situation where they lose their vision at mainstream junior school level. However, this argument is irrational. It is based on probability and diametrically contradicts Snyman and Bloem (2001:180) view that many professionals believe that partially sighted learners should be encouraged to use their sight as much as possible. There are many misconceptions regarding the use of residual vision. For example, it is not true that holding a book too close to the eyes harms the sight or that strong lenses hurt the eyes or even that using the eyes too much damages the eyes.

Since vision, regardless of its scope, facilitates learning (reading and writing), the teachers at the School for the Blind as well as regular teachers in the mainstream schools in Eritrea, have to make a conscious effort to encourage partially sighted learners to use their remaining sight with the necessary care and assistance.

5.7 Assessment mechanisms for the learners with visual impairment in the junior mainstream schools.

Formal and continuous classroom assessment is constructive. Immediate feedback also evaluates the degree to which all learners understand the course content. Recent research has shown that academic assessment is the most powerful educational tool for promoting effective learning. Emphasis needs to be placed on teaching and learning in ways that will enhance the learners' academic achievement. Ollerton (1999) indicated that outcomes of research tell us that successful learning occurs when learners take ownership of their education. That is, the learners have to be included in the goals that the school has set for itself and its learners.

Being included in the objectives of the school can increase the degree of learner participation and the development of skills to achieve success. Teaching is more of a concept aimed at how learners of different abilities can cope with adapting to the general curriculum and general assessment methods. As a result, educators are capable of measuring the all-rounded ability of learners and can satisfy the learning requirements of all learners irrespective of their disability and other learning difficulties.

In the Eritrean situation, there is a serious challenge in assessing the performance of learners with visual impairments. Despite the fact that learners are assessed through continuous examination and test cycles, examination or test questions are not delivered to blind or partially sighted learners in the required manner. In the mainstream junior schools, examination or test questions are read orally by a reader (teacher) because Braille printers which can convert the print into Braille are not available for the learner. The learner with visual impairment then listens to the question and gives his or her answer either orally or in Braille. The oral answer is then written by the examiner. Alternatively, the learner can write the answer in Braille. This lengthy and inconvenient assessment procedure clearly violates the learners' rights of access their question papers.

The majority of the regular teacher respondents as well as pupil respondents agreed that

they understand that there are a number of disadvantages in the oral reading of examination or tests. Some of the disadvantages they mentioned, are: the blind and partially sighted learners are not using their time properly. Some oral readers do not repeat the question more than twice. Learners mistrust their friends to read their Braille answers to the regular teachers. Sometimes pupils complain about suffocation in case there is a smoker teacher who reads the exams or tests, but this is a rare case. Finally, some of the regular teachers also suggested that pupils are suffering from pronunciation barriers in the case of the reader being an Indian or Filipino. But since the number of expatriate teachers in the junior schools in Eritrea is very insignificant, the comment can't be supported by concrete evidence.

The assessment procedure employed to evaluate blind or partially sighted learners also has negative consequences. Most of the exam papers contain a number of multiple choice and the filling in of blank spaces as questions. It is, therefore, tiresome and time consuming for anyone to read 30-40 questions, and even sometimes up to 100 (during the national examination) questions for a blind or partially sighted learner. That is the reason why, especially during the national examinations, most teachers prefer to invigilate the sighted learners rather than being assigned to read to a learner with visual impairment.

From the above comments and suggestions, it is obvious that there is a serious barrier in carrying out the correct assessment procedure for blind and partially sighted learners in junior schools in the mainstream in Eritrea. Since learners are not managing their time and unless the questions are delivered or communicated in the manner required by the learners and if learners continue to assess their own examination or test papers, then it is irrational to expect that proper and reasonable assessment will be conducted for learners with visual impairments in the mainstream in Eritrea.

Apart from this, some of the pupil respondents preferred oral listening examinations to Braille forms of examinations or tests. This choice might be true for the learners who cannot read and write Braille adequately. These respondents' choice might not be a real choice. It is likely that they do not have other means of preparing for examinations or

tests. For example, had they gained experience in listening to the questions from a tape-recorder, their choice would probably have been different. Since recorded materials are not used by the blind or partially sighted learners in the junior mainstream schools in Eritrea, this choice may have originated from the fact that the learners had no other alternative in preparing the examination or test questions.

5.7.1 Attitudes of learners with visually impairment towards their inclusion to the mainstream

As it was explained earlier, the inclusion programme of the blind or partially sighted learners in Eritrea was sudden and unconditionally implemented by the then authorities of the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia, in collaboration with the provincial office of education in Eritrea. At that time the only justification to introduce the inclusive approach was not for academic reasons, rather it was poor management by the authorities who were complaining that they couldn't manage children as well as adult learners together in a separated boarding school. According to the researcher's personal experience, about 15 blind and partially sighted learners including the now researcher of this study, were told to leave the special school of the blind and join the mainstream schools, with the excuse that it was not psychologically advisable to keep children of grade one and grade two together with physically and emotionally grown up pupils of grade ten and eleven. This was actually hypocritical of the authorities, because at that time, there was no junior psychiatrist who could recommend such a solution. So, the inclusion programme was simply implemented without investigating its academic impact on the learners with visually impairment.

However, despite all the challenges faced by the learners for almost two decades, a number of them have achieved much in their studies in mainstream schools and universities, and they are currently teachers, lawyers and sociologists in the different ministries of the country. Even though research has been done on the Abraha Bahta School of the Blind, the issue of the blind and partially sighted pupils in the mainstream schools seemed to be forgotten. To sum up, the favorable attitudes of the learners towards their inclusion to the mainstream schools, look as follows. Firstly, the majority of learners perceived inclusion as helping them

to develop a sense of equality with their sighted peers. Secondly, they understood that new experience and knowledge can be developed through inclusion, rather than exclusion. Finally, the pupils with visual impairment in the mainstream schools consider the inclusive approach to be the best means of socializing themselves. That is, they believe that it helps the learners to teach the community about their merits (values) in having an impact on the socio-economic development of the society as an individual citizen.

However, a few of the participants expressed the view that inclusion had added responsibilities to the learner's daily life, such as preparing food, washing clothes and managing the budget. The above activities or services were being done for the blind or partially sighted learners while they were residing at the School for the Blind. Here, the argument of the respondents is that the activities of daily life create an extra burden on the learner with visual impairment in the regular schools. However, to the knowledge of the researcher, the Abraha Bahta School of the blind gives a course on Activities of Daily Life (ADL) for the blind or partially sighted children so that they may not be a problem when they are included in the society through the inclusive approach. Of course, regarding budgetary management, since the pupils included to the mainstream are mostly about the age of 13-14 years and are living in hostels rather than with their parents, one can say that they are too young to manage their daily living.

