Including disabled students in mainstream educational provision in Lebanon with particular reference to those with vision impairment

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Abstract

This research explored what it means for disabled students to be included in mainstream private and governmental schools in Lebanon. It investigated the mainstream secondary school selection that students with vision impairment (SVI) and their parents follow; the experience of disabled students in mainstream education from the perspective of SVI and those around them; and the way inclusive education (IE) is applied and practised in schools that have SVI. After adopting Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied. One hundred and five semi-structured interviews involving 136 participants (SVI, their parents, peers, teachers, learning support teachers, headteachers, higher education tutors and individuals from governmental and non-governmental organisations) were conducted. Additionally, quantitative data from 85 teachers were gathered.

Thematic and quantitative analyses were applied to the interview and questionnaire data. Three key themes emerged: lack of autonomous decision making by SVI and their parents; unpreparedness of mainstream schools for inclusion; approaches to inclusion. The findings indicated that whilst SVI and their parents seek mainstream provision, their school selection is largely influenced by the opinion of professionals. When an autonomous decision was made, it was connected to 'normalisation', whereby SVI were required to act in a way that was considered acceptable by society. Accessing information, undertrained teachers, poor knowledge of the principles of inclusion and the absence of a whole school approach to inclusion were major barriers to implementing IE in Lebanon. The various support approaches utilised for SVI at these mainstream schools demonstrated that no full inclusion has been reached. Instead, SVI have experienced educational facilitation and social integration rather than inclusion. The findings highlight that the inclusion practices of SVI, in place for over a decade, are a long way from delivering these in full. Proposals regarding enhancing IE practices are offered and the potential generalisability of the study are discussed.

Declaration

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I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is my own

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, sister, brothers, cousins, uncles and aunties, for their undivided support during my early life in Lebanon. It is their encouragement, advice and support during my time at school and as an undergraduate that enabled me to progress to higher education in the UK. I would also like to dedicate this work to my father, who did not live to see me graduate from school or university. But should he have lived, he would have been so proud to see me specialising in the field of education that he was very passionate about.

Most importantly, I would like to dedicate this work to my husband, whose support, encouragement and belief in my abilities gave me all the strength I needed to bring this work to completion.

Acknowledgment

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Glossary of acronyms

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

AFB: American Foundation for the Blind

ATDP: Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons

ATI: Attitudes towards Inclusion

AUB: American University of Beirut

BC: British Council

BERA: British Educational Research Association

BP: Brevet Professionel

BSVI: Brevet students with vision impairment

BT: Baccalaureate Technique

CAP: Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle

CERD: Centre for Educational Research and Development

CRPD: Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities

CSIE: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education

DfES: Department for Education and Skills

DSA: Disabled Student Allowance

EfA: Education for All

GO: Governmental Organisation

HE: Higher Education

HET: Higher Education Tutors

HI: Hearing impairment

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IE: Inclusive Education

IT: Itinerary Teachers

KBSPIS:	Knowledge, Beliefs, Skills and Practice of Inclusion Scale
LA:	Local Authority
LAS:	Lebanese Autism Society
LD:	Learning Difficulties
LST(s):	Learning Support Teacher(s)
MAS:	Mainstreaming Attitude Scale
MEHE:	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MOSA:	Ministry of Social Affairs
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHS:	National Health Service
NIP:	National Inclusion Project
NIPL:	National inclusion project Lebanon
PE:	Physical Education
PSSVI:	Post-Secondary Students with Vision Impairment
QTVI:	Qualified Teacher in Vision Impairment
REC:	Research Ethical Committee
RQ(s):	Research Question(s)
SEBD:	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SEN:	Special Educational Needs
SENCO:	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SI:	Sight Impairment
SKILD:	Smart Kids with Individual Learning Differences
SLD:	severe learning difficulties
SpLD:	Specific Learning Difficulties
SSI:	Severe Sight Impairment
SSVI:	Secondary Students with Vision Impairment

SVI:	Students with Vision Impairment
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
UK:	United Kingdom
UN:	United Nations
UNCRPD:	United Nations international convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF:	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO-IBE:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
	International Bureau of Education
UNRWA:	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USA:	United States of America
USJ:	University of Saint-Joseph
USVI:	University Students with Vision Impairment
VI:	Vision Impairment
YAB:	Youth Organisation of the Blind

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION - SETTING THE SCENE

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Since the last quarter of the last century, inclusion of students described as having special educational needs (SEN) has been a topic of debate and a focus for research worldwide. Some of this research, nonetheless, has been, at least to some extent, participatory, aimed at informing policy and practice. Despite this, little is known about the inclusion of students identified as having SEN in Lebanon, or about their participation in research studies that are of direct relevance to them. Furthermore, for the last decade, the enrolment of students with vision impairment (SVI) in both government and private mainstream education in Lebanon, has been increasing, in both secondary and higher education (HE). However, studies that have investigated the inclusion of this population at the secondary stage, that is, the last three schooling years before entering HE, in relation to their school selection, the readiness of educational institutions for inclusion and the extent to which these students feel included, are scarce. Hence, I aim through this research to address this dearth of knowledge and in so doing, contribute original insights and information to the field.

This research important for several reasons. Firstly, because of its theoretical framework and the adaptability and suitability of such a framework for deepening our understanding of the factors that affect inclusive implementation and practices in Lebanon. That is, the research involves investigating inclusion from an ecological perspective, as introduced by Bronfenbrenner (1979), supported by the social model of disability, as Section 1.5 explains. Secondly, it is significant in its emancipatory approach, as it is conducted by an insider to the field of vision impairment (VI), secondary education and HE in Lebanon. Furthermore, it is salient in terms of its intention to provide a better understanding of the issues related to the inclusion in mainstream education of disabled students, of those described as having SEN, their parents, teachers, practitioners, and policy makers, and from the point of view of the disabled people concerned themselves. Specifically, through this research I address what it means to be included in private and government mainstream education in Lebanon, from the perspective of included students, their peers, teachers,

parents and any concerned individuals, whether in HE, in government or non-government organisations (NGO). I also explore how inclusion is applied, practised and perceived in mainstream education, along with the factors that could contribute to better inclusive education (IE) policy and practice. I focus specifically on those with VI in secondary mainstream education; however, to understand this population better, I also investigate the education of students with VI in Brevet, i.e. those in pre-secondary, together with those in HE, i.e. those in post-secondary education.

Indeed, it is currently particularly appropriate to investigate the implementation of inclusion in Lebanon due to the growing interest of governmental, NGOs and educational institutions in supporting and including those who are described as having SEN in mainstream education, as well as the significant increase in the Lebanese government's efforts to adopt an inclusive agenda. This was demonstrated in early 2012 through the launch of the government's 'National Inclusive Strategy' aimed at implementing inclusion in government schools across the country. This is significant, as the education of those described as having SEN and VI was, and still is, the responsibility of private and special education supported largely by NGOs. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can give IE practitioners, legislators and policy-makers in Lebanon a clearer understanding of existing inclusive practices, and highlight what needs to be done to further the implementation of inclusion in education in that country. It also provides empirical data that will add to the available research and literature on the topic of inclusion in the Middle East, and particularly in Lebanon. Lebanon is an Arabic speaking, middle-income country, of the Middle East region, located in Western Asia. It is one of the global South countries, the term that is used to refer to the poorer part of the world also called 'developing' or 'third world' countries. However, Lebanon does have a high literacy rate.

In this introductory chapter, I:

- Present the research aims followed by posing the questions to guide the research (1.1)

- State my position and the motives behind conducting the research as an

insider in the field of disability and VI (1.2)

- Discuss and define the key terms related to inclusion used in the study (1.3)

- Give a historical overview of the movement that made inclusion a goal to be achieved worldwide, including in the Arab world (1.4)

- Describe the approach of the study, namely, the social model of disability as well as the principles of emancipatory research (1.5)

- Present the theoretical framework of the study, which is derived from Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory and demonstrate its application in the present study (1.6)

- Give background information about the education system in Lebanon and the schooling structure, in general and in relation to implementing inclusion in education, including the existing different forms and applications of inclusion (1.7)

- Conclude the chapter with an overview of the structure of the subsequent chapters of the thesis (1.8).

1.1   Research aims and questions

Through this research I aim to:

- Understand the different factors that can inform the decisions that SVI and their parents reach when identifying a suitable secondary mainstream school.

- Investigate the experience of SVI in mainstream education in the context of available IE policy, provision and practices.

- Explore what factors contribute to inclusive educational practices for disabled students in the Lebanese setting, which may lead to their inclusion with, or exclusion from, their peers and ultimately from society at large.

- Contribute to improving the experience of SVI, as well as the implementation of inclusion in education, by giving my insights into

possible ways of enhancing inclusive implementation and practices in Lebanon.

For the investigation of these aims, I pose the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: What are the factors that influence students with vision impairment and their parents in identifying and selecting a secondary mainstream school?

- RQ2: What is the experience of disabled students in secondary mainstream schools in Lebanon, from the perspective of students with vision impairment, their peers, educators, families, and those who are in direct or indirect contact with them?

- RQ3: How do the perspectives of those involved in the education of disabled students in mainstream education impact on the implementation of inclusive practices?

1.2 My position on the research

The motivation for the study stems from my own experience as a woman who attended mainstream education throughout all my educational history, from nursery through to the completion of my HE teaching degree in the southern part of Lebanon and later during my postgraduate studies in the UK. My vision started to deteriorate gradually at the age of 14, at a time when the principle of inclusion had not even been proposed (1980s and 1990s). Instead, advocates for the education of disabled people were seeking or were satisfied with the educational provision of special schools for those with sensory impairment.

Being in a private mainstream school still meant that my VI was my individual responsibility and the school had very limited help to offer, which mainly consisted of allowing me to sit at the front. The support I received was exclusively that from family and close relatives. My personal efforts led me to seek possible ways to accommodate my needs so that I could access the educational material provided and understand its content. That was at a time when additional support and facilities for those with impairments of any kind

were exclusively available to students who were under-achieving or failing. Whilst finding solutions to the problems that could limit me was an issue, I adapted myself to doing so, but I envisaged that if I had no residual vision in both eyes things would become much harder for me given the non-existent support for SVI in mainstream education at that time.

By the time I had completed my schooling years, my VI became severe. It meant that it used to take me a long time to complete reading a paragraph and by the time I had completed reading a whole page, I would lose track of its meaning. However, after extensive preparation, I passed the Lebanese official Baccalaureate exams. To take the examination, I had to be tested under the same procedure that any other examinee would follow, i.e. no additional time, no offer of having enlarged-print exam sheets and no help in reading the exam questions.

Having completed my school education, I joined the Lebanese public university in Sidon and spent five years at the HE stage obtaining a degree in History followed by completing a teaching qualification, again with no adjustments made or any other type of support. Instead, I had to search for solutions to help me manage the demands of HE myself. After completing my teaching qualification, it seemed to me that the only option I had was to further my education, so I decided to enrol on a Masters course at the same HE institution. However, I soon realised that collecting data for my research, writing up a thesis and accessing many documents would not be possible, if I were to rely solely on the voluntary support of others and without possessing supportive assistive tools. Thus, I left education and began another journey, but this time it involved seeking employment opportunities. After this, I lost all my residual vision, which constituted a turning point in the history of my education as it meant that I was no longer able to further my education in an environment that was not ready to provide support.

I did not attend a special school for my education, but this was not because my parents did not want me to be away from home or because I wanted to be in mainstream education. It was simply because we were not aware of the existence of special schools. In fact, my first interaction with disabled people was through gaining a teaching position at a school for people with sensory

impairment, language and communication difficulties in Beirut in 2001. This was when I first entered the world of 'the disabled others' and when I started to identify myself as a woman with VI. This position helped me to build my skills, experience and knowledge in teaching generally and in teaching students described as having SEN. Through this position, which in turn enabled me to connect with several disabled students and colleagues at work, I developed a greater understanding of a range of barriers that people with different types of impairment can encounter either in education or in their social lives.

Conducting the current research was motivated by my personal experience, as through encountering educational as well as social exclusion and recognising the many barriers hindering my inclusion as well as those of my fellow disabled students throughout my time in Lebanon, I was inspired to have a positive effect on its implementation. Ultimately, this led me to want to understand what inclusion means in the Lebanese context, what it means for those who work towards mainstreaming disabled students, for those who teach them and for those who live with and make up the same community. More specifically, I want to discover how disabled students themselves perceive their inclusion and whether they have been experiencing equal and fair treatment in an inclusive setting.

Having moved to the UK in 2006 to further my education, I could access a level of education which I was not able to reach in my home country. The willingness of the educational institution to offer me equal access in support of my inclusion was something that I had not been exposed to previously. However, being the disabled 'other' was and still is, what I perceive in relation to my inclusion. Further issues in relation to my inclusion in the UK will be highlighted in subsequent chapters. As for my position in the research, being an 'insider' in the field of disability and VI has allowed me to access information without being treated as an outsider (Soorenian, 2013; Whitburn, 2014a). This might have also given me a significant advantage in respect of the shared experience of living with a disability that I, as the researcher, along with a group of research participants, possess.

My background as a Lebanese woman with experience in the Lebanese educational system at both the schooling and HE levels also enabled me to

understand the challenges faced by those who are disabled within the Lebanese context. Moreover, I was able to consider the perspectives of those who are directly concerned with IE. Furthermore, I believe that being an 'insider' in Lebanese society and its educational system in relation to both schooling and HE adds validity to the research and its contribution to the emancipation of this group. On the one hand, this has facilitated my access to different institutions and put me in a strong position in relation to understanding the Lebanese dialogue and expressions, which aided the conduct of the interviews that could have been difficult or even impossible for an outsider to access. On the other hand, having resided outside the country for nearly ten years prior to beginning the research, this reduced any possible bias that being familiar with the Lebanese context and its educational system could have caused. Furthermore, I feel that being an outsider to all the contacted schools and organisations has reduced any possible bias that being an insider to these environments might have resulted in.

Through the current study, I aim to demonstrate an inclusive approach to conducting research (Messiou, 2012; Soorenian, 2013) into IE, one I consider to be powerful as it involves listening to the voices of the people concerned. That is, accurately gathering information about the perceptions and experiences of inclusion from those who are disabled will allow this population to become the main informants of the research that, first and foremost, is concerned with their situation.

1.3   Key terms in the thesis

In this section, I discuss the key terms used in the thesis and present the definitions that I have adopted for this study. Defining the inclusion-related key words used in the thesis is pertinent to this study, as inclusion-related language is subject to ongoing debate regarding its appropriateness to the language and culture when applied in different contexts (Armstrong & Barton, 2009). I provide a general picture about the global debates including those in the Lebanese context. However, to understand the local context and the way inclusion and disability are referred to in Lebanon, necessitates using Arabic words with their English translation, as demonstrated below.

Inclusion: The term 'inclusion' has been defined differently by different scholars, with the extant definitions often being based on a combination of different concepts, e.g. education, social issues, morality or human rights (Armstrong & Barton, 2009; Ellis, Tod & Graham-Matheson, 2008). It has, however, been argued that in countries of the global North, that is, the richer part of the world that is often associated with the terms 'developed country', 'first world', or Western European and North American nations including the UK, the term 'inclusion' has been used to refer to the process of involving and encouraging the meaningful and active participation of everyone in all aspects of life. That is, inclusion in these countries refers to all regardless of their ability or disability, socioeconomic background, religion, sexual orientation, age or gender (Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow, Howes, Farrell & Frankham, 2003; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Hwang & Evans, 2011).

Most existing definitions of inclusion have looked at the issue from an educational perspective. For example, Booth and Ainscow (2011), in the UK, defined it as a reform that aims at welcoming all students who are vulnerable to exclusionary pressures because of gender, economic situation, religion, ethnicity or disability. More specifically, Sebba and Ainscow (1996) considered inclusion to refer to the 'process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricula organisation and provision.' (Sebba & Ainscow, 1996, p.9). However, some other scholars, including Chimedza (2009), have asserted that the concept of inclusion should not only be used to refer to inclusion in mainstream education, for it should also encompass that in society and in schooling as well as in higher education. Indeed, most existing definitions of inclusion refer to it in education and mainly for those who are disabled.

A focus on disability is apparent in the work of the Canadian, Uditsky (1993), who viewed inclusion as referring to a set of principles that ensures that the student with a disability is viewed as a valued and needed member of the school community in every respect. The Council for Development and Reconstruction (2005) in Lebanon, in comparison, has defined it as pertaining to providing disabled people with the resources and structures to support them to become fully contributing members of society. There is the simultaneous goal

of changing society, so that it becomes welcoming for disabled people, regardless of the different abilities and interests of each individual. This approach to defining inclusion demonstrates that in Lebanon, there is a focus on the inclusion of those who are disabled and this population is still seen as a separate group. This approach was also adopted in the work of Khochen and Radford (2012), who in their study on the attitudes of professionals towards inclusion in Lebanon, interpreted inclusion to mean a process that promotes *useful* participation of all students, irrespective of their difficulties, but nevertheless, the focus of the study was the inclusion of those who are disabled.

In fact, the term inclusion was, and for many still is, synonymous with the education of those considered to have 'disabilities and SEN' (Goodley, 2007). Some scholars (Alborno & Gaad, 2014; Miles & Singal, 2010) have ascertained that inclusion, mainly in countries of the global South, is used to refer to an approach that serves disabled students in mainstream settings. Goodley (2007) explained that disability and SEN are fundamental to what inclusion means, be it in countries of the global South or North. What is of equal prominence is the adoption of a broad approach to the term inclusion that takes into consideration the diversity of learners who should be involved in the respective debate.

Some scholars (Armstrong & Barton, 2009; Chimedza, 2009) have pointed out that the concept is not universally agreed upon, in that it can refer to different values and meanings that vary from one context to another. For example, in Italy, the term inclusion is not used. Instead, the term integration '*integrazione'* is employed, as the Italian word for 'inclusion' refers to something that is not natural, but forced (D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009). This is true in other languages, such as Arabic and in the context of Lebanon as well. For example, in Arabic, the term inclusion has been translated to 'Al-Damj' in the Arabic version of the Index on Inclusion. Inclusion has been also translated in Arabic to mean 'al Taaleem al Jamaa' or 'Al Daamaj', both of which refer to inclusion mainly in education. Hence, the term inclusion in the Arabic language is still open to a wide interpretation regarding what the term refers to. Furthermore, in the Arabic context, it is still more common to use the term to refer to inclusion in education and particularly for those who are disabled.

In my study, specific attention is paid to disabled students, with a focus on the inclusion of those with VI in mainstream education. Hence, adopting the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) definition of inclusion, which focuses on that in education, was deemed to be appropriate for my study. UNESCO refers to inclusion as:

"...a process that involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children." (UNESCO-IBE, 2011, para 4, p. 7)

Further discussion of the concept of IE and its practices is presented in Section 2.1.

Integration: Integration as a term differs from inclusion, however, the two have been used interchangeably by some scholars to refer to the placement of students described as having SEN in unsegregated schools, which can be referred to as regular or mainstream schools. More broadly, integration refers to recognising the right to uninhibited participation in the activities of daily life. It is known as 'mainstreaming' in the United States and 'normalisation' in Canada and the Scandinavian countries (Ellis, Tod & Graham-Matheson, 2008, p.23). As in the Italian language (D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009), in Arabic both 'inclusion' and integration' are sometimes used to denote the same meaning (Khochen & Radford, 2012), which can create confusion at times. In Arabic, as aforementioned, 'inclusion' is 'Al-Damj', whilst 'integration' translates as 'Al-Idmaj'. Linguistically speaking, Al-Idmaj, however, in Arabic, could mean forcing disabled people into the system as opposed to the definition of inclusion, which refers to creating a welcoming environment for all, regardless of their differences. Consequently, the term 'Al-Damj' has been used to denote both terms when translated into Arabic, whilst the term that pertains to translating integration is not used.

Mittler (2003), in the UK, suggested that the use of 'integration' indicates that there are some children who are different, requiring special environments and special teachers with specialist training. It was also argued that this implies that it is the responsibility of the student to adjust to the educational environment.

Hence, the use of this term would reflect the need of the student to adjust to the environment as opposed to building an educational environment that can welcome everyone, irrespective of their differences. Aligning with Mittler's definition of integration, I use the term integration in my research to refer to the presence of disabled people, mainly those with VI in a mainstream educational milieu, with no special provision in support of their inclusion.

Disability: In the disability literature, according to Croft (2010), the term disability has been variously defined as 'a deficit, a deviation from the norm, social oppression, exclusion, disadvantage, a collection of barriers, a challenge, an experience, an identity, a process, a predicament, difference, an aspect of diversity, and at one end of a continuum with health' (Croft, 2010, p. 4). The evolution in defining disability has been influenced by the shift in attitudes and concepts towards disability and disabled people that has taken place over the last two decades in different parts of the world. Earlier disability definitions had an individual blaming approach, regarding the individual as responsible for their impairment or difficulties. For instance, disability was referred to as 'the inability to do something that most others can do because of a specific impairment in physical, psychological, or intellectual functioning' (Gallagher, Connor & Ferri, 2014, p. 3). From this perspective, having a disability is a personal tragedy for which the individual is responsible for the impact of their impairment on their lives (Goodley, 2011; Hagrass, 2005). However, in the 1970s and 1980s, disabled people and their allies in the UK and the US and later across the Arab world, including in Lebanon, challenged this traditional approach to the perception of disability. Disabled advocates called for a social model that situates the disability in the environment and not in the body of the individual (Wilkinson-Meyers, Brown, Reeve, McNeill, Patston, Dylan, Baker, Ryan & McEldowney, 2014). They saw the problems facing disabled people as deriving from the response of society to their impairment. This shift in understanding has influenced policy in terms of the way disability is defined and responded to. Examples include the *International classification of functioning, disability and health* (ICF) introduced by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2011), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) and the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities (2003-2012). These

developments have resulted in the disability definitions of this century referring to the phenomenon as being caused by the interaction of the impairment of the individual with attitudinal, environmental and social barriers that can hinder the effective and meaningful participation of disabled people on an equal level to others in society (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011). In my research, I adhere to the social model of disability (Oliver & Barnes, 2010), which considers disability to be caused by external factors. Advocates of this model (Soorenian, 2013) regard impairment and disability are two different terms, whereby the former is an individual property, whilst the latter is caused by attitudinal, environmental and physical barriers that can hinder the inclusion of disabled people.

Similarly, in the Arabic language, the term 'mu'awwaq' holds that disability is created by the surroundings and not caused by the impairment of the individual (Damaj, 2008). The term 'j'aaqa', on the other hand, denotes the impairment of the individual who carries it. That is, when 'j'aaqa' is used to denote the individual, this implies that the disability is in the person and not with society (Alborz, Slee & Miles, 2013; Damaj, 2008). In the most recent Lebanese legislation regarding the rights of disabled people, namely the Law for the Rights of Disabled People 220/2000, nonetheless, disability is defined as meaning any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity considered normal for a human being. This demonstrates that disability in this context is defined in terms of the impairment of the individual and thus, a medical approach that considers disabled people to be deviant from the norm is still found.

Complying with the social model of disability, in this research the terms 'disability' and 'impairment' are not used interchangeably. Accordingly, in the thesis I will refrain from using the term 'people' or 'students with disabilities', as this implies that the disability is caused by the impairment of the individual and not by the society that disables them. Instead, the terms 'disabled people' or 'disabled students' are used. However, when referring to the impairment of the individual, a 'person first' approach is used e.g. 'a student with a vision impairment'. Likewise, to indicate general cognitive differences that individuals have that are not caused by the impairment of the individual, the terminology

adopted in the UK (Byrne, 2013) is used, e.g. 'students with specific learning difficulties' (SpLD), 'those with learning difficulties' (LD) and 'students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties' (SEBD). Consistent with the English meaning, the term 'difficulties' is also translated into Arabic as 'soubat', the term that is used in this research to denote those who have SEBD, LD or SpLD.

Special Educational Needs: This term has been seldom defined in SEN related literature (Isaksson & Lindqvist, 2014; Mohamed, 2011). However, the UK Special Educational Needs Code of Practice of 2014 defines it as follows:

A child has Special Educational Need if he/she has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. A child has a learning difficulty if he/she:

- *Faces a significantly greater difficulty in learning than a majority of children of the same age; or*
- *Faces a disability that either prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local educational authority;*
- *Is under compulsory school age and falls within the definition a) or b) above or would do so if special educational provision were not made available for them.' (DfES, 2014, p. 7)*

The term SEN also has been rarely defined in Lebanese related literature. Examples of which include Ismail (2004) and Oweini and El-Zein's (2014) works about SEN that do not engage in defining the term. Instead, the literature refers to international definitions mainly from a global North perspective (see Fayiad & Tabet, 2012). The debate on SEN related language, nonetheless, is ongoing, be it in English or in any other language. For instance, the term 'people with SEN', which translates into Arabic as 'dhawiyy hBjat khBssah', has been used in the majority of the available Arabic literature (see Aldaihani, 2011; Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2015). Whilst the term 'people with additional needs' (dhawiyy ehtiyajat edafiyya'l) has been advocated by the inclusion network (cited in Damaj, 2008) to be more appropriate than the term 'people with SEN'. The aim was to distinguish between the basic needs that every person would require and their different additional needs (Damaj, 2008). Nevertheless, both concepts imply that children are not one group. That is, in each case there are some children with either special or additional needs who are distinguished from others (Chimedza, 2009; Niemi & Kurki, 2014). Hence, both terms do not

represent a social model of disability, but rather, refer to the SEN as being either 'with' or having 'additional' needs, thus considering the individual concerned as different from others.

In this study, I avoid the use of the term 'people with SEN', which, according to social model advocates (Ainscow, 1999; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Soorenian, 2013), implies that the problem is with the individual with the impairment and not with the society that can disable them. The term 'SEN', as used in this research, refers to those who have an impairment or a difficulty that could require special facilities for them to participate in education. That is, the term 'SEN' is used to indicate those who are described or identified as having SEN or those who require support provision. By adopting this approach, I focus on the range of different barriers to learning caused by external factors rather than on the impairment and / or difficulties of the individual.

Vision impairment: This refers to those who have either severe sight impairment (previously called blindness) or sight impairment (also called partial sight). While according to the National Health Service (NHS) of the UK, the latter pertains to those who have poor visual acuity (of between 6/18 and 3/60), that is, what a person can see from a distance of 3 or 6 metres, a non-VI can see from a distance of 60 metres (NHS, 2014). The former refers to those whose vision is severe (less than 3/60), i.e. those who can only see from three metres or less what a non-VI person can see from a distance of 60 metres. Globally, people with severe sight impairment are those whose vision does not allow them to perform any work for which eyesight is essential (WHO, 2011). Whilst this definition of VI represents a medical definition usually used in clinical assessments to assess the functioning vision of the individual, on its own it does not provide an accurate description of how the individual can use their vision to see fine details, to distinguish between colours or to adjust to different degrees of light (Douglas, McCall, McLinden, Pavey, Ware & Farrell, 2009). Consequently, assessing the capacity of an individual to use their vision to see in certain environments is another approach, which is referred to in countries of the global North as functional vision. Nonetheless, both types of assessments, 'the clinical' and 'the functional', are used to assess the ability of the individual

to use their sight, rather than considering the surrounding environment that might prevent access for those with VI.

The VI related terminology can also vary from one context to another. For instance, in the USA the terms low vision and legally blind are used to denote those who have sight impairment and severe sight impairment, respectively. The terms visually impaired and blind are also used in the literature to denote either group. Generally, in Lebanon, international disability related definitions are usually adopted when defining the terms, which are then translated synonymously, mainly from English to Arabic (See Kabbara, G. 2013). As far as the term VI is concerned, the Arabic and sometimes Islamic words that are used in the Middle East region to refer to 'the blind', such as 'Amma' or 'Dareer', place the burden of this disability on the individual (Damaj, 2008).

Complying with the social model of disability, in this thesis, the term 'vision impairment' is used to refer to those who have severe sight impairment (SSI) and those who have sight impairment (SI) in accordance with the participant's self-definition of the severity of their impairment. The use of the term 'blind' or 'blind people/students' is avoided, as it refers to the language of the medical model of disability. Similarly, the term 'visually impaired' or visual impaired person/student is avoided as it places the burden of the vision impairment on the individual. Having said that, people with VI in Lebanon generally identify themselves and are identified as 'blind' 'makfoof' either totally or partially, which is preferred by them and is used in Arabic documentation, thus placing the burden of impairment on the individual.

Having explained the key words of this thesis and what they mean in the context of this study, an overview of the movement that brought about the debate around inclusion and SEN is deemed useful before moving on to providing the description and justification for the approach adopted for the study, an account of the educational system in Lebanon and consideration of inclusion in this context.

1.4 Historical overview of inclusion in education

Inclusion, as a concept, has been advocated since the United Nations

Declaration of 1948 (UNESCO, 2005). Since then, it has been the focal point of several UN declarations and conventions. The inclusive education movement was inspired by the drive towards attaining Education for All (EfA) by 2015, a programme that represents an international commitment to ensuring that every child and adult receives primary education of good quality (Croft, 2010). The EfA movement sprang from the World Conference on Education for All, which assembled in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. The programme's objective was to ensure that a high level of education is provided for all children and adults. However, during the early stage of the EfA movement, the focus was on all students and there was only a symbolic mention of those who are disabled (Miles & Singal, 2010).

The inclusion of disabled people in mainstream education was further enhanced in 1993, when the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Disabled Persons. Rule 6 called for the recognition of the right to equal educational opportunities for all children, youth and adults in integrated settings to ensure that the education of disabled people is fully integrated within the educational system (UN, 1993). At that time, integration was the aim and inclusion as a phenomenon was barely recognised. Another significant advance was the Salamanca Statement of 1994, which, amongst other things, called upon countries to:

'…adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of IE, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise.'
(UNESCO, 1994, p. 9)

Whilst the Salamanca statement recognised that there are always going to be some children whose needs do not suit mainstream schools, it encouraged new ways of looking at the educational challenges faced by children experiencing difficulties. It recognised that by responding to the differences encountered by those children through applying different methodologies, mainstream education can, under certain circumstances, be beneficial for all learners (UNICEF, 2013). By adopting this approach, students who are identified as having SEN can be considered a source that is able to stimulate a richer teaching environment. Hence, this represented a valuable reference point in relation to a new way of thinking for all those involved in lobbying for IE.

In 2000, the international community convened again in Dakar, Senegal, to confirm their pledge to achieve EfA by the year 2015 (UNESCO, 2007). The progress towards attaining IE was reviewed during this meeting in which the attendees accepted that:

'Education for All… must take account of the need of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health; and those with special learning needs' (UNESCO 2000, p.14)

However, the EfA movement does not explicitly mention disability, nor does it mention disabled people as an excluded group of concern. The inclusion of this group of SEN, was, however, part of the stated aim to ensure complete coverage of quality primary education for all children by 2015. This has become an increasingly significant issue following the Dakar 2000 World Forum on Education. While several Arab countries, including Jordan, the UAE, the Yemen and Palestine, have developed their national EfA strategies (UNESCO, 2008), in Lebanon, according to Ismail (2004) and Oweini and El-Zein (2014), no measures have been taken to adopt them. Instead, the educational system still comprises special and regular educational provision. Further information about the different school provision that constitutes the Lebanese educational system is presented in Subsection 1.7.1.

With a focus on the inclusion of disabled people in all aspects of society, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN) came into effect on 3rd May 2008. It marked up what needs to be accomplished to ensure social change and put an end to oppression based on disability (Wehbi, Elin & El-Lahib, 2010). In ratifying this Convention, governments are required to adopt national laws and policies, as well as to review existing ones to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and to ensure non-discrimination for them. Under such laws, this population should have equal access to their rights. This, in turn, will lead to implementing social inclusion where the rights of all citizens, including those who are disabled, are protected. It should be noted that by the end of 2015, the UNCRPD, had been signed by 159 countries including Lebanon and had been ratified by 152 countries, exclusive of Lebanon

(European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015). Indeed, Lebanon has agreed or signed up to most IE related international treaties, including the World Conference on Education for All, the Salamanca Statement, and the most recent UNCRPD. However, by signing the treaties, governments might be expressing their agreement, but this does not compel them to take the necessary measures to comply with their requirements.

At a regional level, and as far as the recent IE initiatives across the Arab region are concerned, UNESCO has held two preparatory meetings on them, with a focus on the inclusion of those described as having SEN in mainstream education: one in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2007; and the other in Lebanon in 2008. Various recommendations emerged from these two workshops, which included: suggesting a gradual strategy of awareness-raising among different stakeholders; the dissemination of the UNESCO vision on inclusive education in the region; the training of professionals and the strengthening of cooperation, especially communication, between countries. This was aimed at promoting the sharing of lessons learnt, as well as the setting up of regional agendas. In sum, being influenced by the existing legislation, the trend across the globe is to achieve inclusion. This has had an influence on current inclusive practices, as further illustrated in Subsection 2.1.3.

1.5   The approach of the study

For the current study, the aim is to adhere to the social model of disability and the principles of emancipatory research, as articulated by Oliver in 1992, both of which have introduced a new approach to conducting social research (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013). As established in Section 1.3, the social model of disability conceptualises disability as socially constructed and considers the barriers to participation facing disabled people to be societal rather than individual ones. Advocates of this model (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007; Cameron, 2014b), argue that it is not those described as having SEN who should be examined, but the system that creates barriers towards their inclusion. The focus of this model, hence, is not on the individual property of disabled people, but rather, the collective issues that can disable this population. Under this optic, it is also acknowledged that disabled people, nonetheless, can

experience 'impairment effects' (Thomas, 1999, 2002), which are experiences specifically related to their impairment, but the individual property of this impairment is not what the social model is about. It, instead, involves reconceptualising the way disability is defined by shifting away from a functional limitation approach, which requires medical intervention to restore disable people back to 'normality'. Hence, the response to the exclusion faced by disabled people, according to this model, should be in creating inclusive societies as opposed to seeking medical treatment for the impairment of the individual (Cameron, 2014b; Shakespeare, 2015) or to rehabilitating those with impairment so that they can fit into their societies.

Adopting this approach, has led to disabled advocates challenging the traditional way of conducting research into disability (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007), which had the tendency of focusing on the individual model. In fact, in his argument for the eminence of the representation of disabled people in research that is of direct relevance to them, Oliver (2002) contended that research on disability failed to reflect the experience of disability accurately from the perspective of disabled people themselves; failed to provide information that can be helpful for policy makers in improving the living conditions that disabled people face; failed to recognise the struggle that this population face; and failed to admit that disability is not just a medical issue that can be considered in isolation from the social and political context. Disability advocates have further contended that to understand the barriers facing the inclusion of disabled people, it is fundamental to draw on their experience of living with impairments. That is, there is the need for an emancipatory approach to disability research, a term coined by the British disability activist, Mike Oliver, in 1992 (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007).

Emancipatory research aims to make disability research grasp what living with an impairment actually means from the perspective of those who live with it themselves. It calls for critical, politically-based, disability research that is capable of engaging disabled people with the objective of producing positive change in their lives, in society and in research practice. Under this lens, the researcher needs to establish relationships with those who are disabled, listen to their voices and ask how the knowledge and skills that emanate from the

inquiry can be employed to improve the living situation of this population (MacConville, 2007; Soorenian, 2013). By following this approach, disabled people become part of the solution and not part of the problem (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007).

Aligning with international disability activism, disabled people in Lebanon have a long history of lobbying for the rights of disabled people, which has led to the passing of national anti-discrimination laws, such as Law 220 for the rights of disabled people, which came into effect in 2000 (Kabbara, N. 2013; Wehbi, 2007). Disabled people in Lebanon, together with their organisations, also played an important role in the negotiations linked to the UNCRPD, which Lebanon signed two months after its opening for signage in 2007. However, studies that involve the participation of disabled people in research in Lebanon that is of direct concern to them are very scarce. Moreover, the limited number of studies available still do not cover the advocacy role that disabled people in Lebanon have been playing (Wehbi, 2012). Hence, there is a vital need for the involvement of disabled people in Lebanon in research into disabilities that investigates their experience with the aim of improving their living situation.

However, this should not be interpreted as meaning that only those who are disabled have the right to conduct disability research (Shakespeare, 2015). Involving disabled people in research that is of concern to them should be the ultimate aim of research that is concerned with improving their situation. Moreover, being disabled can give the researcher advantages regarding access to information and the sharing of experience, which would not be the case if the researcher was not disabled. For example, Duckett and Pratt (2007) established that research on this in the UK and internationally has invariably failed to represent issues of prime importance, specifically for people with VI, including issues related to access, employment and the social environment. The authors also pointed out that despite the growing body of emancipatory literature on disability focusing on single impairments, e.g. LD and mental health difficulties, studies that single out VI for special attention are still scarce. It is true that VI is a low incidence impairment (Douglas et al., 2009) compared with others. Thus, considering the different access modality that this population requires, conducting emancipatory research with the focus on VI will prove beneficial

(Duckett & Pratt, 2007).

This failure of disability-related research has contributed to the fact that very few disabled people, in general, and particularly those with VI have been able to make contributions to the design and execution of research into their circumstances or have been called upon to make recommendations that could improve their lives. Indeed, some scholars (Fielding, 2004; Riviere, 2015) have highlighted that despite the growing literature that seeks the views and voices of disabled people, there remains little evidence that these are acted upon. This limited enactment calls for an emancipatory methodological approach, which non-disabled researchers as well as others of those who construct the point of enquiry, should strive to achieve (Barnes, 2002), in order to ground politically informed understandings regarding disability, in general and in vision impairment, in particular, if more progress is to be made.

With respect to the application of an emancipatory approach, Oliver (1997) suggested six ways for its implementation that can contribute to the representation of disabled people in research that is relevant to them. Firstly, presenting a faithful account of the experiences of disabled people participating in the research; secondly, looking at disability away from an individual or medical model and instead, dealing with it according to a social model; thirdly, challenging the ideology and the methodology of the dominant research paradigms; fourthly, developing a methodology commensurate with emancipatory research; fifthly, presenting an account of the collective experience of disabled people; and finally, monitoring and evaluating services controlled by disabled people.

In adhering to the emancipatory approach of researching disability, I strive to present a faithful account of the experience of the participating SVI by taking a social approach to disability that considers disability not to be caused by the impairment of the individuals. Moreover, I aim to introduce a new approach to disability research in which the investigation is conducted by an insider to the field of disability and VI, who shares with the participants the challenge of living with an impairment as opposed to most disability studies, in general (Duckett & Pratt, 2007), and particularly in the Middle East region which have been conducted by non-disabled people. The aim was also to involve disabled people

at different stages of the development of the research, as explained in Subsection 3.1.2 of the Methodology chapter. In addition, I present a collective account of SVI who have participated in the study regarding issues in relation to their educational and social inclusion from their own perspectives and from those of the people who are directly or indirectly connected to them. By doing so, their experience of being in mainstream settings is presented. The last point of Oliver's steps, regarding the services controlled by disabled people, is beyond the scope of this study. However, the representation of disabled people in the different organisations that the study covered is considered and commented upon in the methodology chapter.