A few of the respondents also responded negatively to the inclusion of the blind or partially sighted pupils in mainstream education. These respondents suggested that their inclusion had negatively impacted on their academic studies due to poor awareness of the society regarding visual impairment. That is, they argue that they are mistreated within the community after being included into the mainstream school. The respondent's perception of poor social awareness towards pupils with visual impairment directly contradicts the perception of the majority of pupil respondents who believe that an inclusive approach helps them to develop social acceptance. This contradiction in perception might have emerged from the fact that the last respondent who was not in favour of the inclusive approach, was mainstreamed herself in the low land provinces where the community is dominated by the Tigre ethnic group. The 66% of the respondents who favored the inclusive approach, were mainstreamed in the

highland provinces where the Tigrigna ethnic group is dominant. From the above variations in point of view or different perspectives, one can imagine that society's awareness (or attitudes) towards visual impairment may vary from one ethnic group to another or from one culture to another.

5.7.2 Insufficient support materials and services provided by the MOE to the blind and partially sighted learners in the mainstream in Eritrea

According to the above findings it was discovered that most of the pupil respondents as well as the regular teachers agreed that support materials and services for the learners with visual impairment in the main stream are not fully addressed. For example, textbooks are shared between three or four learners. There are no Braille machines or tape recorders for pupils with visual impairment in regular schools. The learners also complained that they did not get any replacements for their lost writing materials.

Although the MOE is supplying support materials and services through the Blind School to strengthen the inclusion of learners with visual impairment in mainstream schools, there is still a long distance to go to address the special education needs of the learners with visual impairment. This is especially so with regard to establishing a strong special educational needs department with specialized staff to meet the growing demand for resources and support materials in mainstream schools for learners with learning difficulties

5.7.3 Sighted peers attitudes towards the learners with visual impairment in the mainstream

The majority of the pupil respondents agreed that at the beginning of their inclusion the sighted peers regarded them as a burden to society, but later on they treated them in a friendly manner. Similarly, some of them also expressed similar ideas by suggesting that initially, on their inclusion, peer sighted groups were looking at them in amazement, especially when they read and wrote in Braille, but later their sighted friends became closer and approached them in a friendly way. Here one can understand that it is natural for a pupil

at Grade Six to be surprised to see a pupil physically different from him or her and do things in different ways from his or her own way. Also no one can blame a learner of 13 – 14 years old to consider his or her peer learner who cannot see the environment, as unproductive at first glance. The good or encouraging thing here is that the majority of pupil respondents admitted that with the passage of time, their sighted peer's attitudes towards them developed to be more cordial and friendly.

When one compares the issue of sighted peer's attitudes towards blind and partially sighted pupils in the mainstream in Eritrea to that of Zimbabwe, 92% of the regular teacher respondents in the primary schools in Harare, Zimbabwe, agreed that inclusive education doesn't automatically make a sighted child interact with a blind child. The teachers in Harare tried to rationalize their belief by saying that sighted peers will shun the blind or partially sighted learner, because he or she may be a nuisance in terms of seeking assistance in moving around the school compound during break time.

This perception is quite opposite to the understanding, which exists among the regular teachers in the mainstream in Eritrea, regarding the attitudes of sighted peer learners towards the learners with visual impairment. This difference in perception in these two studies with regard to sighted peer learner's attitudes, might have emerged due to the fact that in Eritrea, because of the bloody war of independence, combined with the recent border conflict with Ethiopia for the last three years, the proportion of the number of pupil with disability to the total population of Eritrea may be higher than that of Zimbabwe. This may assist sighted learners in Eritrea in having the opportunity to associate themselves with pupils with disabilities faster than those sighted learners in Zimbabwe.

5.8 Parental Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of their Children with Visual Impairments

As in the culture of other African countries, there is a stigma attached to having a child with visual impairments in a family in Eritrea. According to Birenbaum and Sagarin (1976: 43)

The stigma is a broad and multi-dimensional concept of which the essence centres around the issue deviance. Those who are stigmatised are the entire field of people who are regarded negatively for having violated the norms of society for being the type of people who have the traits that are not highly valued.

The NCSNET report (1997) also comments on the negative impact of the stigma on the parents rearing a child with disability. Many parents have difficulties in accepting a child with disabilities. In a patriarchal society, the mother is often blamed for the child with a disability, while the father denies responsibility for the child. Similarly, parents of children who are visually impaired in Eritrea, felt stigmatised. However, from the conversations in Chapter Four (the Findings), with the parents of learners with visual impairments, it is obvious that parents accept and have the responsibility to treat their children with disabilities on an equal basis with other sighted children. But the low economic standard combined with drought and the high cost of living due to the aftermath of a war economy, has frustrated parents and prevented them from contributing their support to their children in the mainstream. The positive attitudes of the parents towards the education of their children agrees with the idea of Palmara, cited in Berglund (1995), who established the “Pahidos” in 1992 in Mexico, an organisation aimed at encouraging parents to treat their children with disabilities as normal children and should struggle for their education. In the same way, parents of children with visual impairments in Eritrea struggle for the education of their children.

From the above discussions and comments, it is understood that parents take care of the education of their children with visual impairments. That is, they put a positive expectation on their children as would be on their sighted peers. They pay attention to

their academic conditions. As a result, they discuss the learners' special needs with the regular teachers. Even though almost all of the parents agreed that inclusion helps their children to study in the same environment and under the same conditions with their sighted peers and they believe they are performing well academically in mainstream schools, almost all of them emphasised that learners with visual impairments should stay in the blind school at least until they complete junior school. The last statement emerged as a result of the economic constraints mentioned in the above conversations. Although a learner cannot learn on an empty stomach, the main emphasis will be on the parents' enthusiastic attitudes towards the inclusive approach and their learners' educational achievements, rather than on economic constraints, since the main aim of this study is educational assessment of the learners with visual impairments in the mainstream.

In the above findings, almost all (100%) of the parent respondents of children with visual impairment in Eritrea indicated that their participation to improve the quality of education of their children in the mainstream schools is more positive and encouraging. Even though it is not organized and supported by the PTA (Parents Teacher Association in Eritrea), to some extent their role is related to the comment of Stainback et al (1992) who maintain that parents should share their knowledge of quality education with teachers, academic committee members and as a staff members. This means not only getting involved with their own child's educational affairs (like most of the Eritrea parents do), but also parents should become involved in making the quality of education a reality for the many other children who are labeled as children with disabilities.

5.9 Financial Constraints among Pupils with Visual Impairments in the Mainstream

Most of the learners with visual impairments in the inclusive programme in Eritrea live in small groups in the capital city as well as in the small towns in the provinces. A few of them also live with their parents in the city and semi-urban areas of the country. The reason why most of them live in groups in the provincial towns are that their parents are in remote areas where there is no school at junior level; or the school might be located at a distance, far away from the villages. This will make it difficult for a learner with visual

impairment to walk on rough terrain, sometimes crossing rivers and valleys to reach the school. To overcome these barriers to mobility, learners with visual impairments rent a house in groups and live in the small provincial towns.