1.6   The theoretical framework of the study

The theoretical framework adopted is derived from Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979). His perspective is founded on the person, the environment, and the continuous interaction between the two, thus being a theory that pays attention to all social interactions around the individual. It focuses on people within certain environments and the impact influential factors have on one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He proposed that it was not only the environment directly affecting the person, for there were layers in between, all of which have resulting impacts at the next level. Specifically, according to Bronfenbrenner:

'*The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger context in which the settings are embedded.' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21)*

This can include direct and indirect interactions within the environment. Bronfenbrenner described the development of the person as happening within a series of nested systems (Armstrong, 2005), each of which is embedded in larger settings. At the centre of this model is the developing person, who Bronfenbrenner calls the biosystem. Next, is the microsystem level, which consists of the immediate setting(s) in which the developing person is a regular

participant. People often participate in multiple microsystems, such as the family, the school classroom, school play groups or community activities. Influences that occur between microsystems, according to Bronfenbrenner, characterise the next level, the mesosystem. This is thus a system of microsystems, which can be extended according to the different settings that the developing person moves into (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Beyond the mesosystem is the exosystem, which comprises the influences on the person from settings that do not include any members of their microsystems. This can refer to regulatory bodies, social policies or equality and inclusive related advocacy, established by policymakers or leaders who have never, themselves, entered the school environment, but who might exert influence on inclusive classes and students. Broader still is the macrosystem, which includes the larger, overarching, social, political and cultural influences that affect other levels of the system. Thus, there is mutual interaction between the different systems of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and focusing on one level without looking at the interconnections of other factors would certainly underestimate the influences of these factors (Klein, Tosi & Cannella, 1999) on the developing person.

The suitability of applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological conceptualisation of development for researching the inclusion of students described as having SEN has been confirmed in several other studies (Aldaihani, 2011; McLinden, Douglas, Cobb, Hewett & Ravenscroft, 2016; Sontag, 1996). In what follows, I offer a description of how my study fits within the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. In so doing, I draw a picture of the range of different variables that the study addresses, in relation to the factors of relevance in the ecological systems, namely inclusion, disability and SEN, with the focus being on those with VI in Lebanon.

a) Biosystem: disabled students in secondary mainstream education in the Lebanese context

I explore what it means for students with vision impairment (SVI) to be included in mainstream education in Lebanon and examine their views as well as the perspective of those who are directly or indirectly connected to them in the implementation of inclusion in practice. As such, secondary students with vision

impairment (SSVI) comprise the biosystem of the ecological model, with the interest being in exploring the influencing factors on their inclusion in mainstream settings in relation to the support provided for them along with the challenges they face.

b) Microsystem: inclusion in the school environment

In this research, secondary schools represent the main microsystem in which SVI participate. Regarding which, the environmental arrangements or necessary adjustments, the readiness of educators to teach inclusively, the mutual social relationships between peers in the school milieu, as well as teacher behaviour and beliefs are probed. Individuals participate in more than one microsystem. Another such setting in which SVI of this study are regular participants is the family environment, where they are immediate members. Accordingly, the relationships between SVI and their parents and siblings, their social interaction in their local communities and the influence that parental support has on their inclusion, are investigated.

c) Mesosystem: the family and the educational system

In Bronfenbrenner's conceptualisation, the mesosystem influences the development of people when the participants in different microsystems interact. For example, the interactions of parents with teachers, or teachers with school leaders, can influence elements of the inclusive programme microsystem applied in certain educational institutions. Likewise, inclusion-related information and provision that school leaders make available can inform the expectations of parents as well as the school identifications that they and their children make. Hence, the factors that affect the views of parents and educationalists, together with those that can have an influence on peer perceptions, are also explored.

Furthermore, inclusion is often rightly viewed as a much broader issue than participation in a school classroom (McLean & Dunst, 1999). For example, the participation of disabled people in higher education (HE) can function as a mesosystem-level influence, whereby the developing person moves to a new setting (e.g. university lecture theatres, academic events, libraries or bookshops can constitute a range of microsystems) and any of these microsystems can

affect a person's participation, in general, as well as in the inclusive environment.

d) Exosystem: higher education and the policy making environment

As previously explained, the exosystem consists of influences or events that can affect the microsystem, but that occur in settings that do not include its members. For school inclusion, the exosystem variables can include regional disability policy and practice as well as decisions or agreements occurring between educational agencies and schools that identify themselves as inclusive. As a result, this study also involves investigating the perspectives of those in HE in relation to the influence of their specialised courses on implementing inclusion in education and on developing inclusive practice at the national level.

e) Macrosystem: social, cultural and political values

Macrosystem variables are: cultural, legislative, values and attitudes. These variables influence students' development directly or can have secondary influences by affecting variables at other levels of the ecological system, which, in turn, influence students' development. In this respect, the views of key personnel at governmental and non-governmental levels are investigated as well as the approach that these organisations follow to enforce the culture of inclusion in mainstream education and their attitudes towards the related practices. Furthermore, the implementation of Lebanese disability legislation, from the point of view of governmental individuals, is also examined along with the effectiveness of the available legislation on the progress towards inclusion in the country.

f) Chronosystem: systems level influences across time

Bronfenbrenner (2005) added the time dimension to his conceptualisation of the ecological system's influence on a person's development. By doing so, he brought a further refinement to the conceptual framework. Over time, influences within and across different levels of the ecological system evolve, leading to their redefinition and changes in the relationships among variables. Thus, while the study's framework mainly focuses on SVI in secondary schools, it also includes those who were about to embark on their secondary education, that is

those who were in Brevet, as well as those who had just completed their secondary schooling, i.e. those who were now attending HE. In sum, the aim is to look at SVI perceptions of inclusion across time.

The cultural and social values together with policy developments that have influenced the acceptance of disabled people into mainstream education, has generally changed in recent years, with increased demands from parents of children described as having SEN being able to participate in these schools (Riviere, 2015; Plaisance, 2009), both in countries of the global North or South. Hence, utilising the addition of the time element of Bronfenbrenner's model represented in the form of the chronosystem allows for this research to introduce an important, but complex, dimension to testing this theory in relation to topics, such as inclusion, disability and VI. In this research, I take three consecutive educational stages (pre-secondary, secondary and post-secondary), thus involving a limited age range amongst the student participants. By doing so, I am able to provide greater insight regarding inclusion at these three stages. Where I to cover a wider age range in relation to the development of the human being, e.g. nursery, secondary and employment, I believe the richness of the data would be compromised.

1.7   Trend towards inclusion in Lebanon

In this section, the trend towards inclusion in Lebanon is presented and it begins with an overview of the Lebanese educational system.

1.7.1 The Lebanese educational system

Schools in Lebanon are of several different types:

Private: Private schools have a long history of religious affiliation. They can receive the support of local Islamic organisations, French Jesuits, American or British Protestant missions. They are run and operate entirely privately. Some are fee paying whilst others are government subsidised and the latter type of school covers only the primary stages of education (Najjar, 2008).

Governmental: Government schools, also called state or public schools, have

no fee charges at any stage (Mattar, 2011). They are secular, operate under the government authorities and accept all those who apply, provided that they reside in the school vicinity, meet the appropriate age range for their group and pass the entry exam (Najjar, 2008).

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East: UNRWA schools are privately operated by the agency. Their school fees are fully subsidised throughout all educational stages by voluntary financial support, which is almost entirely funded by United Nations member states in support of the education of Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2015).

Special: Special schools are privately operated by NGOs or advocates of civil society. They are free of charge, relying on donations, grants and funded projects as well as being part-funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). They offer, among other things, a primary special education alternative to regular mainstream education for their SVI on their respective premises. They also support the education of their students in mainstream education during the secondary stage of education. Special schools also run vocational training for their SVI.

Generally speaking, schools in Lebanon, including those of UNRWA (Shuayb, 2014), comply with the Lebanese educational curriculum leading to a Baccalaureate or a professional certificate, both of which give access to tertiary education, as is explained below.

It should be noted that in Lebanon, there are six years of compulsory education, which are between the ages of 6 and 12 years old (elementary education). The current aim is to increase the mandatory education in the country up to the age of 15 (end of intermediate education) (Jurdak & BouJaoude, 2009; Mattar, 2011). The overall enrolment rate in the country is increasing rapidly. The EfA global monitoring report of 2000-2015 stated that Lebanon had a gross ratio of 80% in pre-compulsory education (UNESCO, 2015). As for the mandatory or elementary, intermediate and secondary stages of education, the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) reported that the net enrolment rate of elementary education in the country recorded an increase from 91.5% in 2001-2002 to 97.1% in 2005-2006, whilst the rate of pupils reaching the end of their intermediate education was 96.3% in 2003 as compared to 95.3% in 2000. Of

those who completed their intermediate education, around 86% were enrolled in secondary education in 2003. The gross enrolment rates for the intermediate (between the age of 12 and 15) and secondary levels of education (between the age of 15 and 18) were reported as 100% and 77%, respectively. This demonstrates the high literacy rate that exists in Lebanon, which in fact is the highest among Arab countries (Najjar, 2008).

The number of private schools is nearly three times that of the government sector. Private education in Lebanon also has a high profile at both the school and tertiary levels compared with public education (Najjar, 2008; Vlaardingerbroek & Shehab, 2012). For example, about 40% of elementary and intermediate school-aged students attend government schools, whilst the remainder are enrolled in private education. However, this increases at secondary level so as to exceed 50% of school-aged students (Nahas, 2011). This increase in government school attendance is considered to be due to the low attainment of some students at private schools, which does not correspond with the high academic profile that many such schools aspire to achieve.

Notably, after the end of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), in 1997, the educational system underwent major reforms, which were implemented in the academic years of 1997-1998 and 2000-2001 (Jurdak & BouJaoude, 2009). These covered, among other things, the curricula, books, teaching techniques, school buildings, official exams and specialised education (Mattar, 2011).

As far as the schooling structure in Lebanon is concerned, it is divided into four consecutive stages: nursery, elementary, intermediate and secondary. Nursery lasts from the age of four to six kindergarten (KG 1 and 2); elementary, or cycle one and two, is between the ages six and 12 (from Grade 1 to 6); intermediate or cycle three, ranges from the age of 12 to 15 (from Grade 7 to Grade 9); and the secondary or cycle four pertains to those aged 15 to 18 (Grade 10 to 12). To complete their school education successfully, students must take two centralised official exams: the 'Brevet' at the end of Grade 9, or by the age of 15, and the Lebanese official Baccalaureate examination at the end of Grade 12, or by the age of 18 (Mattar, 2011). Whilst passing the Brevet exams marks the completion of 'basic or primary education', and allows for entry to the secondary stage, passing the Baccalaureate official exams permits entry to HE

(Jurdak & BouJaoude, 2009). Students with SEN in Lebanon can apply for exemption from the Brevet official examinations, whilst there is no exemption that can be applied for in regards to the official Baccalaureate (CERD, 2012).

Secondary school students can choose one of two streams (Makki, Abd-El-Khalick & BouJaoude, 2003) when they reach Grade 11:

The humanities stream, which lays emphasis on languages and the social sciences, or

The scientific stream, which places emphasis on science and mathematics.

In Grade 12, those students who opted for the humanities stream can choose a further one of two streams, either to continue with humanities and literature or to study social sciences and economics. Whilst those who chose the science stream can subsequently choose the physical sciences stream or the life sciences one, when they reach Grade 12 (Jurdak & BouJaoude, 2009). The Lebanese educational structure shows that students follow the same educational system until first diverging in grade 11 and then there is further divergence prior to starting grade 12, which allows for less rigidity in the transition to higher education. Those who do not succeed in regular education can repeat their last year, drop out of education or transfer to the parallel vocational system (Jurdak & BouJaoude, 2009), which is comparatively short and less academically demanding, as explained hereafter. Students undertaking the vocational path enter for examinations leading to the award of the Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP), equivalent to Grade 7, the Brevet Professionel (BP), equivalent to Grade 9 or the Baccalaureate Technique (BT), equivalent to Grade 12. This depends on the point at which the learner makes the transition (Vlaardingerbroek & El-Masri, 2008).

1.7.2 Trend towards inclusion in Lebanon

In line with the international movement towards inclusion, starting from the last century, attempts to implement inclusion and avoid exclusion in special and segregated environments for students described as having SEN, were also advocated in countries of the global South, including in Lebanon (Brousse-Chamichian, Murphy, Makarem & Marji, 2000; Ismail, 2004). This began in the

early 1980s, through the efforts of civil society inclusion advocates (Rizic, 2007) as well as owing to pressure from parents of children described as having SEN. Their collaborative efforts consisted of lobbying, developing and implementing inclusion programmes as well as raising awareness about disability issues (NIP, 2007). This can be seen through the range of different inclusion-related projects that were implemented in different schools in Lebanon including the following:

An individual educational mainstreaming pilot project (1982), which covered several schools in and around the capital city Beirut (Kustantini, 1999), with the aim of supporting the individual needs of children described as having SEN in these schools.

The academic integration programme of children with SEN (1991), which aimed to establish constructive inclusive strategies, along with setting up further research studies that could be used to inform better inclusive practices (Dirani, 1993 cited in Kustantini, 1999).

A three-year full integration trial project starting in 1993 was undertaken by civil society activists. However, this project was terminated in June 1995 due to several disagreements that hindered its progress (Kustantini, 1999).

The National Inclusion Project (NIP) 2005 to 2007, which was led by four Lebanese NGOs, three working nationally and a fourth working internationally. It aimed at addressing the exclusion experienced by disabled people across 10 private schools in Lebanon (Khochen & Radford, 2012), with a focus on institutional development, capacity building and public awareness (NIP, 2007). However, the evaluation of this project, reflecting on its success in terms of what it achieved in fulfilling its aims, was led by the NIP itself, thus making the validity and reliability of the evaluation questionable.

The National Inclusion Project Lebanon (NIPL) 2008 to 2010 followed on from the Lebanese social action plans led by MOSA, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), the Italian Embassy and Saint-Joseph University (USJ), which jointly made efforts to implement another two year NIPL. The project was concerned with the quality of education for all. It aimed to a) pilot a project to promote the inclusion of special needs of children in ten government

run schools and b) to develop a national policy on inclusion that would guarantee the right to Education for All in the Lebanese educational system (Mansour, 2011). The NIPL came to an end in November 2010 without fulfilling its aims. Nonetheless, this project marked the first involvement of the MEHE in the education of students requiring SEN in government schools in the country.

The government's interest in inclusion goes back to 1999, when the MEHE, in collaboration with UNESCO, asked for an in-depth expert report on the educational needs of children with SEN in Lebanon (Rizic, 2007: Wehbi, 2006), followed later that year by the First National Conference on the Education of People with SEN in Beirut (UNESCO, 1999). This raised a number of issues for the Lebanese government aimed at improving the inclusion of disabled people in the Lebanese educational system and in society at large. A survey was prepared by one of the committees that emerged from this conference. Its findings, which were presented at the second national conference in 2000, revealed that most schools were not yet open to, or equipped for, working with children requiring SEN (Kanafani, 2000; Wehbi & El-Lahib, 2007).

In an effort to enhance the inclusion of students requiring SEN, in December 2010, the MEHE passed several laws to update the functions of educational support to include other personnel, social educators and specialised educators to help teachers perform their duties. The objective of such laws was to allow schools to meet students' learning needs, as well as cater for the psychological and social conditions of students categorised as having special needs. This initiative was further supported in the recent MEHE five-year plan 'Quality Education for Growth (2010-2015)', which aimed to develop the educational sector with a focus on social integration (MEHE, 2011).

The MEHE launched its first national inclusive strategy in 2012 and also put national plans in place concerned with the inclusion of students with SEN and the support that this population should expect to receive from the school they attend, as well as in the course of official examinations (M. Tabet, personal communication, September 1st, 2013). More recently, in 2013, a Memorandum of Understanding was established between the MEHE, the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD), Smart Kids with Individual

Learning Differences (SKILD) and the British Council (BC) of Lebanon, with the purpose of supporting the implementation of inclusion in mainstream education in the country, with a focus on issues related to LD and SEN (British Council, 2014). The project activities included, among other things, creating and distributing a guidebook on inclusive schools to 5,000 schools with the aim of helping parents and educators to identify an inclusive school (British Council, 2014). Like NIP, the evaluation of the impact of the project on the development of IE in Lebanon was conducted by the BC, with the aim being to assess their level of success in the implementation of IE in the country (Wagstaff, 2014). The focus of this type of evaluation leaves room for questioning its validity. Indeed, the limited evidence-based scientific evaluation of the implemented IE related projects in Lebanon and across the Middle East Region is clear in the literature (Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2015; Peters, 2007), which brings into question the effectiveness of the implemented projects in enhancing the implementation of inclusion in the country. Simultaneously, it calls for conducting evidence based scientific research to inform the implementation of inclusion so future directions aimed at addressing gaps in understanding can be identified.

The involvement of the MEHE in inclusion projects also took the form of partnering with the Youth Organisation of the Blind (YAB) and the Inclusion Network in a three-year 'Integration Project' starting in 2012. The project aimed at promoting the inclusion of children described as having SEN in six primary government schools in Lebanon. The project received funding from the Italian Embassy in Beirut. It involved providing training for educators, social workers and those working in relevant ministries on disability and SEN. It also involved creating an accessible curriculum for SVI, adapting the physical environment and making resources available in the schools. Moreover, a series of public awareness events was held (GVC, 2012) regarding the implementing inclusion in the identified schools, despite its organisers stating that 'integration' was the desired goal. This demonstrates the influence of the funder on the use of terminology, as the project received the financial support from Italy, where the term 'integration' is deemed more appropriate than that of 'inclusion', as explained earlier (Section 1.3). This also demonstrates that the Lebanese government still uses these two terms interchangeably, ignoring the difference in meaning and consequently, the correct application of both.

With the aim of identifying government schools that have students with SEN enrolled in their classes, in the school year 2012-2013, the CERD conducted a national screening of government schools across Lebanon (Tabet, 2014). Government schools' head teachers and class teachers of all educational stages were asked to complete questionnaires. The analysed responses were from nursery and primary schools, while those of secondary schooling were omitted, due to the limited responses received from this group. This, according to CERD, could indicate the limited enrolment of students with SEN in secondary mainstream education in Lebanon. Keeping in mind that the secondary stage of education is not mandatory, one might argue that this also provides an indicator of the high drop out from schools of this population when reaching this stage of education. Moreover, the findings of the survey revealed a large gap in the responses between different provinces in relation to the identified disabled students with SEN. This raises a number of questions about the definition of disability that the survey adopted and the extent to which those who completed the questionnaires were able to identify these students, given that inclusion in government schools was and still is, in its infancy. This also brings up the matter of whether students who require support provision know that they should identify themselves or are aware of their different needs.

The above provides evidence that the need to promote IE and its practices is growing internationally as well as in Lebanon, being supported by international efforts. Consequently, students described as having SEN are increasingly enrolling in mainstream education. Of those who are in education, the majority of students identified as having SEN across the Arab region, however, still receive their education in special schools (UNESCO-IBE, 2009). Whilst the aim is for the policy of inclusion to be implemented across the region, inclusion or sometimes integration projects implemented in Lebanon continue to mainly be aimed at those described as having SEN, in spite of the stated goal of achieving inclusion for all.

In Jordan, students identified as having SEN who were considered able to benefit from an education began to be enrolled in special schools from the middle of the 20th century. Later on in the same century, some of those students who had mild difficulties were considered as being able to be included in

mainstream education - either in parallel classes in mainstream schools or in integrated classes supported by resource rooms. However, those with severe difficulties, including those with sensory impairment, continued to receive their early education in special schools. That is, those with VI were not moved to neighbouring mainstream schools until they reached Grade 6 (age 12 years) (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2014).

Similarly, in Lebanon, the establishment of special schools started during the second half of the 20th century, but mainly in the capital city, Beirut and its surrounding districts. Their purpose was to provide students described as having SEN (mainly those with sensory and physical impairment) with an education equivalent to that of mainstream students, which was not previously available for these students. This led to those who were excluded from education receiving their education in segregated settings. These institutions, like others in Lebanon that provide support for those described as having SEN, receive partial support from MOSA. Special schools also support the inclusion of some of their students in mainstream education, mainly those with VI, when they reach certain stages of their educational journeys, as illustrated above. This demonstrates the continuing support of the government for special education. Supporting only some students in mainstream education, suggests that these institutions believe that there are still some students for whom their schools are not suitable for their education.

The main special schools in Lebanon that offer equivalent education (from nursery to grade 9) to that of mainstream education and that integrate their SVI during the secondary stages in mainstream schools are:

Alhadi Institute for Deaf, Blind and Learning Difficulties: an Islamic organisation established in 1988. It caters for children with vision and hearing impairment, as well as for those with LD.

The Lebanese School for the Blind and Deaf: established in 1957. It was the first national school for students with visual and hearing impairment.

Nazek Hariri Complex for Developing Humanitarian Capacities: caters for students with vision, hearing and physical impairment as well as for those who are in poverty.

1.7.3 Forms of inclusion in Lebanon

Schools in Lebanon apply different forms of inclusion, which can be categorised as follows:

Basic inclusion: some schools offer limited help in support of the inclusion of students identified as having SEN. More specifically, they can accept students with mild difficulties who can manage the demands of mainstream education by themselves.

Mainstream schools supported by special schools: this form comprises schools that can accept disabled students requiring support provision, provided they receive the support of their special schools to which students with VI are affiliated (Khuri, 2004). The mainstream school only provides a basic form of support, whilst the special schools will allocate a peripatetic teacher to visit the schools, support their students with transportation to and from the schools, amend the visual element of their course materials, provide them with accessible course materials as well as supporting them in reading and writing during school exams.

Inclusive schools: some schools consider themselves to be inclusive and have inclusive programmes in place. These are generally attended by students with impairments or difficulties that require support provision, who live with their parents (as opposed to students of special schools, who have to board in the school, if their parents do not reside within the proximity of their institution), and are included in one or more of these school levels: KG, elementary, intermediate, or secondary (Nadjarian, 2009; UNESCO, 2000). The majority of these schools are private (Ismail, 2004; Nadjarian, 2009; Oweini & El-Zein, 2014). Their inclusive programme can involve specialised support in the inclusion of their students with SEN, which might include the availability of learning support teachers (LST), who are called SEN teachers or specialised teachers, a SENCO and/or extra resources in support of the inclusion of their students. Examples of which include the Al-Kawthar School and the International College School.

Inclusive schools can also be part of an implemented inclusion project supported by NGOs, where there is a special educator and/or LSTs (Nadjarian,

2009) appointed in full or part by the NGO, whose role is to provide support during exams in reading and writing, converting daily exercise sheets into an accessible format, adapting exam questions of a visual nature to text based questions so the SVI can access their contents, liaising between the school, parents and the NGO as well as being those in charge of any issue in relation to the SEN and the social inclusion of the SVI at the school (A, Makarim, personal communications, January 31st 2012). Examples of NGOs that support the inclusion of SVI in inclusive schools include:

YAB: it is a national NGO run and operated by civil society, which advocates for the rights of people with VI in education, access to resources and equal participation in all aspects of society. At the end of last century, YAB began to advocate for the inclusion of SVI in mainstream education. The association partnered with some mainstream schools (Damaj, 2008) and was also a partner in some inclusive projects, including the NIP and NIPL. It is a non-profit association and has no religious affiliation.

UNRWA: it implements a centralised inclusive project through its headquarters in Beirut. The inclusive initiative began at the end of the last century, with the programme designating a number of schools to be equipped with resource rooms, learning support teachers and assistive tools in support of implementing inclusion. These designated schools, located in different geographical locations of the country, accept mainly students with vision and physical impairment.

Non-inclusive schools: indeed, most private and government schools in Lebanon are not well equipped for inclusion (Oweini & El-Zein, 2014). Many deny entry to disabled students who would require support. This is enforced by many barriers, including the fact that teacher training lacks an SEN component, support for teachers when available is not maintained, there is no budget allocated to support the cost of inclusion and the physical environment does not always allow access for all students (Mattar, 2012).

Withdrawal schools: these schools do not accept disabled students, for they may have had experience of being inclusive previously and have decided to opt out. They could have been part of an inclusion project and dropped out, with the parents/ NGOs that supported the inclusion of students with SEN in these schools having decided not to continue educating their students in these

schools. Alternatively, they might have been part of an inclusive project for which funding came to an end so that they were no longer able to carry on with such a programme.

Indeed, the Lebanese Autism Society (LAS) conducted a comprehensive survey of inclusive schools in Lebanon during 2007/2008. For the purpose of this study (LAS, 2009), inclusive schools were those that:

- Have students identified as having SEN included in an inclusive setting within the school.

- Have an inclusion programme in one or more of these school levels: kindergarten, elementary, intermediate, or secondary.

- Have at least one special/support teacher working as a special educator.

- Have parents being able to contact the school directly for student admissions.

Whilst the identification criteria for an inclusive school that the survey followed were unclear, as it did not define the term SEN or whether it encompassed only those with identified severe and mild SEN, nor did it mention the speciality that special educators should possess, it identified 41 inclusive schools across the six Lebanese provinces. These were mainly private schools, some of which were non-profit-making and others that were run on a commercial basis. The findings of this survey reflect the reality of the educational system in Lebanon, whereby very few mainstream schools accept disabled students requiring support provision and hence, most those who receive an education are still placed in special schools or are out of education altogether (Wehbi, 2007). It should be noted that in Lebanon NGOs play a significant role in supporting the inclusion of students requiring support provision in mainstream settings. Moreover, special schools are run by several NGOs and supported, in part, by MOSA. The students whose parents reside in regions far from special schools must be boarders (Thomas & Lakkis, 2003; Wehbi, 2007), thus being separated from their parents and siblings.

To conclude thus far, most students requiring support provision receive their education in or through special schools or other NGOs and very few secondary mainstream schools are open to these students. Despite inclusion being a

strongly desired goal in Lebanon, its implementation is still dependent on a host of variables, including the international support that GOs and NGOs receive, the efforts of NGOs to support students described as having SEN in mainstream education and in certain schools, the willingness of schools to be inclusive or part of an inclusive project. There is also the matter of the inclusive policy having sufficient backing from the authorities so as to be able to enforce the culture of inclusion in mainstream schools. If SVI wish to continue with their secondary stage of education, they have no choice but to do so through a mainstream school. To succeed in this, they can be supported by NGOs or special schools in mainstream schools that have inclusive provision and that are willing to accept them, if the NGOs or special schools can provide them with their required support needs. Alternatively, they need to manage the demands of secondary schooling for themselves. The presented range of inclusive initiatives and projects that have been implemented or are in the process of being so in Lebanon, demonstrates the different approaches that inclusive projects have been following, which have been aimed at mainstream schools through alliances by different organisations. As such, this has highlighted the disjointed efforts to create inclusive educational environments that currently exist in Lebanon. The above discussion has also highlighted the inconsistent use or rather undefined inclusion related terminology in the Lebanese context, which has most likely been exerting an influence on the implementation of inclusive policy in practice.

The structure of this thesis

In the subsequent chapter, I review the literature pertinent to the RQs that have been posed and define the terminologies that underpin these questions. In chapter 3, I present the research design and its methodology, including the strategies applied to identify the research sample, the procedure followed to gather data and the approaches used to analyse those gathered. In chapter 4, I present both the qualitative and quantitative results in light of the ecological system theory. In chapter 5, I reflect on the role of the researcher, the contribution of the research to knowledge, along with discussing the findings of the research, its limitations and their implications for policy and practice. Finally,

I conclude with a summary of the research findings and provide some recommendations for future consideration in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As discussed in Chapter 1, this research explores the school identification processes that students with vision impairment (SVI) and their parents in Lebanon follow, the experiences of those described as having SEN, specifically, those with vision impairment (VI), regarding their perception as well as from that of those who are connected to them and the existing inclusive practices in secondary mainstream education. In this chapter, I review the relevant literature in these three areas with a focus on the Middle East region, supported by examples from the available international literature.

I divide the literature review into three parts. In the first of these, I address the existing literature on the school identification processes that children described as having SEN and their parents follow when identifying a suitable school. The dearth of literature on school identification aimed specifically at SVI meant that it has also been necessary to present literature on school selection for students identified as having SEN, in general. Secondly I present a review of the literature relating to: a) the experiences and perceptions of disabled students in mainstream education, including regarding those with VI, b) the literature on perceptions of 'others around disabled students' towards inclusion, and c) the extant work on the perceptions about inclusive related barriers. Lastly, I present the relevant literature on inclusive policies, practices and provision before I conclude the chapter with a summary of the prior scholarship presented.

I should note that studies investigating issues related to disabled students, as established elsewhere (Gaad, 2011; Wehbi, 2012), regarding those described as having SEN generally and VI, specifically, are limited in the Middle East region, including in Lebanon. Therefore, relevant literature about disabled students as well as those described as having SEN from across the world, is reviewed with a key focus on the inclusion of people with VI. However, to situate pertinent literature within the context of the three RQs that I pose for this research, the reviewed literature is additionally positioned within a broader inclusive context in relation to inclusion in the Middle East region as well as across the world. Before presenting the reviewed literature, I describe first the context that underpins the research in relation to the key terms that constitute

the foundation of the three RQs and how they are understood regarding this research, namely, perceptions, inclusive education and inclusive practices.

2.1 Research context

2.1.1 Perceptions

Literature on perceptions seldom presents definitions (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011). Furthermore, the relevant terminology has been used interchangeably, e.g. opinions, perspectives, attitudes, views, thinking and beliefs. Indeed, perceptions have been considered to have a great impact on the implementation of inclusion and its practices, whereby positive perceptions can lead to positive influences on the acceptance of the concept of inclusion and the converse is true for negative perceptions. In fact, positive attitudes have been considered to constitute the beginning of IE (UNESCO, 2008). However, despite the fact that studies have shown that attitudes should be positive in order for inclusion to move forward, this should not be interpreted as meaning that positive attitudes are all that is required for it to be successfully implemented (Ellis et al., 2008). Attitudes can vary from one person to another within and between organisations. This is because they are influenced by a number of factors, including the ethos and background of the educationalists, the support provided for them and the extent to which this makes them feel supported and capable of performing their tasks in an inclusive manner. Having said this, many of the barriers experienced by students arise from pre-existing negative ways of thinking, which in turn, could reflect the culture of each institution (Ainscow, 2005), and thus, detrimentally influence the way inclusion is implemented in practice.

2.1.2 Inclusive education

Developments within education in many countries have been moving towards what is referred to as IE. Comparable to the concept of 'inclusion', IE is a term the precise meaning of which has been the subject of long lasting debate (Greenstein, 2014). It is aimed at ensuring that all children have access to an effective education within their communities (Armstrong & Barton, 2009; Bailey,

McWilliam, Buysse & Wesley, 1998). Broadly speaking, IE should be viewed as a process that promotes useful participation for all students, irrespective of their differences, abilities or disabilities. Hence, based on the belief that education is a fundamental human right and the foundation for an equal, more just and non-discriminatory society (Armstrong & Barton, 2009), IE can be seen as a process of strengthening the capacity of an education system to reach out to all learners as part of the process of recognising and engaging them as participants in communities and society (UNESCO-IBE, 2008).

In Lebanon, despite the efforts made to define IE from a broader sense by referring to all children, its use is still synonymous with the inclusion of disabled students and of those who require support provision or resourced provisions located in mainstream settings. Indeed, the movement towards IE is at different stages of development across the world including in Lebanon. This process has evolved from the exclusion of disabled students, mainly those who required support provision, from education, to segregating them in special schools, whether boarding or day schools, to the more recent integration or inclusion of these students in mainstream education (Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2015; Slee, 2011). In Italy, almost all special schools have been closed (D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009), whereas in Lebanon, special schools still play a fundamental role in the education of disabled students (Wehbi, 2006). However, the common target for most countries worldwide is to achieve IE, in spite of the continuous debate regarding whether it should only be focused on students described as having SEN, rather than being for all students regardless of their differences, as will be further explained in Subsection 2.1.3.

It has also been argued that the process of achieving IE is subject to socioeconomic and political change, which in turn are influenced by wider societal changes and ultimately, shaped by changes at the global, national and local levels (Goodley, 2007). Accordingly, this author contended that it is important not to import simplistic inclusive ideas from one nation to another, but rather, to think how these ideas can best be implemented on the national level. This is of great prominence as, in an era of globalisation, the potential success of a school can be threatened by its location in the market. Schools aspire to maintain standards and ultimately to attract high achieving students, which can

work in the opposite direction to the concept of IE (Ainscow, 2007). If educational institutions accept only those who are able to maintain their academic standards and to score high on league tables this will result in the continuing placement of students described as having SEN in special and segregated schools, or only being accepted in the primary stages of mainstream education, where performance is less accountable than that of secondary stages. This is of relevance to the Lebanese context in which private education is more valued by students and parents than public education (Abou-Nassif, 2011; Najjar, 2008). This is not least due to the former's superior performance in official exams when compared to that of the latter. In fact, the good reputation of the educational institution, their score in league tables and the achievements of their graduates are of great importance to Lebanese parents who do not have children identified as having SEN, who might thus prefer high attaining schools to inclusive and diverse ones. This underpins the continuous placement of disabled students in special schools or special provision and thus, militates against the achievement of IE irrespective of the continuing debate around its definition (Slee, 2011).

2.1.3 Inclusive educational practices

Like defining the term, views relating to implementing IE are contested. Whilst the apparent commitment to implementing it is growing worldwide, there is still no agreement on what this means in practice. More specifically, there is no agreement as to whether it means that all students - including those described as having SEN - should be able to join their local schools, be taught in the same classrooms by the same teacher using the same curriculum. Or whether it means that there should be only certain schools that are inclusive, where teachers would not be fully responsible for educating students described as having SEN, and that certain students of those requiring support provision cannot be fully included in mainstream classes or schools or even to study using the same curriculum as their peers.

Some scholars (Evans & Lunt, 2002) argue that the first step to implementing inclusion in practice is for the educational institution to embrace inclusive attitudes, to accept and can change, and to have the necessary resources in

support of implementing inclusion. Indeed, implementing IE in practice in a global North context (Croft, 2010) would require schools to apply student-centred learning and teaching approaches in meeting the different needs of all their students. Specifically, teachers need to accept and respect full responsibility for all their students, they need to apply differentiation in their teaching approaches and strategies, to receive relevant continuing professional development training, be able to engage all students in making decisions about learning and teaching and finally, it is essential that the whole school adopts the policy of inclusion. All of which, require a shift in the culture, organisation and expectations of schooling. In global South countries, however, inclusive agendas are very often built on different borrowed notions from the global North (Al-Daihani, 2011; Croft, 2010; Mohamed, 2011), resulting in practices that vary from one country to another and from one school to another within the same nation.

In Lebanon disability-related legislation is not enforced (Damaj, 2014) and instead, it is left in the hands of each school to judge the level of inclusion they will accept. In fact, inclusive practices in Lebanon are very often dictated during the implementation of an inclusive project influenced by non-governmental, governmental and international organisations, as Subsection 1.7.3 demonstrated. That is, these organisations play the main role in executing such IE projects, deciding upon the type of inclusion, the support provided and the adjustments to be made. They also decide on the required training as well as on the schools that they cooperate with.

Even though the number of schools asserting that they adhere to the policy of inclusion is growing, inclusive practices experienced by students described as having SEN in mainstream settings remains questionable. Some scholars (Sawhney, 2015) argue that schools adopting the principle of inclusion need to have a clear definition of what this means in practice, for failing to do so could result in their implementing superficial forms of inclusion. Enrolling students described as having SEN in mainstream education does not necessarily guarantee their participation (Croft, 2010; Farrell, 2004) nor does it ensure that they are experiencing inclusion. It has also been contended that practices at the classroom level can determine whether students stay at school, for how long

and what degree of academic and social success they achieve (Croft, 2010).

Furthermore, Goodley (2007) asserts that for inclusion to work it is not enough for a school to adapt its educational curriculum to the specific needs of particular students. Rather, it should reflect on the extent to which educational policy, pedagogy and teaching practices are 'socially just' throughout all educational stages as well as in the wider community. Inclusion demands changes at the macro, meso and micro levels. This involves, among other things, adopting government policies and initiatives that promote the social and educational inclusion of people who were previously not included in mainstream milieus; developing inclusive organisations, a curriculum and pedagogy in educational settings aimed at all learners, irrespective of their differences; and having educationalists who can adjust their teaching practices to meet the needs of all their learners (Goodley, 2007).

Having explained the key terms that underpin the posed RQs, in what follows, I present the reviewed literature in relation to each RQ sequentially.

2.2 School identification or school selection

Existing school selection policy in some countries, mainly those of the global North, emphasises the rights of parents to select the school that best meets theirs and their children's needs (Byrne, 2013; Mann, Cuskelly & Moni, 2015; Smithers & Robinson, 2010). However, practising the right of choosing can influence the pattern of placement of children. It can result in children with similar support requirements being educated in the same mainstream school, in resourced provision or in special schools (Byrne, 2013). This policy has created conflict between the regular or standard education that is based on assessments and level of attainment and that of the inclusive model (Evans & Lunt, 2002). Whilst the former emphasises and supports parental choice of schools for their children, its consequences can lead schools to compete for high attaining students, for parents to look for educational institutions that meet their requirements (Bagley & Woods, 1998) and ultimately for students requiring support provision not to be accepted in certain schools for fear that they will lower the level of education of the school. In contrast, the inclusive model calls

for creating an educational system that takes into consideration the individual differences that exist between students. Consequently, maintaining standard educational agendas has a tendency to reproduce social and academic segregation for those identified as having SEN, in particular, those with severe and complex needs, by supporting schools to select the academically most able children and to reject those who may constitute a risk to the performance of schools in league tables.

Studies in the global North, including in the UK and USA, have indicated that parents, as consumers of school services, consider certain factors when selecting a suitable school for their child and academic outcomes have been commonly reported as being the most important factor (Bast & Walhberg, 2003; Flatley, Connolly & Higgins, 2001). Other reported factors are schools' discipline, emphasis on good exam results, nearness to place of residence (Hunter, 1991), an elder child already in attendance, convenience for travelling, the denomination of the school and the child's preference, together with the socioeconomic status of the parents when compared to that of the students in the school (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz 1996; Smithers & Robinson, 2010).

Similarly, in Lebanon, different factors could influence students' decisions in relation to a suitable educational institution. This has been found in a study conducted by Abou-Nassif (2011), who surveyed 720 students from 12 different schools located in six different cities in the country. The author identified that parents, friends and financial considerations were the main factors affecting student decisions when selecting an educational institution. As the participants were in their final schooling year and intending to attend HE, the research demonstrated the influence that parents in Lebanon have on the educational decisions of their children throughout their schooling. The study also demonstrated the value that Lebanese students and their parents have for education, in general and particularly for private education.

Studies that have investigated issues related to school selection for those described as having SEN are generally scarce. Furthermore, the majority of what is available is dated and pertains to the global North context (Byrne, 2013). Broadly speaking, scholars have ascertained that parents of disabled students can have different preferences for school selection to parents of non-

disabled students. For example, academic attainment was not reported to be the most important factor when identifying a suitable educational institution for their disabled children. Instead, issues related to the support requirements of their children were found to constitute a major concern to this population (Ysseldyke, Lange & Gorney, 1994). On the other side of the coin, some parents of non-disabled children have decided to send their children to non-inclusive schools in the belief that children described as having SEN will take a lot of teachers' time and thus, they will lower the educational level of the school (Bagley, Woods, & Woods, 2001). Parental school preference for their disabled children has been illustrated in a study conducted by Bagley and his colleagues, who investigated the influence of restructuring the school system in England in the 1990s for parents of children described as having SEN, transferring from primary to secondary education. By analysing qualitative and quantitative data on parental preference and perceptions in school identification, the authors concluded that while the responses indicated that parents wanted their children to succeed to their highest ability, none of them cited academic-related reasons for choosing a school. Likewise, very few of those who completed questionnaire surveys ranked academic-related factors as the most important for selecting a school for their child (Bagley, Woods & Glatter, 2001). I should note that similar to an array of studies on the topic of SEN, the term was not defined in the study. Providing some explanation of the ways terminology was used in the study would have given a better understanding of the population covered by the research.

Similarly, Byrne (2013) in his literature review on school identification found that the following factors have an impact on parents' decisions when identifying a secondary school for their child who required support provision: the age of the child, the nature and degree of the SEN; the socioeconomic status of the parents; the child's experience of inclusion in primary education; the secondary schools' philosophy, capacity and perceived commitment to SEN; beliefs about teacher's skills, knowledge, capacity and attitudes; and the influence of other people, for example family, friends and professionals. Once again, academic factors in this literature review were not found to have an influence on parents' decisions. Rather, issues related to the support requirements of their children and the readiness of the school and its staff for inclusion were of more concern.

Other factors that can influence parental selection of suitable mainstream schools for their children who are identified as having SEN are the reputation of the school and informal knowledge - positive and negative - that parents acquire from one another regarding certain schools. Lilley (2014) interviewed 22 mothers with children identified with autism in Australia about their school choice. The study revealed the influence of informal knowledge that the mothers gathered from one another regarding selecting suitable schools and provision for their children. This informal knowledge was informed by the treatment that the students received at school, as well as the environment and the school's readiness for inclusion that parents may share with one another.

The experience of parents of children described as having SEN in mainstream education and the ability of different educational stages to meet their children's needs also has its influence on school preference. Hotulainen and Takala (2014) conducted a survey of parents of 219 children described as having SEN in Helsinki, Finland, regarding how their views on important aspects of integration correlated with actual experiences in the mainstream education of their child. The quantitatively analysed data indicated that the parents' actual experiences were affected by teacher performance and the self-worth of their children. Teachers at the primary level were evaluated as being more skilful at meeting these needs than those at the secondary level, whereas at secondary level, the teaching was more individualised than at the primary level. Secondly, a child's self-worth was shown to be higher when integrated into the neighbourhood school. However, the authors used the term 'integration' to refer solely to the inclusion of children described as having SEN and hence, this might not have involved preparing the educational environment so as to be inclusive for all students irrespective of their differences.

As pointed out in the first chapter, there is a global trend towards educating disabled students who require support provision in the same environment as their non-disabled counterparts. However, despite most countries purporting to implement inclusion policies in mainstream settings, the number of students who receive their education in special settings has not significantly dropped (Armstrong, 2003; Jenkinson, 1998; Norwich, 2014; Rieser, 2000). In addition, although the number of children described as having SEN in nursery and

primary mainstream education has increased (Plaisance, 2009), the number of those who manage to continue and complete their schooling in mainstream settings has not followed suit. For example, in France, Plaisance (2009) reported that whilst the increase of the number of children requiring support provision joining mainstream education has increased at early educational stages (nursery and early primary), parents face problems in continuing to educate their children in the same settings due to the unwillingness of the mainstream schools to carry on doing so.

Similarly, the struggle that parents whose children have severe impairments face to keep their children in the same setting was reported in a study conducted by Mann (2015). The researcher reported the narrative of a mother in Australia revealing first her struggle in finding a mainstream school that would accept her son, and then the struggle to continue educating her son in the same environment. This led the mother to change educational placements for her son from mainstream to special settings and back to mainstream (Mann, Cuskelly & Moni 2015). Despite the author not claiming any generalisability, this study provided an example of what parents could encounter when identifying a suitable school for the education of their children, especially those children with severe impairments.

It has also been found that not all parents of disabled students select a mainstream school for the education of their children, with some still preferring a segregated setting. Indeed, different factors can influence parental decisions to opt for either a special or a mainstream school. This has been revealed in a study conducted by Knill and Humphreys (1996) in the UK, who interviewed 13 parents from two mainstream primary schools, and another 12 from a special primary school. The findings indicated differences in terms of needs and expectations between the two groups. They demonstrated that parents of the special school students were more concerned about the social and emotional well-being of their children rather than their educational outcomes. Whilst it could be argued that the small scale of this study (25 participants) makes the generalisability of the findings questionable, they are however supported by several other studies. For example, Byrne (2013), in his literature review of the factors that influence parents of children described as having SEN when

identifying a secondary school for their children, noted that decisions made by those who preferred special schools were influenced by the small class sizes, specialist teachers and their capacity to provide one-to-one attention in the classroom and the school at large. This shows the interest of parents of children described as having SEN in the well-being of their children.

This has also been confirmed in other studies investigating the matter from the perspectives of disabled students themselves. For example, McVilly and his colleagues (2006) explored the attitudes of people with cognitive impairment regarding their experience of inclusion in Australia. The authors found that the participants valued friendships with people who shared the same disability as them. In fact, they believed that shared life experiences associated with disability had contributed to building social inclusion. It also emerged that the participants valued friendships with people who are not disabled, although often for providing practical assistance with problems (McVilly, Stancliffe, Parmenter & Burton-Smith, 2006). These findings suggest that policy makers need to consider the importance of connections between and amongst different groups of disabled students and their non-disabled peers as essential components of inclusion.

Further factors related to selecting either special or mainstream settings for children were identified by Jenkinson (1998). Amongst 193 parents from a parental support group in Victoria, Australia, 7% reported having a child with a mild disability, 40% a moderate disability, 43% a severe disability and 10% a profound disability. Whilst all the participating parents mentioned the importance of the school environment for their school identification, such as social acceptance and peer relationships, differences between parents of students in different settings also existed. For instance, it was reported that parents who sent their children to mainstream schools gave a higher rating to normalisation and educational aspects, whilst those with children in special settings rated special programmes and teacher-child ratios as highly important. The study also identified that parents favoured first mainstream primary education then special settings as secondary school approached. This was mainly because they believed that the social and academic gap started to widen between their children and their non-disabled peers in mainstream education,

mainly for those with moderate and severe impairments and also because they believed that their children's curriculum needed to address independent living skills.

Other findings of the study were that parents of children requiring support provision were more concerned about the social and special needs of their children than their academic attainment; and that children with mild and moderate impairments were likely to be in mainstream settings, whilst nearly half of those with severe and profound ones were in special schools (Jenkinson, 1998). It should be noted that the adopted definitions for the categorisations of disabilities were unclear and therefore, could easily be interpreted differently by different participants. However, Jenkinson's findings closely matched the assertions of a number of authors that schools are more likely to include those with mild impairment as opposed to those with severe and profound impairments and that parents of children with the foremost type of impairment would prefer a mainstream environment for the education of their children (Rapp & Arndt, 2012).

Several of the studies mentioned above revealed that social inclusion is one of the main motives for parents in school selection. De Boer et al. (2011), in their literature review, however, found that mainstream and segregated educational institutions did not help in building social relationships and the limited available research on the topic suggests that disabled students are not popular in either mainstream or special schools.

The social inclusion of students described as having SEN and parental concern was echoed in a purposively selected three-case study into inclusive provision in government schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Alborno and Gaad (2014) investigated, among others, the views of parents of disabled and non-disabled students in the UAE about the enrolment of disabled students in mainstream education. They reported that whilst parents often felt relieved when their children got a place in a mainstream school, concerns about the inclusion of their children remained. The focus of these concerns was a reduction in teachers' attention towards their children, and the possibility that their children would face bullying. The authors reported both on positive attitudes that some parents of non-disabled students had towards accepting

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disabled students in mainstream classes, as well as their fears over the implications of inclusion on the development and academic attainment of their own children. Alborno and Gaad (2014) pointed out that accepting disabled students in governmental schools has been a requirement of the Federal Law of the UAE since 2006, but that this still relies on the ability of schools to meet their needs. For, when failing to do so, the headteacher can request transferring the student to another school or institution. However, the authors did not clarify how parents chose the schools their children went to or what factors drove their choice of school.

It should be noted that the majority of mainstream schools in the UAE and across the Middle East routinely deny students described as having SEN, who require support provision, entry to their schools. Moreover, existing national disability legislation often mandates government schools to accept disabled students but not privately run ones, unless private schools opt to accept them. A study conducted by Bradshaw, Tennant and Lydiatt (2004) elicited that many private schools in Dubai do not accept disabled students at all. The reasons for this include limited funding allocated for these students and/or the limited expertise to provide appropriate services for this group. Again, the authors found that children with severe impairments are not able to enter mainstream education in its entirety, often because parents are told that there are no services for their children in these schools. Parents are instead left to find appropriate programmes for their children themselves and as a result, many families either send their children to special schools or can even keep their children at home. This situation remains common in the UAE, as private schools are exempt from the Federal law of 2006 and governmental schools are able to work around it by requesting the students transfer. Furthermore, private schools that do accept those described as having SEN can require parents to pay or to contribute to the additional expenses caused by their children's disability, thereby further excluding children (Tennant & Lydiatt, 2004).

The situation across countries of the global South, including in Sudan (Mohamed, 2011) as well as in Lebanon, is similar to that of the UAE. Khochen and Radford's (2012) study in Lebanon highlights the negative as well as the positive perceptions of some parents towards having their children enrolled in

the same classroom with disabled students. The authors also established that accepting disabled students in private mainstream education in Lebanon is down to the school and the organisations that support disabled students in the country, rather than any policy directive from the government.

Ultimately, schools in Lebanon are still selective about what type and degree of impairment they welcome, and do not have the financial support or the physical and human resources to meet the needs of disabled students. In addition to this, many schools adopt the policy of not accepting disabled students with identified special needs (Brousse-Chamichian et al., 2000). The existing disability legislation (Law 220) states the right of disabled students to receive their education in mainstream settings. However, this law does not have the mechanisms to mandate its implementation and thus, it remains unenforced (Damaj, 2014). Hence, it has been left in the hands of schools and their leaders to judge the level of their inclusivity and the type and degree of SEN they can accept in their schools.

The reviewed literature suggests that school selection policy, when available, has an influence on the school identifications that parents follow. However, when these policies are non-existent and disability-related rights are not acted upon there is little or sometimes no school choice for those requiring support provision. Furthermore, parental school selection does not necessarily reflect their choice of school. Factors that impact on school identification include the type and severity of the impairment, the educational stage, teachers' expertise, the background of the parents, the support available and the information about inclusive schools that parents receive.

2.3 Experiences and perspectives of disabled students of mainstream education

A wealth of published international research has explored the perceptions of educational professionals towards their experience of the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream education (Howgego, Miles & Meyers, 2014). As the focus of the literature for the past decade has been, to a large extent, on the attitudes of educationalists towards the inclusion of disabled children in primary

mainstream education, some scholars have asserted that there is a shortage of literature exploring the experience of disabled students themselves, mainly in relation to their educational and social inclusion in more advanced phases of education e.g. in secondary and higher education (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; Claiborne, Cornforth, Gibson & Smith, 2011; Soorenian, 2013). What follows is a review of literature relating to the perceptions of disabled students of their experience of mainstream education, followed by those of their educationalists.

Including those with vision impairment

In an attempt to enhance the experience of disabled people in mainstream education, interest in involving and listening to this population has been growing for the last two decades. Some scholars contend that listening to the experiences of disabled students and fully involving them in issues related to their education can better inform inclusive practices (Adderley, Hope, Hughes, Jones, Messiou & Shaw, 2015; French & Swain, 2004; Vlachou & Papananou, 2014; Wilson & Jade, 1999).

Involving disabled people in studies that are of relevance to them is a relatively new phenomenon. Consequently, those that seek the views of disabled students, in general and those canvassing the perspectives of students with VI specifically, are still very scarce (Whitburn, 2014a). Studies that involve this population in countries of the global South are even rarer (Katsui & Koistinen 2008; Vlachou & Papananou, 2014). However, the available literature has consistently discussed the unfair treatment disabled students receive in mainstream environments. For example, Asbjørnslett and her colleagues (2015) explored the ways in which disabled children experience participation and inclusion in their everyday school life. They interviewed fifteen Norwegian children identified as having SEN. These were started during the last year of their primary school and were completed at the beginning of their secondary school attendance. The children's responses demonstrated the disproportionate support provided for them by school aides and limited support from their teachers. The interviewees also reported their limited contribution to formal school meetings that dealt with academic issues and individual assistance (Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud & Helseth, 2015). The findings of this study highlight

the limited consultation and autonomy that disabled participants were exposed to on issues relating to their educational preferences, whereby they did not contribute to decisions that could lead to enhancing their inclusion and participation.

Equally, Egilson (2014) conducted a qualitative study investigating the experience and views of seven Icelandic young adults with physical impairment, between the ages of 17 and 19 years, regarding their present and past schooling experiences. By conducting a total of 17 interviews with the seven secondary school students, supplemented by observations and data from their primary school years, the findings demonstrated the continuing limited opportunities that were given to participants to engage in school activities as well as a lack of consultation regarding their preferences. Moreover, the data revealed that the secondary schooling environment was less adapted for disabled students' educational and social needs than the primary school environment had been (Egilson, 2014). This supports the assertion that mainstream school support services are less appropriate for older disabled children (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007) than for those available during earlier stages of schooling.

In their qualitative study, Vlachou and Papananou (2014) explored the perceptions of disabled students about different aspects of school experience in primary and secondary education in Greece. 32 disabled university students were interviewed and their narratives analysed. The findings showed that the interviewees went to mainstream schools either due to their lack of knowledge regarding the availability or the unsuitability of the location of special schools. Furthermore, it emerged that the mainstream schools lacked the appropriate support systems, services, resources or training, which in turn, resulted in unfair treatment of these students throughout their education. The interviews also demonstrated how students had to adjust to the educational environment instead of having one that welcomed them regardless of their differences (Vlachou & Papananou, 2014). The findings of this study are consistent with that of Egilson (2014), which indicated disabled students have not fully experienced inclusion in mainstream education.

Vlachou and Papananou's findings are also echoed in a 2014 study of the

experiences of SVI in Queensland, Australia. Whitburn (2014a) conducted face-to-face individual interviews, as well as focus groups, with five SVI. Whitburn was himself an insider in the field of disability and had received his schooling in a similar educational setting as the participants. His findings revealed unfair treatment of the participants in mainstream schools that appeared to have perpetuated their exclusion. The researcher further noted the similarity in experiences that he had had in mainstream education over a decade earlier in terms of both limited autonomy and support (Whitburn, 2013). Considering the time gap between the experience of school inclusion that the researcher had versus those of the interviewees, it would seem reasonable to argue that inclusion was and still is, applied in terms of physical inclusion, which does not necessarily lead to social inclusion (Tuttle & Tuttle 2004), nor does it lead to educational inclusion.

In investigation to the 'living a life with a physical disability in Taiwan, Lin and her colleagues (2014) held in-depth interviews with seven purposively selected adults with physical impairments. Through these interviews, the researchers developed their grounded theory, 'it is more than just the impaired body' (p. 8), reflecting the daily experience of living with a 'physical disability' on that island from their perspective. The responses revealed the interaction between the individuals and structural factors, demonstrating the social, political and attitudinal issues that these participants encounter on daily basis. I should note that whilst the authors distinguished between the terms 'impairment' and 'disability' in their study, they did not define these two terms or explained how they differentiated between them. Failing to do so, makes their findings difficult to interpret. To illustrate, all their participants had physical impairment, but were referred to as having a 'physical disability'. Given the authors constructed the grounded theory, 'it is more than the impaired body', this would have necessitated defining the term 'impairment' as well as drawing a clear distinction between what it means as compared with 'disability' in their work.

Other literature has gathered the perceptions of disabled people of mainstream or segregated education. Studies on this topic generally demonstrate the neutral contribution that special schools have offered and still offer for disabled students.

In research exploring the individual perceptions, experiences and preferences of disabled students regarding special or mainstream schools, Shah (2007) consulted 30 disabled students between the ages of 13 and 25 in the UK. The findings revealed that mainstream schools have not embraced full inclusion and continue to disempower disabled students with exclusionary procedures and practices. The study ascertained that in spite of advancements in inclusion-related legislation, a great deal of change is still required within mainstream schools before disabled students can experience inclusion (Shah, 2007). Whilst the evidence in favour of disabled people being in special school environments is scarce, the author argued that such schools should continue to exist, so that such students, along with their parents, can have a choice in relation to what is the most suitable educational placement for them (Shah 2007).

In another study, Shah and her colleagues investigated the perceptions of 20 people, disabled since birth, in the UK, about the influence of their educational setting on their transition to adulthood. Their sample group, born between 1950 and 1970, experienced education at either special or mainstream schools, or combinations of both settings. The authors found that disabled students are less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to pursue the academic subjects of their choice, due to certain physical and educational limitations. However, they concluded that neither of the two environments have an adverse effect on the career success of disabled people (Shah, Travers & Arnold, 2004). The experience of the participating disabled students in either setting dates back to before the concept of inclusion became the target to be achieved in different countries, including the UK, which is where the participants received their schooling. Considering the changes in educational provision that implementing inclusion has brought about and the increase in the number of disabled students reaching HE (Strnadováab, Hájkovác & Květoňovác, 2015), one could argue that these findings would not be replicated, if the participants were at HE during the beginning of this century. Nonetheless, barriers facing the implementation of inclusion are still numerous and to a certain extent enduring (Armstrong & Barton, 2009).

2.3.2 Perceptions of others around disabled students (educationalists who are directly or indirectly connected to them)

A growing body of literature has recognised that the perceptions towards disabled people and their inclusion in mainstream milieu are influenced by an array of different factors. These factors include the type and severity of the impairment, the gender of the educationalists, these people's prior training and their level of exposure to disabled people. There is some consensus and some disagreement in the literature regarding the influence on perceptions of the different groups. For example, there is general agreement that those who have had previous exposure to disabled people, as well as those with professional training, tend to have more positive attitudes towards disabled people (Al-Abdulwahab & Al-Gain, 2003; Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2008; Walton & Rusznyak, 2014). The literature also suggests that the variation in attitudes towards different types of impairment is the result of such factors as cultural values, living environment, age and level of exposure to disabled people (Nagata, 2007).

A large body of literature has investigated the perceptions of professionals towards inclusion in mainstream education in the countries of both the global North and South. This is apparent in Scruggs and Mastropieri's (1996) review of the literature on inclusion from 1958 to 1995. This highlighted the focus on the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion and towards disabled students (cited in Berry, 2011). Whilst this review explored the available literature in the second half of the previous century, investigating the perceptions of professionals towards inclusion has remained the focus of relevant literature for the first decade of this century, despite changes in inclusive policies and provisions worldwide.

Despite extensive enquiry into perceptions, the literature has been consistent that perceptions could be negative, neutral or positive, but no fully positive perception of inclusion has yet been reached. For example, Avramidis and Norwich's (2002) review of international literature on integration/inclusion uncovered 'evidence of positive attitudes, but at the same time it reported no evidence of acceptance of total inclusion or 'zero reject' approach to special educational provision' (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002, p. 129). Another review of

the empirical research, conducted by de Boer et al. (2011) in the UK, similarly revealed that most teachers held neutral or negative perceptions about the inclusion of students described as having SEN in mainstream primary schools.

Studies exploring perceptions across the Arab world have also confirmed that there are no fully positive attitudes towards inclusion existing in the region as yet. Nonetheless, some shift in perceptions of inclusion from negative to positive is evident in the available literature. Alghazo (2002) explored the attitudes of 337 Jordanian teachers and administrators towards disabled students and their inclusion in mainstream education. He randomly selected them from 18 mainstream and special schools. Using the 'Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons' (ATDP) scale and the 'Mainstreaming Attitude Scale' (MAS), which were derived and amended by the author from the literature, the study revealed generally negative attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream education. Responses also favoured those with mild LD over those with severe learning difficulties (SLD), described in the study as having 'mental retardation', who received the most negative attitudes from educators towards their inclusion (Alghazo, 2002). One could argue that special school educationalists would have different views on inclusion to those of mainstream educationalists. Consequently, reporting the responses of these two groups jointly might have reduced or increased one's bias towards the other.

The scale of Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons (ATWP) developed by Antonak (1982, 1998(was applied by Nagata (2007), who conducted a pilot study aimed at assessing existing attitudinal barriers towards disabled people in four communities of Jordan. By surveying 199 randomly selected participants, her findings confirmed the negative attitudes towards disabled persons documented in earlier focus groups run in 2005 in that country by the same author. Based on the findings of this study, Nagata compared the attitudes of Jordan's participants with the attitudes of 94 university students towards five different types of impairments in Lebanon (Nagata, 2008). Her findings indicated a similar degree of negative attitudes. However, the 94 university students who took part in the later study favoured those with physical and sensory impairments, followed by those with an intellectual impairment and finally those with mental illness. The research highlighted the negative public

attitudes towards people with intellectual impairment and mental illness in Lebanon (Nagata, 2008).

More recently, Khochen and Radford (2012) explored the attitudes of 40 teachers of the primary education across six private inclusive mainstream schools in Lebanon and interviewed five leaders of inclusive institutions. Whilst the findings revealed generally positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students described as having SEN, the participating teachers demonstrated a reluctance to include all students in their classrooms, especially those with SEBD. The interviewed leaders, additionally, expressed a reluctance to include those with intellectual impairment. In contrast to the above studies, this one's findings revealed a shift in attitudes in the Middle East region from negative, which was found in the literature of the first decade of this century, to generally more positive in relation to the inclusion of disabled students in more recent years. Nevertheless, consistent with the other studies, it emerged that some types of difficulties and/or impairments were less favoured in this regard than others.

The literature above demonstrates that learners with 'SLD' (as referred to in the UK), 'mentally retarded' (as referred to in the USA) or 'intellectually or mentally impaired or retarded' (as referred to in the Middle East region), together with those categorised as having SEBD, are the groups that receive the least favourable attitudes towards their inclusion (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2014; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Khochen & Radford, 2012; Mohamed, 2011; Nagata, 2007). The influence of the type of disability on existing attitudes has been presented above. Nonetheless, factors that influence educationalists' perceptions are numerous and can influence existing perceptions in different ways. For example, there is consensus among scholars regarding the influence of the level of the support provided for educationalists and the severity of the impairment on the attitudes of educationalists. Evidence for this can be found in a study that investigated the attitudes of primary mainstream teachers towards the inclusion of students with intellectual impairment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Memisevic and Hodzic (2011) surveyed 194 teachers from eight different schools using the 'Attitudes Towards Inclusion' (ATI) questionnaire designed by Cornoldi and his co-workers in 1998. The findings elicited that

teachers did not believe they were sufficiently supported to deal with these students or that those with intellectual impairment could be included in mainstream education.

The literature has also shown a correlation between the gender of educationalists, their age, exposure to disability and their training in SEN in relation to variation in attitudes toward inclusion. A study that probed the perceptions of secondary mainstream school teachers regarding the inclusion of disabled students in New-Delhi (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014) involved 479 teachers completing questionnaires using the 'Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Scale' (ATIES) developed by Wilczenski (1995). The analysed data showed that teachers had generally positive attitudes towards inclusion. However, the study also found that male teachers, those younger than 40 years-old, those with less than 10 years teaching experience, those with postgraduate qualifications and those who had prior contact with a disabled person were more positive about inclusion. Additionally, it was reported that both those who had a focus on disability in their pre-service training programme and those who did not have this tended to be generally positive about inclusive education; however, the former group were more so than the latter (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014). The positive attitudes among educationalists who had no disability focus in their training programmes would appear to reflect the change in attitudes towards disability and inclusion in recent years, despite the literature consistently attributing the positive attitudes to the influence of training on changing attitudes.

Several recent studies have elicited the influence of relevant training on changing attitudes. Regarding which, Peebles and Mendaglio (2014) explored the impact of an inclusive course and its practical experience on pre-service teachers' self-efficacy for teaching in inclusive classrooms. The authors collected data from 141 participants enrolled on a university course in West Canada. Their findings demonstrated significant gains in self-efficacy for both the inclusion course and in relation to practical experience. The outcomes indicated that participants with prior experience with people with exceptional needs had significantly higher levels of self-efficacy than those without. The findings also revealed that both groups experienced significant gains after

taking the course and practical experience (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014).

Consistent with this, Male (2011) investigated the attitudes of 48 teachers enrolled on an introductory Special and Inclusive Education Masters module in the UK by collecting quantitative data at the beginning and the end of the module. The findings revealed a significant positive shift in attitudes of teachers towards inclusion at the end of the module compared to those at the beginning. However, differences in attitudes among educationalists persisted in the literature.

To summarise, no full acceptance of inclusion yet exists in countries of the global North or South. However, it has been argued that countries of the former have both more experience of, and are more comfortable implementing, IE than those of the latter (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011). In the USA disabled students join mainstream schools routinely and receive full or partial instruction from mainstream teachers, who feel capable of supporting them, as opposed to relying on specialised teachers to provide them with the necessary support (Brownell & Pajares, 1999). This issue has been illustrated by a study conducted by Berry who led focus groups to explore the views of 46 general education teachers in the USA regarding what newly-qualified teachers would need to know about teaching disabled students. The responses pertained to a focus on general issues rather than those specifically related to disability, such as instruction, knowing the child, training/resources, policies/procedures, classroom dynamics, communication with colleagues, self-development, parent–teacher relationships and understanding inclusion (Berry, 2011). This contrasts with countries in the global South, where teachers tend to feel unsupported (Gaad & Khan, 2007); perceive that they do not have the necessary physical, human and financial support (Khochen & Radford, 2012); and do not feel able/are not well prepared to teach inclusively.

Influenced by the social or medical models of inclusion, educationalists' perceptions of disabled people can be summarised as either being about the person with the impairment or about the society that disables those with a disability from performing their lives in an equal manner to others (Finkelstein, 2002). A pilot study conducted by Opdal and his colleagues (2001) examined the attitudes of 90 primary teachers at six different schools in Palestine towards

the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream education and the factors that were influencing teachers' attitudes. 81 (90%) of the teachers expressed a need for change in public schools to meet the needs of those described as having SEN. Their focus of interest for building their own competence was on knowledge and skills that could empower them as teachers, not on knowledge about the students' disabling impairments and or difficulties. However, in the same study, when asked about the preferred applied model of inclusion, nearly half of those who were positive about inclusion preferred applying partial inclusion for their disabled students (Opdal, Wormnæs & Habayeb, 2001). Even though the study did not specify in which subjects the teachers would prefer to include their disabled students in mainstream classes and in which subjects there should be special classes, it found that teachers preferred special classes for those with severe and intellectual impairment.

Subject teachers very often seek or receive support based on the different impairments and difficulties that they have in their classrooms rather than being prepared to include everyone in their classes. With the aim of determining teachers' views on the types of inclusion suitable for disabled students in an educational environment in Israel, general education teachers were asked to create a best scenario model for the implementation of inclusion. They failed to reach a barrier-free scenario, instead suggesting ideas for improving the current exclusive situation (Shani & Koss, 2014). Such findings point to the limited knowledge that many educators possess regarding the requirements of an inclusive school.

In the UAE, Gaad and Khan (2007) examined the attitudes of expatriate primary mainstream teachers towards inclusion in the large private sector in Dubai. They found that primary private mainstream school teachers in the emirate believe that students who require support provision lack the necessary skills to be on the same educational level as their peers. Furthermore, according to the study, the teachers felt burdened by having to meet different needs in their classrooms. The findings uncover a medical model of thinking, whereby students identified as having SEN are still considered to be the cause of the problem. These researchers also found that teachers believed additional training, support from administrators and access to related services and

resources were necessary for them to be able to meet the needs of their students identified as having SEN (Gaad & Khan, 2007).

Jafar (2003) investigated the major barriers to inclusion of students described as having SEN in mainstream education in Jordan. Teachers reported a number of barriers, of which, the limited progress of students who required support provision was the most frequently mentioned. In Lebanon, Rizic (2007) explored the obstacles teachers can face for including those with SEN in their classes, which again appears to support the assumption of the medical model of disability that endorses the belief that students with SEN are the cause of the problem.

Gaad (2001) researched the education of pupils with Down's syndrome in the UAE. Conducting qualitative research, she interviewed their parents as well as professionals and policy makers. She also undertook a series of observations in classes for students with Down's syndrome and their teachers. The evidence highlighted the negative attitudes towards those with 'mental disabilities', in general, and those with Down's syndrome, in particular. The researcher, however, reported a noticeable change in the language used when addressing people with Down's syndrome. This suggests that despite the change in the language used in relation to disability, the medical perceptions towards disabled people still exist.

The medical perception is further reflected in the question whether having disabled peers in the same classroom lowers the achievement of non-disabled peers, which is pertinent in the literature. In fact, some educationalists believe that the inclusion of pupils described as having SEN in mainstream classes can have an adverse effect on the educational attainment of their non-disabled peers and lower the ranking of the school in league tables (Barton & Slee, 1999; Chapman, Ainscow, Miles & West, 2011). In contrast, inclusion advocates argue for the advantages of including disabled students due to the adaptability of the educational environment and the availability of human assistants, which can be useful for disabled students as well as for non-disabled students (Berry, 2011; Rapp & Arndt, 2012; Rieser, 2008). This positive perception has been demonstrated in a review of the literature on the benefits of inclusion for 'students with disabilities' (Salend & Garrick, 1999 cited in Berry, 2011), which

revealed a number, including gains in academic achievement for them as well as for students without disabilities. However, research on this topic is controversial regarding the academic benefits for both groups, because of the dominant culture of low expectations for students described as having SEN (Chapman et al., 2011) and the extensive support that this population can require, as Section 2.4 further explains.

Other research evidence indicates that inclusion has no adverse influence on the academic attainment of both groups. This has been supported in a study conducted by Ruijs and her colleagues (2010) investigating the influence of the inclusion of disabled students in primary mainstream education on the educational attainment and socioemotional functioning of non-disabled students. By selecting a representative sample of 27,745 non-disabled students in Dutch primary education in a large cohort study, they assessed academic attainment using a language and arithmetic test together with assessing their socio-emotional functioning using a student-teacher questionnaire and a non-verbal IQ test to measure the students' intelligence. The students who did not require support provision were divided into several groups: non-disabled students with no, a few and more than a few students with certain types of impairment and/or difficulties in their class. Multi-level regression analyses were used to compare these groups and no major differences were found between the different groups' academic attainment. The findings would appear to support the principles of inclusion (Ruijs, Van der Veen & Peetsma, 2010) as they provide evidence that the inclusion of disabled students does not influence the educational attainment of either groups.

Similarly, when the low attainment of those described as having SEN in mainstream schools is recognised, it should not be linked to inclusion, as the low attainment of these students can also occur in special schools (Cook, Swain & French, 2001). This low attainment has also been demonstrated in a study conducted by the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU) in 2003 in Lebanon. The researchers asked 200 disabled graduates from special schools aged 14-38 to answer questionnaires about their educational and vocational achievements (Thomas & Lakkis, 2003). The findings indicated that 40 of the 200 graduates could not read or write, and that almost half of them did not

complete their intermediate stage of education. This, according to the authors, reflected the alarming reality of the educational attainment of Lebanese special school graduates (Thomas & Lakkis 2003). Whilst this study had serious methodological shortcomings, particularly since it did not provide explanation of how the level of attainment of the surveyed students was measured, the culture of low attainment of disabled students is consistent with the general literature (Smith & Douglas, 2014).

2.3.3 Perceptions about inclusive-related barriers

The literature suggests that barriers facing the implementation of inclusion are in many circumstances universal. They can take the form of attitudinal, institutional, environmental, and/or physical barriers (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Strnadováab et al., 2015). There are major issues facing inclusion in countries of the global South (Croft, 2010) including inaccessible physical educational environment; the lack of proximity of inclusive schools to place of residence; limited educational materials and resources; the introductory nature of available inclusive training or lack of it; lack of qualified individuals in disability; lack of data regarding the prevalence of disability (Parmenter, 2012); the limited enforcement of disability legislation (Damaj, 2014; Kabbara, N. 2013; Khochen & Radford, 2012); limited disability support services; and limited evidence-based research on disability and inclusion.

The literature related to the perceptions of barriers to inclusion includes a study conducted by Wilkinson-Meyers et al. (2014), who held eight focus groups with 49 disabled people with sensory, physical and intellectual impairments in New Zealand. Inaccessible environments, negative attitudes, unreliable transportation and poor access to information were found to be key barriers facing disabled people in their day-to-day activities. Notably, difficulty in accessing information is a universal barrier acutely affecting people with VI. This additional finding is supported by a study conducted by Bishop and Rhind (2011), who explored the lived experiences of university students with VI in the UK. By conducting semi-structured interviews with nine SVI, the authors identified several issues to have constituted challenges to their participating students, including lack of accessible materials, difficulty in allocating places

and poor lighting (Bishop & Rhind, 2011).

The universality of the barriers to inclusion were also echoed in a study that looked at the influence of learning English on the lives of disabled people across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region including in Lebanon. Khochen (2013) interviewed 47 disabled people with VI in either one-to-one or group interviews from 13 different countries of the region. The research was aimed at investigating the enablers and barriers that people with VI face in their respective countries when learning English. The reported barriers included limited accessible English learning materials, needing to change the method of accessing information at a later stage of life, transportation to and from the teaching centres, inaccessible teaching environments, limited opportunities to practise spoken English and difficulties in managing English spelling (Khochen, 2013).

Considering the large geographical scope of the research covering the MENA region together with its small sample (47 participants), one could argue that whilst the study had identified the general challenges that face disabled English learners across the region, learning about the specific challenges facing English SVI in each country of the region would require investigating those in each country separately. Barriers facing SVI are further supported by studies based in Africa, especially where projects targeting the inclusion of SVI have been implemented. Lynch and McCall (2010) ascertained that the inclusion of SVI in Malawi, especially those residing in rural areas, face major barriers. They are 'educationally vulnerable, more likely to begin school late, repeat years and drop out' (Lynch & McCall, 2010, p. 32). In Kenya, SVI who attend education face fundamental issues including a lack of text in large print for those who need them, the need for two students to share one sheet, and the lack of punctuality in producing Braille exams (Lynch, McCall, Douglas, McLinden, Mogesa, Mwaura, Muga & Njoroge, 2011).

Itinerant teachers (IT), also called learning support assistants, peripatetic teachers or learning support teachers, who support the inclusion of SVI in mainstream schools, also face a range of different barriers. For example, in Malawi, barriers include difficulty in supporting Braille users in mainstream settings due to their lack of knowledge of teaching it; lack of availability of

necessary resources and difficulties in embossing Braille material and making it ready in a reasonable amount of time for its users. IT in Uganda also face barriers in managing their large workload. The need for them also to be involved in communal VI awareness work, the long travel times in rural places and the additional involvement of IT in school teaching work, were all found to create serious barriers to the implementation of inclusion (Lynch, McCall, Douglas, McLinden & Bayo, 2011). Whilst the reported barriers from different countries of the African world demonstrated those in a global South context, the lack of educational resources, whether physical or human, are universal issues that face the implementation of IE.

Amr (2011), in his study into the barriers facing inclusion in the Middle East region, revealed that the challenges facing IE in Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Egypt are numerous. He argued that the teaching force across the region is not adequately prepared to teach inclusively nor are suitable university disability-related training courses available. In Jordan, Al-Rossan (2012) found the following to be challenges in facing inclusion: poor management and poor supervision of SEN, financial constraints, limited curricular and instructional materials and assessment tools, limited range of placement alternatives, lack of information and lack of involvement of families. In Lebanon, Khochen and Radford (2012) identified limited human and physical resources, financial support and qualified personnel in the field of SEN as major barriers facing inclusion.

Globally, the biggest challenge facing educationalists is the readiness of teachers to teach inclusively, the support that teachers can receive in relation to their preparation and continuous professional development (CPD) training (UNICEF, 2013). UNICEF (2013) published the findings of their global study into the ways that teachers are educated in teaching disabled children in inclusive environments. The data for the report were collected through different methods, including reviewing the literature along with distributing questionnaires, interviewing educationalists and key individuals from international organisations. The questionnaire included gathering the responses of 603 educators and teacher trainers from 111 countries through an electronic survey questionnaire.

The questionnaire aimed at obtaining a global picture of teacher training in inclusion and particularly in teaching disabled children with a focus on the countries of the global South located in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and South America. The survey questionnaire received only a limited number of responses (18%). Of those received, 33% stated that inclusive education was either not covered in their teacher training or that whilst it was part of the design of their course, was not realised in practice. Another 40% reported limited progress in developing inclusive principles. The findings also pointed to the variation in the availability of teacher training on inclusion and disability, revealing that in some contexts disability is entirely absent from teacher training.

However, one may argue, despite the large scope of the study, using the same instrument to collect data on a global level is not robust. This is significant as teacher training may vary both from one country to another, as well as inside the country, in its components and focus, which may allow room for questioning the reliability of the instrument used as well as its validity.

2.4   Implementing inclusive practices in mainstream settings

Whilst inclusion has become a goal in many countries across the globe, some scholars contended that what is applied in practice in many circumstances, reflects the application of integration instead (Allan, 2010; Croft, 2010). Jahnukainen's (2014) study of the perception of school principals organising inclusive and special education in two well-performing schools in Finland and Canada, showed that despite inclusive rhetoric within education policy documents, most were still defining their current practices using the language and application of integration. Moreover, the educational decisions were often based on the more traditional idea of the least restrictive environment. Whilst the terms 'inclusion' and 'integration' have been used in some of the literature and school policy interchangeably, school practices can be examined to reveal which concept is applied.

The inconsistent IE school practices are revealed in a study conducted by Gous, Eloff and Moen (2013), which aimed to explore the practices of IE in South Africa. The authors examined how inclusive education is understood and

practised by headteachers of eight purposively selected inclusive schools in five provinces. Their qualitative methods of research revealed variation in the implementation of inclusion across the sample schools regarding headteachers' practices in relation to inclusion, actions towards implementing inclusion and their levels of sympathy towards marginalised groups. These findings suggest that inclusive practices are still dependent on the efforts and personal characteristics of headteachers. Whilst it would be interesting to see the applications of inclusion in more randomly selected schools, examples from five provinces were sufficient to demonstrate that inclusion is not a policy being widely applied.

The situation regarding inclusive practices in Lebanon are similar to those which Gous and his colleagues (2013) found in South Africa. This has been recognised in a thematic social assessment (TSA) on the theme of inclusion of disabled people (Council for Development and Reconstruction, 2005). By interviewing key personnel from 19 schools, four university academics and eight governmental officials – along with holding eight focus groups with a variety of stakeholder groups - the TSA revealed that various types of inclusive efforts are being practised in the country and that different forms of inclusion are being applied. The findings also indicated that most schools integrate children in regular classrooms without special support or provision. This analysis demonstrates the random efforts of implementing inclusion in Lebanon. It also showed that whilst the stated policy aim is inclusion, it is not implemented in practice. However, despite the different forms of inclusion that were identified, the views of disabled students themselves were missing. Involving disabled students in issues of concern to them will most likely influence the results obtained, as their perception on their inclusion could vary from that of those who are concerned with implementing inclusion projects.

It has been argued that, where available, disability rights based legislation is not fully enforced (Wilson & Jade, 1999) and that inclusive policy could be about promoting the application of integration. Sakız and Woods (2014) found in their exploration of inclusive policy and practice in Turkey that the approach to inclusion in education adopted by the government is still broadly associated with a medical model of disability. They contended that existing policy supports

integration practices, emphasises category-based medical diagnosis and supports rehabilitation based programmes, all of which indicate an approach that would more serve the applications of 'integration', according to the advocates of inclusionary practices (Sakız & Woods, 2014). This study appears to provide information about the existing gap between current policy and IE practices for disabled children in Turkey. However, because there is no global consensus of a best model of implementing inclusion, what was missing in this study was the explanation of what an inclusive approach in Turkey should mean in practice, from the perspectives of the authors themselves.

In fact, practising integration instead of inclusion is often the case in countries of the global South, including in Lebanon, where national disability legislation is not accompanied with mechanisms that enforce their implementation (Khochen & Radford, 2012). This was demonstrated in a recent ethnographic study conducted by Damaj (2014), who investigated existing social policy and practices in Lebanon concerning disabled children, generally and those with VI, specifically. The sample for the study was drawn from a special residential school for students with VI. By conducting observations and interviews with children with VI, their parents, educators and those concerned with inclusion, the author concluded that rights based legislation cannot, on its own, change inclusive policy and practices. The findings indicated that the absence of implementation mechanisms of the existing disability legislation is resulting in exclusionary practices for children with VI and their parents. Whilst this study provides further evidence of the gap between policy and practice from the global South context, literature from the global North (Powell, 2006) shows that the existing legislation supports the implementation of inclusion, as further explained in Section 2.3. However, globally, what is still less clear is how IE could be successfully implemented in practice

It has been contended (Khochen & Radford, 2012) that positive attitudes of educationalists constitute the starting point for implementing successful IE in practice. Literature regarding the influence of teacher training on changing perceptions towards inclusion has been discussed in Subsection 2.3.2. However, investigating perceptions on their own can be of limited use when the implementation of inclusive practices, or lack thereof, are not explored (Croft,

2010). It is therefore topical to enquire about teacher's preparation for teaching inclusively and the effectiveness of teacher training on implementing inclusive pedagogy.