The MOE provides financial assistance to the learners with visual impairment in the mainstream schools. The financial assistance is 4360.00 Nakfa (which is equivalent to R2180.00) per year for each learner. As reported in the findings in Chapter Four, the majority of the pupils responded negatively to the financial assistance of the MOE. The reasons for their dissatisfaction were:

1. High cost of living due to the aftermath of the war economy
2. Devaluation of the local currency
3. High Prices of consumer goods due to seasonal droughts in the country.

When one compares the pupil's annual income, which is 4360.00 Nakfa (R2180.00) with the per capita income of the general population of Eritrea, which is 3700.00 Nakfa (R1850.00) (Source; Internet), the learners' complaints are much exaggerated and less substantiated by concrete facts. However, though the per capita income of the general population is less than the blind or partially sighted learner's annual income, the MOE has not yet allocated a sufficient budget to upgrade educational resources and support materials for pupils with visual impairment as recommended in White Paper 6, (DOE, 2001) a considerable amount of budget is allocated in line with the intensity of support needed for learners with learning difficulties. The fiscal allocation is rated from high, medium to low intensity of support. This may be a good lesson to the MOE, where there is no definite or separated budget to maximize the material support of the learners with special education needs. The same idea was enshrined in the Salamanca Statement (1994) recommendations as follows:

We call upon all governments and urge them to give the best policy and budgetary priority to improve their education systems to enable them to include all children regardless of individual difference or learning difficulties

5.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.

Even though the study was conducted in the three Zobas (regions) of the six regions of the country, there are constraints in terms of finance and access. The HRD (Human Resource Development) of Asmara University funded this research study with only 1000 Nakfa, which is equivalent to 500 Rand. This small amount of money was insufficient to conduct field trips and interviews in the towns of the provinces, i.e. it was not enough to cover the transport fee, hotel expenses and food allowance for the researcher and his assistant.

Furthermore, since the parents of the learners with visual impairment live in remote areas of the regions, they were inaccessible for the researcher, due to lack of public transport. As result, the researcher decided to take parent participants from townships of the provinces and from the capital city, Asmara. However, with availability of a private car, it would have been possible to reach the parents in the rural areas. Nevertheless, in spite of the above odds, the research has been carried out in the three provinces successfully. Therefore the above problems do not prevent the data from being reliable and valid on a national level.

5.11 Conclusion

Among the major problems faced by MOE immediately after independence, was unequal distribution of educational opportunity within the community. Equal opportunity for all strongly suggested that the mainstream schools have to work hard towards meeting the diverse needs of all learners. That is, schools need to arrange the learning environment and have to design the curriculum with the on going demand of different learners within the community, without discrimination. Therefore, equal educational opportunity means both equal access to schooling and equal treatment within mainstream schools. Equality in access to education, as well as equal treatment in the schools, is thus an essential condition for all forms of social equity.

Based on the above principles, the MOE has been integrating learners with visual impairment into the mainstream schools from grade six and over, to study on equal bases with their sighted counterpart. In this study, an attempt was made to investigate the educational resources and support services provided for the pupils with visual impairment in the mainstream junior schools in Eritrea, and make recommendations for the future.

5.11.1 Overview of the Study

At the first stage of this study, the experience of different countries with regard to accommodating learners with special education needs in the mainstream schools was thoroughly reviewed in the literature. Besides this, empirical findings concerning the inclusion of learners with visual impairment in mainstream education, were obtained in studies conducted in different countries. These findings were compared as well as contrasted to findings of this research in the later part of the study. Data was gathered from multiple sources for good triangulation.

At the second stage, since the inclusive approach could not be fully and successfully implemented without the participation of all stakeholders of education, the research was aimed at identifying the attitudes of educators, pupils and parents towards the inclusion of learners with visual impairment in mainstream education through triangulation of data collection. Thus, interviews were conducted with stakeholders so as to investigate attitudes, perceptions, roles, constraints as well as identifying barriers in the implementation of the inclusion of such learners in Eritrea.

At the third stage, the information gathered was analysed in accordance with the substantiation and justification provided by the respondent's own words, information from class observation journals as well as information extracted through document analyses. As a result, important themes emerged and findings were indicated in term of percentages.

5.11.2 Summary of the Results

At the fourth stage, all the main issues raised in the data were analyzed and discussed in detail. The results highlighted that in Eritrea, there is an encouraging positive attitude among regular teachers to receive and integrate blind or partially sighted pupils into mainstream education. This cordial attitude might have developed due to the fact that mainstream schools in Eritrea have long experience of admitting these kinds of learners. This idea was clearly reflected in Miller and Hover cited in Lomofsky et al (1999) “International research suggested that teachers with little experience of people with disabilities are likely to have negative attitudes towards inclusion.” On the other hand, it has also been found that experience with disability tends to change attitudes to the positive.

On the other hand, the results also showed that regardless of the positive attitudes towards the inclusion of blind or partially sighted pupils in mainstream schools, almost all regular teachers have insufficient skills or training to accommodate the special education needs of learners with visual impairments. To make matters worse, the findings pointed out that the majority of the teacher respondents felt that they are failing to adapt the curriculum to fit the learning needs of blind or partially sighted pupils in the regular classes. The reasons for the aforementioned inadequacies are heavy workload and lack of support materials and services.

Nevertheless, the results also indicated that under such constrained teaching conditions, most of the regular teachers are struggling to ensure effective learning and active participation of learners with visual impairment in class discussions. To avoid learning breakdowns, the teachers talk to the learners separately in case there is any problem in classroom follow ups. Besides, they let the learners sit in front, omit non-verbal communications and read what is written on the chalkboard with a loud voice. They also control the amount of light in the class and write the notes neatly on a clean board, though this is only for the learners who are already in the mainstream schools.

Concerning the partially sighted pupils who passed through the blind school, there is a misunderstanding among the regular teachers about using the residual sight to read the print. Otherwise, the above classroom interventions are almost all related to the recommendations made by Snyman and Bloem (1999) (See Classroom Interventions, Chapter Two).

The results also revealed that most of the pupils and the regular teachers felt dissatisfied with the minimum support materials offered by the MOE through the blind school. Ironically, though the support materials are insufficient, the majority of the blind or partially sighted learners agreed that inclusion helped them to develop social acceptance and to acquire new experiences.

The study has also revealed that parents' attitudes towards the inclusion of their children is not in principle negative. It was pointed out that no matter how unaware and disadvantaged they are, most of them believed that they have parental obligations to support their children economically. Not only this, but also the majority of parents in Eritrea advocated that their children with visual impairments should get the appropriate treatment by their regular teachers.

Finally, the findings indicate that the majority of the blind or partially sighted pupils are dissatisfied with the insufficient living allowance provided by the MOE.

Having analyzed and discussed all the above barriers and constraints to achieve successful inclusion of pupils with visual impairment in Eritrea, remedial interventions which could serve a model mechanisms to suit the specific socio-economic and educational development of the Eritrean society, are suggested below in the form of recommendations.

5.11.3 Recommendations

Based on the above discussion and conclusion, the following suggestions have been developed as recommendations to improve the inclusive approach of learners with visual impairment in the Eritrean context.