Indeed, very often the support offered to students who require support provision from their schools is interconnected with the quality of training that educationalists receive in teaching inclusively. Regarding which, some studies have demonstrated that SEN related training in many circumstances overemphasises theoretical knowledge over practical skills and strategies (Lancaster & Bain, 2010), which can leave teachers with no practical experience in teaching inclusively (Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). Consequently, they feel unprepared for either teaching inclusively or unprepared to teach students with severe difficulties. Examples illustrating this, include a qualitative study conducted by Hodkinson (2005) in England with 80 pre-service teachers, which found that whilst inclusive training allowed the participants to have a good understanding of IE theories, their understanding of inclusive practices was limited.

The influence of the quality of training on inclusive practices is also demonstrated in a study conducted by Agbenyega and Klibthong (2014), who elicited that training related to SEN in Taiwan was in many circumstances of poor quality. The authors collected quantitative data from 175 teachers from 11 public and 12 private inclusive early childhood centres in Taiwan. This was also supplemented by qualitative data from 12 of those who agreed to be interviewed. Using the 'Knowledge, Beliefs, Skills and Practice of Inclusion Scale' (KBSPIS) developed by the authors, the survey revealed that half of the participants (49%, 86) considered the training they received to be poor; 20% (35) thought it was average, 2% (4) were not sure and only 29% (23) rated it good to excellent. This suggests that training on disability, when available, does not necessarily meet the needs of its recipients nor that the newly obtained skills would be useful for teachers when encountering disabled students. It should be noted that studies that investigated the training component in relation to its suitability for the needs of its trainees along with the background of those who deliver the training are scarce in the literature.

It has been claimed (Slee, 2011) that IE advocates that the implementation of

inclusion should be the responsibility of classroom teachers. Nonetheless, including students identified as having SEN requires mainstream schools accommodating, adapting and adjusting the teaching environment to facilitate their inclusion. As a result, across the globe, implementing inclusive practices is increasingly becoming associated with the availability of additional support staff. At the same time, teachers in inclusive schools are increasingly becoming supported by paraprofessionals (Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, Blatchford & Rubie-Davies, 2014), whose roles, responsibilities and titles can vary from one country to another (Douglas et al., 2009; Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010) and sometimes from one school to another. However, despite the assertion that deploying paraprofessionals can help teachers in building inclusive classrooms, some scholars argue that their involvement could confuse the role and responsibilities of the classroom teacher for students identified as having SEN. Hence, their role could be of little benefit to, or even harm, the promotion of inclusion (Khochen & Radford, 2012; Webster et al., 2011).

The limited number of studies that analysed the support disabled students received from paraprofessionals (Giangreco et al., 2010) reported their negative impact on student achievements. Radford, Blatchford and Webster (2011) found that teacher assistants (TA) offer alternative rather than additional support to students in their study of support provided by them in maths lessons across 15 primary and secondary schools in the UK. Additionally, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell and Webster (2011) found in their longitudinal study investigating the impact of the support provided on pupils' progress that there was a consistent trend for those with most support to make less academic progress than similar students with less support.

It should be noted that the available support for disabled people in countries of the global South is far more limited than in those of the global North. Hence, the limited support available could suggest that exclusion practices are greater than those in global North. Examples of limited available support in countries of global South, include a study conducted by Bayat (2014), who held individual and group interviews with disabled students in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, as well as making observations, conducting a survey and examining government documents. It emerged that there was a shortage of disability programmes,

very limited support available for this population and as a consequence, high levels of exclusion of disabled students. It would be interesting to determine the educational progress of disabled students in spite of the limited support they receive in mainstream settings in the global South context, however, this was scarce in the literature.

The implementation of inclusive practices has also been connected to the availability of educationalists who can identify the requirements of students requiring support provision in mainstream settings. Moreover, it has also been associated with the presence of coordinators of SEN, who can provide teachers with support in practising inclusion. However, the lack of qualified individuals in SEN is evident (Peters, 2007), both in countries of the global North and South. In contrast, the influence of existing courses in SEN and inclusion on the employability of their graduates are still scarce in the literature.

The lack of qualified individuals in relation to inclusion is illustrated in an example from the global North. Isaksson, Lindqvist and Bergström (2010) explored how schools identify and support students who require support provision in Sweden. By interviewing principals, regular teachers and special educationalists of two schools in the north of the country, the study revealed that school personnel generally placed a great deal of trust in external assessments and did not consider themselves sufficiently qualified to identify and assess those who would require support provision. Given Sweden is a wealthy nation this would suggest that there is a widespread lack of qualified SEN staff at the school level across the globe. Regarding the global South context, Khochen and Radford (2012) not only found that in Lebanon qualified educationalists in SEN are limited but also that when headteachers and inclusion project managers were interviewed, they claimed to have built their skills and knowledge through experience of working inn inclusion and not through gaining a qualification. Whilst the sample of this study was purposively selected, the findings support the assertion that qualified individuals in SEN are limited.

In light of the current inclusive practices and support available, it would seem pertinent to ask how disabled students are faring academically in mainstream education. Indeed, scholars (Powell, 2006; Smith & Douglas, 2014) from the

global North context have argued that disabled students, in particular those who require support provision, are the least academically successful in schools. It has also been contended that in spite of the efforts to include those with support provision in official exams, the outcomes poorly reflect the level of ability of these students. In their aim to identify suitable assessment arrangements, Woods, Parkinson and Lewis (2010) of the UK surveyed 86 disabled students, their parents and teachers. Specifically, the purpose was to enquire about the special assessment arrangements that the participating disabled students would consider to be suitable for them. They highlighted four main issues that need to be considered for a fair assessment of disabled students' level of attainment: tailoring the exams to the individual needs of students; involving students and their parents; considering issues related to exam anxiety and finally improving the communication between schools, parents and their children. Even though the authors only surveyed those with SpLD, language impairment and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), their findings could provide the foundation to what inclusive based measures entail when identifying the special assessment arrangements for this very heterogeneous group of students.

While the literature (Douglas et al., 2009) has noted the different adjustments necessary for disabled students during exams, the impact of these on the accuracy of the achieved results of such students for official exams has been minimal. It has been argued (Glazzard, 2014), that accountability based measures testing, whereby the effectiveness of teachers and their schools are evaluated by quantifying the outcomes of their students, do not serve to support the conducting of inclusive exams. Equally, maintaining standards through league tables has the potential of leaving those who are disabled being discriminated against owing to the misplaced assumption that they will be low achievers and hence, will have a negative impact on the scores for national and international league tables. Consequently, these students might be denied admission in schools of those that are concerned with their ranking nationally and internationally.

Reflecting on the impact of admitting high proportions of students described as having SEN on the schools score on league tables, Glazzard (2014) reported the life history of a SENCO who worked in a mainstream school in England for

nearly two decades. Recalling her experience, the SENCO revealed the high percentage of students attending her school that required special support, some of whom had not previously been welcomed in other schools. The consequences were that the low performance of her school meant it was deemed to be at risk of special measures being taken. This was particularly threatening, because two neighbouring schools with very low percentages of students requiring support were deemed to be outstanding. Whilst the author did not claim any generalisability, the history of this SENCO illustrates how the pressure on schools to attain standards might limit the extent that they can enact inclusion.

To conclude, in this chapter the relevant literature in relation to the three main areas of this study, namely, school selection; experience of inclusion has been reviewed as well as that pertaining to practices regarding implementing inclusion throughout the world and in Lebanon, the focus point of this research.

The reviewed literature has demonstrated that school identification is generally influenced by a range of factors, e.g. the parents and their background, the child and the type and severity of the impairment, their geographical location and the support that schools can make available for them. It has also shown that globally, the enrolment of children described as having SEN in early educational years is increasing. However, it has also been noted that the inclusion of this population becomes a concern for the school as well as for parents in the later stages of education. Whilst previous research findings have shown that the social inclusion of their children is of great importance for parents at the primary school level, the previous research has also shown that acquiring independent skills and being academically included are what interest those with children attending the secondary stage of their education. Similarly, through the reviewed literature, it has been noted that studies that looked at the school identification that students and their parents in the Middle East and in Lebanon generally follow are limited. Studies that have considered the school identification that disabled students and their parents specifically follow are almost non-existent. Hence, it is timely to investigate the factors that may influence the school identifications that parents and their children who require support provision in Lebanon adopt. Consequently, this led to the framing of the

first research question as:

RQ1: What are the factors that influence students with vision impairment and their parents in identifying and selecting a secondary mainstream school?

The second research question was formulated and confirmed based on literature reviewed in Section 2.3 of this chapter. This section focused on research findings from different parts of the world that registered the unfair treatment that disabled students receive in mainstream schools. This has led some scholars such as Beauchamp-Pryor (2013), Egilson (2014), Soorenian (2013), Vlachou and Papananou (2014) and Whitburn (2014) to question the readiness of mainstream education for inclusion. It has also resulted in some parents believing that special schools are better equipped to support their children than mainstream schools with their impairment related needs, as suggested by the work of Byrne (2013). Nonetheless, the available research outcomes are neutral about the academic contribution of special schools. Indeed, the reviewed literature has shown that barriers facing the full inclusion of disabled students are numerous and to an extent universal. They include attitudinal, educational, physical, environmental, institutional and financial barriers.

Based on these findings and inspired by the current trend towards implementing an inclusive agenda in mainstream schools in Lebanon as explained in Section 1.7, it would be appropriate to investigate the experience that disabled students generally and those with VI may have in mainstream education in Lebanon, to elicit whether mainstream schools that welcome them are ready for inclusion. The literature reviewed earlier has generally shown that researchers who have consulted the views of disabled students about their experience in mainstream education are scarce and this is particularly the case in the Lebanese context. Hence, it would be interesting to investigate the views of those who are disabled, their parents and those connected to them to see what they think of their inclusion. This is of relevance given that the reviewed literature indicated that there have been changes in attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled children requiring support provision globally from negative to being more positive. However, full acceptance of inclusion has not been reached yet, so investigating how the change in attitudes manifests itself in the Lebanese

context in relation to the inclusion of disabled students generally and those with VI in mainstream education seemed appropriate. It framed the second research question:

RQ2: What is the experience of disabled students in secondary mainstream schools in Lebanon, from the perspective of students with vision impairment, their peers, educators, families, and those who are in direct or indirect contact with them?

This second research question also sought to address the gap in this area revealed by the literature review.

The third research question evolved from a consideration of the stakeholder roles in how needs might be met. The reviewed literature in Section 2.4 has also shown that attitudes towards inclusion together with the readiness of the educational institutions may have a direct influence, not only on the experience that students have in mainstream education, but also on their level of attainment. Indeed, evidence of successful implementation of inclusion is limited, whether in countries of the global North or South. If rights-based legislation is indeed necessary for the implementation of effective educational inclusion, something quite prevalent in the global North and invariably lacking in global South countries, it seems appropriate to explore how this is reflected in the Lebanese context and specifically in mainstream secondary education.

The reviewed literature of Section 2.4 has also provided some evidence of the availability of a high level of additional support for students requiring support provision in countries of the global North. Nonetheless the efficacy of its use is still questionable. In contrast, a lack or complete unavailability of additional support staff in countries of the global South is also found in the literature. Therefore, investigating the support available for disabled students in schools that accept them in Lebanon would be relevant. Furthermore, as the reviewed literature has shown, disabled students worldwide are increasingly undertaking milestone exams. However the outcomes of these, and whether they reflect an accurate measure of their attainment, is questionable. Including students with support provision in mainstream schools has been argued to negatively impact the ranking of these schools in league tables and contradict the concept of inclusion. However, evidence showing whether official examinations in Lebanon

provide an accurate measure of the attainment of this population is non-existent. Based on the reviewed literature, it seemed timely to raise the question about current inclusive practices in mainstream schools in Lebanon. Therefore, the third research question asks:

RQ3: How do the perspectives of those involved in the education of disabled students in mainstream education impact on the implementation of inclusive practices?

The main purpose of the current research is to address these three questions. In the following chapter, the methodology used in the current study is presented. This includes the study sample, the methods used to collect data and the procedures followed to analyse them.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

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As the preceding chapters of this thesis established, my research is concerned with the school identification of students with vision impairment (SVI) and their parents in Lebanon. It also addresses the mainstream experience that disabled students face in education from the perspective of SVIs and those who are directly or indirectly connected to them. It further examines the existing inclusive practices in education for students described as having SEN and for those with VI. In brief, the overarching aim of this study is to show how inclusion is applied, perceived and practised in secondary mainstream education in Lebanon. Ultimately, it aims to contribute to improving the experience of disabled students in such education who are identified as having SEN, specifically those with VI.

In this chapter I present:

- The design of the research including the instruments used, the rationale for using them, the protocol followed and the details of each of the instruments used;

- How the sample was identified and how the participating schools were contacted;

- The characteristics of the sample of the study;

- The step-by-step procedure of the data analysis;

- My experience and the challenges I faced in the course of conducting the research.

3.1   The design of the research

I used a multi-instrument survey design, consisting of qualitative and quantitative instruments, involving interview, questionnaire and field note approaches. Piloting before instrument use was followed by data gathering from a sample, structured by geographical location and type of educational institution. Pursuing these approaches led to the acquisition of information about the different types of mainstream inclusive provision (as outline in Subsection 1.7.3), their location and various characteristics of the study participants. Substantive data about the perspectives of SVI and those around

them were also gathered using survey instruments. In what follows, I present the rationale for the methodology used while demonstrating the protocol for its use and how it was organised. Finally, I describe the details of each instrument and how they were used with different types of participants.

3.1.1 Rationale for methodology used

A multi-instrument survey design was adopted, which is widely used in educational research, for descriptive and explanatory purposes. Surveys generally involve adopting several data collection techniques that include interviews and questionnaires - the two methods that I selected to collect data for this research. According to Thomas (2009), each method of collecting data can have its strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, using two methods of collecting data can counterbalance the weaknesses of either approach when used by itself. Utilising questionnaires can generate substantial data from many participants in a relatively short period and with minimum cost. Moreover, it is a highly structured method of collecting data whereby each respondent is asked the same set of questions. I used this approach to characterise one group of the study's participants, namely, secondary mainstream subject-teachers.

The questionnaire instrument of this study included a cover page that explained the aims of the study and gave instructions on how to complete the form. It comprised seven sections, with the initial part set to obtain background information about the participating teachers. The subsequent questions asked about the training that the teachers had received; their perceptions of educational inclusion and whether they thought that students described as having SEN including VI should be educated in their classes. They were also asked about the extent of interaction and the experience with different types of disabilities that they had had. The last page of the questionnaire asked for the contact details of teachers who were willing to elaborate further upon their answers in an interview. However, due to the rich data collected, it was deemed unnecessary to gather further information from these teachers.

In this research I used questionnaires as a method of collecting data supplemented by interviews. The latter is a data collection method that entails

discussions with a person or a group of people with the aim of getting information from them and they can be: structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Thomas, 2009). The main advantage of conducting interviews linked to distributed questionnaires is that it affords the opportunity to ask for further clarification or for more information, if necessary. Furthermore, interviewees can respond to an interview in a different way from how they react to a questionnaire that is handed to them. Additionally, conducting interviews is particularly useful when discussing sensitive topics such as the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream classes. That is, in this instance, the use of probing questions can encourage interviewees to share their views as well as elaborate further upon their answers (Thomas, 2009). Thus, by using another method of collecting data, I avoided some of the potential pitfalls of collecting data which rely only on a single method as highlighted by a number of researchers (Holliday, 2007; Robson, 2011). Furthermore, I used additional measures such as field notes so that richer and more accurate inferences could be made.

3.1.2 Quantitative and qualitative elements of the study: triangulation

In this study, I used a number of qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering. Conducting semi-structured interviews made it possible for me to examine particularly important aspects of the research which were also covered by the other data gathering methods in greater depth. In doing so, the likelihood of misinterpretation was reduced thereby strengthening the validity of the methods utilised (Greene, 2008; Robson, 2011).

These multiple data collection process allows for triangulation which refers to the process of using multiple perceptions (and sources of data) to clarify meaning and to verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. Considering that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation also serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways that the same phenomenon is observed (Flick, 1998). Robson (2011) ascertained that there is 'no best method' but the choice should be made according to the feasibility of time and resources (Robson, 2011, p. 304). The reason behind

choosing mixed-methods in collecting data is that every method has its strengths as well as weaknesses, and matching the strengths of one to the weaknesses of another can help in the later stages of the study.

Barnes (1992) also pointed out that research strategies themselves, whether qualitative or quantitative, are not the problem but rather it is in the way they are used. Consequently, in addition to questionnaires and interviews, I took daily field notes in the form of written logs. These logs contained a mixture of summary descriptions of events and records of some conversations, especially those that were before or after conducting the interviews, which were all recorded as I explain below. The taking of field notes was to document those events that were relevant to the focus of the research questions (Foster, Gomm & Hammersley, 1996) that participants might have been reluctant to share during voice recorded interviews.

In sum, after having decided to employ a multi-instrument survey design, I opted to apply a mixed-methods approach, an approach that embraces multiple traditions and develops distinctive methodological components. It represents a reconciliation between the traditional qualitative and quantitative methods of research, which has been referred to as 'a synthesis that includes ideas from quantitative and qualitative research' (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007, p. 112).

With the goal of implementing an emancipatory approach, I endeavoured to listen to the voices of concerned individuals and to make their voices heard (Section 1.5). To this end, a focus group of three people with VI was held at the beginning of the data collection stage. One of the participants was about to start university, another was in the third year of university and the third was employed. They had different variations in the severity of their VI. The aim of this focus group was to consult their views on the research topic and the salient aspects regarding it that I should focus on in my investigation.

This included discussing their views in relation to:

- Living with VI

- School identification

- Level of education

- Social and educational inclusion

- Perceptions for the future.

These points stimulated rich discussion, which helped me to construct the list of interview questions for the participating SVI in the study (see Appendix 4 for the interview questions).

It should be noted that in this focus group, I acted as a facilitator and did not include my experience as part of the discussion. Nevertheless, the discussion alerted me to the importance of disclosing my VI to everyone taking part in the research as the participating SVI might not recognise my VI. By doing so, I avoided being considered as an outsider to VI by some interviewees and an insider by others. Moreover, to ensure that all interviews were handled in a consistent way, all participants were made aware that due to my VI, a transcriber would be converting the recorded material into text format.

Applying an emancipatory approach to research meant that having the input of insiders to the field of disability and VI would be of great relevance to my research. Hence, consultation with insiders to VI was ongoing throughout the process of the research, whereby two disability studies academics offered some feedback during different stages of the development of the thesis. The consultations with these academics aided the refinement of the language used in the research and supported me in developing my understanding of the social model of disability (Section 1.5). Most importantly, they highlighted the importance of avoiding the danger of researching the inclusion of disabled students while perpetuating the separation between disabled and non-disabled students. Having explained the involvement of insiders to VI in constructing the interview questions, in what follows I explain the purpose of the interview questions for SVI and the rest of the groups involved in the study.

Students with vision impairment

Through conducting the interviews with SVI, I aimed to investigate the school selection process they followed, the support they received, the challenges they faced and their perceptions of their social and educational inclusion.

Parents

Through the interviews with parents, I aimed to explore the support interviewees received in the course of raising a child with VI, the challenges they faced and the issues that were of concern to them.

Peers

Through interviewing peers of the SVI, I aimed to probe their perceptions about inclusion, the extent to which they believed students identified as having SEN should be educated in the same classrooms as them, and the extent to which they felt confident about interacting with their disabled peers.

Teachers

I conducted interviews with secondary school teachers at the schools I had physically visited and those teaching secondary SVI during the year of collecting data (2012 - 2013) were also asked to fill in questionnaires. Both tools served the purposes of measuring their perceptions towards inclusion, their readiness to teach inclusively and the challenges that they faced.

Learning support teachers

Through these interviews, I aimed to look at the support LSTs could provide for their learners, the challenges they faced and their views on the educational and social inclusion of their learners.

Headteachers

Through interviewing headteachers, I aimed to explore the extent to which school leaders believed their schools to be inclusive with sufficient resources and training available to their teachers and the barriers they faced. Also of interest, was how schools were assessing and meet the needs of students identified as having SEN and what they had put in place to facilitate their inclusion.

Higher education tutors (HET)

Through these interviews, I aimed to assess the quality of the courses that were on offer that support the preparedness of teachers to teach inclusively, to understand who joins them, and to uncover the challenges HET faced in running them.

Organisations (governmental and non-governmental organisations)

Participating governmental organisations (GOs) are involved in the education of SVI in Lebanon for those attending either special or mainstream settings. By interviewing key individuals representing these institutions, the aim was to investigate the efforts of the government towards implementing IE, the efforts towards enhancing inclusive practices in the Lebanese educational system, the challenges that the government face and the progress that has been achieved to date.

Through conducting interviews with non-governmental-organisations (NGOs), the aim was to investigate the contribution of these organisations to the inclusion of disabled students, the challenges that these organisations face and the extent to which they believe their support has helped in moving inclusive processes in the country forward.

3.1.3 Methods applied for data analysis

Having explained how I collected the qualitative and quantitative data, a summary of the procedure which was followed to analyse these is presented. It should be noted that the explanation regarding the qualitative analysis forms by far the lion's share in the subsequent description of these procedures. The weight of the quantitative analysis of my questionnaire data was restricted due to the unavailability of accessible statistical software that could be accessed through my screen reader. As an alternative, basic quantitative analysis was undertaken, supporting broadly-based interpretations.

As the following chapter of the thesis further demonstrates, the applied analysis to the quantitative data of my research involved calculating the frequencies of the single and multiple choice questions. I also used MS Excel to calculate the mode of the Likert scale questions. A volunteer researcher double checked the calculated responses for accuracy reasons. The qualitative data was analysed thematically and the identified themes were cross checked with the volunteer researcher for validation purposes. Indeed, in thematic research, it has been argued that each researcher might express their themes in different ways (Clarke & Braun, 2013). However, cross checking the identified themes with a

second party can also add weight to the data when writing up the story that the identified themes appear to tell (see Subsection 3.1.4). Having explained the different methods utilised to collect data for this research and the rationale for choosing them, next, I present the protocol for the conduct of the study.

3.1.4 Study protocol (what was undertaken and the order that it happened)

In table 1 below, I give the breakdown of the activities that were conducted in relation to the data gathering.

Table 1. 'What happened and when'

Period Month-by-month	Instrument development	Piloting	Sample	Data
October to December 2012	Constructing the questionnaire and interview instruments			
January 2013	Conducting focus group to inform the structure of interview questions with SVIs	Piloting interview and questionnaire instruments		
January to March 2013			Sample identification and recruitment, including contacting schools and HE and identifying participants	
February to April 2013				Data gathering, including distributing and collecting questionnaires and conducting phone and face to face interviews

3.1.5 Constructing the instruments

I constructed the questionnaire and interview instruments between October and December 2012, prior to the onset of the field work, which was intended to last from 4th January to 12th April 2013. It started with the conducting of the focus group mentioned in table 1, followed by piloting the instrument. Subsequently, potential sample (schools, HE and organisations) were identified followed by the recruitment of the participants (SVI, their parents, peers, teachers, their LSTs,

and headteachers, along with tutors from HE and different organisations).

The questionnaires

With a focus on the research questions, supported by the relevant literature, I compiled a questionnaire that was used to collect data from secondary school teachers who were teaching a class with at least one SVI in attendance. The questionnaire asked for some demographic information from the participants. It also contained a mixture of questions that gathered contextual data, that required yes or no answers and multiple-choice questions (where some required one answer and others allowed more than one answer, where appropriate). The questionnaire also contained rating or Likert-scale questions focusing on:

- Measuring the participants' attitudes towards teaching SVIs in secondary mainstream education, (questionnaire section 2);

- The support received and given (questionnaire section 3);

- The interaction with students with different types of SEN (questionnaire section 4).

- At the end, the questionnaire posed some open-ended questions.

12 Arabic copies of the teacher's questionnaire were handed to the headteachers of each of the visited schools to distribute to subject-teachers who taught a secondary classroom with an SVI. In the secondary stage, there are 12 subjects taught in each class, which is why 12 questionnaires were given to each visited school.

I visited a total of 12 schools as will be further explained in the section below. I give the prefix S followed by a number 1 to 12 when presenting information about the visited schools. I should note that the completed questionnaires were collated by the appointed support worker, whose role is explained in Subsection 3.1.6. Those completed by teachers at S3, 4 and 5 (see figure 1) were sent by headteachers to UNRWA's central office where a support worker collected them. To maintain confidentiality for all participants, the questionnaires were returned in an envelope with just the name of the school written on it. All

teachers, however, were given the choice of enclosing their name and contact details, if they wished to be contacted to elaborate on their responses.

Similar to the prefixes given to participating schools, I gave each contacted teacher a code: 'T' (teacher) followed by a participant number. Of the 144 questionnaires handed to headteachers to distribute to their secondary school teachers, 85 were returned, indicating a response rate of 59%. 33 of the participating teachers provided their contact details and indicated a willingness to discuss the issues focused upon in further detail with the researcher. See Appendix 3 for versions of the distributed questionnaire.

The interviews

The compiled semi-structured interview questions were informed by the focus group discussion, the relevant literature and the posed RQs. The schedule produced was used to interview SVIs and those around them, for which I gave each group a prefix followed by a participant number as follows: Parents (Pa), peers (Pe), teachers (T), learning support teachers (LST), headteachers (HT), HE tutors (HET) and key individuals from different GOs (GO) and NGOs (NGO). A total of 105 interviews were conducted with a total of 136 participants. They were:

- On the phone (n=24);

- Others were face-to-face (n=81).

- These were either:

- Individually (n=80) or;

- In groups (n=25)

- Through the interview questions, I enquired about:

- School identification;

- Experience of inclusion;

- Available support;

- Challenges

(See Appendix 4 for interview questions).

Piloting the instruments

The research tools were piloted during January 2013 prior to the data collection stage. In compliance with the emancipatory approach underpinning the study, as aforementioned, I started by conducting a focus group, which had three SVI in attendance. Additional piloting was carried out with three identified volunteers, who had similar specifications to the rest of the participants. These were a consultant with background experience in education (including working with parents), educationalists and governmental and non-governmental organisations; an academic with a strong knowledge of the Lebanese HE system; and a university student who had studied at an inclusive secondary school in Lebanon with a student with VI in the same classroom. The piloting helped in identifying some questions that could lead to repetitive or identical answers, along with revealing the need to re-order the questions so as to flow better.

The volunteers offered feedback on the proposed interview items. The first volunteer, who helped with piloting the interview questions for parents, headteachers, teachers, LSTs and organisations, suggested asking headteachers about the training in SEN that their teachers received, and asking parents about the educational support that they offered for their children. The second, who helped pilot the questions with HE tutors, suggested asking HE interviewees to give specific examples about the involvement of their graduates in issues related to SEN, whilst the third, who helped pilot the questions for non-disabled peers, proposed asking the peers whether they believed disabled students were receiving an equal level of the teachers' attention during sessions as their non-disabled peers.

The questionnaire designed for teachers was written in English before translating it into Arabic, with assistance of an Arabic speaking support worker. Two volunteers were identified, who helped with the piloting of the questionnaire: a former secondary school teacher and a writer on disabilities. The first volunteer helped to check that the questionnaire was clear and

concise, including how much time it would take to fill in and checking for overlaps in the questions. The second volunteer applied the back-translation technique to check whether the questions had the same meaning in both English and Arabic. This involved reading the Arabic questionnaire and comparing it with the original English version, before being provided with suggestions on how to improve the Arabic translation. I then used these to revise the Arabic questionnaire, the final version of which was checked by a linguist for any possible language errors.

3.1.6 The support received towards gaining equal access in higher education

During conducting this study, having severe sight impairment (SSI) meant that I required the use of auxiliary tools and human support for accessing information, referred to as support workers in this study. In the course of conducting this research, the auxiliary tools I used included a computer with screen reader (Jaws 15); a Braille note taker; a digital recorder; and an iPad tablet. I received 12 hours of weekly support in the UK from five different local support workers, at different stages throughout the course of conducting this research. This support involved, under my directions, converting written material into Microsoft Word from other formats including PDF and hard formatting, formatting and creating tables to present information, performing some data searches and checking the visual layout and formatting of the work I produced along with providing support in accessing one of the otherwise inaccessible research programmes, namely EndNote, to organise the references.

During the four months of the data collection stage in Lebanon, an additional six support workers provided the necessary support, each for different tasks. This involved accompanying me to schools, universities and organisations. Other support included converting hand written questionnaires into an electronic form, visiting libraries, searching available theses, dissertations and reports, and converting some reading materials into an accessible format. All who provided support, be it in the UK or in Lebanon, had to be guided by me, as none of those allocated had prior experience in supporting students at this level of education.

I should note that the support workers did not attend the interviews with me. However, in S3, 4 and 5, which were generally busy schools and where there were no waiting areas, the support workers stayed in the same room where the interviews took place, but made no contribution. They only helped in filling in the demographic sheet with the participants and handing out a copy of the summary of the research to them at the end of each interview. Having a support worker attending the interviews would have helped me to understand better the facial expressions of the interviewees and would have facilitated my communication with them. However, to insure the confidentiality of the participants and to reduce any possible pressure that having different people in the interview room could have caused, it was deemed to be more appropriate for me to conduct the interviews on my own.

3.1.7 Ethical considerations and use of final instruments

Ethical considerations

My research received the approval of the Institute of Education's Research Ethical Committee (REC) in December 2012, prior to conducting the field work, which started in January 2013. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) 'ethical guidelines for educational research' (2011) were referred to in order to ensure compliance with these. Accordingly, all participants were informed about the research, the importance of their contribution and how I was going to use the acquired data. I also obtained the verbal consent of all the interviewees prior to conducting all the interviews. This included asking for their consent to record the interview; sharing some of the information with the supervisors of the research and in the case of publishing any material, reassuring them that anonymised data obtained from the interviews would be used. Moreover, all the interviewees were made aware that their anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained throughout and that only the transcriber, who would be supporting the researcher in transcribing the interviews, would have access to the recording, which would be deleted on completion of the research.

I sought the consent of the universities, schools, and all other participating

institutions for the names of their institutions to be acknowledged in the appendices of the thesis and all those involved obliged, thus being duly listed there (see Appendix 8). An information sheet with a summary about the research and the ethical issues that the interviewees approved was handed or emailed to all the interviewees (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the summary sheet).

I provided all contacted schools, universities and organisations with a brief summary of the research, together with a supporting letter from both the American University of Beirut, the university that hosted my research during the data collection stage, and the Institute of Education, explaining:

- the research topic;

- the information that I was interested in collecting;

- the individuals who it would be helpful for me to interview;

- the confidentiality of the participants

As aforementioned, demographic data was collected at the beginning of each interview, with each being recorded on a digital recorder. The interview questions were provided on an iPad4 tablet in English and as a bilingual researcher, I performed immediate translation throughout. All the participants were given the choice not to answer any questions that they did not have an answer for or they did not feel comfortable answering, as well as to opt out at any point during the interview. They were also given the right to ask for any information to be taken out of the research, if there was anything they wished not to be included.

Questionnaire instrument

The distributed questionnaires had a covering page that explained issues in relation to the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. On the final page, it asked participating teachers to provide their names and contact details, should they wish to discuss their responses in further detail. The contact details of those who provided them (n=33) were added to a separate MS Excel

spreadsheet to that of the responses. That is, all answers from the returned questionnaires were firstly distributed on an MS Excel spreadsheet with the help of an Arabic-speaking support worker. For practicality reasons, I calculated the frequencies, mean and mode of the collected data using MS Excel. The results were cross checked on SPSS with further help from a support worker and the findings were then presented in table format, as shown in the next chapter (Section 4.4).

Field notes

Field notes were also taken throughout the data collection stage. However, because I did not seek the consent of participants regarding their usage, it was deemed to be unethical to use these notes to validate some of the collected data. Consequently, no information, either in the form of quotations or events, was taken from them for the written thesis.

3.2   Identifying and contacting participants - the process

In the following passages the criteria adopted for identifying the participating schools together with those for identifying the different groups of participants are described. The procedure pertaining to how schools and participants were contacted is subsequently explained. It should be noted that in subsequent sections and the presented tables I use the participant codes introduced earlier.

3.2.1 Identifying schools and participants

Identifying schools

As of the scholastic year 2012-2013, there were 793 secondary schools across Lebanon (MEHE, 2013) and of these:

256 (33%) were government schools free of charge;

528 (66%), the majority, were private with fees;

just 9 (1%), were private free of charge schools run by the UNRWA;

there were no private government subsidised secondary schools.

Contacting the UNRWA central office in Beirut was the only way for me to learn about secondary schools across Lebanon that met the selection criteria for private UNRWA schools, i.e. secondary schools that have SVI enrolled in their classes. Identifying other public and private secondary schools that met the selection criteria was done through different channels.

As of February 2013, the MEHE in charge of public schools was not able to help with identifying which of their secondary schools had enrolled SVI, nor was there a union for private schools that could have guided me to obtain the necessary information about the mainstreamed SVI. Based on this, I adopted a multiple strategy approach to identify potential private and government schools that could participate in the study as follows:

Strategy-1: Consultation with eight NGOs that supported the inclusion of SVI in secondary mainstream schools, either in special schools that supported these students being in secondary mainstream education or those that believed they had adopted the concept of inclusion and were striving to mainstream disabled people. Their names and contact details were gathered through recommendations from active individuals in the field of disability as well as from the internet.

Strategy-2: Conducting school screening, whereby I contacted, one by one, all the listed private and governmental secondary schools (387 schools) on the School Net website (http://www.schoolnet.edu.lb/schools.htm), a website that is updated regularly by the MEHE, to identify schools that met the research selection criteria.

Strategy-3: Consulting the Lebanese Autism Society (LAS) guidebook, which listed 15 inclusive private schools with experience in the inclusion of SVI across different Lebanese provinces.

I should note that strategy-2 entailed contacting 49% of public and private secondary schools in different geographical locations of Lebanon.

This multiple approach helped to identify a total of 19 schools as potential participants in the study, as follows:

Through strategy-1: four governmental mainstream schools were identified. All of them were in Beirut and supported by special schools, which were located in

the capital city and its vicinity, as further explained in Subsection 1.7.3. Indeed, special schools were providing support for their secondary SVI in mainstream schools.

Also, by contacting UNRWA, three of their schools were identified, with two being in South Lebanon and the third in North Lebanon. All these three schools had LST in support of the inclusion of their SVIs.

Through strategy-2: 10 schools were identified, one of which was private (in North Lebanon) and the rest were governmental, located in different geographical locations of the country as follows:

- North Lebanon (n=3)

- Bekaa (n=3)

- Mount Lebanon (n=1)

- South Lebanon (n=2)

None of these schools had LSTs in place or had allocated individuals in support of the inclusion of their SVIs. They had learners with mild VI, who were in their secondary schooling years.

Through strategy-3: two private schools were identified, one being in South Lebanon and the other in North Lebanon. Both had LSTs in support of the inclusion of their SVIs

An initial call to headteachers established whether the school had any SVIs in their secondary school classes or not. When the presence of an SVI in the contacted schools was identified, they were then asked if they would be interested in taking part in the research and were given a brief introduction about what this would involve. Where permission was granted, follow up calls were made to arrange the school visit. Due to the unstable situation in Bekaa and South Lebanon during the time of the field work, and a nearly two months' strike by secondary school teachers, I was able to physically visit only 12 (63%) out of the identified 19 schools and these formed the final school sample for the study.

Figure 1: Map showing the distribution and codes for the schools participating in this study by geographic region of Lebanon and school type.
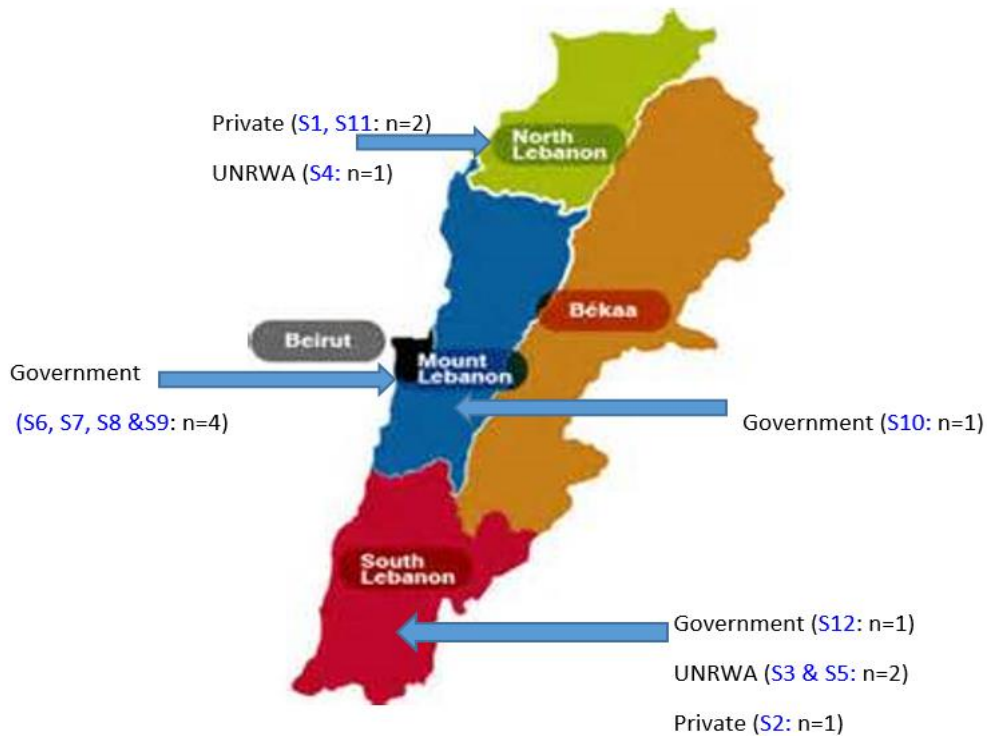
Notes:

Three private schools: two in North Lebanon (S1,S11) and one in South Lebanon (S2). Of these, two had LSTs in support of the inclusion of their SVIs and the third did not have human support in place.

Three UNRWA schools: two in South Lebanon (S3,S5) and the third in North Lebanon (S4). All had LSTs in place.

Six government schools: four located in Beirut (S6,S7,S8&S9), one in Mount Lebanon (S10), and one in South Lebanon (S12). Whilst those located in Beirut received the support of special schools, the rest had no human support in place.

Visiting private schools required only the verbal permission of their headteachers. The permission by the UNRWA central office had to be given to their identified schools for gaining access. In addition, the permission of the MEHE had to be sought before I could be permitted access to any of the identified governmental secondary schools and in fact, this was necessary to obtain even before I was permitted to approach them regarding their participation.

Identifying participants

In accordance with the theoretical framework adopted in this study, I investigated inclusion from an ecological perspective. Specifically, I aimed to survey the views of secondary SVIs, who comprised the biosystem of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. In addition to investigating the views of those who were about to start their secondary education (those in Brevet) and those who were in HE to uncover the influences of inclusion across time, which Bronfenbrenner referred to as the chronosystem. I also investigated the views of those who were directly or indirectly connected to SVI and hence, the participants also included:

- Parents (Pa) who constituted the microsystem;

- Peers (Pe) who constituted the microsystem;

- Teachers (T) who constituted the microsystem;

- Learning support teachers (LST) who constituted the mesosystem;

- Headteachers (HT) who constituted the mesosystem.

    In addition to surveying:

- Higher education tutors (HET), who constituted the exosystem

- Key individuals from GO and NGOs that support the inclusion of secondary SVI in the country and who constituted the exosystem.

As informed by previously conducted studies (Thomas & Lakkis, 2003; Wehbi, 2006), most students described as having SEN who receive an education in

Lebanon are placed in special and segregated schools. Furthermore, up to the time of collecting data for this research, there was only one special school in existence in Lebanon that offered a similar education to that of the regular schools and was licensed as a secondary school. However, this special school did not run special secondary classes for their SVI but instead, supported them in secondary mainstream schools (J. Khury, personal communication, November 12th 2011). In other words, all SVI in Lebanon have had to join mainstream education to be able to participate in secondary schooling.

The headteachers of the schools approached were asked if they had students with sight limitation or those whose glasses did not correct their vision completely. Terms, such as vision impairment or blind students, were not used during these enquiries to minimise any confusion that using these terms could cause as well as to include those who had sight limitation, but were not registered as vision impaired.

Participant criteria were defined as below.

SVI who met the selection criteria were those who were:

In Brevet, secondary stage of education, just completed their secondary schooling, or;

who had recently completed their schooling and were within the first three years of their HE.

Parents who met the study criteria were those of secondary SVI.

Peers of SVI who met the study criteria were those in the same classes as the enrolled secondary SVI.

Interviewed teachers were those subject-teachers who taught the secondary stage of education at the visited schools, despite whether they had experience in teaching SVI or not. Whilst the secondary school teachers who were asked to complete questionnaires were those who had direct experience teaching a class with SVIs

LSTs were those who identified as present in secondary schools and whose main role was to provide support during exams as well as transcribing materials into Braille for their SVIs.

Headteachers were those leading a secondary mainstream school with SVIs enrolled in their schools.

HE tutors were those in charge of universities' SEN training, where such courses were provided.

Individuals from organisations were those who were engaged in projects that support the inclusion of SVI in secondary mainstream education.

In the 12 schools visited, SVIs, peers, teachers, LSTs and headteachers were invited to take part as appropriate in the study, as is further explained in the section below.

3.2.2 Contacting participants – the process

Students with vision impairment

A total of 42 SVIs took part in this study as follows.

Brevet SVI participants (BSVI):

Six (14%) BSVI (1-6) attended two different special schools and all were identified through these schools, which were located in Beirut.

Geographically:

- Of these, 3 (50%) BSVI were from South Lebanon (BSVI1, 2 and 3);

- 2 (33%) were from Beirut (BSVI4 and 5);

- 1 (17%) was from the north (BSVI6);

Secondary students with-vision impairment participants (SSVI)

- 23 (55%) SSVI, attending various types of schools, were interviewed. They were identified as follows:

- 16 (70%) through strategy-1. Of these, 10 were identified through special schools and 6 through UNRWA;

- (13%) through strategy-2;

- (17%) through strategy-3.

The SSVI attended three different types of schools, categorised on the basis of the support they received in each, these being as follows.

Type-1 schools: (S6, 7, 8 and 9). These were government secondary mainstream schools with mobile 'supervisors' appointed by and based at the special schools to support the inclusion of their SVIs in mainstream schools.

Type-2 schools: (S1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). These were private Lebanese and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) mainstream schools, where SVI received additional support from their LST.

Type-3 schools: (S10, 11 and 12). These were private and government mainstream schools, where the SVIs received basic support from their schools.

SSVI attended schools:

- 10 SSVIs (24%) attended Type-1 schools, who were: SSVI9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 7, 9 and16.

- 10 SSVIs (24%) attended Type-2 schools, who were SSVI4, 5, 6, 8, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23.

- SSVIs (7%) attended Type-3 schools, who were SSVI1, 2 and 3.

Geographically

Type-1 schools (n=10)

- 1 (10%) SSVI7 – Beirut;

- 2 (20%) SSVI9 and 13 – Mount Lebanon;

- (40%) SSVI10,12,15 and 17 – North Lebanon;

- 1 (10%) SSVI11 – Bekaa;

- 2 (20%) SSVI14 and 16 – South Lebanon; Type-2 (n=10)

- (30%) SSVI4, 5 and 6 – North Lebanon;

- 1 (10%) SSVI8 – South Lebanon;

- (40%) SSVI18, 19, 20 and 21 – North Lebanon;

- 2 (20%) SSVI22 and 23 – South Lebanon; Type-3 (n=3)

- 2 (66%) SSVI1 and 2 - North Lebanon;

- 1 (33%) SSVI3 – South Lebanon.

Post-secondary SVI (PSSVI):

Out of the 23 SSVI, seven (30%) were in grade 12 and were re-interviewed on the completion of their schooling official baccalaureate exams (August 2013), these being:

- 2 (29%) SSVI9 and 11 attending governmental Type-1 schools;

- (43%) SSVI4, 8 and 20 attending private and UNRWA Type-2 schools;

- 2 (29%) SSVI1 and 3 attending private and government Type-3 schools

University students with vision impairment (USVI**):**

I interviewed 13 (31%) USVI, who were identified as follows:

- (31%) through their special schools;

- 8 (61%) through applying snowballing technique;

- 1 (8%) through strategy-1.

- All attended universities located in Beirut.

Parents (Pa)

I interviewed 10 parents of the SSVI who vouched for their flexibility with regards to taking part in the study during the time of the data gathering. I obtained their contact details either through their children or through their children's schools. An initial telephone call was made to see whether they would be interested in taking part in the study and to establish arrangements for the interview, if they responded affirmatively.

These were:

3 (30%) had their SSVI attending Type-1 schools, (Pa5, 8 and10). These parents resided in North Lebanon;

5 (50%) had their SSVI attending Type-2 schools and of these, three parents resided in North Lebanon (Pa1, 6 and 7). Two sent their children to private schools (Pa6 and 7) and the third attended an UNRWA school (Pa1). Pa4 and 9 sent their children to schools located in South Lebanon, one of which was a private school (Pa4) and the other was run by UNRWA (Pa9). All their children had an LST in place;

2 (20%) had their children attending T-3 schools, one being from South Lebanon (Pa2) and the second from North Lebanon (Pa3).

Peers (Pe)

13 interviewed peers attended a secondary school classroom where an SSVI was present:

- 2 (15%) (Pe1 and 2) attended type-1 schools and were the peers of SSVI 7;

- 9 (69%) attended Type-2 schools, which were broken down as follows:

- 2 (15%) (Pe5 and 6) were the peers of SSVI22;

- 2 (15%) (Pe7 and 8) were peers of SSVI5;

- 2 (15%) (Pe9 and 10) were peers of SSVI4;

- (23%) Pe11,12 and 13 were peers of SSVI6.

- 2 (15%) (Pe3 and 4) attended Type-3 schools and were the peers of SSVI 3.

Geographically

2 (15%) (Pe1 and 2) attended government Type-1 schools in Beirut;

4 (31%) (Pe3, 4, 5 and 6} attended government Type-3 and UNRWA Type-2 schools in South Lebanon;

7 (54%) (Pe7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13) attended Type-2 schools in North

Lebanon.

Everyone was identified based on the feasibility of talking to the students at the time of the school visit and all those interviewed were selected by the SSVI him/herself. They were held in an administration office at their respective schools chosen by the school supervisor.

Teachers (T)

I asked the headteachers of the 12 visited schools (see the map above, figure 1, for the visited schools) to invite two to three teachers of those who were available during the school visit for interviews. 28 teachers, coded as T, were interviewed face-to-face in their respective schools:

- 8 (28%) taught in government Type-1 schools (T11,12,17,18, 22, 23, 24, and 25);

- 15 (53%) taught in private and UNRWA schools Type-2 schools (T3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,10,13,14,15,16, 26, 27 and 28);

- 5 (18%) taught in government Type-3 schools (T1, 2, 19, 20 & 21).

Geographically

- 10 (36%) teachers taught in schools in South Lebanon (from T1 to T10);

- 8 (28%) in Beirut (T11,12,17,18, 22, 23, 24 and 25);

- (11%) in Mount Lebanon (T19,20 and 21);

- 7 (25%) in North Lebanon (T13,14,15,16, 26, 27 and 28).

Questionnaires were also given to the headteachers of the visited 12 schools to distribute only to teachers who taught a class with SVI.

85 teachers from the visited 12 schools also completed questionnaires. These were as follows:

- 27 (32%) teachers from government Type-1 schools (S6,7,8 and 9) in Beirut;

- 42 (49%) teachers from private and UNRWA Type-2 schools from five different schools located in South and North Lebanon as follows:

- (4%) UNRWA (2 in South Lebanon and 1 in North Lebanon (S3,4 and 5);

- 2 (2%) private; one in South Lebanon and 1 in North Lebanon (S1&2).

- 16 (19%) teachers from private and government Type-3 schools, which were:

- 1 (1%) government school in South Lebanon (S12);

- 1 (1%) private school in North Lebanon (S11);

- 1 (1%) government school in Mount Lebanon (S10).

Headteachers (HT)

The 12 headteachers of the 12 visited schools were interviewed. An additional two headteachers of the identified schools were interviewed on the phone. Their composition was as follows:

- (29%) were headteachers of mainstream schools supported by special schools [Type-1 schools (HT6,7,8 and 9)];

- (36%) were private and UNRWA schools with LSTs in support of their SVIs [Type-2 schools (HT1, 2, 3,4 and 5)];

- (36%) were private and government schools with no support allocated to their SVI [Type-3 schools (HT10, 11,12,13 and 14)].

Geographically

- (21%) HT were in North Lebanon (HT1 and 4 [Type-2] and HT11 [Type-3]);

- (29%) HT were in South Lebanon (HT2, 3, 5 [Type-2] and HT12 [Type-3]);

- (29%) HT were in Beirut (HT6,7,8 and 9 [Type-1]);

- 1 (7%) HT was in Mount Lebanon (HT10 [Type-3]);

- 2 (14%) HT were in Bekaa HT13 and 14 (Type-3).

Higher education tutors (HET)

An Internet search using the key words 'universities in Lebanon' and 'Lebanese universities' guided me to identify 32 licensed universities existing as of February 2013. Of these, 14 (44%) had no School or Department of Education, a further four (12%) had no active websites and thus they were not contacted. The remaining 14 (44%) had a School of Education, so these were all contacted via email. Out of the 14 contacted universities, I received positive responses from eight universities (57%) and nine key individuals from these agreed to be interviewed. Six universities (43%) did not take part, as two of them (14%) did not have SEN courses on offer and the remaining four (29%) did not respond.

Of the eight universities that took part in the current study:

- 7 (88%) were private;

- 1 (13%) was public.

Geographically

- 6 (75%) were located in Beirut;

- 1 (13%) was in North Lebanon;

- 1 (13%) was in Mount Lebanon.

Organisations

Nine organisations working on projects targeting the inclusion of secondary SVI took part in the study. These were as follows:

- (33%) governmental organisations (Coded as 'GOs'), all being in Beirut;

- 6 (67%) non-governmental organisations (Coded as 'NGOs):

- 1 (17%) was in the North;

- (83%) were in Beirut.

GOs were identified as follows. The MEHE was approached to recommend governmental departments working on the inclusion of disabled students in secondary mainstream education. Three governmental organisations (GOs) were recommended by the MEHE as well as by the identified NGOs and ultimately took part in the research, namely, the MEHE, MOSA and the CERD. A formal request was sent via fax to each governmental organisation requesting their participation in the study.

Four government individuals participated in the study:

- MOSA - 2 (50%) (GOS3 and 4);

- MEHE - 1 (25%) (GO1);

- CERD - 1 (25%) (GO2).

Three of the interviews took place at the interviewees' offices, while the fourth was held in a public place.

Six NGOs were also approached for interviews and one-to-one interviews were held with the four heads of four organisations, who oversaw the educational inclusion of SVI (NGO3, 4, 5 and 6). Two NGOs appointed two individuals who attended a group interview, namely, the head and the inclusion officer (NGO1 and 2 and NGO7 and 8). Four of the interviews were conducted at the offices of the interviewees in their respective institutions, whilst the fifth (NGO6) was on the phone and the sixth (NGO3) on Skype.

3.3 The characteristics of the sample

A total of 136 participants representing the different groups of interviewees attended 105 interviews (see Appendix 5 for further demographic information about the participants), which were as follows.

Students with vision impairment (SVI)

BSVI

Six BSVIs attended two group interviews each with three BSVIs, with:

- 5 (83%) females (BSVI2 to 6);

- 1 (17%) male (BSVI1);

- Ages ranging between 14 and 19 years-old;

- (50%) being severe sight impaired (SSI) (BSVI1, 2 and 4);

- (50%) being sight impaired (SI) BSVI3, 5 and 6);

- (67%) living in boarding schools (BSVI1, 2, 3 and 6);

- 2 (33%) (BSVI4 and 5) living with their parents.

SSVI

23 SSVIs from three different types of schools were interviewed as follows:

- 18 face-to-face;

- 5 on the phone;

- group interviews with nine SVIs as follows:

- A group of two (SSV18 and 19) attending Type-2 schools;

- A group of three (SSVI9,10 and 11) attending Type-1 schools;

- A group of four (SSVI12,13,14 and 15) attending Type-1 schools.

- 14 One-to-one interviews (SSVI1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,16,17, 20, 21, 22 and 23);

- Ages ranging between 16 and 24 years-old.

- Of those interviewed from Type-1 schools (n=10):

- 7 (70%) were living in boarding schools (SSVI10,11,12,13,14,15 and 17);

- (30%) were residing with their parents (SSVI7, 9 and 16);

- (40%) were SSI (SSVI12,13,14 and 15);

- (60%) were SI (SSVI7, 9,10,11,16 and 17).

- Of those interviewed from Type-2 schools (n=10):

- 9 (90%) were SSI (SSVI4, 5, 6, 8,18,19, 20, 21, 22 and 23), who attended private or UNRWA schools;

- 1 (10%) was SI (SSVI6);

- All resided with their parents.

- Of those interviewed from Type-3 schools (N=3):

- 3 (100%) were SI (SSVI 1, 2 and 3);

- 3 (100%) resided with their parents.

PSSVI

The nine PSSVI were in their final year of the secondary stage of education and all were approached for follow up interviews in August of the same year. Seven of them participated in one-to-one follow-up phone interviews:

- 2 (29%) (PSSVI3 and 7) attended Type-1 schools;

- (43%) (PSSVI1, 2 and 4) attended Type-2 schools;

- 2 (29%) (PSSVI5 and 6) attended Type-3 schools

USVI

13 students who were in the first three years of university were interviewed as follows:

- 5 (38%) through face-to-face interviews (USVI4, 5, 7, 8 and 13);

- 8 (61%) through phone interviews (USVI1, 2, 3, 6, 9,10,11 and 12);

- 11 (84%) through one-to-one interviews (USVI1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9,10,11,12 and 13);

- 1 (8%) through a group interview with two participants (USVI4 and 5);

- Ages ranging between 18 and 39 years-old;

- Specialising in:

- 1 (8%) maths (USVI13);

- 1 (8%) nutrition (USVI2);

- 1 (8%) sociology (USVI6);

- 1 (8%) translation (USVI10);

- 2 (16%) business (USVI1, 7);

- 2 (16%) law and political science (USVI9 and 3);

- 1 (8%) musicology (USVI4);

- 2 (16%) preparatory English courses (USVI11 and 12);

- 1 (8%) psychology (USVI8)'

- 1 (8%) English literature (USVI5).

Pa

10 interviews with parents of 10 SVI were conducted as follows:

- 8 (80%) only with the mothers (Pa1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8);

- 1 (10%) with both parents (Pa9);

- 1 (10%) with the father only (Pa10);

- (40%) face-to-face (Pa2, 6, 7 and 9);

- 6 (60%) on the telephone (Pa1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and10).

None of the interviewed parents considered themselves to be disabled. The level of education of parents varied, with those who sent their children to Type-1 schools (Pa5, 8 and 10) having had incomplete schooling. All the children of those parents who had SSI lived in boarding schools.

Of those who sent their children to Type-2 schools (Pa1, 4, 6, 7 and 9):

- 2 (40%) had university degrees;

- 2 (40%) had complete schooling;

- 1 (20%) had incomplete schooling;

- 5 (100%) had children with SSI;

- 5 (100%) had their children living with them.

- Of the parents who sent their children to Type-3 schools (Pa2 and 3):

- 1 (50%) had incomplete schooling;

- 1 (50%) an uncompleted university degree;

- 2 (100%) had children with SI and lived with their parents.

Pe

13 peers of six SSVIs attended six face-to-face group interviews:

- 5 group interviews with two Pe (Pe1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10);

- 1 group interview with three Pe (Pe11,12 and 13).

- They were:

- 5 (38%) males (Pe1, 2, 7, 9 and 10);

- 8 (62%) female (Pe3, 4, 5, 6, 8,11,12 and 13);

- 6 (46%) were in grade 12 as follows:

- 2 attended Type-1 schools in Beirut (Pe1 and 2);

- 2 attended Type-2 schools in North Lebanon (Pe9 and 10);

- 2 attended Type-3 schools in South Lebanon (Pe3 and 4);

- (31%) were in grade 11 (Type-2 schools). Of these:

- 2 attended schools in South Lebanon (Pe5 and 6);

- 2 attended schools in North Lebanon (Pe7 and 8);

- (23%) grade10 (Type-2 schools) in North Lebanon (Pe10,12 and 13).

T

28 teachers from 11 different mainstream schools who had SVI in their secondary classes:

- 28 face-to-face interviews;

- 18 one-to-one interviews; (T11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28);

- 10 group interviews (T1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and10):

- interviews with groups of two (T1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6);

- 1 group interview with four (T7, 8, 9 and10);

- Specialities:

- 7 (25%) taught Arabic (T6 and 22 [Type-1]; T7, 28 [Type-2]; T1, 2 and 19 [Type-3]);

- 7 (25%) taught science (T12 and 18 [Type-1]; T3,10,14,16 and 27 [Type-2]);

- 1 (4%) taught English (T6 [Type-2]);

- 6 (21%) taught maths (T17,23 and 25 [Type-1]; T7 and 13 [Type-2]; T20 [Type-3]);

- 6 (21%) taught humanities (T24 [Type-1]; T4, 5, 7,15, 26 [Type-2])

- 1 (4%) taught economics (T21 [Type-3])

All interviewed teachers had a university degree and all considered themselves not to be disabled.

Work experience:

- Less than 3-30+ years (Type-1);

- 3-30+ years (Type-2);

- 7-30+ years (Type-3).

- Those who taught classes with SSVI were also asked to fill in questionnaires and a total of 85 (59%) teachers from three different types of schools completed them. These were:

- 27 (56.2%) from Type-1 schools;

- 42 (70%) from Type-2 schools;

- 16 (44.4%) from Type-3 schools.

Moreover, 31 male teachers and 54 female teachers completed the questionnaire.

Table 2: Participating teachers by age range and type of school (Type-1-3)

Age of teachers (years)	School type			
	Type-1	Type-2	Type-3	Total
18 to 25	3	8	0	11
26 to 35	6	12	3	21
36 to 45	5	9	9	23
46 to 55	7	13	3	23
56+	6	0	1	7
Total	27	42	16	85

The age groupings of the participating teachers varied slightly between private and public schools. While very few governmental teachers were below the age of 26, most private school teachers were below the age of 45. None of the private teachers were above the age of 56 while very few government schools' teachers were. The teachers were asked to select the subject/s they taught at their schools, which are presented in the table below.

Table 3: Frequency of subjects taught and school type

(Teachers were asked to select all those that applied)

Subject	Frequency Type-1	Frequency Type-2	Frequency Type-3	Total
Maths	2	5	2	9
Science (biology, physics or chemistry)	7	6	2	15
Economics	1	5	1	7
Humanities and religious studies (geography, history, sociology, civic education, Islamic education)	8	15	5	28
General philosophy	1	4	0	5
Arabic language and its literature	5	5	3	13
French language and its literature	1	2	0	3
English language and its literature	1	5	2	8
Physical education	0	2	0	2
Computers	0	0	1	1
No response	1	1	0	2
Total	27	50	16	93

As the table above demonstrates, the clear majority of the teachers in government schools taught one subject, whilst those in private and UNRWA sometimes taught more than one subject.

LST

I interviewed eight LSTs face-to-face. They were from five different schools:

- 2 private schools;

- UNRWA schools.

- Interviews were:

- 1 one-to-one (LST1)

- in groups:

- 1 group interview of two (LST5 and 6);

- 1 group interview of three (LST2, 3 and 4);

- 3 joined headteachers in their interviews (LST5, 7 and 8);

- 1 was also interviewed in a group interview with other LSTs. (LST5).

All interviewed LSTs attended private and UNRWA Type-2 schools, which provided support for SVI in secondary stage. All the participants were female and held a university degree. Of the eight LSTs interviewed, one had an impairment (vision) while the rest did not.

HT

14 HT from 14 different schools with SSVI included in their schools attended 14 interviews which were broken down as follows:

- 12 HT attended face-to-face interviews (HT1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,10,11 and 12);

- 2 HT attended phone interviews (HT13 and 14).

They were with headteachers from:

- (29%) Type-1 schools (1 female and 3 male) (HT6, 7,8 and 9);

- (36%) Type-2 schools (one female and four male) (HT1, 2, 3,4 and 5);

- (36%) Type-3 schools (all male) (HT10, 11,12, 13 and 14).

HET

Nine HET from eight different Schools of Education attended eight interviews,

which were:

- 7 face-to-face (HET2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9);

- 1 phone interview (HET1);

- 7 one-to-one interviews (HET1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9);

- 1 group interview (HET7 and HET8).

- All nine interviewed HET reported not being disabled:

- 7 held a PhD (HE1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9);

- 2 did not hold a PhD (HE8 and 4).

Other organisations

Four individuals from three GOs were interviewed one-to-one and face-to-face. There was one from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), two from the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) and one from the Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD). All interviewees were female and averaged around 45 years of age. None of them considered themselves to be disabled. Eight individuals from six different NGOs that support the inclusion of SVI in secondary stages of education in Lebanon were also interviewed as follows:

- 6 face-to-face (NGO1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8);

- 2 by phone interviews (NGO3 and 6);

- one-to-one (NGO3, 4 ,5 and 6);

- 2 in groups of two (NGO1, 2, 7 and 8).

- The NGOs were:

- participants from 3 special schools:

- 1 was with VI while the rest did not consider themselves to be disabled;

- participants from other 3 NGOs that had worked on early inclusion programmes.

Of these:

- 2 considered themselves to be disabled, while the rest did not.

3.4 Data analysis

Through the interviews and the distributed questionnaires, qualitative and quantitative data were collected. As aforementioned, the qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis and the quantitative data was analysed statistically. In Subsection 3.1.1 the method adopted to analyse the questionnaire data was explained. In what follows, the thematic analysis followed to analyse the qualitative data is described.

Thematic analysis refers to the process of identifying concepts and themes embedded throughout the data. This method constituted a useful and flexible method for analysing qualitative data, as it allowed me to provide a rich and detailed as well as complex account of those collected. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2006) asserted that there is no ideal method of analysing data and that the applied methods should match with what the researcher wants to know. Consequently, I applied thematic analysis to reflect the reality demonstrated in the data collected from participants and to discover the reality by identifying emerging themes that could usefully summarise key features across the large body of data.

3.4.1 Thematic analysis procedure: step by step

In this section, the step by step implemented activities for analysing the qualitative data is described by time and sequence, as follows:

February to June 2013: Transcription

April-June 2013: Data familiarisation

July to December 2013: Coding and grouping

January to May 2014: Identifying themes and their sub-themes

June 2014: Inter-rater reliability

July to December 2014: Re-organising and cross checking the identified sub-

codes, selective codes, themes and subthemes

January 2015 to May 2015: Writing the story that the data tell.

Transcription

A bilingual support worker helped with the transcriptions of the interviews from audio-Arabic to typed-English. This support helped me to address the challenge of having to listen to two inputs at the same time; the sound of the screen reader while typing, along with the recorded interviews. It also helped surmount the difficulty of having to move backwards and forwards with the recording which proved to be difficult when relying only on a screen reader to access information. However, what was more challenging during the process of transcribing the interviews, was translating some of the concepts from Arabic to English. To avoid any misinterpretation that translation could cause, the Arabic term together with its English translation were transcribed. By so doing, I could accurately quote someone or refer to the term the way it was used during the interviews.

Data familiarisation

The analysis of the qualitative data began by going through the interviews conducted to become familiar with what had been collected. This was done firstly by listening to the recorded interviews, which comprised 10 groups of participants, total n=136, as further explained below. The second step of the analysis involved reading through the transcribed interviews. The typed interviews were then cross checked with the recorded versions for accuracy in the transcriptions, using my knowledge of the two languages as a bi-lingual speaker of Arabic and English. I revisited the recorded interviews several times throughout the analysis to ensure accuracy in the translation when quoting someone or referring to data from the interviews.

Coding and grouping

Guided by the research questions and informed by the responses to those of

the interviews, the next step was to identify quotations from the participants that could be used to illustrate examples of what might lead to identifying the selective-codes and their sub-codes. This involved going through all the interviews, group by group, so I could identify codes, sub-codes and their indicative related selected meaningful quotations. To complete this task, selective codes were assigned which were identified based on the focus of each of the interview questions.

Focussing on the RQs, selective codes were identified and grouped together with their indicative sub-codes and linked them with the RQ they corresponded to (Benaquisto, 2008). To illustrate this principle, an example of the selective codes of one question is shown below (further examples are provided in Appendix 7):

Question: *"why did you join this school in particular? Did you have other choices?"*

Selective Code: ***"School selection"***;

All responses linked to the reasons for joining certain schools were gathered under the selective code 'school selection'. Using an excel spreadsheet, quotes from the interviews were then coded by linking a quotation or several quotations with their selective codes or category names; a method known as descriptive coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The main purpose of this coding is to assign labels, or tags, that can give summaries to the identified quotations, thus permitting the re-ordering of data from different perspectives. The coded quotes were further explored by identifying sub-codes, which could then be used to identify specific subsidiary elements of the main codes. For example, all the stated motivations of SVI behind their choice of school became sub-codes linked to the selective code ***"school choice"***.

Below are several examples of sub-codes derived from the 'initial coded' quotes associated with the selective code ***"School selection"***:

Sub-codes:

- *The termination of the inclusive project resulted in terminating the available support for SVI in mainstream school*

- *Special school is the only choice for some SVI, especially those with SSI*

- *Mainstream schools lack the ability to cater for the needs of students with SSI.*

The link in sub-code (i.) above is through the strong connection between accepting SSI and implementing an inclusive project. The link in sub-code (ii.) above is through 'special school is the only choice'. The link in sub-code (iii) above is through 'no alternative to a special school'.

The following quotes are associated with the three listed sub-codes above:

There is no inclusion in the school anymore so we had to move to a different school. (BSVI2)

We went to a government school. Being totally blind it was not that easy for us to manage with no support available. So we had to join a special school. (BSVI1)

I didn't want to be in a special school. I had previously refused it completely…in my situation, there wasn't a suitable place except here... (BSVI4)

The same coding procedure was followed across all interviews for each group separately. In order to establish patterns in the selective-codes and sub-codes that might indicate themes or sub-themes, the codes that were already identified were revisited, organised and re-grouped using 'a reiterative approach', based on the apparent connections existing between them. This entailed moving the identified quotations from one cell to another on the spreadsheet. So, for example all data relating to "support" was under one category group and all relating to "challenges" under another. The original source of the quotes, in terms of question and participant type, was retained and redistributed. The same procedure was applied for all the other categories (see Appendix 7).

Identifying sub-themes

The next step was to construct sub-themes to explore further the points identified by the coding process, by detecting patterns related to the research questions across the identified sub-codes connected to each of the selective

137

codes. The same procedure was applied to identify sub-themes across the selective sub-codes and their sub-codes for all the groups of interviews.

Identifying main themes

Having identified the sub-themes, the next step was to look across these so as to establish the main themes. However, due to my limitations in *visualising* the large range of selective codes and sub-codes, I used a different strategy. To look for overarching themes across each group of interviews and ultimately across the whole data, I re-read again almost 10% of the transcribed interviews. The aim was to step back from the data analysis and to seek patterns in the responses that might help in understanding the bigger picture of the data as well as the larger themes running through them. The aim was to identify the main themes across each group of the interviews. This procedure was started by coding 10% of each of the various groups of interviews separately. Then, I grouped the identified codes based on their similarities and relevance to the posed research questions. This allowed me to look for common patterns in the grouped codes and led to the identification of overarching themes in each group of the interviews in a separate manner. For example, the group of interviews with governmental and non-governmental-organisations, produced the following main themes:

- Inclusive approaches

- Barriers to inclusion

- Inclusive applications / provisions

- Perceptions

The codes that were identified and that led to the main themes of the research are presented in Subsections 4.1.9, 4.2.13 and 4.3.13. These codes were used to identify the overarching main themes for each group of the data, which meant that the earlier selective codes needed to reorganised, so that they corresponded to these themes. The next step was to go through the identified selective codes, sub-codes and sub-themes to check that they were still consistent in relation to the main themes.

This led to merging or dividing of some of the selective codes so as to have a better representation of the range of meanings associated with a particular code, as well as to the rewording or merging of some sub-themes. For example, the two sub-themes "positive-about-implementing-inclusion" and "the-role-of-the-LST" were combined into "meeting-the-needs-of-VI-learners" because these were interlinked. By doing so, sub-themes that had the same meaning were gathered under the same theme. This enabled me to give more specific definitions to the identified themes, which led to developing the story that each could tell. This also enabled me to give weight to the identified sub-themes by counting the sub-codes that corresponded with each sub-theme to ensure all potential codes had been considered.

Developing reference labels

To illustrate the links between quotations and to show which sub-codes belong to which sub-themes, reference labels were developed. These aimed at demonstrating the relationship between themes, selective codes, sub-themes and sub codes. For instance, any question I asked the interviewees is marked with a "Q". Participant prefixes were also used, followed by the number that refers to that individual. On the same basis, the letters "SC" have been used to indicate selective codes that link between certain sub-codes (which were labelled "SUBC") and "ST" to indicate sub-themes that emerged from the sub-codes.

It should be noted that to help sighted readers understand the presented data better, I was advised to use a formatting style for each type of information and its coding level. The style is as follows:

Main themes are in **bold**, Sub-themes are underlined; Selective codes are in ***bold italics***, Sub-codes are in *italics*; and Quotations and Interview questions are in *italics*.

Inter-rating agreement

Assessing inter-rater reliability (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman & Marteau, 1997) whereby data is independently coded and emerging key themes are checked by

two researchers or more for agreement, is a recognised process in qualitative research. As noted by Clarke and Braun (2013), this is often associated with the reliability of a data gathering process especially where generalisability is sought for in the results. As these same authors also pointed out, qualitative researchers inevitably acknowledge that the researcher influences the research process, specifically through their active engagement with the text data they use. One way of looking at reliability is by calculating inter-rater agreement. For qualitative work this becomes problematic since, on what basis could or should codes be identical?

Clarke and Braun (2013) suggest two common approaches; the first is member checking where the researcher checks their analysis with the participants' perspectives. However, for the current study this was impractical given the setting and travel difficulties. A second approach is by triangulation of the participants' perspectives to identify consistencies. In this study, this technique was applied by looking at the issues from different participant sources and this will be further reported in the results and discussion chapters.

The applicability of inter-rating processes to qualitative research is still questionable (Armstrong et al., 1997). While some scholars believe that this process is not relevant to qualitative work, others believe it can ensure rigour. From their perspective, conducting such an exercise can enhance the achieved results, as identifying themes would be improved when conducted as a group activity (Armstrong et al., 1997), especially when different viewpoints are compared.

Therefore, for my study I thought it worthwhile to use an inter-rating approach, given the use of thematic analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to identify patterns in the data, by repeated examination of the data and the re-examination of the links between the codes and quotes already described for this is a subjective process.

The inter-rating approach used in the study

To conduct this exercise, I reiteratively examined the data and noted the identified codes. An independent inter-rater volunteered to read approximately

one in ten of the transcribed interviews. She was asked to identify potential codes and themes, informed by the focus of the various research questions, by undertaking casual coding. She was also asked to link quotes to the codes she identified by following the instructions below:

- Read the entire interview to familiarise yourself with the contents

- Follow a casual coding approach identifying and recording any meaningful quotations

- Group the quotations based on their similarities

- Look for patterns across the recorded and grouped quotations

The outcomes were subsequently emailed to me for comparison between our codes. Any ambiguities in what the inter-rater had sent was clarified by email where I then made the final decisions. I compared the two sets of codes and identified any differences. Where this related to a possible code not identified by myself, I re-examined the data at the next reiteration and sought evidence for the point in the data. Where this was found, depending on the extent of the data, a new code or theme would be created.

The examples that follow indicate how this approach was used and in fact, inter-rater 'agreement' in these terms was around 80%.

The inter-rating process in action

Some of the conducted interviews were inter-rated for validation purposes. Specifically, 14 interviews, approximately 13%, were given to the inter-rater to validate. As an example of this process, themes relating to SVI are illustrated to show how I used inter-rating to evaluate my themes.

Table 6a: Teachers, Parents and Peers

Teachers		Parents of the VI		Peers	
My-themes	**Inter-rater-themes**	**My-themes**	**Inter-rater-themes**	**My-themes(t)**	**Inter-rater-themes**
Experience-in-SEN	Experience-with-disabled-students	Influences-on-parental-school-identification	Consideration-of-a-special-needs-school	Positive-attitudes-towards-inclusion	Beliefs
Barriers-to-inclusion	Disability-issues-in-teacher-training	Support-in-education	Support-from-school	Understanding-of-SEN-learners	Good-level-of-understanding-of-what-special-educational-needs-means
(1) Meeting-the-needs-of-SVI; (2) Beliefs	Perceptions-of-the-experiences-of-learning-that-the-student-had	Living-with-VI	(1) Parental-support; (2) Social/friends	Attitudes-towards-supporting-disabled-learners	Rights
Parents-school-relationship	Parental-involvement	Independency-of-the-VI-child	Independency	Limited-interaction-of-non-disabled-learners-with-peers-with-disability-outside-the-class	

Recommendat ions	Parental- concerns	(1) Possible- over- protection;

The table shows the range of themes identified by both myself and the inter-rater for three groups of participants, namely, parents, teachers and peers. I should note here, that in the case of the teachers, consistency was found between four of the themes identified by the inter-rater and my own. However, one point identified by the inter-rater, 'recommendations of the teacher', was not found to be evidenced in the data on my re-examination in the next thematic analysis cycle, and so was not retained.

Interviews with parents

Regarding the parent data there was little difference between the inter-rater's codes and my own. However, again, re-examination of the data led to the detection of evidence that some re-arrangement of the codes would be useful for further refining the definition of codes. For example, *'the role of faith in accepting disability'* was used to re-examine the code: ***'living with VI'*** and a point about the views of an eye doctor who said *"…special needs school would be worse for a VI child's situation"* informed the definition of the theme 'parental school identification'.

Interviews with peers

In relation to the peer interviews, the inter-rater identified three themes which I considered to be consistent with my identified themes. A fourth one, not noticed by the inter-rater (in relation to the 'limited interaction that non-disabled peers had with disabled people outside the school environment' was well evidenced in the data and hence, retained in the next thematic analysis cycle.

Final thematic analysis cycle

In the final cycle sub-themes derived from the sub-codes from across the whole

data were organised, which led to reaching the final themes of the research. Further reiterative cycles involved re-organising and re-examining the established themes, this time to improve the coherence of the complex story that was emerging. I re-worded some themes and sub-themes, along with merging others so the story that they told was clearer. For example, themes related to challenges, limitations and barriers were all expressed as 'barriers to inclusion'.

In what follows, the final themes are presented, together with a short description of each theme. In giving definitions to the identified themes, the hope is to clarify how the coded data and the identified sub-themes, presented in the succeeding chapter, led to the final themes that informed the analysed data.

There were three main themes that emerged in relation to the first research question, namely:

1. **Autonomy** refers to the autonomy (or lack thereof) that SVI and their parents had in identifying a suitable educational institution. It reflects the factors that influenced their school and HE identification, which was dependent on their support need and the willingness of the educational institution to accept them.

2. **School-policy** reflects the motivation that led the participating mainstream schools to accept disabled students in their classes. The headteachers' acceptance of disabled students in their schools was to a great extent informed by their commitment to equality and inclusion, the disability-related support that the school receives from external sources and the support they can provide for disabled students.

3. **Approaches-to-inclusion** pertains to the different approaches that NGOs and GOs follow in implementing their inclusion projects. It reflects the factors that these organisations consider when identifying suitable mainstream schools for the education of their disabled students and for the implementation of their inclusive projects.

Five main themes emerged in relation to the second research question, linked to experiences and perspectives of disabled students, regarding mainstream

education. These are as follows:

1. **Experience-in-educational-and-social-inclusion** refers to the restricted educational and social access that SVI experience at special and mainstream schools. This is linked to the challenges, adaptations (or lack of) in core and none-core subjects that SVI are subject to in special and mainstream settings. It is also associated with their restricted and negative social inclusion they experience in education or in society at large.

2. **Experience-in-SEN** pertains to the unpreparedness of mainstream schools for inclusion. It reflects the restriction in providing SVI with access to information, the limited use of assistive tools as well as the unavailability of support provision. It also reflects the limited experience in SEN that their teachers have had, their limited exposure to students requiring support provision, along with the limited types and severity of disabled students their schools accept.

3. **Living-with-VI** covers the experience that parents of SVI have had with vision impairment. It reflects the concerns they have had in relation to the educational and social inclusion of their children, whether at school, HE or in society at large.

4. **Background-in-SEN** refers to the existing knowledge and interaction with disabled people that peers as well as teachers and HET revealed. It also refers to the available courses in SEN, when they started and the qualification they could lead to.

5. **Barriers-to-inclusion** pertains to the existing barriers facing the implementation of inclusion in mainstream education. It reflects the limited human and physical resources, unavailability of training, lack of support for inclusion and the negative attitudes towards inclusion that educators have. It also refers to the financial constraints and the limited numbers of qualified individuals in different domains in SEN faced by NGOs and GOs.

Finally, eight themes emerged related to the third research question, regarding the implementation of inclusion practices in mainstream settings. They are as follows:

1. **Perceptions-on-inclusion-in-education'** refers to the perceptions that SVI have regarding their level of education; their preference to text based subjects versus visual and scientific subjects; and their opinion on inclusion with non-disabled peers versus disabled peers. It also covers the perceptions that non-disabled peers have towards the inclusion of their disabled peers; the perceptions of teachers on the level of attainment of their SVI and their educational inclusion.

2. **Meeting-the-needs-of-SVI-in-education** pertains to the support that made available for SVI, whether from their parents, peers or teachers. It reflects the way the needs of SVI are met and the reasonable adjustments that have been put in place in meeting their needs, whether at school or at HE. Furthermore, it reflects the fundamental role that peers of SVI play in meeting their needs.

3. **Inclusive-implications** refers to the positive outcomes that all SVI have obtained in official exams.

4. **Applications-of-inclusion** covers the different forms of support that different schools and different NGOs follow in the pursuit of the implementation of inclusion.

5. **Parental-experience-in-inclusion** pertains to the support available for parents. It also refers to their perceptions on using their faith to accept VI, the limited social interaction of their children with others in their local community and the limited changes in attitudes towards disability in their local communities.

6. **Access** refers to the knowledge, skills and experience (or lack thereof) that LST as well as HET have in supporting SVI to access educational materials. It reflects the influence of working in the field of inclusion on the gained experience of LSTs, together with the limited knowledge in SEN they obtained through training. All of which have been restricting SVI from accessing mainstream education at an equal level to their counterparts.