- As it was frequently mentioned by the teacher respondents, preliminary orientations should be conducted among regular teachers, particularly in the junior schools which admit blind or partially sighted learners for the first time.
- The MOE had been repeatedly called by the regular teacher respondents to conduct in-service training so as to upgrade teachers' skills and know-how on special education needs, which is a strong recommendation.
- In addition to this, colleges and universities have to add special educational need courses to their course work coverage, so that teachers in the pre-service programs could be well-equipped with necessary knowledge and skills to deal with the learners who might face learning breakdowns in the regular classes.
- The MOE is needed to strengthen the educational resources and support materials for the blind or partially sighted pupils in the mainstream junior schools. These can be realized by establishing resource centres through which the junior schools which register these kind of learners could be developed into full service schools. The resource center may have a specialist staff who can give advice to the regular teachers. Moreover, the resource centre should be equipped with necessary tactile and other special teaching aids so that regular teachers can use it in a form of loan. Learners could also use the necessary Braille materials when they are out of the regular class.
- The MOE needs to strengthen the resource centre as well as the Braille library in the School for the Blind, so that they can provide services to the neighboring mainstream schools and thereby expand its service at national level.
- Regular as well as special teachers in the blind school should also be provided with workshops in order to correct the misconception that using one's remaining sight may harm the eyes.

- Regular schools should introduce appropriate assessment methods for pupils with visual impairment. That is, test or exam papers should be prepared in accordance with the pupils' choice, either in Braille, tape-recorded or through an oral reading. The same preparation should also be made for national examinations. The Abraha Bahta School for the Blind should also prepare Braille textbooks which contain diagrams, tables and numerical expressions, as they are in the print text copy. The necessary symbols for mathematics can be accessed through the SANCB (South African National Commission for the Blind).
- The MOE needs to find a way by which parents of children with disabilities could be embraced the PTA and contribute their share to address the special education needs of the learners in mainstream schools.
- The MOE is requested to allocate a significant amount of the budget to enhance the educational resources for learners in the inclusion program and to support their living allowance. This can be ensured through participating national and international NGOs via fundraising programs.
- Moreover, according to the researcher's school observations, some subjects are inaccessible to learners with visual impairment in regular schools. For example, blind or partially sighted pupils are not taking mathematics and physical education in the Junior Secondary Schools, though these learners were given mathematics and sports courses on an equal basis with sighted peers at the elementary level. However, the courses are denied to the learners at junior level in mainstream schools. The lame excuse for this segregation is that mathematical symbols are not available in Braille. In this regard, one of the respondents in the unpublished paper of Tsigab (2001) stated that any blind child can attend mathematics class if relevant teacher training and appropriate materials are provided. The above idea was again elaborated on by Susan, a college mathematics student, cited in Allan (2001) as saying: "The language of mathematics does rely on visual references and the teacher of a child with visual impairment is challenged to be creative at times. Creative teachers can help the children with visual impairment to be more creative as well." Hence,

the blind school should introduce numerical expressions and symbols so that blind or partially sighted pupils can be exposed to mathematics and sport.

- Finally, the MOE should setup a strong department of special education needs and has to adopt a policy based on the UN Declaration of Human Rights, as well as on other standard rules, so that the Special Education Needs Department might be able to address the special needs of learners with learning difficulties.
- At the University of the Western Cape (UWC), where the researcher studies, learners with visual impairments have the right to receive their question papers in the form that they prefer, i.e., either in Braille, tape-recorded or written in large-typed letters. With regard to time allocation, all blind or partially sighted learners are allocated extra time of half an hour in addition to the time allocated for their sighted colleagues.

Thus, to the researcher's knowledge, this research is one of the few studies conducted in the field of inclusive education in the Eritrean context, and may therefore serve as a springboard for further study in the area of ensuring education for all in the country. At least, the study will shed a light on the vague understanding of educators in the area of an inclusive approach in the Eritrean context and make the concerned authorities aware of taking the right track so as to make the teaching and learning process more flexible and accessible, to receive the special education needs of all learners with learning difficulties.

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APPENDIX 1

PART 1

Data gathered from the interview with regular teachers.

First respondent: teacher from Natsnit Junior Secondary School

Teaching experience: 5 years

Qualifications: degree from Asmara University.

Question 1: Do you support or oppose the inclusion of visually impaired learners to the ordinary school?

Response: "In my part, I support the inclusion program because, when blind students are restricted in a localised area they lack the knowledge that can be gained from interaction with their peer groups. I believed that knowledge can be constructed not only through academic means, but also through communicating with other pupils. So I believe that the inclusion programme of visually handicapped student is more advantageous".

Question 2: Do teachers in the ordinary schools prepare special teaching aids for visually handicapped students?

Response: "In my experience and from what I observed the ordinary teachers including my self do not prepare tactile teaching aids to our students. This is because currently, in Eritrea, school are crowded with students. Teachers have 70 - 80 students in one class. And one teacher may enter about eight sections. In such a busy condition, preparing especial aids to visually impaired learners could not be practical".

What do you think a possible solution could be?

Response: "I think, it is better if there is a department for special needs in the curriculum department at national level. That department could have special staff and can convert diagrams and pictures into tactile models. I think that can be supportive to ordinary teachers. These models can be useful not only to the blind students, but also to the sighted learners".

Question 3: How do you conduct an assessment among the visually impaired learners?

Response: "We give oral tests and examinations; I mean one of the teachers read the question orally and they give the answer in Braille".

Do you experience any problems in conducting the oral examination?

Response: "Yes, there are number of problems here. Students do not use their time properly. When they faced a challenging question, they cannot pass over it to come back and check it later on. While their sighted counterparts can pass over a difficult question and can easily do it by turning back after doing the simplest one. In this case, our blind students have no opportunity. To make the matter worse some teachers refused to repeat a question more than twice. There is also pronunciation problem in case of the Indian teachers. Blind students are not given enough time, they can not think over a question, they give the answer at the first glance because the teacher is waiting in hurry to read the next question".

What do you think a possible solution could be?

Response: " I think the special school could convert the questions into Braille before hand and they can be sent into our school during the examination. But also here we have a problem, we can not treat the Braille answers, still we need a blind or special teacher".

Question 4: What suggestions do you have in respect of upgrading the knowledge of ordinary teachers with regard to special needs of education?

Response: "If it is possible it is better if we are given workshops or short term training on special needs education. For those who are in pre-service training, I would like to advise that they would take additional courses on special needs of education."

Second respondent: a teacher from Debarbua Junior Secondary School.

Teaching experience: 16 years

Qualification: a diploma from the Teachers' Training College

Question 1: Do you support the inclusion of visually handicapped learners in the ordinary schools?

Response: "In my part I didn't support the inclusion programme because we, as ordinary teachers, give short notes to our sighted students on the blackboard. In addition to this, class work and homework is completed in print on a sheet of paper. However, in the case of our blind students they only listen to the explanations of the teacher, they are excluded from doing all the above activities. Up to now, they still did not take the mid-semester exam (December), although we are nearing the final exams (January). Of course we are going to give them the tests, because it is their right. But since we are busy doing a lot of work with 70 and even up to 80 sighted peer-group students, I can say that we are not giving the necessary support to the visually impaired students.

Question 2: How do teachers in the ordinary school conduct assessment among the blind students?

Response: "We give the tests orally. That is, any teacher reads the questions, and the students write their answers in Braille.

Do you have any problems with oral examinations?

Response: "Yes, of course. Students cannot use their time properly because the reader (teacher) is in a hurry to read the second question while they are doing the first one. Sometimes teachers refuse to repeat a question more than two times. And also there could be barriers of pronunciation in case the reader is an expatriate. For example, Indian teachers."

What solution would you recommend?

Response: "I think that the special school of the blind can convert the questions into Braille so that students can think about the questions properly. They can use their time. But again, another problem occurs in this regard, we do not know how to read Braille. So we need a blind or a specialist teacher in the school."

Question 3: Do teachers prepare tactile special aids for the visually handicapped?

Response: "I myself do not prepare special teaching aids. I do not want to spend my time preparing such special teaching aids for only two students in my sections."

What solution do you think is appropriate for these shortcomings?

Response: "I think there should be a special resource centre in the Ministry that can prepare tactile teaching aids; we teachers are prepared to put the pictures and diagrams on paper. We can indicate what teaching aid and for which chapter are necessary and can we can send them the centre."

Question 4: How can you be sure that your visually impaired students are keeping up with the class discussions?

Response: "I know my students by name. When they raise their hands to give answers, I give them priority. Think this is a good support mechanism."

Question 5: How do you support your partially sighted students?

Response: "We do not know how to deal with either a totally blind or with a partially sighted student. It is the first time that we have registered such students at our school. We do not know what kind of support is required. For example, one of my visually impaired students is partially sighted, but she uses Braille. I think that the blind school did not encourage her to read in print. These blind students came and suddenly joined us. We explain the lesson in class; I know that and believe that they follow the discussion using their Braille textbook. They do have Braille textbooks in all their subjects, except in Mathematics. Regarding support for the partially sighted, I let them sit in front and I make sure that there is optimum light in the classroom, but I do not know how to use large-type writing. It is the first time that I have heard about the use of contrasting coloured chalks on the blackboard. What I mean is that we are not accustomed to it."

Question 6: What do you think is necessary to upgrade the knowledge of ordinary teachers with regard to special education needs?

Response: "It is better to conduct workshops and short term training among the teachers who are already in service. Moreover, I would like to advise the Ministry to not only include a student with special education needs to the mainstream, but side-by-side, there should be training for the teachers.

Third Respondent: a female teacher from Debarbua Junior secondary School

Teaching experience: 12 years

Qualification: a certificate from the Teachers' Training Institute (TTI)

Question 1: Do you support or oppose the inclusion of visually impaired pupils in the mainstream?

Response: "In my opinion, I disagree with the inclusion programme, because due to large-sized classrooms, students with special needs are not getting the necessary knowledge and support required from the teachers.

Question 2: what kind of support materials does the blind school provide to the visually impaired learners in the mainstream?

Response: "Braille paper, Braille books and writing instruments are available. I did not see students using Braille machines or tape-recorders.

Question 3: Do you think that teachers in the regular schools prepare special teaching aids such as tactile models for their visually handicapped students?

Response; "Teachers cannot prepare special teaching aids because they have large-sized classes and teach eight sections per day. Each section has about 70 to 80 students. In such a difficult situation, the regular teacher is not expected to prepare special teaching aids for the students with special needs.

What do you think the solution could be?

Response: "There must be a resource centre in the blind school or there must be a special education unit in the general curriculum department. We, ordinary teachers

can prepare the diagrams and graphs on paper so that they can be converted into something suitable for the visually handicapped learners in the centre that I mentioned earlier.

Question 4: How can you be sure that your visually impaired students are following the classroom discussion?

Response: "In my part, I strictly follow up on their attention. I have only two visually impaired learners in my sections. Before the sessions start, I try to explain the lesson to them separately in a tutorial format, in my spare time.

Question 5: How do you conduct continuous assessment for the visually handicapped students?

Response: "We call them separately out of the class and read the questions to them orally. They then give their answers in Braille. Then again, they read their answers to us because we do not know how to read Braille. That is how we learn.

Do you experience any problems in conducting such a lengthy oral examination?

Response: "Yes, of course. Teachers do not repeat questions more than two times; there could also be pronunciation problems, especially with Indian teachers. Students could not use their time properly while a teacher is waiting there to read the next question.

What do you think a solution could be?

Response: "I think it would have been better if questions are converted into Braille in the special school for the blind. But again, we have another problem. We cannot read the Braille answers. Thus the best solution is to have a blind teacher in the junior school. You see, there is a blind teacher in the neighbouring elementary school, he teaches in a school where there is not a single blind learner, so it would have been very supportive if the Ministry transferred that blind teacher to our junior school where there are six visually impaired learners.

Question 6: What is the extent of the training of teachers in the ordinary schools in

respect of special education needs?

Response: "We do not have the know how, it is our first time having encountered these type of learners. The colleges and training institutes must include a course on special needs of education to their pre-service training teachers. Those who are already in-service need to be given workshops regarding the special needs of learners with difficulties.

Fourth Respondent: a teacher from Debarbua Junior Secondary School

Teaching experience: 19 years

Qualification: certificate from Teachers' Training Institute

Question 1: Do you support the inclusion of blind students in your ordinary school?

Response: In my opinion, I cannot support it. I want to see the matter in relation to the current teaching situation in Eritrea. For example, in my sections, I have about 70 to 80 students in one class of which only two are blind students. Being busy in such a crowded class and with a lot of class activities such as class work and homework, I do not believe that we are transmitting enough knowledge and support to the visually impaired learners. However, if the inclusion is inevitable, we have to have enough time and then we can take time to deal with their special needs.

Question 2: How do you conduct continuous assessment?

Response: "I dictate the questions to the students and they write the answers in Braille. Then I call them one by one to read their answers to me again.

Do you experience any problems in conducting such a lengthy examination?

Response: "Yes, it is tiresome. Students are not using their time properly, that is why they are obtaining low marks."

What do you recommend as a solution?

Response: "If possible, the blind school in Asmara should convert the questions into Braille and students can answer in Braille. However, we need a special teacher to read the Braille answers as well. It is only if this happens that we can say that we are

conducting proper assessment. Otherwise we are simply denying the right to education of the visually handicapped students.

Question 3: Do you prepare special teaching aids for the visually impaired students?

Response: "Not at all. We do not prepare special teaching aids, I do not want lie at this point."

Who do you think should prepare these special teaching aids?