7. **Employment** refers to the increase in demand for university graduates majoring in SEN.

8. **Approaches-towards-applying-inclusion** pertains to the practical and

reasonable adjustments towards implementing inclusion in education that are applied by NGOs and GOs in the schools that they support. It also refers to the limited specialised approaches to training on inclusion, represented by the negotiation based training with teachers that NGOs and GOs apply. This theme is also connected to the perceptions of NGOs and GOs on their readiness for inclusion, particularly in relation to the focus of current applications of inclusion, being on physical inclusion rather than inclusion in education.

Having provided the definitions of each of the themes that informed the analysis of the data (see subsections 4.1.9; 4.2.13; 4.3.13), I will move on to reflect on my experience in relation to the applied methodology. However, before doing so, I should note that adopting a social model to disability had informed the way I interpreted the views of participants. Whilst this was not assigned a separate theme in the analysed data, the medical versus the social model in the responses of participants is covered later in the discussion chapter.

3.5 Reflections on my experience and challenges while conducting this research

By presenting my experience as the researcher who conducted this research, my aim has been to bring to light the challenges faced while producing this work. As established in Section 1.2, being an insider to VI meant that some participants shared information with me that they would have not disclosed to a non-VI researcher. Being an insider could arguably have strengthened the validity of my findings. It has been argued that disabled researchers of disability subject matter can obtain more honest and detailed responses from participants compared with those with no disability (Soorenian, 2011). It has also been contended that insiders to disability can better understand and interpret the issues faced by other disabled people as they themselves live the disability and know what it means to be disabled. Through interviewing 42 SVI, I managed to recognise the similarities and differences that existed between me and some of the participating VI. However, during the interviews, I made every effort to avoid

influencing what participants shared with me by only prompting them during the interviews and without making any personal comments that would demonstrate my perceptions on the views they were giving. The aim was to eliminate any bias that being an insider to VI may bring.

Having visited 12 schools and interviewed 136 participants gave an insight into the way some interviewees reacted to the activity of disability related research and to me as a disabled researcher. Some participating teachers and students praised my efforts in conducting research into disability and inclusion, as they believed that this type of research would contribute to improving the current situation. Others wondered about my interest in their experience, as I also have VI and hence, must have experienced studying and living with VI in Lebanon. This demonstrates the common belief among certain people connected to VI, who still hold the view that people with vision impairment are a homogenous group of people and do not appreciate the differences that exist between individuals whether they are disabled or not. Further elaboration on existing perceptions towards disability and disabled people is presented in the subsequent chapters.

As stated in Section 1.1 of this thesis, I aimed through this work to improve the experience of SVI fellows in education by investigating current IE practices in relation to implementing inclusion in Lebanon. Hence, being a disabled student furthering my education in the UK, I consider it to be of relevance to have related my experience while conducting this study. As an international student, I was not entitled to a 'Disabled Student Allowance' (DSA), which under current UK legislation, provides Home and European Union students with support towards their disability study needs. In this respect, my university provided me with disability-related support, as explained in Subsection 3.1.6. The provided support had helped to eliminate existing barriers, however, barriers persisted. Analysis software and research methods are very often designed for non-VI users. Examples include presentations related to analysing videos, conducting observations and processing quantitative data. These could have constituted useful research methods that I could have used, if they were designed with inclusion in mind. My choice of research methods, i.e. semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, were informed by the type of methods that would

enable me to use them independently, as these are flexible research methods that can be adapted and accessed using my assistive tools. Further elaboration on my experience and role as a disabled researcher can be found in Section 5.1.

To conclude, in this chapter I explained the design of the research including the rationale for the methods used, the protocols of the study and the instruments used. The procedure followed to identify the sample and its characteristics were described followed by the step by step analysis method that was followed to analyse the data. In the following chapter, I present the results of these analysed data.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In the previous chapter, I discussed the design of the research, the methodology that was employed to select the sample and the procedures that were followed to collect and analyse the data.

In this chapter, I present the collected qualitative and quantitative data sequentially. I start with the outcomes of the qualitative responses of the interviewed sample and then present the responses from the questionnaire instruments, followed by a summary of the findings.

This chapter is structured by reporting data in relation to each of the research questions (RQ) in turn. These were:

- RQ1: What are the factors that influence students with vision impairment and their parents in identifying and selecting a secondary mainstream school?

- RQ2: What is the experience of disabled students in secondary mainstream schools in Lebanon from the perspective of students with vision impairment, their peers, educators, families, and those in direct or indirect contact with them?

- RQ3: How do the perspectives of those involved in the education of disabled students in mainstream education impact on the implementation of inclusive practices?

Before presenting the findings of this study as outlined above, a summary of the theoretical framework that informed and shaped the current study would be useful.

As explained in Section 1.6, Bronfenbrenner's ecological system model looked at the different factors that directly or indirectly influence the development of an individual in a certain environment. He described this process as happening within a series of nested systems. These systems are not static, rather they are interlinked and overlapping. According to Bronfenbrenner, not only the environment that affects the development of an individual, which he refers to as the biosystem, but layers in between the immediate environment (microsystem, of which the biosystem is the centre) and the overarching layer (macrosystem), which affects other levels of the system. Layers between the micro- and

macrosystems affect each other and are affected by the immediate as well as overarching systems:

- Mesosystem, which may constitute an influence on the individual from different microsystems where the biosystem interacts.
- Exosystem, which may constitute an influence on the individual from settings that do not include any member of the microsystem.

Bronfenbrenner considered the time dimension (chronosystem) to have an influence on the development of the individual through the interaction of the different systems on each other across time. The mutual interaction between and among the different layers of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system framework as applied in this study are subsequently presented. This framework is used to present the responses of the different groups of participants. Central to each of the RQs, hence, were the views of the participating secondary students with vision impairment (SVI), which constituted the biosystem of the ecological model. Other people interacting with this population, whether directly or indirectly, may also have informed their educational and life experiences. Hence, data from this population is presented in relation to each of the posed research questions. Others around the SVI are of two broad types. The first type have direct contact with SVIs:

- Parents (microsystem)
- Peers (microsystem)
- Teachers (microsystem)

Those who do not have direct contact with SVIs include the following, all of whom have arguably indirect effects on SVI through their professional activities:

- Higher Education *tutors* (HET) (exosystem)
- Individuals from governmental-organisations (GOs) and non-governmental-organisations (NGOs) working on inclusion in education

(exosystem)

SVI have occupied a succession of educational settings, centred on their secondary stages. In each of these settings, 'other individuals' have had a role, that may have direct influence on the education of the SVI, according to which educational phase the SVI had already been through and were currently in (pre-secondary, secondary, post-secondary or university). These 'others' are:

- learning support teachers (LST) (mesosystem)

- headteachers within particular educational settings (mesosystem)

Beyond, but also influencing these settings, were individuals in outside bodies that, in turn, may influence LSTs and schools:

- HET (through the provided or lack of) courses in SEN at their respective universities (exosystem)

- GOs and NGOs (through the effect of their inclusion projects on the learning environment) (exosystem)

To present the views of this range of participants in a systematic way, I further organise each of the RQ related sections by first focusing on the views of the SVI participants in each educational phase. These were, in succession:

- Brevet (BSVI)

- Secondary, (SSVI)

- Post-secondary (PSSVI)

- University (USVI)

The largest number of SVI participants in the study were drawn from the secondary phase given the focus of the research questions.

The secondary phase responses were further contextualised by linking them to the type of secondary school in which they occurred, identified regarding the source of support the schools or SVI received. Based on the RQs and following

the SVI views, subsequent sections within each RQ take a focus as relevant to the addressed RQ. For example, RQ1 reports the views of SVI in their different educational stages followed, in turn, by the views of:

- Parents (Pa)

- Headteachers (HT)

- Organisations (GOs and NGOs)

Within RQ2 and 3, are the views of:

- SVI in their different educational stages

- Parents (Pa)

- Peers (Pe)

- Teachers (T)

- Learning support teachers (LSTs)

- Headteachers (HT)

- HE tutors (HET)

- Organisations (GOs and NGOs)

For each thematic result, the incidence of evidence for a particular theme in the form of a series of numbers is given. These represent (A) the number of comments related to this theme, divided by (B) the number of respondents making those comments (A/B). This is then expressed as a percentage rounded to the nearest figure as appropriate. This has been done to give an idea of the prevalence of different issues among respondents. Issues raised by single individuals have also been reported to ensure a comprehensive representation of issues and views.

At the end of each RQ section, a summary of the key evidence including the identified themes and their sub-themes (ST) is presented. I adopt a similar approach in relation to the numerical data (Section 4.4) linked specifically to

teachers' responses to questionnaires. The final Section 4.5 summarises and looks across the key evidence that has been presented for each individual RQ.

THE QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE

4.1   RQ1 – School identification or school selection

The views of Students with Vision Impairment

4.1.1 Brevet students with vision impairment (chronosystem)

Five (83%) of BSVI (n=6) in the current sample started their education in mainstream settings and later moved on to special schools. Only 1/6 (17%) of them had started their education in a special school:

'[My parents] first took me to several schools … my mum heard about this institution … she thought that this way it's better for [me and my sister].' (BSVI6)

Those who changed educational provision (n=5) identified multiple factors that had influenced their decision to move to a special school. These were related to the lack of support they received in mainstream schools (5/5, 100%), and the support that can be made available for them in special schools (5/5, 100%):

'I didn't want to be in a special school … in my situation, there wasn't a suitable place except here.' (BSVI4)

Other reported influencing factors that this group reported were the deterioration of sight and the negative treatment received from peers at mainstream schools (3/5, 60%):

'Nothing was provided to me at all and there were pupils who mocked me.' (BSVI4)

Further influencing factors were the termination of an inclusive project that their private mainstream school was part of (2/5, 40%):

'There is no inclusion in the school any more so we had to move to a different school.' (BSVI1&2)

The influencing factors that BSVI reported demonstrated the lack of autonomy in school selection for SVI (hence the theme **autonomy** was identified during the analysis). All BSVI (n=6) reported that joining a special school was their only choice. The motivation for this, as was apparent from the quotes of participants, was influenced by their support-needs (ST) and lack-of-inclusive-provision-in-mainstream schools (ST).

4.1.2 Secondary students with vision impairment (biosystem)

SSVI in the sample (n=23) attended one of three types of secondary schools, as explained in Subsection 3.2.2 of chapter 3.

SSVI attending Type-1 schools (10/23, 43%) yielded a range of responses. First, all attended a mainstream school (identified by their special school):

'At the special school, they have been including students in the mainstream school we go to … for about 15-10 years.' (SSVI14)

3/10 (30%) SSVI resided in Beirut so had their schools local to their homes and the rest 7/10 (70%) did not reside in Beirut so attended a school local to their special school. All interviewees mentioned the support that the special school may offer in specific mainstream schools to have influenced their school selection. Of these 9/10 (90%) attended special schools previously while 1/10 (10%) started receiving the support of special schools when reaching secondary stage:

'The headteacher of the private mainstream school I attended used to teach here, he told me about this school and brought me here.' (SSVI16)

SSVI attending Type-2 schools (10/23, 43%) attended private (n=4) and UNRWA schools (n=6). Among the six Type-2 schools UNRWA interviewees, five chose to attend the UNRWA designated inclusive schools in their region. The sixth attended the UNRWA school as it was the only local school with an inclusive program that accepted non-refugees:

'I joined the UNRWA school as it is the only school in my region with LST for SVI and I am Lebanese with severe sight impairment (SSI).' (SSVI22)

The rest of the Type-2 school interviewees (4/10, 40%) attended schools that had LSTs based in them; of these, three were guided by the inclusive NGO they were affiliated with and the fourth joined the school that has special support for SVI after hearing about it through word of mouth:

'The association picked this school … which was willing to accept me.' (SSVI8)

Respondents demonstrated that the desire to be in a mainstream school local to their place of residence affected their choice of school, which was then directed by inclusive projects implemented in specific schools.

Those attending Type-3 schools 3/23 (13%) were sight impaired (SI) and, like students of Type-2 schools, went to the local mainstream schools able to support their needs. Factors that influenced their school choice were

- proximity to their place of residence (3/3, 100%):

'This school is close to my house; it takes me a minute to get there.' (SSVI2)

- the academic reputation of the school (2/3, 67%)
- already established friendships (2/3, 67%):

'…all my friends are at this school.' (SSVI2)

- school of childhood (1/3, 33%):

'I have been in this school from when I first started, so about 14 years.' (SSVI1)

The theme autonomy also emerged from the interviews, with SVIs attending mainly Type-1 and 2 secondary schools. This was again associated with two factors, which may in turn influence their school choice:

- SVI's support-needs (ST)

- the lack-of-inclusive-provision-in-local-mainstream-schools (ST).

Consequently, SVIs were arguably not able to make independent decisions about school selection. They stated that their needs and the support available for them influenced their decisions:

'I can't go to the local mainstream school which is 100m from my home because there are no available means of assistance for me there.' (SSVI22)

The responses demonstrate that SSVI attending Type-3 schools had their school choice influenced by the severity of their impairment. When the needs were minor they often chose to attend a local mainstream independent school.

Having presented the data related to the school identification of SSVI, together with the factors that influenced their selection, the next step is to look at the evidence gathered from some of those who had completed their secondary phase and were in the process of transferring to university stage.

4.1.3 Post-secondary students with vision impairment (chronosystem)

Seven SSVI were re-interviewed on completion of their secondary schooling stage. They reported on their transition from secondary school to university and the factors that influenced their university selection.

PSSVI attending Type-1 schools (n=2) reported the following factors that influenced their university selection:

- their major of interest (1/2, 50%)
- the support that university can offer (1/2, 50%):

'My organisation collaborates with them, and they take our cases into consideration.' (PSSVI7)

Those who attended Type-2 schools (n=3) reported the following factors:

- previously established friendship (1/3, 33%)
- proximity to home (1/3, 33%)

- the inclusivity of the university (2/3, 67%)

- offering the course of choice (1/3, 33%).

'This university has the largest number of my school friends, who understand my situation.' (PSSVI1)

All PSSVI who attended Type-3 schools (n=2) reported the following factors to influence their university selection:

- the courses offered
- the relevance of the courses offered for future careers:

'I had the option to study humanities … Psychology especially in Lebanon is not needed that much… Sociology, I can't do anything other than teach … I want to go into the faculty of literature and humanities, to study Arabic literature.' (PSSVI6)

PSSVI responses suggested that university identification of those who were about to embark on their university phase was influenced to a large extent by their previously attended educational provision. Whilst all PSSVI were concerned about the courses on offer, those who attended Type-1 schools were additionally concerned about the support provided; those who attended Type-2 were concerned about their educational and social inclusion, and those attending Type-3 were more concerned about their future career. These concerns were aligned with the different types of schools PSSVI attended along with the available-support (ST). This led to the theme **autonomy** which demonstrated that SVIs choices, mainly those attending Type-1 and 2 schools, were still restricted and dependent on their support needs. More apparent though was a concern for future employability mainly for PSSVI attending Type-3 schools.

4.1.4 University students with vision impairment (chronosystem)

Ten (77%) USVI (n=13) had previously received support from special schools. A further student received the support of their UNRWA school (1/13 (8%) and two students had no previous affiliation with NGOs for SVIs 2/13 (16%). These three

different groups of USVI represent the previously attended three different types of schools 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

USVI gave multiple responses regarding factors affecting their university selection. Those who previously attended Type-1 schools reported

- the fees they/their special schools could afford (6/10, 60%)

- they were denied admission in other universities (4/10, 40%)

- they were awarded scholarships from particular universities (2/10, 20%):

'I decided to go there because they gave us a scholarship when we were featured on the T.' (USVI12)

- the need to major in text-based courses (8/10, 80%):

'I chose this major not because I like it really, but because it's a thing that I am able to do.' (USVI3)

USVI who previously attended Type-2 schools reported:

- the affordability of government universities
- denying acceptance on the grounds of their SEN at a private university:

*'Mr. ** told me that they didn't want any special cases at their university.' (USVI6)*

Those who had not received the support of NGOs in their inclusion reported:

- the academic reputation of the university (2/2, 100%):

'I wanted the best education and it's known that AUB is the best in the Middle East.' (USVI13)

- the support private universities could offer (2/2, 100%)

From the above, it appeared that university selection was influenced by the support-received (ST) and the willingness-of-universities-to-accept-SVI (ST), mainly for those who previously attended Type-1 and 2 schools. On the other

hand, the academic reputation and the quality of education was of more concern for those who had previously attended Type-3 schools.

Hence, **lack of autonomy** of SVI in university selection is a theme that cuts across all educational phases.

Having presented the issues that may influence SVIs' own school identification, the next step is to present the responses of parents of children with VI regarding the school selection that they make for their children.

4.1.5 The evidence from others around students with vision impairment

4.1.6 Parents (microsystem)

Interviewed Pa (n=10) were those of SSVI. Three (30%) sent their children to Type-1 schools. Of these, two parents had their children attending special schools since early educational stages and the third had her child changing educational provision from a local mainstream school to a local vocational institution in north Lebanon prior to joining the special school:

'He reached grade 7 and then he began to have difficulties at school … at vocational institute … they told me that my kids are young, and I shouldn't let them stay there and that they have a chance of learning at school, and they told us about the school for the V.' (Pa8)

Five (50%) parents sent their children to Type-2 schools. Of these, four joined mainstream education from early educational stages and the fifth switched between mainstream and special education. Of these, four parents tried enrolling their children in the same school as their other siblings first:

'We wanted to enrol him in the same school as his sisters, the one next to our house. But not all schools understood and accepted the concept of inclusion whether it was from a student's or a teacher's point of view.' (Pa7)

The last two in the sample (20%) sent their children to Type-3 schools. Of these, one stayed in the same school since early educational stages, while the other moved between five different local mainstream schools due to parents changing place of residence.

Those parents who sent their children to Type-1 schools reported the following factors having influenced the school choice they made for their children:

- the unavailability of local specialised school (3/3, 100%)

- the reputation of special schools in supporting SVI (3/3, 100%).

'I was guided to a special school ... I want to enrol my child in a place that I can guarantee her safety, and guarantee that she is well taken care of … That's why I can't just enrol her in [mainstream] schools here unfortunately.' (Pa10)

Parents whose children attended Type-2 schools reported the following factors on their school selection:

- the desire to have their children living with them and not in a special school (5/5, 100%)

- the unsuitability of previous school for the needs of their children (4/5, 80%)

- the need to follow the NGO's recommended school (4/5, 80%)

- the need to search for inclusive local school for themselves (1/5, 20%)

'We got introduced to the inclusion program through the UNRWA … we thought that inclusion is better for him and for us than special school.' (Pa1)

Those whose children attended Type-3 schools (n=2) reported the following multiple responses to have influenced their school choice:

- the second language of the school (1/2, 50%)

- the reputation of the school (1/2, 50%)

- the efforts of the local schools to adapt to the needs and comfort of their children (2/2, 100%):

'The school he went to was very good, they used to seat him in the front row.' (Pa3)

Responses on decisions about school selection that parents made for their children led to the theme **autonomy of parents**, as choices were influenced by

the school-acceptance-of-the-SVI (ST) and the support-offered-towards-inclusion (ST) whether it was from special schools, inclusive organisations or from schools that were able to provide limited support for their disabled students.

Having presented the school selection made by parents of SVI, the next step is to look at the choices made by headteachers to accept disabled students in their schools.

4.1.7 Headteachers (mesosystem)

Fourteen HT were interviewed about the disabled students they accepted at their schools generally and particularly those with VI.

HT of Type-1 schools (n=4) reported the following to have influenced their acceptance of SVI in their schools:

- the significance of support provided from the special school (4/4, 100%):

'…there is a cooperation between us and the special school.' (HT7)

- governmental-schools are for all students (1/4, 25%)

Those of Type-2 schools (n=5) reported:

The existing inclusive school policies (5/5, 100%)

'Inclusion started three years after the establishment of the school in 1997-8.' (HT2)

HT of Type-3 schools (n=5) reported the following to have influenced their acceptance of secondary SVI:

- the mild impairment of their SVI (5/5, 100%):

'When the case is presented to us, we see and study the problem that this person has. If we saw that we can provide certain help within our capabilities, then we accept that case.' (HT9)

- the development of sight impairment of the student during their time at the school (1/5, 20%):

'Cases such as vision, hearing, and motor impairments which started with the children while they were at our schools … We don't tell them to go home or transfer to another place.' (HT11)

- governmental schools should be open for all students regardless of their financial or physical situation (2/5, 20%)

Overall, the belief in the right of education for all and the capacity of the school to provide the necessary support or to receive external support were factors that led all participating headteachers to accept SVIs in their schools.

Based on that, accepting disabled students in secondary mainstream schools seemed to depend on the commitment to equality-and-inclusion-in-education (ST) of the schools. Other factors that may influence the inclusion of SVI and ultimately the ability of the schools to accept disabled students are the severity of the impairment and the support that schools receive or can provide for these students. Hence, the theme **school-policy** emerged which underpinned accepting disabled students across all different types of schools.

4.1.8 Other organisations (exosystem)

Other organisations (n=9) in the sample that supported the inclusion of SVI were NGOs 6/9 (67%) and 3/9 (33%) GOs. Of NGOs, 3/6 (50%) provided support for Type-1 schools and the rest 3/6 (50%) provided support for private schools of Type-2.

Participating NGOs that provided support to Type-1 schools (n=3) reported the following factors influencing their mainstream school partnership:

- the attitudes of mainstream schools towards including disabled students (3/3, 100%)

- the proximity of the mainstream schools to the special schools (3/3, 100%)

- the suitability of the school for their other disabled students (1/3, 33%)

- the preference of the students (1/3, 33%)

- the academic reputation of the school (1/3, 33%)

- the suitability of the school language of instruction to that of the student (1/3, 33%):

'You can't really send a Braille exam in a fax or in another means … that's why we grouped everything here next to us.' (NGO5)

'We don't have any particular criteria … any school that accepts [our students] and that we are able to include in it, we collaborate with. To accept means to adapt.' (NGO3)

NGOs that provided support for Type-2 schools (N=3) were of different types. One (33%) was international, one was national (33%), and the third was local (33%). All of these NGOs support the implementation of inclusion starting from early educational stages. They reported the following influencing their school partnership with mainstream schools:

- the proximity of mainstream schools to students' place of residence (3/3, 100%)

- the attitudes of the mainstream school's leaders towards inclusion (2/3, 67%)

- the cooperation of the school with the NGOs on implementing inclusion (1/3, 33%):

'The criteria that we consider as a priority is the extent to which the school's administration and the teachers at the school are ready to the idea of inclusion.' (NGO4)

- the suitability of the age of the teachers (1/3, 33%)

- the population of the school (1/3, 33%)

- the suitability of the physical environment of the school (2/3, 67%)

- the ratio of teachers to students (1/3, 33%)

- the proximity of place of residence to the designated inclusive school (1/3, 33%)

'In ** we have two [resource rooms], one in ** and one in ** … So if the student is in ** he can join the school there, and if the student is in ** he can join the school there.' (NGO1)

Participating GOs (n=3) belonged to two different Ministries. One Ministry followed a cluster approach to implement their inclusive programme, identifying suitable schools through recommendations from personnel and NGOs concerned with inclusion, the geographical distribution of the schools and the suitability of their teachers for training. The other supports the education of disabled students in special schools.

A theme emerged showing that different types of organisations followed different **approaches-to-inclusion**. This is influenced by the factors that organisations follow when identifying-inclusive-educational-institutions-for-their-students (ST) along with the different educational stage that NGOs may start supporting their students in mainstream education which may range between what suits the organisations, what suits the students and what could suit the implemented inclusive projects.

4.1.9 Summary of key issues/evidence for RQ1

As the summary of each part of the above indicated, three themes emerged from the data analysis related to school selection:

Autonomy (4.1.3;4.1.4;4.1.6)

School-policy (4.1.7)

Approaches-to-inclusion (4.1.8)

SVI attended one of three types of school; Type-1 consisted of governmental schools located in Beirut and are supported by special schools who support the inclusion of their SVI starting from secondary stage of education; Type-2 comprised of private and UNRWA schools. These schools were located in South and North Lebanon and were supported by NGOs. NGOs supporting these types of schools were concerned with the inclusion of SVI from early ages; Type-3 schools consisted of both private and governmental schools located either in North, South or Mount Lebanon. These schools received no external support for the inclusion of their SVI.

Generally SVI whether in Brevet, secondary, post-secondary or university stage of education, together with their parents, were restricted in their schools selection. Hence the theme **autonomy** emerged. A number of factors influenced the limited autonomy that the SVI and their parents had in identifying a suitable educational institution, which was to a certain extent influenced by the type of schools that SVI attended. For example, the restricted autonomy of SVI of Type-1 and 2 schools was influenced by the limited existing inclusive provision in mainstream schools, their support needs and the severity of their impairment whether they were in pre-secondary, secondary, transition or university phase of education. Whilst those who attended Type-1 schools were more concerned about their support needs in choosing their university, the social inclusion linked to their educational support was of more concern to those attending Type-2 schools. Those attending Type-3 schools were concerned about the academic reputation and quality of education that they could get rather than their additional needs.

Parents of SVI attending Type-1 schools relied fully on special schools to

identify suitable schools for their children. Parents who had their children attending Type-2 school were mainly concerned about having their children living with them hence searched for local schools that could provide their children with their SEN related support. On the other hand, parents who sent their children to Type-3 schools were mainly concerned about the academic reputation of the school and the education that their children could get.

The decisions that headteachers made to accept disabled students in their schools were influenced by a number of variables. The 'school policy' on acceptance of disabled students was influenced by the types, severity of impairments and the support that the school can receive.

Organisations adopted different Inclusive approaches to identify suitable schools for them to implement their inclusive programmes. Issues considered while identifying suitable school were:

attitudes of educationalists

proximity of the school either to the students or the NGOs

identification of certain schools where they can provide their students with support.

4.2   RQ2 - Experiences and Perspectives of Disabled Students of Mainstream Education

The views of Students with Vision Impairment

This section reports the experiences and perspectives of disabled students who are categorised as having SEN in mainstream education, those with VI and those who are directly or indirectly connected to them.

4.2.1 Brevet students with vision impairment (Chronosystem)

Six BSVI were interviewed. They reported multi-challenges that they faced in education:

- difficulties accessing scientific subjects (6/6, 100%)

- weakness in English (6/6, 100%)

- restricted social inclusion in the society and previously attended mainstream schools (5/6, 83%)

- unavailability of advanced assistive tools (3/6, 50%)

- limited accessible educational resources (2/6, 33%)

'The calculators are a problem here (special school) … we do not study geometry.' (BSVI2)

The reported challenges demonstrated the restricted educational access that BSVI faced in special schools, along with the limited available resources. They also demonstrated the restricted social inclusion they faced.

Regarding their contribution to PE activities in their special schools, BSVI reported:

- full inclusion in adapted PE activities (6/6, 100%):

'We always play goal-ball … it's a game for blind people.' (BSVI4,5&6)

Regarding their contribution to PE lessons, those who attended previously a mainstream school (n=5) reported:

- no previous involvement in sport activities (5/5, 100%)

The above responses demonstrated the adaptations made for non-core subjects at special schools and the lack of adapting non-core subjects in mainstream schools. This, together with the above reported challenges demonstrated the restriction on educational inclusion that BSVI experience in special settings. The focus of special schools on adapting non-core subjects as opposed to adapting core subjects was also apparent. The negative social inclusion in previously attended mainstream schools as well as in the society in general was identified.

Hence, in relation to the challenges and adaptations of SVI in education one theme which emerged from the data was the **experience-in-educational and social inclusion** of BSVI.

4.2.2 Secondary students with vision impairment (Biosystem)

As illustrated in Subsection 4.1.2, SSVI attended one of three types of schools. They (n=23) reported on the challenges they faced in education. Those who attended Type-1 schools reported the following multiple responses:

- the non-inclusive teaching practice of some of their teachers (6/10, 60%):

'In Chemistry ... the teacher … never reads anything.' (P12)

- the difficulty of using a screen reader to take notes in the classroom (2/10, 20%)

- limited outside classrooms inclusive provisions (1/10, 10%):

 'I cannot see at all in the sunlight ... So someone should accompany me at school, otherwise I bump into people when walking.' (SSVI17)

- noisy classes (3/10, 30%)

- difficulties crossing roads (1/10, 10%)

- reading from a distance (1/10, 10%)

- restricted school exam adaptations (3/10, 30%):

'They don't always give us extra time.' (SSVI10)

The above demonstrated the out-of-classroom and in-classroom challenges that faced SVI. Whilst some of the reported challenges were related to the readiness of teachers to teach inclusively, others were related to the use of assistive tools and some others were related to the accommodation that schools implement to aid outside and inside-classroom SVI inclusion.

SSVI who attended Type-2 schools (n=10) reported the following challenges:

- the non-inclusive teaching practice of some teachers (6/10, 60%):

'The Math teacher starts explaining by saying "we do this *this way, and we do* that *the other way." How should I know what this and that refer to?' (SSVI23)*

- the limited outside classroom provision (5/10, 50%):

'In any mixed schools, some problems are going to occur. For example, I can't see. If I want to walk in the playground, some guys … well … can you please change the question?' (SSVI21)

- unavailability of Braille books (4/10, 40%)

'The problem is that of Braille books. I am sure if I had the books I would have ranked the first in school.' (SSVI21)

- the sound of the Braillers (5/10, 50%)

'It's loud and it annoys students.' (SSVI8)

- an irresponsible LST (1/10, 10%)

- difficulty in English spelling (1/10, 10%):

'I just write as I know, because if a girl is dictating the words to me, she can't dictate it to me letter by letter … some teachers deduct grades on spelling mistakes, so it affects us.' (SSVI23)

- disability negative language (2/10, 20%):

'…are there other Blind/'Emmie' in your school? ... Can you please say visually impaired' / 'Makfoofeen.' (SSVI22)

Similar to the challenges reported by those who attended Type-1 schools, some of the reported challenges of those who attended Type-2 schools were related to the unpreparedness of teachers and LSTs for inclusion, others were related to the practicality of using VI related assistive tools in mainstream classes and some others were related to the accommodations that school put in place to include their SVI in their outside and inside-classrooms activities. The awareness of the negative language of disability was another issue that arose in this group of SVIs.

Those who attended Type-3 schools (n=3) reported challenges with the following:

- building friendships (2/3, 67%)

- mobility (1/3, 33%)

- eye strain (2/3, 67%)

- negative social interaction with peers in childhood (2/3, 67%):

'They used to make fun of me calling me "4-eyed." That really used to hurt me.'
(SSVI1)

As opposed to the challenges faced by those attending Type-1 and 2 schools, those who attended Type-3 schools demonstrated less concern about their educational inclusion. Instead, the social inclusion and the effect of their impairment on social inclusion was of greater concern to them.

Regarding their contribution to PE sessions, those who attended Type-1 schools reported:

- did not study PE (2/10, 20%)
- did not take part in PE due to their SSI (6/10, 60%)
- participated using their residual sight (2/10, 20%)

'Our friend who has more sight left is able to play with the rest of the sighted peers.' (SSVI9&11)

Those who attended Type-2 schools reported:

- did not study PE (6/10, 60%)
- did not take part in PE sessions due to their SSI (3/10, 30%)
- Participated in some adjusted PE lessons (1/10, 10%)

'The teacher makes me do stretching with my friends normally. Sometimes, they show me how to play ping-pong, and ask me to guess who won in games, one time I even played.' (SSVI8)

All those who attended Type-3 schools (n=3) did not participate in PE lessons due to their VI:

'Football relies heavily on vision … I used not to play so my team won't lose.' (SSVI1)

The above demonstrated that PE mainly in some private schools was not part of their curriculum. However, when PE was taught, SSVI faced the challenges of exclusive-practice-of-schools (ST) because those who were able to participate in Type-1 schools had to rely on the remaining sight that they had. SVI also faced the challenge of the restricted-existing-inclusive-provision (ST) as efforts to encourage their participation were limited in Type-2 schools only, while in Type-1 and 3 schools there were no efforts made by the schools to include their SVI in PE lessons. Hence, the following theme was revealed: **experience-in-educational-and-social-inclusion** that the secondary SVI face.

4.2.3 Post-secondary students with vision impairment (chronosystem)

Seven SSVI were re-interviewed regarding their experience with the official baccalaureate exams. Regarding place of examination, those who attended Type-1 schools (n=2) reported:

- undertaking the examination in an authorised special examination centre for disabled students (2/2, 100%)

Those who attended Type-2 schools (n=3) reported being:

- examined in a designated parallel mainstream classroom to their non-disabled-peers (3/3, 100%)

SVIs who attended Type-3 schools (n=2) reported:

- examined in a designated mainstream parallel classroom (1/2, 50%)
- examined in the same class as his peers (1/2, 50%)

From the above, it appeared that those who received the support of special schools in their inclusion took their official exams in special examination centres, whilst the rest took their examination in mainstream schools. This revealed 'the-influence-of-the-attended-type-of-school-on-the-place-of-examination' (ST).

Reporting on the challenges in official baccalaureate exams, those attended Type-1 schools reported:

- no major challenges. (2/2, 100%)

Those who attended Type-2 schools (n=3) reported multiple challenges:

- not being provided with the preferred format of maths exam (1/3, 33%)

- being provided with a non-adapted chemistry exam (1/3, 33%)

- unnumbered exam pages (1/3, 33%)

- poor printed Braille (1/3, 33

'The chemistry was not adapted by the Ministry. It had three exercises. One had 7 points, and that was not embossed for me!' (PSSVI4)

- problems linked to the allocated LST (1/3, 33%):

'The Proctor was really strict with the lady who was helping me. She was from my school, she was supposed to be from another school. However the Ministry accepted that, and she had the permit and everything, but the Proctor refused and reported that she should not be with me.' (PSSVI4)

Those who attended Type-3 schools (n=2) reported the following challenges:

- unprovided assistance (1/2, 50%):

'Someone should've written for me so I can finish on time. I applied, they accepted my application but nobody came.' (PSSVI6)

There were variations in the challenges encountered. Whilst those who attended Type-1 schools did not consider they had to face challenges, those who attended Type-2 schools reported exam access related challenges. On the other hand, those who attended Type-3 schools encountered disorganisation in their support.

The challenges-that-some-participants-encountered during official baccalaureate exams (ST), re-enforced by attitudinal, practical and organisation related challenges, led to the theme **experience-in-SEN** to emerge.

4.2.4 University students with vision impairment (chronosystem)

Participating USVI (n=13) reported multiple challenges in their higher education journeys. These were the following:

- unavailability of accessible course materials (6/13, 46%):

'Honestly, I stopped comprehending anything in class because I don't have written notes related to any of the lectures.' (USVI6)

- unaffordable assistive tools (2/13, 15%):

'The price of the Braille-Display is 700 Euro and above. This could have helped me a lot. But unfortunately, it's not available.' (USVI9)

- reliance on recorded course material (2/13,15%):

'There is a challenge studying through recorded materials, a big one.' (USVI3)

- the poor knowledge of peers and lecturers in disability/vision impairment (VI) (5/13, 38%):

'[Students] don't want to talk to me because no one knows me… there was a doctor who wanted me not to do an exam on a laptop; he wanted me to do it by hand.' (USVI9)

- weakness in English (4/13, 31%),

- difficulties in commuting to and from university (2/13, 15%),

- work study balance (1/13, 8%),

- attending practical parts of course work (1/13, 8%)

- Additional health difficulties (1/13, 8%)

- engaging in visual course material (1/13, 8%):

'Usually the problems come in when we get into diagrams and graphs, especially three dimensions because it's very difficult to visualise a 3-dimensional object in a 2-dimensional plane.' (USVI13)

The above demonstrated that accessing-information (ST) constituted a major challenge facing SVI in HE. Other challenges facing SVI were attitudinal,-availability-of-assistive tools-and-support-provision (ST). This is in addition to the social-and-educational-challenges that this group faced during their HE (ST). Hence, the theme experience-**in-SEN-at-HE** was revealed.

4.2.5 The evidence from others around SVI: RQ2

4.2.6 Parents (microsystem)

Interviewed parents (n=10) of SVI who attended the different types of schools reported multiple concerns regarding their children. These were:

- employment after graduation (7/10, 70%):

'I want him to get his degree … He wants to become an architect, I don't know if [his VI] will affect him, and will he find a job or not.' (Pa3)

- the incomplete school Braille books (4/10, 40%)

- the social inclusion of their children (4/10, 40%)

- the limited information about the available accommodation for SVI at university (5/10, 50%):

'I can provide her with a driver that takes her to the university gate, but what about inside, will the assistant stay with her?' (Pa4)

The above demonstrates the educational, social and future concerns that parents had regarding their SVI children. This resulted from the limited-access-to-school-material (ST) in the preferred format of their children, concern-for-university-stage-of-education-and-beyond (ST) and the limitations-facing-the-social-inclusion-of-their-children (ST). Hence, the above revealed the theme **parental-experience-in-living-with-vision-impairment** which reflected the short and long term concerns that parents have regarding the inclusion of their children in education and in society at large.

4.2.7 Peers (microsystem)

Peers of the SVI in the sample (n=13) attended four different secondary schools. Of these, 2/13 (15%) attended Type-1 schools, 9/13 (70%) attended Type-2 schools and 2/13 (15%) attended Type-3 schools. Participating peers reported on their understanding of who disabled people are. All mentioned that disabled people are those with vision, hearing, physical and mental impairments. Only one interviewee from Type-1 schools additionally mentioned students with dyslexia whilst two from Type-2 schools mentioned students with LD.

'Those who have: speech difficulties, LD, physical impairment, VI and mental problems.' (Pe3&4)

Participating peers also reported on their interaction with their disabled peers. Of these, 9/13 (70%) from Type-3 and 2 reported never interacting with disabled people outside the educational environment:

'We never went out after school, it's a bit difficult.' (Pe7)

The rest 4/13 (30%) of Type-2 and 3 had interacted with disabled people mainly through having a disabled relative. All participants had had some interaction with disabled peers in the educational environment:

'There's one person I know, he's related to me … he's 23 years old. He talks to you normally. But sometimes he acts as a child.' (Pe4)

Based on the above, it appeared that existing-knowledge-of-non-disabled peers-about-SEN-focused-on-the-visible-disabilities (ST) and that their interaction with disabled peers was restricted to the educational-and-family-environment (ST). This led to the theme **background-in-SEN** to arise.

Participating peers showed building their experience in disability mainly through interacting with disabled peers at school. This in turn had limited their knowledge of differences that exist between students to the types of impairments/difficulties that their schools felt able/willing to accept.

4.2.8 Teachers (microsystem)

Twenty-eight teachers were asked about their interaction with SSVI. Those who taught in Type-1 schools (n=8) reported:

- no interaction with SVIs at the current school (3/8, 37%)
- having direct interaction with SVI at the current school (5/8, 62%)
- interacted with students with physical impairments in the current school (3/8, 37%)
- interacted with students with LD in previously attended private school (1/8, 12%)
- no interaction with students requiring support provision in previously attended school (2/8, 25%)

Teachers of Type-2 schools (n=15) reported interacting with:

- SVI in current school (15/15, 100%)
- Students with physical impairment and students with LD in current school (4/15, 27%)

Teachers of Type-3 schools (n=5) reported interacting with:

- only SVI with mild SI (5/5, 100%)
- students with physical impairment (3/5, 60%)

The above responses demonstrated the limited interaction that teachers had with disabled students regardless of the type of schools they taught in and that their interaction was mainly with the type of impairment that was present in their schools. Hence, the theme **background-in-SEN** was revealed.