Response: "I think the special school for the blind should prepare these things. We can indicate and inform them beforehand what the necessary graphs and diagrams are if they are going to help us in changing them into tactile designs and models using local materials such as wood, string, mud, etc. I believe that this would be a good support service for us."

Question 4: How can we upgrade the knowledge of ordinary teachers with regard to special needs education?

Response: "It is better if workshops are conducted specially on how we teach visually handicapped students and on how we can conduct assessment. In addition, I would like to call for the Ministry of Education to add a course on special needs education for the pre-service training teachers."

Question 5: How can you be sure that your visually impaired pupils are following the class discussions?

Response: "I know my blind students by name and I ask them questions. Also they raise their hands equally with the sighted pupils."

Question 6: How do you encourage the partially sighted students to read print?

Response: "I seat them in front of the classroom. Sometimes I tell one of the students who has a good handwriting to sit beside them so that they can copy from his or her exercise book with ease. However, we do not use this bold type writing. I did not see students using magnifying lenses. Perhaps this is due to a low standard

of living. In respect of the light, the windows are always open and the room is well ventilated. Regarding the use of contrasting coloured chalks, it is the first time that I have heard about it.

Fifth respondent: a teacher from Debarbua Junior Secondary School

Teaching experience: 21 years

Qualification: Diploma from the Teachers' Training College (TTC)

Question 1: How do you see the inclusion of students with visual impairment in the regular school?

Response: "On the one hand, I oppose it and on the other I support it. Our blind learners are brilliant, however, since they are mixed with a lot of sighted peer groups, they disturb them. They hamper them from listening attentively.

Question 2: Do your visually impaired learners (VILs) do classwork?

Response: "Yes, as an English teacher, I let them do classwork and homework. I tell them the page on which the exercises can be found and they look at it in the Braille text. They then complete the exercises. However, they do not come back for corrections because as they do it in Braille, I am unable to correct it.

Question 3: Do ordinary school teachers prepare special teaching aids for the VILs?

Response: "No, we do not prepare any special teaching aids, still I did not see any teacher doing that. For example, as an English teacher, there are diagrams and pictures in my textbook that the sighted students can understand by looking at them and can easily describe them. However, in the case of my VILs it is difficult for them to do the same. Therefore, I simply pass over it.

What do you think a solution for this could be?

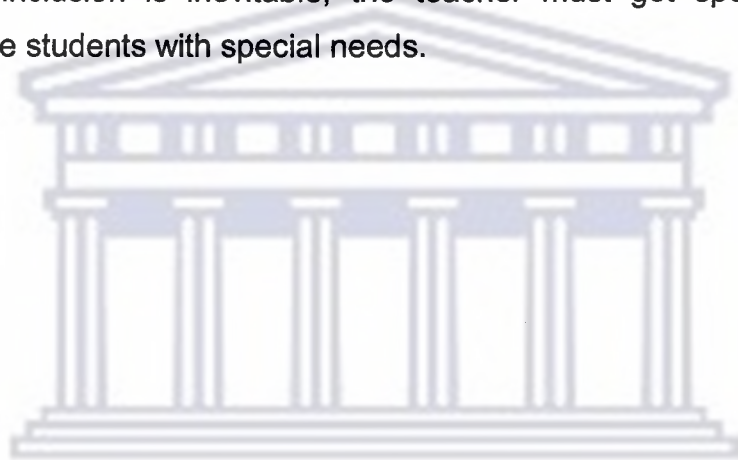
Response: "The resource centre in the blind school must prepare it in a way that the students can understand by touching the pictures or diagrams. In addition to this, teachers in the ordinary school can use these aids without any problems.

Question 4: How can we upgrade the knowledge of ordinary school teachers in respect of special needs education?

Response: "I need to know how to read Braille. It strengthens and develops my teaching experience. As a result we need workshops. It is also interesting to add a course in the pre-service training programmes.

Question 5: What suggestions do you have on the general education of learners with special needs?

Response: "As I mentioned earlier, I prefer special schools for them to ordinary schools. But if inclusion is inevitable, the teacher must get special training to accommodate the students with special needs.



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APPENDIX 2

PART 2

DATA GATHERED FROM THE INTERVIEW WITH learners

Student 1: Age 16; Grade 6, School B

Question 1

Do you support or oppose the inclusion of visually impaired students into the mainstream?

Response: I support the inclusion of visually impaired students to the mainstream because in the special school for the blind, you can have only limited experiences because you are constantly in contact with students who have the same problems. On the other hand, in the mainstream schools we can share experiences with different sighted friends. Hence, acquiring different experiences and knowledge is better than having limited knowledge and experience.

Question 2

Are the support services and materials provided by the school for the blind satisfactory?

Response: We are supplied with about 180 – 200 Braille papers for one year. This is not enough for our studies. In addition to this, we are given one Braille copy textbook to share among three students. This also creates numerous problems in our studies.

Question 3

Do you teachers prepare special teaching tactile aids for the blind and partially sighted students?

Response: They do not prepare any teaching aids for the blind or partial sighted

students; because they do not have the necessary experience or knowledge regarding the special education needs of visually impaired learners.

Question 4

How do you think teachers can improve their knowledge in the area of special education needs for visually impaired students?

Response: Teachers must receive training on special education needs in the colleges while they are studying or they must be given short-term courses while they are in service.

Question 5

How do you feel about having your examinations conducted orally through a reader?

Response: I am opposed to this. We tend to lose our spelling ability because the teacher reads the question to us and writes our answers down for us.

Question 6

What are your sighted peers' attitudes towards you?

Response: In the beginning, the sighted students did not consider us to be useful to the community. But later, as time passed, the sighted students began to respond positively towards the blind or partially sighted students. They become more accepting of us and relate to us in order to gain knowledge from us.

Question 7

Is the 250 Nakfa provided by the MOE sufficient to cover your living expenses?

Response: It is not enough to cover our living expenses. You know that today the cost of living in Eritrea is very high. However, since we want to study, we persevere even with an insufficient amount of money. We would rather attend school with bare feet, than sit at home due to a lack of funds to buy shoes. We do not have any other

option other than to finish our studies despite cost. We pay for a housekeeper from the 250 Nakfa as well as our medical costs. Hence we are studying under a bad financial situation.

Question 8

Do your teachers make sure that you keep up with the class discussion?

Response: No, they simply explain the lesson to us. They do not give any special attention to the blind and partially sighted students.

Student 2: Age 16, Grade 6

Question 1

Do you support or oppose the inclusion of visually impaired learners into the mainstream?

Response: I support it, because it helps to place us on an equal basis with our sighted peer groups.

Question 2

Are the support services and teaching materials provided by the school for the blind adequate for your studies?

Response: When we joined the mainstream, we were provided with one Braille textbook to share among three students, one slate and stylus, and a limited amount of Braille paper for three months. There is no provision for the services of a Braille machine or a tape recorder.

Question 3

Do your teachers use any tactile teaching aids to enable you understand the lesson?

Response: They do not prepare any tactile teaching aids. They simply explain the

lesson to us. Also, any diagrams are explained orally.

Question 4

Do your teachers encourage the partially sighted students to read in print?

Response: None of the teachers encourage the partially sighted students to read in print. Teachers tell them that if they read the book by holding it close to their eyes, that this will harm their residual sight. So, our partially sighted learners are not encouraged to read print.

Question 5

How do you think regular teachers can upgrade their knowledge relating to special education needs?

Response: I would say that parallel to the regular pedagogic training, they must also take a course on special needs education.

Question 6

How do you feel about having your examinations conducted orally through a reader?

Response: When a teacher reads the questions, he or she may not repeat the questions more than twice. Also, the student feels embarrassed to ask the teacher to repeat a question more than twice. If the questions are in Braille, then we would be able to use our time constructively. And we could possibly ask for extra time. But in the case of an oral examination, the time is limited by the reader (teacher) rather than by the person who is being examined. Sometimes, where the examiner is an Indian teacher, there are also pronunciation problems.

Question 7

Is the 250 Nakfa provided by the MOE sufficient to cover your living expenses?

Response: No it is not enough. In addition to our other living expenses, we also have to pay rent from that money.

Question 8

What are your sighted peers' attitudes towards blind and partially sighted students?

Response: First when we joined the mainstream, sighted students approached us in large numbers: they watched in amazement as we wrote in Braille. But later on, they started to treat us in a friendly manner.

Question 9

How do you view yourself in relation to your sighted peers?

Response: I also try to be friendly with them. However, I consider myself to be average - neither at the top nor at the bottom.

Student 3: Age 15, Grade 7, School C

Question 1

Do you support or oppose the inclusion of visually impaired learners into the mainstream?

Response: I oppose it because at the special school for the blind, we can help each other since we have common problems and needs. But in the regular schools, due to the attitudes of the various communities, and the low awareness of visual impairments, we face pressure from society. Moreover in the outside community, we have to shoulder the responsibility of our daily living expenses. This creates an additional burden to our studies.

Question 2

Are the support services and teaching materials provided by the school for the blind adequate for your studies?

Response: There are difficulties regarding the provision of teaching materials. For

example, we are given one Braille textbook to share among three students. As a result, there are problems regarding studying during the examinations. In the event of damage or loss to the slate or stylus, there is no possibility of obtaining a replacement.

Question 3

Do you teachers prepare any tactile teaching aids?

Response: No, they merely explain the lesson orally.

Question 4

How do you teachers ensure that you are keeping up with the class discussion?

Response: They do not pay special attention to us, but they do give us an equal opportunity together with the sighted students, to answer any questions asked.

Question 5

How do you think regular teachers can upgrade their knowledge relating to the special education needs of visually impaired learners?

Response: They should be given the opportunity to attend workshops. Organizations such as ERNAB, and the students themselves should be invited to conduct seminars concerning the special education needs of the blind and partially sighted students and these should be presented to the regular teachers.

Question 6

What are your sighted peers' attitudes towards blind and partially sighted students?

Response: In the beginning their attitudes were negative. They avoided us. But later, the situation improved. Although, society has not yet developed a proper awareness of visually impaired learners, a few students approach us in a friendly manner.

Question 7

Are partially sighted students encouraged to read in print?

Response: No, they are not encouraged to read in print. Even at the school for the blind, they are told to read Braille by covering their eyes.

Question 8

Is the 250 Nakfa provided by the MOE sufficient to cover your living expenses?

Response: No, is not enough. Due to the drought, the cost of living in Eritrea today, is high.

Student 4: Female, Age 12, Grade 6, School B

Question 1

Do you support or oppose the inclusion of visually impaired students into the mainstream?

Response: I do not support the inclusion of blind and partially sighted students into the mainstream because there are many difficulties that arise for the students. Such as in taking exams and doing exercises in the mainstream.

Question 2

Are the support services and teaching materials provided by the school for the blind adequate for your studies?

Response: No it is not sufficient. There are problems with access to the prescribed books while we are studying because one Braille textbook is shared among three students. In addition to this, we have a shortage of Braille paper.

Question 3

Do your teachers use any tactile teaching aids to enable you understand the lesson?

Response: No, they do not prepare any tactile teaching aids, but they explain the

lesson orally in a loud and clear voice.

Question 4

Is the 250 Nakfa provided by the MOE sufficient to cover your living expenses?

Response: No, we do have financial problems.

Do you use tap water?

Response: No, the house that we rent does not have a tap, so we bring water from the nearby areas.

How do you carry the water considering that you are visually impaired?

Response: Those who are completely blind cannot carry the water, but our partially sighted friends fetch the water.

Question 5

What are your sighted peers' attitudes towards blind and partially sighted students?

Response: In the beginning they were surprised to see a blind or a partially sighted student in the regular school. They would gather around us in group to see how we write in Braille. But later on, they became more accustomed to us and their attitudes were more friendly.

Question 6

How do you view yourself in relation to your sighted peers?

Response: I regard myself as being inferior to my sighted peers.

Student 5: Female, Age 15, Grade 6, School , Partially sighted

Question 1

Do you oppose or support the inclusion of visually impaired learns into the

mainstream?

Response: I support it, because when we are away from the school for the blind, we have the opportunity to interact with a number of different teachers and students. Thereby bringing an end to our isolation. Inclusion into the mainstream will help us to establish our service within the community.

Question 2

Are the support services and teaching materials provided by the school for the blind adequate for your studies?

Response: No, it is not enough. We struggle with the lack thereof but we try to cope because we want to learn. We ensure that it is adequate by using economically.

Question 3

Do your teachers prepare special teaching aids which are suitably related to your studies?

Response: No, they simply explain the lesson orally, then we have to listen to the explanation carefully. They do not even tell us where the class discussion has commenced and on which page it stops. They merely ask the sighted students where they had stopped discussing the lesson the previous day and begin to discuss that day's lesson.

Question 4

Is Abraha Bahta, school for the blind aware of this problem?

Response: No, they have never been to our school. They are not concerned about us when we leave the school for the blind. No one does follow-ups regarding our learning conditions in the regular schools. For example, it is almost the end of the first semester, and we have not yet taken our mid-semester tests.

APPENDIX 3

PART 3

Questions for Parents

1. How did you feel when one of your children is or becomes born blind?
2. What is the attitude of your neighbors towards your having a child with visual impairment?
3. What is your attitude towards the inclusion of your children to the mainstream schools?
4. Do you treat your child with visual impairment on equal basis with your sighted children?
5. Do you expect him or her to rise one day as human being and support himself or herself or even you?
6. What kind of role do you think parents could play to support their children in the inclusive schools?

Additional quotation for financial constraints.

The same idea was enshrined in the Salamanca recommendations as follows: "We call upon all governments and urge them to give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve their education systems to enable them to include all children regardless of industrial difference or learning difficulties".