Interviewed teachers (n=28) reported on the issues they face in teaching SVI. Those who taught in Type-1 schools (n=8), reported:

- difficulties including SVI in scientific and visual parts of the courses as opposed to including them in literary and text based subjects (8/8, 100%): *'Our subject/Sociology allows us to work with these cases more than the other*

subjects.' (T24)

Of Type-1 schools, five teachers had direct interaction with SVI. They reported the following challenges:

- the unavailability of Braille materials and clarification resources (5/5, 100%)

'The SVI is not having Braille books, he is having a regular book like the rest are having.' (T11)

- limited available support team (3/5, 60%):

'The role of a support person is very important but unfortunately not available.' (T23)

The above responses demonstrated the negative attitudes teachers had towards the inclusion of SVI in visual and scientific subjects. The limited available human and physical resources in support of the inclusion of their SVI were also revealed to be problematic.

Teachers of Type-2 schools (n=15) reported the following challenges:

- the noise of the Braillers (5/15, 33%)

- the difficulties of including SVI in scientific and visual parts of the courses as opposed to including them in literary and text based subjects (15/15, 100%):

'We have to use geometrical applications in physical contexts, these are impossible to explain to them.' (T16)

- restricted participations of SVI during lessons (4/15, 26%)

- unavailability of Braille exercises (1/15, 7%)

- the introductory nature of teacher training (5/15, 33%):

'I assessed her academically, and I knew how I can actually get the best out of her … I got to the point in the end where I said that I should probably go to their NGO and teach them how they could teach maths to these students.' (T7)

- facing no major challenges including SVI in their subjects (2/15, 13%):

'Honestly, I don't find any difficulties with these students … I usually assign a student to sit next to the VI so he can dictate him … I can't say everything out loud in class.' (T28)

- poor social relationship between SVI and their peers (2/15, 13%)

- the overload of the LST (3/15, 20%)

- the restricted mobility of SVI in the school environment (1/15, 7%)

'The challenges that face us as well are the ones related to the building itself. There is no specific path for them. That's a serious problem. They aren't able to move around easily inside the school unless they were accompanied.' (T26)

The negative attitudes towards the inclusion of SVI, as well as their inclusion in scientific and visual based subjects, were apparent in the responses of these teachers. The social, educational and physical barriers facing inclusion in these schools were also apparent.

All teachers of Type-3 schools (n=5) reported experiencing SVI students with mild difficulties. Hence they reported:

- the foreseen difficulties of including SVI with SSI in scientific and visual parts of the curriculum as opposed to including them in literary and text based subjects (5/5, 100%)

- no major challenges with the current students (5/5, 100%)

'I never had severe visually impaired students, the ones I had I simply moved them to the front … and that's it.' (T20)

The above responses also revealed the negative attitudes towards including SVI in visual subjects. It also demonstrates the minor barriers teachers face when they have SVI with SI.

Hence, teachers' interaction with disabled students was interlinked with the severity and type of impairments their school can accept. As a result, the theme **experience-in-SEN** emerged. It is derived from the sub-themes the limited-exposure (ST) that teachers had with disabled students and the types-of-disabilities-they-were-exposed-to (ST).

Teachers generally reported <u>issues that SVI-face-in-accessing-visual-based-subjects</u> (ST), <u>accessing-resources</u> being it physical or human (ST) and the lack of specialised support in <u>adapting-visual-materials-especially-for-those-who-have-SSI</u> (ST).

It should be noted that challenges reported by teachers of Type-1 schools were concerned with the limited support that teachers in these schools received to help them include their SVI together with the limited accessible resources that were made available for their students. The concerns that teachers of Type-2 schools had were related to the independence and social inclusion of their SVI, the unavailable specialised training and support team together with the challenge of using Braille equipment in mainstream classrooms. On the other hand, those who taught in Type-3 schools did not experience teaching students with severe impairment therefore they did not report major challenges. Nonetheless, their attitudes, like all participating teachers, were not positive regarding the inclusion of SSI in visual based subjects.

Hence, the theme **barriers-to-inclusion** was identified. As demonstrated, the barriers towards including SVI in mainstream secondary schools vary based on the type of schools the SVI attend, the severity of the vision impairment and the support that can be made available for students and their teachers.

4.2.9 Learning Support Teachers (Mesosystem)

LSTs in the sample (n=8) worked at five different private and UNRWA Type-2 schools. They reported multiple responses in relation to the challenges they face, as follows:

- the limitation in adapting visual and scientific subjects for their SVI (6/8, 75%)

- their heavy caseload (5/8, 63%)

- the incompatible Braille curriculum with its print version (3/8, 38%):

'There are a lot of differences between the books that the non-disabled students have and the ones that the SVI have. A large part concerning drawings and pictures is omitted from their books.' (LST5&6)

- limited participation of SVI in PE lessons (3/8, 38%)

- unavailability of guidelines about curriculum adaptations for the official baccalaureate exams (6/8, 75%):

'We have problems when it comes to the curriculum. This is related to the government… in the grade-9 exams, we were not able to get the necessary information about what is and what is not required from SVI.' (LST6)

- the ineffective available assistive tools (4/8, 50%):

'We trained them on these Braille machines, but these machines stopped working… also, most of their studies are in Arabic; however our computer programs are only in English. So that didn't assist us.' (LST2,3&4)

- the difficulties in providing academic support for this stage of education. Therefore, their need to coordinate and liaise with the subject teacher (8/8, 100%):

'It becomes difficult for us to support them educationally in grades-11-12. Because you now need specialised teachers… when it comes to adapting the questions, we rely on the subject teacher to do so because he knows better about the nature of the material and what's being given in class.' (LST5&6)

Some of the reported challenges were related to the limited support and information that LST can be provided with, others were related to the unreadiness of LST to support secondary SVI, and some others were related to accessing educational environment linked to the participation of SVI in the school and its activities.

This was demonstrated in the restricted-support-offered-from-LSTs-in-secondary-stages (ST), and the physical,-human-and-technical-barriers-facing-the-implementation-of-inclusion-in-secondary-stages (ST). Hence, the theme **experience-in-SEN** has emerged.

Having presented the experience of LST in supporting SVI in secondary stages, next the experience of headteachers in inclusion is presented.

4.2.10 Headteachers (mesosystem)

All interviewed headteachers (n=14) reported that SSVI attended their schools on a full-time basis.

As for the different types of SEN headteachers encountered in their schools, those of Type-1 schools (n=4) reported encountering students with:

- physical and hearing impairments (1/4, 25%)

- only SVI (3/4, 75%):

'Only VI. The school started receiving them for not less than ten years ago.' (HT7)

Headteachers of Type-2 schools (n=5) encountered students with:

- physical impairment (5/5, 100%)

- LD (2/5, 40%)

- SEBD (5/5, 100%)

'We had some students with different learning abilities than the rest of the students, and from then on we started getting more involved in the issue of inclusion.' (HT2)

Headteachers of Type-3 schools (n=5) reported encountering students with:

- physical impairment (2/5, 40%)

- hearing impairment (2/5, 40%)

- SEBD (4/5, 80%)

- Poor socio-economic background (5/5 100%):

'The school has some students with mild VI and others with social and emotional problems along with some with financial constraints.' (HT10)

Although the above demonstrates, the dominance of headteachers at different types of schools to encountering VI, most reported interaction was with those with visible impairment mainly in Type-2 schools. Based on this, the theme background-in-SEN that secondary-school headteachers-experienced-was-limited-to-the-inclusion-of-those-with-visible-disabilities-mainly-SVI-and-physical-impairment-when-the-school-allows-access-for-these-students (ST) has been identified.

As for the challenges in including disabled students in their schools, headteachers of Type-1 schools reported multiple issues:

• teachers being hourly paid so their out-of-lesson support for SVI was voluntary (3/4, 75%)

• no school-parents contact - school contacts were with the special school (4/4, 100%):

'I wish that the parents would come. Our contact is with the institute not the parents.' (HT7)

• positive social relationship between peers of the disabled and the non-disabled (4/4, 100%):

'A lot tried and succeeded in building meaningful relationship of students with SEN.' (HT9)

Headteachers of Type-2 schools (n=5) reported no major challenges but the following:

• SVI's emotional circumstances (2/5, 40%)

• overload of the LST (2/5, 40%)

• financial constraints (2/5, 40%)

• lack of remedial classes for SVI (1/5, 20%)

- limited specialised training opportunities (1/5, 20%):

'We need to provide the necessary training for teachers to be able to continue the process of education with these children. This is a challenge by itself for us, because sometimes training resources are not available locally, and we have some difficulties in that regard.' (HT2)

- the inability of LST to support secondary SVI (2/5, 40%:

'The LST finds it difficult to support SVI in grade-12 official baccalaureate exams - the programme is beyond her capacity.' (HT4)

Headteachers of Type-3 schools (n=5) reported the following issues/challenges facing inclusion:

- positive relationship between disabled and non-disabled peers (1/5, 20%)

- negative relationship between disabled and non-disabled peers (1/5, 20%):

'We can't tell each and every one of them what to say and what not to say in front of the disabled students.' (HT10)

- lack of resources, be it human, physical or financial (3/5, 60%)

- stigma attached to disabled people (2/5, 40%)

'[Parents] don't like to talk about the subject … this is an obstacle, because sometimes the school needs information … so that we know how to act.'(HT11)

Regarding the training in SEN that headteachers attended, those of Type-1 schools reported:

- attending a discussion about VI (1/4, 25%)

- attending no training in SEN (3/4, 75%)

Headteachers of Type-2 schools (n=5) reported:

- attending general training with an introduction to SEN (2/5, 40%):

'When it comes to the course we took, you can say 0% discusses special needs, and at the same time say 20% includes issues about special needs.' (HT4)

- attending no training (3/5, 60%):

'I started learning about the educational methods for disabled students using my personal efforts, and I developed my knowledge about the subject alone.' (HT2)

Those of Type-3 schools reported:

- attended workshops on the topic (1/5, 20%)

- attended no training (4/5, 80%)

All headteachers of Type-2 schools mentioned that their teachers had attended VI-related training previously but not during the last year. Current training took the form of negotiation between LSTs and teachers regarding possible ways of including their SVI:

'Teachers receive guidance from the LST so there is no specific training that is conducted for them.' (HT4)

All headteachers of Type-1 schools (n=4) and Type-3 schools (n=5) reported that their teachers attended no training.

The above demonstrated the challenges facing headteachers in different types of schools. Whilst those leading Type-1 schools faced constraints in the educational inclusion of their SVI, they reported the positive social inclusion that their SVI receive.

Responses from headteachers of Type-2 schools demonstrated the support the schools need to receive to equip their team for inclusion, the wellbeing support that their students would need to receive and the limited resources that they have. Headteachers of Type-3 schools reported the challenges of social

inclusion, the negative attitudes towards disabled people, in addition to the limited resources available in support of inclusion.

Responses also demonstrated the unavailability of specialised teacher training and that when training was available, it was 'introductory in nature' and did not take the form of training in many circumstances.

Responses regarding the 'barriers-to-inclusion' demonstrated the 'restrictions-of-schools-to-include-disabled-students-in-their-schools' (ST), the 'lack-of-human,-physical-and-financial-resources' (ST) and the limited-specialised-training-for-teachers-and-headteachers (ST). Hence, the theme **barriers-to-inclusion** has been identified.

4.2.11 Higher education (exosystem)

Participating HE (n=8) reported on the courses in SEN they had on offer as follows:

- optional standalone courses in SEN (3/8, 37%)
- BA in SEN (2/8, 25%)
- Diploma in SEN (3/8, 37%)

These universities additionally offered:

- MAs in SEN (2/8, 25%)
- Mandatory standalone courses in SEN as part of teaching qualification (1/8, 12%)

Universities started delivering their courses in SEN as follows:

- over a decade ago (5/8, 62%)
- five years ago or less (3/8, 37%)

The following responses were reported linked to the enrolment rate on courses in SEN:

- satisfactory enrolment rates on BA courses in SEN (5/8, 62%)

- low/limited enrolments rate on standalone courses in SEN (3/8, 37%)

'[Students] see that there is demand for them at schools … So I sense that their numbers are increasing compare to before.' (HET1)

Based on the reported course information, it appeared that there are limited-specialised-courses-on-offer-in-specific-areas-of-SEN, mainly-sensory-impairment (ST). It also appeared that the SEN-major-at-universities-started-a-decade-ago (ST) and that there is growing-interests-in-majoring-in-SEN – Less-interest-in-taking-optional-standalone-courses-in-SEN (ST).

This reported information led to identifying the theme **background-in-SEN at taught courses in SEN.**

Participants reported on the issues/challenges facing the inclusion of disabled students at their respective universities as follows:

- inaccessibility of the HE environment (6/8, 75%)

- the full accessible physical environments (2/8, 25%):

'Many of the buildings that we have … when they were built … did not take accessibility into consideration … we can have ramps which we did, but not all classrooms can be accessed.' (HET8)

- omitting course contents for disabled students (3/8, 37%):

'The support system at university for disabled students is very loose ... There's a thin line between helping someone and abusing the system.' (HET5)

- financial constraints (1/8, 12%)

- rigid university systems (2/8, 25%):

'Last year we had a student who had a missing leg … there's an elevator at the department, but they didn't turn it on in the afternoons on a regular basis, even though we asked them to give her a key so she can use it.' (HET6)

The challenges reported above demonstrate the limited educational inclusive practices for those identified as having SEN in HE and the limited accessible physical environment.

The following challenges were reported linked to the issues/challenges facing graduates of courses in SEN:

- The introductory skills in SEN they gain at HE (3/8, 37%):

'The courses here prepare them to be familiar with SEN, but it doesn't make them experts.' (HET8)

- the unavailability of specialised tutors in specific areas of SEN (5/8, 62%)

- the low wages that graduates in SEN may earn (2/8, 25%)

- the work overload (3/8, 37%)

'When they go to institutions they are being faced with something different than what they theoretically learned here.' (HET6)

The reported challenges appeared to be barriers-facing-the-educational-environment (ST). There are also barriers-that-students-with-SEN-qualifications-may-face-after-graduation (ST) in relation to the suitability of SEN courses to the job market and to their future career. This has led to the theme **barriers** to emerge.

To sum up, although courses in SEN are available in a range of HE institutions and can award different degrees, challenges facing these institutions along with their graduates are still numerous. This is mainly due to the introductory nature of the courses in SEN that are on offer, and the challenges that may face students after graduation.

4.2.12 Other organisations (Exosystem)

Participating organisations (n=9) reported multiple challenges towards implementing inclusion. NGOs supporting Type-1 schools (n=3) reported the following:

- untrained governmental teachers in teaching inclusively (3/3, 100%)

- reliance of schools and parents on NGOs to support SVI in governmental schools (3/3, 100%)

- inability to convert material into Braille at short notice (2/3, 67%)

- difficulties converting class handouts into Braille (2/3, 67%)

- inability of SSI students to participate in visual subjects (2/3, 67%):

'There are things that are impossible for SVI to do. We can't hide this fact.' (NGO6B)

It appeared that barriers revealed by these NGOs were institutional and VI focused. The limited role of parents in the education of their children and the unequipped teaching resources for inclusion were also reported as limiting.

NGOs who supported Type-2 schools (n=3) reported:

- load on their LSTs (2/3, 67%)

- limitations faced in converting materials into Braille (2/3, 66%)

- difficulties adapting visual material into Braille (1/3, 33%)

- including students with LD (1/3, 33%)

- conducting teachers training (1/3, 33%)

- unsustainability of international funding (2/3, 67%)

- limited resources towards implementing inclusion (3/3, 100%):

'Limited resources stop us from dealing with individual cases … even if we have the money, we lack the qualifications and resources.' (NGO1A)

Barriers which faced these NGOs were connected to the practicality of implementing inclusion in the classroom level. Financial barriers were also reported.

The last three organisations of the sample were GOs (n=3). They reported:

- low educational attainment of disabled and non-disabled students in governmental schools (2/3, 67%)

- limited human and physical resources available in governmental schools (3/3, 100%)

- introductory nature of teachers' training (2/3, 67%)

- restricted liaison between different governmental departments in relation to implementing inclusion (3/3, 100%)

- unavailability of specialised personnel at the ministry (2/3, 67%)

- unavailability of specialised positions to support inclusion (1/3, 33%)

- financial constraints towards implementing inclusion in governmental schools (2/3, 67%):

'If a student with very severe psychomotor disability was not able to write, then we cannot provide a person to write for him in class… we are doing it in the official exams.' (GO2)

GOs barriers were institutional and financial. The limited available resources and training were also challenging.

It appears that the organisation's perspectives, it appeared that barriers facing inclusion are numerous. They ranged from educational, financial, environmental and institutional. These barriers showed that 'Implementing-inclusion-in-education-is-still-physical-rather-than-educational' (ST), that there are 'Limited-available-human-resources-in-support-of-inclusion' (ST), there are 'Financial-barriers-to-implementing-inclusion' (ST) and that 'Environmental barriers hinder the implementation of inclusion' (ST).

Hence, the theme **barriers-to-inclusion** emerged, cutting across the range of barriers facing the implementation of inclusion from different organisations that support different types of schools.

4.2.13 Summary of key issues/evidence for RQ2

As the summary of each part of the above indicated, five themes emerged from the data analysis related to the experience and perspectives on inclusion:

Experience-in-educational-and-social-inclusion (4.2.1;4.2.2)

Experience-in-SEN (4.2.3;4.2.4;4.2.8;4.2.9)

Parental-experience-in-living-with-VI (4.2.6)

Background-in-SEN (4.2.7;4.2.11)

Barriers-to-inclusion (4.2.8, 4.2.10;4.2.11;4.2.12)

As the presented data linked to SVI responses demonstrated, the experience of this group across the three different stages of education demonstrated the poor adaptations in support of educational inclusion that exist in mainstream schools regardless of the type of school they attended:

the unreadiness of educationalists for inclusion

the limited available resources in support of inclusion.

SVI experienced inclusion in non-core subjects in special schools and experienced a lack of resources to aid their educational inclusion in main subjects. The efforts of mainstream schools to include SVI in non-core subjects when available were very limited. The experience of SVI also demonstrated the influence of their support on their place of official examinations and the ad-hoc support that they receive in official exams.

Accessing information for SVI at secondary and the university stage of education was challenging, along with the attitudes towards their inclusion, understanding of peers at HE and educators of their different needs, as well as the poor physical and environmental inclusion they encountered.

The experience of the parents of SVI in inclusion was typified by their concerns regarding their children's limited access to educational materials

and their concern for the future of their children mainly in accessing HE and employment. Parents also demonstrated their concern regarding the social inclusion of their children.

Peers' interaction and knowledge about SEN was very limited and mainly through their current schools.

The availability of courses in specific areas of SEN at HE, although courses in SEN started to be available nearly a decade ago, remains limited and introductory in content.

The barriers facing SVI in education, their teachers, LSTs, headteachers, NGOs and GOs, included: accessing visual materials, human or physical resources, and the lack of support in adapting visual material, all of which may vary based on the type of school SVI attend, the severity of their impairment and the support that can be provided for them.

4.3 RQ3 – Implementing Inclusive Practices in Mainstream Settings

The views of Students with Vision Impairment

Perceptions on inclusive practices

4.3.1 Brevet students with vision impairment (chronosystem)

Participating BSVI students (n=6) reported on the support they received at their special schools. They noted receiving:

- all what they may need (6/6, 100%):

'All is available, everything is being provided.' (BSVI2)

- omission of visual subjects from their course content (4/6, 67%)

- the support of SI students to their SSI-peers (3/6, 50%):

'[SSI] need someone to help them.' (BSVI6)

- additional educational support from volunteers (3/6, 50%)

- access to Braillers (3/6, 50%)

- additional explanations from teachers (4/6, 67%):

'At the previous private inclusive school we were at … the teacher shouts at all of us saying that she explains only once. While here at the special school they keep on repeating until…' (BSVI2)

Reporting on self-perceptions of level of education, participants reported:

- achieving equal level of education as non-disabled peers (1/6, 17%)

- having some differences in educational level (5/6, 83%)

'I am very lagging compared to my class.' (BSVI5)

Reporting on subject-preference, participants reported:

- preference for text based subjects (5/6, 83%)

- interest in scientific subjects (1/6, 17%):

'I am weak in Arabic, Literature … in my nature, I like the scientific subjects more.' (BSVI3)

Regarding inclusion with disabled and non-disabled students participating SVI reported:

- interest in being with non-disabled peers (4/6, 67%)

- preference to being in a special school (2/6, 33%):

'I like to be with people like me.' (BSVI6)

Based on the support reported above, it appeared that inclusion was practised on the grounds of Applying-reasonable-approaches-to-meet-the-needs-of-SVI-in-education (ST). Hence, the theme **meeting-the-needs of SVI** in education has emerged. It also appeared that BSVI perceived their level-of-attainment-to-be-different-from-their-peers (ST). And that vision impairment had an influence-on-preference-of-text-based-subjects-to-visual-ones (ST). This led to the theme **SVIs perceptions-on-inclusion-in-education** to emerge.

4.3.2 Secondary students with vision impairment (Biosystem)

Participating SSVI (n=23) reported on the support they received in mainstream education. Those attending Type-1 schools (n=10) reported receiving the following support provided by their special schools:

- afterschool educational support (5/10, 50%)

- transportation to and from mainstream school (9/10, 90%)

- assistant during exams (4/10, 40%):

'During midterm and final exams [the supervisor] stays with us in class the whole time, she reads, checks if we wrote anything wrong … we do our monthly exams in rooms by ourselves.' (SSVI12)

They also reported receiving the following support at their schools:

- non-disabled peer support (7/10, 70%)

- teachers' support (4/10, 40%)

- curriculum omission (8/10, 80%):

'Our exam doesn't have any maps.' (SSVI13)

- parents' explanation and recording school materials (4/10, 40%)

Those attending Type-2 schools (n=10) reported on the support received from their LST to include:

- converting exam sheets into Braille (9/10, 90%)

- reading and writing during exams (6/10, 60%)

- converting Braille exams into text (7/10, 70%).

Reported support at schools related to:

- peers (6/10, 60%)

- teachers' additional explanations (6/10, 60%)

- designated examination area (9/10, 90%)

- photocopying class notes (2/10, 20%):

'I have the right to photocopy the course material from my friends in case I couldn't write down the notes fast enough.' (SSVI8)

Reported support from NGOs included providing:

- Braillers (9/10, 90%)

- Braille books (9/10, 90%)

They also reported support received from parents (4/10, 40%)

All interviewees of Type-3 schools (n=3) reported receiving educational support from their parents. They also reported the support received at school to include:

- sitting in the front

- peer support

- enlarged exam sheets

- additional educational support:

'I needed help in maths, so I attended the remedial classes after school hours, I managed to improve.' (SSVI1)

Reporting on self-perception on level of education, those who attended Type-1 schools mentioned:

- changing in level of education due to change in educational provision (4/10, 40%):

'When I was [at the special school] my level of education was very good. But when I left it, I found a difference.' (SSVI17)

- obtaining same level of education in both environments (5/10, 50%):

'Except the omitted geometry and maps, our [results] are the same.'
(SSVI12,13,14&15)

- obtaining the same level of education required extra work (1/10, 10%):

'Of course it's easier for them since they can see everything … they get all the information required immediately in class, while I need to borrow a notebook, then read the notes and try to make sense of them for myself.' (SSVI16)

Interviewees attending Type-2 schools reported:

- obtaining the same level of education as others (2/10, 20%)

- excelling in their classes (2/10, 20%):

'I am the first in class, I get 15/20, and the second one just behind me in the rankings gets around 12.' (SSVI5)

- reaching lower level of education than their peers (5/10, 50%):

'I don't want to say a very low [score], but I'd say 35%.' (SSVI23)

- variations in attainment during one year (1/10, 10%):

'I think it varies, from the start of the year, middle of the year, and the end of the year.' (SSVI20)

All those attending Type-3 schools reported achieving a similar level of education as their peers:

'I think it's very similar, my average is very high compared to some students that took the whole of the grade-11 curriculum, keeping in mind that I missed a huge chunk of it.' (SSVI2)

Reporting on their subject preference, 22/23 (96%) of the interviewed SVI in all school types reported a preference for text based subjects over scientific ones. A further one who attended Type-2 schools reported interest in scientific based subjects.

Reporting on their interaction with their non-disabled peers, those who attended Type-1 schools mentioned:

• adjusting to the mainstream environment 2/10 (20%)

• preference to being around people they knew since childhood 8/10 (80%)

'Of course, I get comfortable with people just like me, since we've been staying here for a long time. We are just like a family now.' (SSVI15)

• gradually adapting to the mainstream environment (5/8, 50%):

'When I first started secondary school … I started to cry … But then I got used to it and it became normal.' (SSVI17)

Those attending Type-2 schools reported:

• familiarity with and preference for the mainstream environment (9/10, 90%):

'It is normal. Thank God I was included from the start.' (SSVI20)

• not being fully adapted to mainstream environment (1/10, 10%):

'It's 50% either way … I am not really convinced with it [inclusion] ... Sometimes it feels that if we were with students with similar cases to ours, they might understand us better.' (SSVI23)

All those attending Type-3 schools (n=3) reported no direct interaction with peers with VI.

Based on the reported support for SVI in education, it appeared that the support offered was on the ground of 'Applying-reasonable-approaches-to-meet-the-

needs-of-SVI-in-education' (ST) regardless of the type of school they attended. This led to the theme **meeting-the-needs-of-SVIs** to arise.

Reported self-perceptions on level of education demonstrated that the level-of-education was influenced by the ability of schools to support SVI in education' (ST). A common issue which all SVI faced regardless of the type of school they attended was their preference for subjects that do not require specific adaptations.

The interaction between the two groups of the disabled and the non-disabled suggested that early-inclusion-has-its-influence-on-building-social-interaction between both groups, possibly more so than inclusion in later educational stages (ST). These two sub-themes are linked to the theme **perceptions-on-inclusion-in-education**.

As shown, the support provided for SVI has implications for the way inclusion is practised in the secondary stages. Factors that may affect inclusive applications are the educational attainment of SVI along with the social inclusion that they perceive in mainstream education.

4.3.3 Post-secondary students with vision impairment (chronosystem)

SSVI (n=7) were re-interviewed. Reporting on the likely support during HE, those attending Type-1 schools (n=2) mentioned:

- course fees (2/2, 100%):

'The special school I am affiliated with can help me a little bit with the tuition.' (PSSVI7)

- Transportation (1/2, 50%)

Those who attended Type-2 schools (n=3) reported receiving:

- universities' support (3/3, 100%):

'The director of the university was really considerate and understood my situation.' (PSSVI1)

- NGO support (1/3, 33%):

'The association said that they will provide everything for me as they did during my school years.'(PSSVI4)

- support through an awarded scholarship (1/3, 33%):

'As part of my scholarship I will get an electric Brailler … [the MP] honoured us.' (PSSVI2)

- no knowledge of any available support (1/3, 33%)

- likely parental support (3/3, 100%):

'If the organisation didn't provide me with the books on time, my parents can read for me and I'll take notes on my own.' (PSSVI4)

Those attending Type-3 schools (n=2) reported receiving:

- parental financial support, (2/2, 100%)

- no knowledge of any additional support (2/2, 100%):

'[I don't expect any] support from any external sources – I'm not aware of NGOs that could offer such support.' (PSSVI5)

In relation to the support they received during the official baccalaureate exams, those who attended Type-1 schools (n=2) reported receiving the following:

- unmodified exam sheets (1/2, 50%)

- transportation (2/2, 100%)

- a reader and a writer (1/2, 50%)

- additional explanations during exams (2/2, 100%)

'I was helped a little bit … something like little favours … I only asked about the really difficult things.' (PSSVI3)

Those who attended Type-2 schools (n=3) reported receiving the following support:

- Braille exam sheets (3/3, 100%)

- amended versions of the exams, (3/3, 100%)

- designating a parallel examination classroom in same mainstream schools as their peers (3/3, 100%)

- human assistance (3/3, 100%):

'The exams were printed in Braille … I worked normally. I had an assistant … she helped me reading.' (PSSVI2)

Those who attended Type-3 schools (n=2) reported receiving:

- enlarged exam sheets (2/2, 100%).

- human assistant (1/2, 50%)

- separate examination room (1/2, 50%)

- examinations in the same class with peers (1/2, 50%):

'We were all sitting in the same room and working normally ... I don't copy from anyone, and I work by myself.' (PSSVI6)

Regarding their self-perception on level of attainment in official baccalaureate exams, whilst all passed the official baccalaureate exams, those attending Type-1 schools achieved:

- a pass mark (1/2, 50%)

- a 'good' grade (1/2, 50%)

Those who attended Type-2 (n=3) schools achieved:

- a good grade (1/3, 33%)

- close to good grade (1/3, 33%)

- a pass mark (1/3, 33%):

'When I passed I was even happier because I accomplished a thing that I was working hard towards all year long.'(PSSVI4)

Those who attended Type-3 schools (n=2) achieved:

- pass grades (2/2, 100%):

'I am satisfied given my current situation … It was normal [for my] capabilities.' (PSSVI5)

Based on the above, the support that SVI expect to receive in HE demonstrated that accessing HE would highly depend on the support-universities-can-offer, on their affiliation-with-NGOs and/or special schools as well as on the remaining-sight-that-they-might-have (ST). Likewise, the support they received in their official baccalaureate exams demonstrated variations-in-the-applied-applications-to-support-SVI-in-official-governmental-exams (ST). Hence the theme **approaches-towards-applying-inclusion** emerged. It revealed different applications of inclusion which can be influenced by the type of the school that SVI attended, which is in turn is influenced by the support that organisations are

able to offer, which as well could be influenced by the support need of the student.

The positive results of official baccalaureate exams demonstrated the <u>academic-success-that-SVI-may-achieve</u> (ST). This led to the theme of **inclusive-implications** to arise.

4.3.4 University students with vision impairment (Chronosystem)

USVI (n=13) reported receiving varied support during HE as follows:

- Peers support (13/13, 100%):

'My friends are the ones that help me the most … no one else can help me more, because they are with me in the same class.' (USVI4)

- recorded course materials (5/13, 38%)
- laptops for taking notes (11/13, 85%)
- omission of course materials (4/13, 31%)
- using a long-cane for mobility (3/13, 23%)

'I use a long-cane, but on rare occasions.' (USVI2)

- tutors' support (7/13, 54%):

'Professors are very willing to sit down with me and explain things in detail.' (USVI13)

Regarding the support received during official baccalaureate exams, participants reported the following:

- omission and alteration of visual questions (13/13, 100%)
- a reader and a writer (8/13, 54%)
- Braille exams (4/13, 23%)
- enlarged exam sheets (2/13, 15%)
- additional time (8/13, 54%)

- assistive tools (1/13, 15%):

'I sat for my final exams in Canada … I requested a talking calculator … A writer and a reader … Brailler ... a Braille exam ... extra time … I never really used everything I asked for.' (USVI13)

Regarding undertaking the official Baccalaureate exams, participants reported:

- examining in a special centre for disabled students (10/13)

- skipping secondary school to the Baccalaureate official exams (2/13, 15%)

- examining in parallel mainstream classes. (3/13, 23%)

- the cheating and the additional explanations offered during official baccalaureate exams (7/13, 54%):

'The teacher stood at the middle of the hall and [provided] answers ... I decided not to get myself into cheating.' (USVI9)

Interviewees reported on self-perception on level of education as follows:

- having similar or near similar levels of education to their peers (8/13, 62%):

'100%. Because if I didn't understand something, I go to the professor's office and he will later re-explain them to me.' (USVI2)

- A lower level of education than their peers (5/13, 38%):

'I will be honest with you. I wouldn't say it is 50%, I would say it is 30%. (USVI12)

Interviewees reported multiple perceptions '*on their interaction with disabled and non-disabled students*' as follows:

- interest in interacting with non-disabled peers (13/13, 100%)

- no difference between the two groups (7/13, 54%).

- preference for interacting with peers who share the same disability with them (3/13, 23%).

- preference for not interacting with peers who share them the same impairment (2/13, 15%):

'I don't like the idea that a person with VI is isolated with VI people only ... perhaps I prefer that my friends are not VI, so that I remove [stereotypical views about SVI] from their thoughts.' (USVI9)

Based on the above, it appeared that the support offered at university level was based on the grounds of applying-reasonable-approaches-to-meet-the-needs-of-SVI-in-education' (ST). The support-offered-in-official-baccalaureate-exams (ST) was once again ad-hoc. It demonstrated that it could be beneficial to some SVI and harmful to others. This had led to the theme **meeting-the-needs of SVIs** to emerge.

Perceptions on the level of education demonstrated the influence of the support-received-in-education (ST). Responses on interaction between disabled and non-disabled students revealed the-importance-of-interaction-between-and-among-the-two-groups-on-building-social-inclusion (ST). This led to the theme **perceptions-of-inclusion-in-education** to arise.

The support that is available for SVI prior to the secondary stage, in secondary, during the transition to university, as well as at university was presented together with the factors that may influence implementing inclusion, namely educational attainment and social inclusion.

The next section examines inclusive applications and perceptions of its practice from the point of view of secondary SVI parents.

4.3.5 The evidence from others around the SVI

4.3.6 Parents (microsystem)

Participating parents (n=10) reported on the range of general support their children received. Those who sent their children to Type-1 schools (n=3) reported:

- treating their children 'normally' at home (3/3, 100%):

'We can support them, be kind to them, but most of the time we treat them normally.' (Pa8)

- receiving the support of special schools in their children's education and independence skills (3/3, 100%).

All those with children attending Type-2 schools (n=5) reported on the support they provided:

- additional explanations (5/5, 100%)

- reading inaccessible text (5/5, 100%)

- converting material to Braille (5/5, 100%)

- recording material (5/5, 100%):

'I transfer school material to Braille ... Help in reading and explaining unclear school work.' (Pa4)

Parents of SVI attending Type-3 schools (n=2) reported:

- receiving educational support (2/2, 100%):

'I help in reading school material.' (P2)

- receiving peer and teacher support (2/2, 100%)

- receiving financial support from the school (1/2, 50%):

'Last year, they managed to raise 500,000 L.L. to assist him.' (Pa3)

Regarding the support parents received in the course of raising a child with VI, responses were as follows:

- receiving external specialised support (2/10, 20%):

'I received support from the centre for the disabled - they used to come and check on him and teach me how to deal with him.' (Pa1)

- receiving no external support (4/10, 40%):

'No help at all … I didn't read anything about it in a book, I didn't meet anyone who helped in that regard.' (Pa9)

- being supported by their religious faith (4/10, 40%):

'That's what God wants, so we accepted the situation.' (Pa10)

- meeting with a role model (1/10, 10%):

'… I had a visit from my uncle who [is in a similar] situation, and I saw that he had amazing capabilities when it comes to everything.' (Pa4)

- enrolling their child in a mainstream school (2/10, 20%):

'… I was relieved when I enrolled him in an inclusive school. This made me feel far better as I was really so concerned about enrolling him in a boarding school.' (Pa7)

- receiving emotional support from family members on the diagnosis of the VI (10/10, 100%)

Regarding the interactions of their children in their communities, parents reported a number of issues. Those whose children attended Type-1 schools (n=3) reported:

- limited acceptance of the disability of their children in their communities (3/3, 100%):

The community here doesn't really accept those who are disabled … we don't get for example a girl from the same age as T coming over and proposing that they go for a walk. T is suffering from that now.' (Pa10)

- the engagement in social-religious events (1/3, 10%):

'God gave her a good voice, she sings solo in church masses, she sings at weddings and ceremonies.' (Pa5)

Those whose children attended Type-2 schools (n=5) reported:

- limited friendships for their children in local communities (4/5, 80%):

'She has no friends … she stays at home. (P4)

- building friendship through religious events (1/5, 20%):

'He joins religious activities with his friends, goes to coffee shops and for walks.' (Pa1)

Parents whose children attended Type-3 schools (n=2) reported:

- the ordinary life their children live (2/2, 100%):

'His vision problem is not setting him back from anything … He even drives my car. (Pa3)

The above indicates that parents-create-different-strategies-in-support-of-their-children-with-VI (ST). The support-offered-by-schools (ST) varied based on the type of schools SVI attended which could be influenced also by the-severity-of-their-VI (ST). This led to the theme of **meeting-the-needs-of-SVIs** emerging.

There was limited-specialised-support-available-for-families-with-a-child-with-VI (ST), which is linked to the emerged theme **parental-experience**. Parents employed different coping strategies which revealed the influence-of-religious-faith-on-accepting-VI (ST). This led to the theme **perceptions** to emerge. It is linked to the social interactions of their children, which demonstrated limited-changes-in-attitudes (ST) towards disability in local communities.

4.3.7 Peers (microsystem)

Participating peers of SVI (n=13) reported on the support their peers with VI receive at school. Those who attended Type-1 schools (n=2) reported:

- copying from the board for their disabled peer (2/2, 100%):

'He only has a problem in seeing what's written on the board, so I write for him.' (P1)

- receiving the support of subject teachers (2/2, 100%):

'The teachers help a lot. They sometimes stay after class to help those with SEN.' (Pe2)

Those attending Type-2 schools (n=9) reported providing:

- walking assistance (4/9, 44%)

- fetching assistive tools (2/9, 22%):

'Sometimes I guide him upstairs while another one guides him down, someone carries his machine, brings his papers.' (Pe7)

- copying class notes (7/9, 78%)

- reading printed documents (4/9, 44%)

- lending class note books (2/9, 22%):

'Sometimes the teacher doesn't have time to make a Braille copy for him, so I just sit next to him and read out, and he answers.' (Pe9)

- teachers' additional explanations (5/9, 56%)

- omission of visual subjects from their course materials (6/9, 67%):

'SVI don't study geometry in maths ... because they can't draw.' (Pe5&6)

- peers additional explanations (7/9, 78%)

- Supporting SVI in non-core lessons (2/9, 22%):

'We teach him some moves in the PE lessons. We don't leave him standing alone … In maths ... there are some drawings that he can't do, we hold his hand and make him imagine these drawings.' (Pe8)

Additional comments were in relation to the right of their disabled peers to be assisted, and their belief in their capacity and independence. (2/9, 22%)

Peers attending Type-3 schools (n=2), reported the morality behind supporting their disabled peers:

'It's our duty to help them … it's our morals that pushes us to help them.' (Pe3&4)

Reported support related to:

- dictating from the board

- copying class notes

- providing additional explanations

'We either help him if he can't see something on the board, or we take his notebook and write the notes for him.' (Pe3)

Peer interviewees reported on the perceived attainment of SVI peers. All of those attending Type-1 and 3 schools reported no noticeable difference in level of attainment. Also 6/9 (67%) of those attending Type-2 schools reported an equal level of attainment:

'In the case of R, he can grasp everything, and do it better than us … He knows every word, there's nothing that he doesn't know.' (Pe7&8)

However, three peers in the Type-2 school (3/9, 33%) reported the limited participation of their peers with VI:

'W for example doesn't get involved in certain things... When the maths teacher comes, we encourage him to ask, but he doesn't do that.' (Pe13)

Based on the reported support offered, it appeared that peers play an essential role in the inclusion-of-their-peers-with-VI (ST) regardless of the type of schools they attended. This led to the theme **meeting-the-needs-of-SVI** to emerge.

The variations in attitudes on level of attainment also demonstrated the variation in level of attainment that SVI achieve along with peers' development of their understanding-of-the-social-and-educational-inclusion-of-their-VI-peers (ST). This sub-theme is linked to the theme **perceptions-towards-inclusion**. It demonstrated that, regardless of the type of schools they attended, peers generally held positive attitudes towards the inclusion of SVIs.

4.3.8 Teachers (microsystem)

Teachers (n=28) reported on the training they had received in SEN. Those taught in Type-1 schools (n=8) reported:

- receiving no training in SEN (8/8, 100%).