Table 1.: AGE GROUPS AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED BY REGION (ZOBAS)

AGE GROUP (Yrs.)	REGION/ZOBA														GRAND TOTAL	% vs G.Total
	MAEKEL	% vs G.Total	ANSABA	% vs G.Total	DEBUB	% vs G.Total	SEMIENAWI KAH BAHRI	% vs G.Total	DEBUBAWI KAH BAHRI	% vs G.Total	GASH-BARKA	% vs G.Total				
1-6	22	22.22	17.17	17.17	13	13.13	25	25.25	2	2.02	20	20.20	99	0.95		
7-12	94	54.02	15	8.82	22	12.94	10	5.88	2	1.18	27	15.88	170	1.63		
13-17	80	40.00	29	14.50	35	17.50	12	6.00	4	2.00	40	20.00	200	1.92		
18-23	63	34.81	23	12.71	34	18.78	19	10.50	8	4.42	34	18.74	181	1.74		
24-28	39	25.83	22	14.57	22	14.67	21	13.91	4	2.65	43	28.48	151	1.45		
29-33	79	36.92	29	13.55	34	15.89	26	12.15	8	3.74	38	17.76	214	2.05		
34-38	84	37.67	22	9.87	39	17.49	28	12.56	10	4.48	40	17.94	223	2.14		
39-43	81	31.40	26	10.08	64	24.81	35	13.57	10	3.88	42	16.28	258	2.48		
44-48	78	26.44	36	12.20	53	17.97	42	14.24	15	5.08	71	24.07	295	2.83		
49-53	127	27.49	44	9.52	92	19.91	85	18.40	21	4.55	93	20.13	462	4.43		
54-58	149	27.19	67	12.23	93	16.97	77	14.05	59	10.77	103	18.80	548	5.26		
59-63	192	21.87	120	13.67	196	22.32	127	14.46	72	8.20	171	19.48	878	8.43		
64-68	350	28.52	125	10.19	313	25.51	138	11.25	87	7.09	214	17.44	1,227	11.78		
69-73	418	26.61	216	13.75	461	29.34	161	10.25	88	5.60	227	14.45	1,571	15.08		
74-78	437	29.87	139	9.50	517	35.34	130	8.89	56	3.83	184	12.58	1,463	14.04		
79-83	290	23.93	183	15.10	464	38.28	71	5.86	72	5.94	132	10.89	1,212	11.63		
84-88	214	31.61	86	12.70	264	39.00	35	5.17	16	2.36	62	9.16	677	6.50		
89-93	96	25.33	67	17.68	136	35.88	18	4.75	17	4.49	45	11.87	379	3.64		
94-98	50	27.03	20	10.81	81	43.78	5	2.70	7	3.78	22	11.89	185	1.78		
99 & Above	0	0.00	5	19.231	3	11.54	13	50.00	3	11.54	2	7.69	26	0.25		
TOTAL	2,943	28.25	1,291	12.39	2,936	28.18	1,078	10.35	561	5.38	1,610	15.45	10,419	100.00		

Source: Eritrean National Association of the Blind, 2001.

Table Two: Special education enrolment: Grade and gender by zone

Zone	School Name	1-5		1		2		3		4		5	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Maekel	Abraha Bahta ¹	28	35	12	9	3	8	4	5	4	8	5	5
	Evangelical ²	36	40	14	16	8	5	8	5	3	8	3	6
	Total	64	75	26	25	11	13	12	10	7	16	8	11
Anseba	Evangelical ²	42	32	16	9	5	7	6	6	7	6	8	4
	Grand total	106	107	42	34	16	20	18	16	14	22	16	15

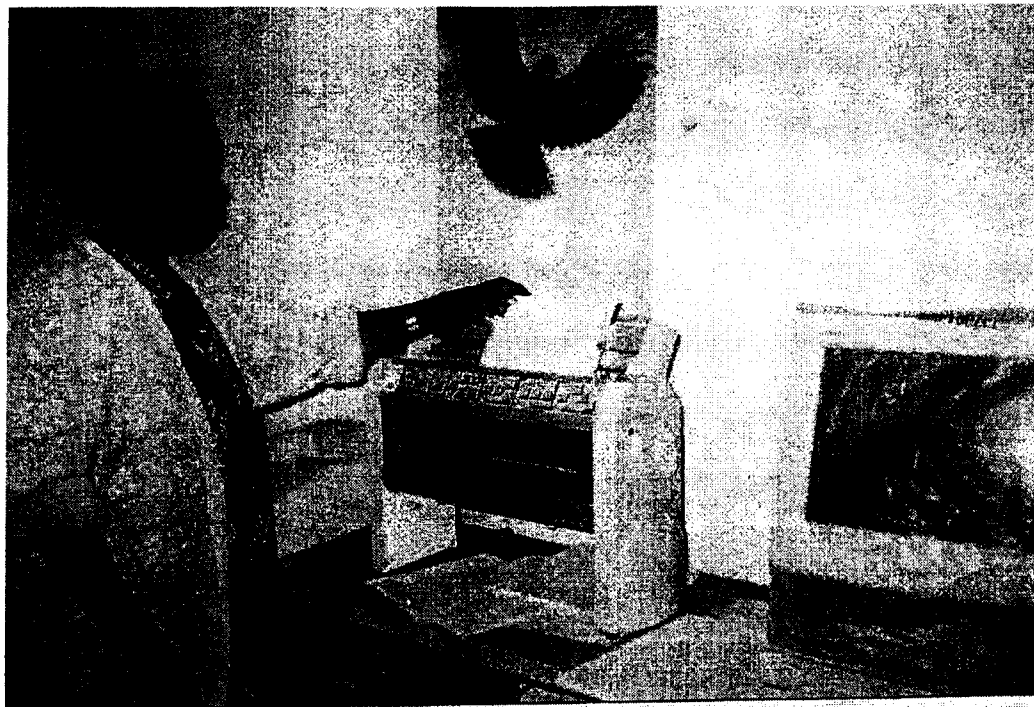
Source: Ministry of Education. 2001. Eritrea: Basic Education Statistics 2000/01. Asmara, Eritrea.

¹ School for the Blind

² School for the Deaf









UNIVERSITY OF ASMARA
ERITREAN HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (EHRD)
PROJECT COORDINATING UNIT (PCU)

Ref. No. HRD\4\4848\02DATE: 16 DEC 2002

Dear W/ro Alganesh,

The bearer of this letter, **Ato Nassir Mohammed Fitwi**, is one of the students placed by the EHRD Office at the **University of Western Cape** to do his Masters degree in **Education**.

Ato Nassir is presently back in Asmara to collect data/information for his thesis work titled: *"Assessing Educational Resources for the Visually Impaired Learners in the Mainstream in the Junior Schools in Eritrea"*. We have come to learn that, to complete his research project successfully, he would definitely need to have access to your organization's data/information base.

I take this opportunity to request you to assist him in his research endeavour.

I thank you for your time and kind consideration.

Awet N'hafash!

Tewelde Zerom, PhD.
 Manager, EHRD-PCU
 University of Asmara



cc.: Mehari Tewolde
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