Those taught in Type-2 schools (n=15) reported receiving:

- introductory training in SEN (7/15, 47%):

'The training we received was basic … even if we did not take such training, we would be able to act properly.' (T3&4)

- no training (8/15, 53%):

'No training in SEN was given honestly, I wasn't trained on that before. When I got these students in my class, I had to adapt on my own.' (T13)

Those who taught at Type-3 schools (n=5) reported:

- receiving no training in SEN (5/5, 100%):

'Our training did not include an SEN component - they are not concerned of issues around this topic.' (T19)

Interviewed teachers reported on the support provided for SVI at school. All those who worked at Type-1 schools and had experienced teaching SVI 5/8 (63%) expressed a dependence on support from the special school supervisor:

'They have a supervisor to help them. We sometimes would give the supervisor the questions and she would fix the questions in a certain way so that the students can understand whether it was a drawing or anything like it … We are not equipped.' (T12)

Of these, one additionally reported the school's support in enlarging documents for their SVI:

'The current SVI is SI. The school enlarges the exams/documents for him and gives them to him on time.' (T18)

All teachers who taught at Type-2 schools reported the support offered from the LST in providing Braille material:

'LST do not attend classes … They are only given the sheets to convert it to Braille prior to the lessons.' (T27)

7/15 (47%) of these teachers additionally reported peer support and 1/15 (7%) reported the adaptations they performed by reading out loud and offering additional explanations:

'In the classes where I have SVI, I read everything I write on the board.' (T16)

Those who taught at Type-3 schools (n=5) reported:

- sympathising for their disabled students (2/5, 40%).
- making practical adaptations e.g. clear hand writing and speaking loudly (3/5, 60%).

Teachers also reported their views on the level of attainment of disabled students. Those of Type-1 schools reported:

- Being apprehensive about SVI educational inclusion (5/8, 63%):

 '[He] cannot write a 15-20-line paragraph … he [is not very literate] since he doesn't have books written in Brail to increase his knowledge. He depends on his hearing which is not enough.' (T11)

- There is no major difference between SVI and non-VI students (3/8, 37%)

Teachers of Type-2 schools reported:

- their SVI needed more educational support than others (12/15, 80%)
- their SVI were fully included (3/15, 20%):

'There's no doubt that they complete a lower percentage of the material than the rest. Of course, they won't be able to do the same work as their classmates.' (T16)

Teachers of Type-3 schools (n=5) reported:

- The distinctive enthusiasm of SVI and their willingness to learn, (5/5, 100%)
- No differences in level of education, only additional time in reading and writing (5/5, 100%)

On the 'parent-teacher relationship', those who taught at Type-1 schools reported:

- the special schools are their point of contact in relation to the SVI (8/8, 100%):

'The Institute used to bring them here… the relationship is with them directly.' (T18)

All teachers of Type 2 and 3 schools reported that parents themselves were the point of contact.

The responses of teachers of SVI demonstrated the limited training in SEN that was made available for them, hence, teachers'-experience-in-SEN-was-built-through-practising-teaching-inclusively (ST) regardless of the type of school they attended, which led to the theme **meeting-the-needs-of-SVI** to emerge.

Regarding their attitudes on level of attainment of disabled students, teachers' reluctance-about-educational-inclusion' (ST) was revealed. This was influenced by the available-support-for-teachers-to-follow-strategies-to-include-SVI-in-their-classes (ST).

It appeared that different-parents-have-different-approaches-in-following-up-the-progress-of-their-VI-children; through-the-special-school-or-through-direct-contact-with-the-school (ST). These different approaches were based on the type of school SVI attended.

4.3.9 Learning support teachers (mesosystem)

Interviewed LSTs (n=8) reported on the training they received:

- attended university training (2/8, 25%)

- attended training organised by their schools (6/8, 75%):

'We didn't have any idea how to draw stuff in Braille, or maps, so we learned a couple of ideas about how to transfer these ideas to those with visual impairment 'Makfoofeen' … when we first started the job.' (LST2,3&4)

- the introductory nature of the offered training courses (3/8, 37%):

'The received training, I think it's barely 10%. The rest is all experience.' (LST1)

Reporting on the support LSTs provide for their SVI, all stated provision of Braille materials, helping in reading and writing during exams, converting Braille answers into hand-writing for teachers to access and supporting teachers in adapting course materials. All reported providing no support for their SVI during sessions:

'[SVI] take all their classes with the other students, they have Braille machines … They are the main responsibility of their class teachers.' (LST5&6)

Interviewees reported the following in relation to the level of attainment of their SVI:

- obtaining a distinctive level of education (2/8, 25%):

'I have a SVI in Grade-12 sociology-Economics stream, she ranks first in both sections of the class.' (LST1)

- reaching similar levels of education to their peers (6/8, 75%)

Of these, 2/6 (33%) reported the type of subject to have an influence on the attained level:

'They are getting an equivalent level of education in all their humanities subjects … However, in the scientific subject we have a problem because these scientific subjects require eyesight. And when you omit a lot of stuff from the subject it loses part of its integrity.' (LST5&6)

Three LSTs reported the influence of the previously acquired education on the current attained level of education:

'We had an experience with a student who was previously attending a special school. She came here in secondary level but had no clue about most of the material. Most of the curriculum had been previously omitted for her. On the contrary, we try to at least have 80-90% of the material given to our students.' (LST2,3&4)

Another two LSTs reported the interest and willingness of the SVI to influence the level of attainment:

'Some of them are able to get 100% of the material, so an equivalent level to their friends ... Some students are not able to get 20%. This is related to the learning capabilities of the students, his/her cognitive abilities, and their level of interest in getting an education.' (LST5&6)

The above informed the emergence of the sub-theme influence-of-working-in-the-field-of-SEN-on-the-gained-experience (ST) and the limited-knowledge-of-SEN that LSTs acquired through training. Responses on level of attainment of SVI demonstrated that the subject-taught-had-an-adverse-effect-on-the-level-of-attainment of SVI (ST) mainly in scientific subjects. This has led to the theme **access** to arise.

4.3.10 Headteachers (mesosystem)

Headteachers (n=14) reported different ways their schools support SVI.

Type-1 school Headteachers (n=4) reported:

- designating an examination room (1/4, 25%)

- enlarging class materials (3/4, 75%)

- providing hard copies of subject exams handouts to special schools to convert them to Braille (1/4, 25%)

- allowing disabled students to use the school lifts (1/4, 25%).

- receiving the core support from their teachers, peers and special school supervisor (4/4, 100%):

'Our support consists of facilitating everything she (SVI) needs. But she gets the most support from the institute she comes from.' (HT8)

Those of Type-2 schools (n=5) reported:

- LSTs support (5/5, 100%)

- non-disabled peers support (5/5, 100%):

'[So she can] participate in the class like her friends, the teacher assigns a girl to sit next to her to tell her what's happening.' (HT4)

- assigned LSTs at their schools (5/5, 100%)
- LST based in the school (2/5, 40%) of these, LST paid by the school (1/2, 50%)
- LST partially paid by NGOs and partially paid by the school (1/2, 50%)

The rest were regional LSTs located at the schools but funded by regional inclusion programmes (3/5, 60%):

'I have three LSTs here at this school, they are based here. And it is from this location they move to cover the whole of the Sidon region.' (HT5)

- no school charges for all students (3/5, 60%)

- with school charges but no additional charges for SVI (1/5, 20%)

- with school charges and require additional charges (1/5, 20%):

'The parents are paying a part, and the school is paying another part. The tuition fees for example, let's say for the elementary school level is around 4,000,000 L.L for normal students, those with special needs pay 5,500,000 L.L. This difference of 1,500,000 L.L or 1000$ is almost nothing compared to the real cost of the services that the student is getting, in these cases the school is covering the difference.' (HT2)

Headteachers of Type-3 schools (n=5) reported the following:

- seating their SVI in the front (5/5, 100%)

- providing enlarged class sheets (3/5, 60%)

- photocopying material from peers (2/5, 40%)

- receiving teachers' support (2/5, 40%)

'We can make sure that they sit in the first row, close to the board. We can help them by providing the adequate educational atmosphere. But we don't have the capabilities to do more.' (HT13)

Headteachers also reported on the attainments of SVI.

Those of Type-1 school reported:

- nearly the same educational level as their peers (1/4, 25%)
- lower educational attainment (3/4, 75%)

Headteachers of Type-2 schools reported:

- a nearly equal level of education as their peers (3/5, 60%)
- excelled amongst peers (2/5, 40%):

'They have even more capabilities, on the condition that we include them and understand their situation.' (HT10)

Headteachers of Type-3 schools reported:

- same level of attainment (4/5, 80%)
- a lower level of education (1/5, 20%):

'Both of [the SVI] passed. But not really a spectacular pass, both of them just barely passed.' (HT13)

The above suggests that <u>support offered was restricted to the ability of schools to support-the-needs-of-the-SVI</u> (ST). Headteachers' responses also showed the fundamental role that non-disabled-peers play in implementing inclusion. This contributed to the theme **meeting-the-needs-of-SVIs**. Furthermore, headteachers responses revealed that <u>SVI displayed a range of different educational attainments which were in turn influenced by the type of support schools were able to offer</u> (ST). This led the theme **approaches-towards-applying-inclusion** to arise.

4.3.11 Higher-education (exosystem)

Lecturers (n=8) reported on the support available for disabled students in HE as follows:

- enhancing physical access (4/8, 50%):

'The streets here are being made more accessible, they are modifying the buildings ... There is still a lot to be done though.' (HET2)

- applying practical adjustments to accommodate the needs of disabled students (4/8, 50%):

'I had to switch classrooms once … so we can cater for a student with hearing impairment.' (HET4)

Regarding the offered courses in SEN interviewees reported:

- a high demand for qualifications in SEN in Lebanon and the Arab countries (6/8, 75%).
- their students working in SEN already (4/8, 50%):

'The jobless percent is zero in the department of SEN.' (HET2)

Based on the above support for inclusion, it appeared that universities follow <u>reasonable-initiatives-to-create-an-inclusive-educational-environment (ST)</u> for their disabled students. Thus, **access** has emerged as a theme from the responses that lecturers provided. Furthermore, it appeared that <u>there is</u>

4.3.12 Other organisations (exosystem)

Participants from GOs and NGOs (n=9) reported multiple responses regarding 'initiatives applied towards implementing inclusion.'

GOs (n=3) reported:

- applying reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of disabled students in governmental schools (3/3, 100%)
- enhancing the physical educational environment (3/3, 100%):

'Newly built schools have been designed to meet international standards … they have parking for those with special needs … ramps ... accessible toilets … accessible classroom boards' (GO1)

- holding conferences (2/3, 67%)
- publishing a training guidebook (1/3, 33%)
- implementing inclusive programmes in certain governmental schools (2/3, 67%):

'Recently, there has been an agreement … to create a support room for those with LD in the public schools, and we are hoping to reach 200 public schools in 5 years … taking the cluster approach in each region.' (GO1)

- re-allocating classes, relying on peer support (2/3, 67%):

'There are several steps at the entrance. Until we get them rebuilt... His friends are carrying him over these steps.' (GO1)

NGOs in the study support early inclusion (n=3), and others support inclusion starting from the secondary stages (n=3). NGOs reported the support they provide as follows:

- transportation (6/6, 100%),

- reallocating classes (3/6, 50%)

- providing Braille material, computers, recording material (6/6, 100%)

- providing assistive tools (6/6, 100%)

- enhancing the physical environment (2/6, 33%)

- supporting broad 'access needs' of SVI (5/6, 83%):

'We told them (mainstream school) that we will take care of the boy, bring him over, take him back, get him to class, monitor his case, print his own books.' (NGO5)

- providing human support in exams (6/6, 100%)

- amended exam questions, Braille, photo-copying class notes, sign interpretation (6/6, 100%)

- mediating between the NGO and the school (6/6, 100%):

'We tell them to seat them in the front ... when writing on the board, read out what they are writing…'(NGO3)

- providing financial support in school fees (4/6, 67%)

- sent their disabled student to one of their schools which is free of charge (1/6, 12%)

- relied on parents to pay the school charges (1/6, 12%)

Organisations reported on the support they provided during official exams. All governmental organisations mentioned the availability of a special examination centre, exam sheets in different formats, human and technological assistance during exams, computers, breaks, extra time, exemption from Grade 9 exams and accommodating the needs of ill and hospital bound students:

'We are enlarging the fonts, giving them more time, we are even getting someone to write for them sometimes if they can't write, we have a specialised centre) … all the SEN you might think of are taken into consideration.' (GO1)

Additional government support related to amending exam questions for SVI and converting exam question into Braille (1/3, 33%).

NGO support during official exams related to requesting the required support for each of their students (6/6, 100%):

'There are some students who don't read Braille, so they enlarge the writing for them, some of them can't read or write, so we ask for a reader and writer. (NGO5)

They all offered support related to transportation with accompanying human support.

As for the received training, interviewed NGOs personnel responded:

- Only performing negotiations with teachers through LST/supervisors (4/6, 67%):

'We don't have training, we just negotiate with the teachers, we talk to them.' (NGO2)

'The SVI is a normal student, the only difference is that he has no sight, so it doesn't really need all that specialisation from the teacher, except a bit of consideration.' (NGO6B)

- The rest (2/6, 33%) provided training for the appointed LST.

All GOs discussed a recent governmental teacher training initiative in preparing teachers for inclusion:

'I thought about training the teachers in a form of awareness of the difficulties; what it means that a person has a problem and is not able to learn and what the psychological, social and other reasons are.' (GO2)

Reporting on their readiness for inclusion, all GOs reported the need for greater awareness in the country:

'If we didn't move away from being afraid to talk about these issues, and considering that as a taboo, then this is a problem.' (GO1)

They also expressed a concern with limited progress towards inclusion:

'I can assure you that inclusion has not yet occurred in any school. Inclusion was occurring through the establishment of specialised institutions by the private sector … So if the director in the private school is considerate enough, she would receive disabled students. However, neither the standards of equipment nor building design are being taken into consideration to suit the people with special needs.' (GO2)

On the other hand, all NGOs reported progress in inclusion through experiencing working in the field:

'The schools that we are working with them for a long time have built up some sort of practical experience with how to deal with certain kinds of disabilities. We are cooperating with these schools easily without any problems - private as well as public schools.' (NGO2)

One NGO reported their full satisfaction with their inclusion programme:

'We are 100% satisfied with where we've reached so far. We are really trying to improve ourselves whenever we get the chance. For example we even got up to date computers, and bought printing machines that can print from regular language to Braille.' (NGO1A)

The rest (5/6, 83%) reported the need for more work to be done for inclusion to be achieved:

'We cannot at any time say that we have done very effective work in the local community (although we have helped increase the awareness among the people more than it was 10 years ago).' (NGO4)

Based on the above, it appears that GOs or NGOs perform practical-and-reasonable-adjustments-towards-applying-equality-and-inclusion-in-education (ST). The reported responses regarding offered training demonstrated limited-specialised-training-in-SEN (ST) which is reflected in the negotiation based training that NGOs offer and the training of LSTs in support of inclusion. Furthermore, reported perceptions on the readiness for inclusion demonstrated that current inclusive applications are focusing on social-and-physical-but-not-

educational (ST). This led the theme **approaches towards applying inclusion** to emerge.

4.3.13 Summary of key issues/evidence for RQ3

As the summary of each part of the above RQ, seven themes emerged from the data analysis related to the implementation and practices of inclusion:

Perceptions-on-inclusion-in-education (4.3.1;4.3.2; 4.3.4)

Meeting-the-needs-of-SVI-in-education (4.3.1,4.3.2; 4.3.4; 4.3.6; 4.3.7; 4.3.10)

Inclusive-implications (4.3.3)

Parental-experience (4.3.6)

Access (4.3.9; 4.3.11)

Employment (4.3.11)

Approaches-towards-applying-inclusion (4.3.3;4.3.10;4.3.12)

Regardless of the type of schools or universities SVI attended, it appeared that their needs were met through applying ad-hoc and reasonable adjustments; that the variation of the support offered by schools or organisations was dependent on the severity of sight, type of school attended, as well as on the school's affiliations; that the available specialised support was limited for parents, LSTs and teachers; that peers had an influential role on the inclusion of their disabled peers regardless of the type of school they attended and that there was increased demand for those specialising in the field of SEN.

SVI perceived their level of attainment to be different from their peers depending on the severity of their vision impairment; and that their VI had an influence on their preference to text based subjects. SI students perceive themselves to be less disabled than their SSI peers and focused more on their educational inclusion; the value of interaction between and among non-disabled and disabled peers on building social relationships; the influence of religious faith on coping with vision loss in the family; that regardless of the school they attend, peers held positive attitudes towards inclusion. General existing perceptions among educators leans towards a medical model of inclusion as opposed to a social model.

Limited access to visual courses and the omission of content had an adverse

effect on the level of attainment that SVI were able to reach, mainly in scientific versus literary subjects.

Approaches to inclusion revealed limited social interaction with parents of the disabled with their neighbours; school-parent relationships were influenced by the type of schools SVI attended; limited formal SEN training for LST, and the prevalence of negotiation based support that organisations offer their LSTs and teachers of SVI.

4.4 Questionnaire Results

This section presents the questionnaire data gathered from secondary teachers with SVIs in their classes. Headteachers of 12 secondary schools each received twelve questionnaires to distribute to each subject teacher of those teaching SVI in their schools. Of the 144 questionnaires distributed, 85 were returned, a response rate of 59%.

The completed questionnaires were from the three different types of schools mentioned in Subsection 4.1.2.

Across all three types of schools, only 21 (24.7%) of the teachers had experienced teaching a class with students with physical impairment and only 23 (27%) had experienced teaching students with LD. Whilst 8 (29.6%) teachers of those who taught at Type-1 schools reported teaching a student with hearing impairment in their classes, only 3 (7%) teachers of Type-2 schools and 2 (13%) teachers of Type-3 schools had experienced teaching a class with a student with hearing impairment. Across all types of schools, only 2/85 (3%) participating teachers acquired their knowledge in SEN by being qualified in the field, one participant acquired knowledge through being disabled themselves and 9/85 (11%) through a disabled friend or relative. Further demographic information about participating teachers is in Appendix 5.

Table 1a. Perceptions on inclusion of SVIs/Type 1-3 schools

Participant response

Actual count (%)

Mode in bold print

Statement[1]	ST	Strongly Agree 7	Agree 6	Slightly Agree 5	Not Sure 4	Slightly Disagreee 3	Disagr 2	Strongly Disagrese 1	No Respon	Total response[3] N
Students who cannot read standard print and need to access Braille format should not be in mainstream classes	1	0	**9** **(33.3)**	8 (29.6)	2 (7.4)	0	6 (22.2)	2 (7.4)	0	27 (100)
	2	3 (7.1)	2 (4.7)	3 (7.1)	0	3 (7.1)	**19** **(45.2)**	11 (26.1)	1 (2.3)	42 (100)
	3	**6** **(37.5)**	4 (25)	0	2 (12.5)	0	2 (12.5)	2 (12.5)	0	16 (100)
Enlarged material should be made available at mainstream schools for those whose sight does not allow them to read standard print.	1	**19** **(70.3)**	8 (29.6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	27 (100)
	2	18 (42.1)	**19** **(45.2)**	0	1 (2.3)	1 (3)	2 (4.7)	0	1 (2.3)	42 (100)
	3	**11** **(68.7)**	4 (25)	1 (6.2)	0	0	0	0	0	16 (100)

Statement	ST	Strongly Agree 7	Agree 6	Slightly Agree 5	Not Sure 4	Slightly Disagree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	No Response	Total response N
Teachers at mainstream schools should acquire the necessary skills to include students with SI and SSI in their classrooms	1	**12** **(44.4)**	10 (37)	3 (11.1)	1 (3.7)	0	0	0	1 (3.7)	27 (100)
	2	15 (35.7)	**20** **(47.6)**	2 (4.7)	1 (3)	1 (3)	1 (3)	0	2 (4.7)	42 (100)
	3	3 (18.7)	4 (25)	1 (6.2)	1 (6.2)	**4** **(25)**	3 (18.7)	0	0	16 (100)

Table 1b. Perceptions on inclusion of SVIs/Type 1-3 schools

Participant response

Actual count (%)

Mode in bold print

Statement	ST	Strongly Agree 7	Agree 6	Slightly Agree 5	Not Sure 4	Slightly Disagree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	No Response	Total response N
I do not consider myself to have obtained the necessary skills to teach a class with SVI.	1	4 (14.8)	**12** **(44.4)**	5 (18.5)	1 (3.7)	3 (11.1)	1 (3.7)	0	1 (3.7)	27 (100)
	2	5	7	7	6	6	9	2	0	42

Item										Total
		(11.9)	(16.7)	(16.7)	(14.2)	(14.2)	(21.4)	(4.7)		(100)
	3	7	4	2	0	0	3	0	0	16
		(43.7)	(25)	(12.5)			(18.7)			(100)
I would benefit from the help of a VI advisor on how to amend teaching objectives so that they can be accessed by my SVIs.	1	7	12	3	2	1	0	0	2	27
		(25.9)	(44.4)	(11.1)	(7.4)	(3.7)			(7.4)	(100)
	2	12	19	4	4	0	3	0	0	42
		(28.5)	(45.2)	(9.5)	(9.5)		(7.1)			(100)
	3	5	8	1	1	1	0	0	0	16
		(31.5)	(50)	(6.2)	(6.2)	(6.2)				(100)
SVIs are below the level of other students in the subject	1	1	3	3	0	3	12	5	0	27
		(3.7)	(11.1)	(11.1)		(11.1)	(44.4)	(18.5)		(100)

I teach.

2	1	1	0	1	3	15	19	2	42
	(2.3)	(2.3)		(2.3)	(11.1)	(35.7)	(45.2)	(4.7)	(100)
3	0	6	0	2	1	6	1	0	16
		(37.5)		(12.5)	(6.2)	(37.5)	(6.2)		(100)

Disabled students should be in mainstream classes									
1	5	8	7	5	1	1	0	0	27
	(18.5)	(29.6)	(25.9)	(18.5)	(3.7)	(3.7)			(100)
2	12	22	2	2	0	2	2	0	42
	(18.5)	(52.3)	(4.7)	(4.7)		(4.7)	(4.7)		(100)
3	1	7	1	3	2	2	0	0	16
	(6.2)	(43.7)	(6.2)	(18.7)	(12.5)	(12.5)			(100)

Notes:

1. See Appendix 3 – English and Arabic versions of questionnaire

2. Type-1 – Secondary mainstream governmental schools with Supervisors to support SVI; Type-2 – Private Lebanese and UNRWA mainstream schools – SVI supported by LST; Type-3 – Private and governmental mainstream schools – SVI supported by school

3. Percentage responses by Likert scale

The data presented in Table 1a demonstrates that teachers in Type-1 and Type-3 schools scored the most 'agree' 9/27 (33.3%) and 'strongly agree' 6/16 (37.5%) respectively on the Likert scale in response to the statement 'students who cannot access standard print and would need to use Braille should not be in mainstream schools.' On the other hand, the mode for Type-2 teachers was 'disagree' 19/42 (45.2%) indicating a level of disagreement between

school types. However, a fraction of teachers of Type-2 schools scored either 'strongly agree, agree or slightly agree (8/42, 19%).

The vast majority of teachers responded to the statement 'that enlarged material should be made available for those who need them' in mainstream educational settings were 'agree' and 'strongly agree.' Only 4/85 (4.7%) teachers, all from Type-2 schools, disagreed.

Turning to table 1b, in respect of the statement 'I do not consider myself to have obtained the necessary skills to teach a class with SVI', the modal response of Type-1 and Type-3 schools were 'agree' 12/27 (44.4%) and 'strongly agree' 7/16 (43.7%) respectively. On the contrary, the mode for Type-2 schools was 'disagree' 9/42 (21.4%). A fraction of teachers of Type-2 schools also scored agree (7/42, 16.7%) and slightly agree (7/42, 16.6%), indicating a level of disagreement between the same school type.

The mode 'agree' was reported by teachers of Type-1, 2 and 3 schools (12/27, 44%; 19/42, 45%; and 8/16, 50% respectively) when asked if they 'would benefit from the help of an advisor in VI on how to amend teaching objectives so that they can be accessed by their SVI.' On the other hand, a small fraction of teachers responded 'not sure' of Type-1, 2 and 3 (2/27, 7%; 4/42, 9.5%; and 1/16, 6.2% respectively) indicating a level of slight disagreement.

Surveyed teachers responded to the statement that 'SVIs are below the level of other students' in the subject they teach. The mode of the responses of teachers of both Type-1 (44.4%) and Type-2 (45.2%) of the schools was disagree and strongly disagree respectively, whilst Type-3 teachers' modal response was both 'agree' and 'disagree' (37.5%). However, a fraction of teachers of Type-1 schools scored agree (3/27, 11%) and slightly agree (3/27, 11%) indicating a mixture of agreement and disagreement between teachers'[i] responses of Type-1 and Type-3 schools.

The mode of surveyed teachers of all Type-1, 2 and 3 schools was 'agree' (8/27, 30%; 22/42, 52%; and 7/16, 44% respectively) when asked if they thought 'disabled students should be in mainstream classes.' However, a small fraction of teachers of each type also responded 'not sure' (5/27, 18.5%; 2/42, 5%; and 3/16, 19% respectively) indicating a level of disagreement.

Table 2. Perceptions on support received and given

Participant response

Actual count (%)

Mode in bold print

Statement	School type (1-3)	Not at all 5	Not often 4	Not sure 3	Often 2	All the time 1	No Response 0	Total response N
Teachers receive support with organising and adapting the teaching resources so they can be accessed by all of their learners	1	**10** **(37.0)**	6 (22.2)	3 (11.1)	7 (25.9)	1 (3.7)	0	27 (100)
	2	1 (2.3)	10 (23.8)	10 (23.8)	**12** **(28.5)**	6 (14.2)	3 (7.1)	42 (100)
	3	6 (37.5)	1 (6.2)	**8** **(50)**	1 (6.2)	0	0	16 (100)
I myself set individual educational objectives for each of my student with special needs	1	6 (22.2)	**9** **(33.3)**	1 (3.7)	8 (29.6)	3 (11.1)	0	27 (100)
	2	9 (21.4)	**10** **(23.8)**	2 (4.7)	10 (23.8)	7 (16.6)	4 (9.5)	42 (100)
	3	1 (6.2)	**11** **(68.7)**	0	3 (18.7)	1 (6.2)	0	16 (100)

Statement		C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	Total
Teachers give extra support time for their students with SEN during teaching sessions	1	3 (11.1)	**12** **(44.4)**	0	7 (25.7)	5 (18.5)	0	27 (100)
	2	3 (7.1)	14 (33.3)	1 (2.3)	**15** **(35.7)**	7 (35.7)	2 (4.7)	42 (100)
	3	0	2 (12.5))	1 (6.2)	**11** **(68.7)**	2 (12.5)	0	16 (100)
Teachers give extra support time for their students with SEN after some of their teaching sessions	1	**9** **(33.3)**	**9** **(33.3)**	2 (7.2)	4 (14.8)	3 (11.1)	0	27 (100)
	2	8 (19)	**13** **(30.9)**	1 (2.3)	10 (23.8)	7 (16.6)	3 (7.1)	16 (100)
	3	0	**7** **(43.7)**	6 (37.5)	1 (6.2)	2 (12.5)	0	42 (100)
Teachers make adjustments to the grouping of students to include students with SEN	1	4 (14.8)	4 (14.8)	3 (11.1)	**11** **(40.7)**	4 (14.8)	1 (3.7)	27 (100)
	2	3 (7.1)	9 (21.4)	4 (9.5)	**16** **(38)**	7 (16.6)	3 (7.1)	42 (100)
	3	3 (18.7)	3 (18.7)	1 (6.2)	**8** **(50)**	1 (6.2)	0	16 (100)

Table 2 shows whether teachers 'receive support adapting and organising the teaching resources so that they could be accessed by all their learners', teachers of Type-1 and 3 schools modal scores were 'not at all' and 'not sure' (10/27, 37%; 8/16, 50% respectively). The modal response from Type-2 teachers was 'often' 12/42 (28.5%).

In response to whether teachers give 'extra support to their SEN students during their teaching sessions', the largest number of teachers of Type-2 schools 15/42 (35.7%) and Type-3 schools 11/16 (68.7%) replied 'often' while the largest number of teachers of Type-1 schools (12/27, 44.4%) responded 'not often.'

Nonetheless, most teachers of Type-2 schools (13/42, 31%) and Type-3 7/16, (44%) when asked if they 'give their SEN learners extra support time after some of their teaching sessions' responded 'not often.' Teachers of Type-1 schools' modal score was also 'not often' (9/27, 33.3%).

When asked if teachers adjust the grouping of the students to include students with SEN, the modal of responses of teachers from all different three types of schools was 'often' Type-1 schools were (11/27, 40.7%); Type-2 (16/42, 38%) and Type-3 (8/16, 50%).

Table 3. Teachers' contact time with students with a range of SEN

Participant response

Actual count (%)

Mode in bold print

Question	School type (1-3)	At least once a day 5	At least once a week 4	At least once a month 3	Max three times per year 2	No contact 1	No Response 0	Total response N
How much contact do you have with students with language and communication difficulties?	1	9 (33.3)	3 (11.1)	2 (7.4)	1 (3.7)	**11** **(40.7)**	1 (3.7)	27 (100)
	2	7 (16.6)	12 (28.5)	4 (9.5)	3 (7.1)	**16** **(38)**	0	42 (100)
	3	**6** **(37.5)**	4 (25)	0	2 (12.5)	4 (25)	0	16 (100)
a hearing impairment?	1	7 (25.9)	1 (3.7)	0	3 (11.1)	**15** **(55.5)**	1 (3.7)	27 (100)
	2	3 (7.1)	6 (14.2)	2 (4.7)	4 (9.5)	**26** **(61.9)**	1 (3)	42 (100)
	3	0	6 (37.5)	1 (6.2)	0	**9** **(56.2)**	0	16 (100)

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Question	School type	At least ...	At least once a ...	At least once a ...	Max three times per ...	No contact	No Response	Total responses
a vision impairment?	1	**12** (44.4)	10 (37)	0	2 (7.4)	2 (7.4)	1 (3.7)	27 (100)
	2	**19** (45.2)	18 (42.8)	1 (3)	0	4 (9.5)	0	42 (100)
	3	4 (25)	**5** (31.2)	3 (18.7)	1 (6.2)	3 (18.7)	0	16 (100)
physical impairment?	1	6 (22.2)	2 (7.4)	1 (3.7)	1 (3.7)	**15** (55.5)	2 (7.4)	27 (100)
	2	3 (7.1)	6 (14.2)	3 (7.1)	1 (3)	**28** (66.6)	1 (3)	42 (100)
	3	3 (18.7)	1 (6.2)	1 (6.2)	1 (6.2)	**9** (56.2)	1 (6.2)	16 (100)

Table 3 (continued). Teachers' contact time with students with a range of SEN

Participant response

Actual count (%)

Mode in bold print

Question	School type	At least once a	At least once a	Max three times per	No contact	No Respon	Total respon

(1-3)	once a day 5	week 4	month 3	year 2	1	se 0	se N	N
learning difficulties? 1	6 (22.2)	4 (14.8)		1 (3.7)	1 (3.7)	**12 (44.4)**	3 (11.1)	27 (100)
2	12 (28.5)	8 (19)	0	1 (3)		**20 (47.6)**	1 (3)	42 (100)
3	**5 (31.2)**	**5 (31.2)**	1 (6.2)	1 (6.2)	3 (18.7)	1 (6.2)		16 (100)
emotional and behavioural difficulties? 1	**7 (25.9)**	3 (11.1)	6 (22.2)	2 (7.4)	**7 (25.9)**	2 (7.4)		27 (100)
2	8 (19)	12 (28.5)	3 (7.1)	1 (3)	**18 (42.7)**	0		42 (100)
3	**7 (43.7)**	5 (31.2)	1 (6.2)	1 (6.2)	2 (12.5)	0		16 (100)

with multiple difficulties ?	1	5	3	2	7	**9**	1	27
		(18.5)	(11.1)	(7.4)	(25.9)	**(33.3)**	(3.7)	(100)
	2	6	7	3	2	**23**	½	42
		(14.2)	(16.6)	(7.1)	(4.7)	**(54.7)**	(3)	(100)
	3	4	**5**	1	1	4	1	16
		(25)	**(31.2)**	(6.2)	(6.2)	(25)	(6.2)	(100)

The modal response of surveyed teachers from all schools was 'no contact' when they were asked how much regular contact they had students with hearing impairment (HI) and physical impairment. Type-1 and Type-2 teachers also had no contact with students with language and communication difficulties, students with LD and learners with multiple difficulties.

Type-3 teachers had more contact with students with language and communication difficulties (mode 'at least once a day', 33%), LD (modes 'at least once a day' and 'at least once a week', 31.2%, and difficulties (mode 'at least once a week', 31.2%).

The largest number of Type-2 teachers 18/42 (42.7%) also had 'no contact' with students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, whilst the mode of Type-1 teachers responded 'no contact' or 'at least once a day' 7/27 (25.9%). Type-3 teachers mostly responded 'at least once a day' 7/16 (43.7%). As far as interacting with SVI is concerned, the modal response of Type-1 12/27 (44.4%) and Type-2 19/42 (45.2%) teachers was 'at least once a day', and the largest number of Type-3 teachers responded 'at least once a week' 5/16 (31.2%). These results reflect the very limited interaction of mainstream school teachers with students of different needs and abilities.

Table 4. Teacher perceptions on inclusion of SVIs across Types1-3 schools

Participant response

Actual count (%)

Question response options (number and percentage)

Mode in bold print

Question	School type (1-3)	Yes	No	Not sure	No response	Total response N
Do you feel that your SVIs are fully included in your lessons?	1	**15** **(55.5)**	4 (14.8)	7 (25.9)	1 (3.7)	27 (100)
	2	**32** **(76.2)**	3 (7.1)	5 (11.9)	2 (4.8)	42 (100)
	3	**7** **(43.7)**	5 (31.3)	3 (18.8)	1 (6.3)	16 (100)
Do you think your SVIs are getting an equal level of education as others in your classroom?	1	**19** **(70.4)**	3 (11.1)	2 (7.4)	3 (11.1)	27 (100)
	2	**30** **(71.4)**	5 (11.9)	3 (7.1)	4 (9.5)	42 (100)
	3	**9** **(56.3)**	1 (6.2)	5 (31.3)	1 (6.3)	16 (100)

Table 4 presents an overview of teacher perceptions of the inclusion of SVIs. It shows that 32/42 (76.2%) teachers of Type-2 schools, 15/27 (55.5%) of Type-1 schools and 7/16 (43.7%) of Type-3 schools responded 'yes' when asked if SVIs are fully included in their lessons. In each case 'yes' was the modal response. 19/27 (70.4%) of Type-1 and 30/42 (71.4%) of Type-2 schools responded 'yes' when asked if 'SVI are getting an equal level of education in their classroom' while only 9/16 (56%) of Type-3 schools answered 'yes.' In each case 'yes' was again the modal response.

Table 5a. Teachers' perceptions of training and confidence, and their perception of social interaction between sighted and VI peers

Participant response

Actual count

Question response options (number and percentage %)

Mode in bold print

Question	School type (1-3)	Yes	No	Not sure	N/A no training was received	Total response N
Was the training that you received helpful for you to teach a class including SVIs?	1	1 (3.7)	6 (22.2)	6 (22.2)	**14** **(51.9)**	27 (100)
	2	7 (16.7)	6 (14.2)	7 (16.7)	**22** **(52.4)**	42 (100)
	3	1 (6.3)	4 (25.0)	4 (25.0)	**7** **(43.7)**	16 (100)

Table 5a shows that around half of surveyed teachers have received no training. In addition to this, 6/27 (22.2%) teachers of Type-1 and 4/16 (25%) of Type-3 schools had received no helpful training to teach a class including SVIs, with an equal number being 'not sure.' 6/42 (14.2%) teachers of Type-2 schools responded that their training was not helpful, whilst 7/42 (16.7%) were not sure.

Table 5b. Teachers' perceptions on training, confidence and on social interaction between sighted and VI peers across Type-1-3 schools

Participant response

Actual count (%)

Question response options (number and percentage)

Mode in bold print

Statement	School type (1-3)	Yes	No	Sometimes	No response	Total response N
Do you feel confident to interact and communicate with SVIs?	1	**15** (55.6)	0	8	4	27 (100)
	2	**30** (71.4)	0	6	6	42 (100)
	3	**8** (50.0)	0	7	1	16 (100)
Do you think sighted peers are able to communicate and interact effectively with SVIs?	1	**15** (55.6)	1	8	3	27 (100)
	2	**21** (50.0)	1	11	7	42 (100)
	3	4 (25.0)	0	**11** (69)	1	16 (100)

Do you think SVIs are able to communicate and interact effectively with sighted peers during sessions?	1	**14 (51.9)**	1	7	5	27 (100)
	2	**24 (57.1)**	0	11	7	42 (100)
	3	**7 (43.7)**	2	6	1	16 (100)

30/42 (71.4%) teachers of Type-2, 15/27 (55.6%) of Type-1 and 8/16 (50%) of Type-3 schools stated that they felt confident interacting and communicating with SVIs. This was the mode in each case. None of the surveyed teachers said they would lack confidence interacting and communicating with SVIs.

As far as social interaction is concerned, around half of surveyed teachers of Type-1 and Type-2 schools (15/27, 55.6%; and 21/42, 50% respectively) believed that sighted and SVIs communicate and interact effectively with each other. On the other hand, teachers of Type-3 schools (11/16, 69%) believed that sighted and SVI sometimes interact and communicate effectively with each other.

These figures were slightly higher when asked about interactions during sessions between SVI and their peers among Type-2 and 3 schools (24/42, 57.1%; and 7/16, 43.7%), but lower among Type-1 schools 14/27 (51.9%). Less than half of the teachers replied sometimes to these questions (7/27, 26%; 11/42, 26%; and 6/16, 37.5% respectively)

Very few teachers replied 'no' to the two questions about communication and interaction (2/85, 2.3%; and 3/85, 3.5% respectively).

Table 6. Human availability for teachers across Type-1-3 schools.

Note: In this section teachers were able to enter multiple responses.

Participant response

Actual count (%)

Support Type

Mode in bold print

Question	School type (1-3)	Support worker	VI specialist	Volunteer	No support available	Others	Total response N
What human resources are	1	1 (3.4)	1 (3.4)	3 (10.3)	**20** **(69.0)**	4 (13.7)	27 (100)
available to support you in teaching lessons?	2	**16** **(35.6)**	**16** **(35.6)**	1 (2.4)	8 (17.8)	4 (8.8)	42 (100)
	3	0	0	1 (6.2)	**14** **(87.5)**	1 (6.2)	16 (100)

Table 6 shows that 16/42 (35.6%) Type-2 teachers worked with a support worker and 16/42 (36.5%) with a VI specialist as part of their inclusion programme. In contrast, 20/27 (69%) Type-1 school teachers and 14/16 (87.5%) Type-3 teachers reported having 'no support available.'

4.5　Summary of Key Evidence

Based on the data presented in this chapter, it can be concluded that:

Parents of SSI who attended Type-1 and 2 schools relied on NGOs to allocate suitable secondary mainstream schools for their children. Whilst their main concern was the support that their children receive, those with no contact with NGOs who had their children sent to Type-3 schools were more concerned about the level of education their children obtain.

The restricted social inclusion that SVI experienced in their local communities as well as in mainstream education and the unavailability of adequate provision to aid their social inclusion, whether from the schools or the NGOs that supported inclusion, was an issue of concern to SVI, their parents and educators. It was more for those connected to Type-1 and 2 schools than for those connected to Type-3 schools.

Peers in all different types of schools appeared to offer the fundamental supportive role for those with VI from the perspective of peers themselves, their educators, SVI as well as their LST and headteachers and those who supported the inclusive programmes in their schools.

Access was a major issue facing the inclusion of SVI. Educators and those who supported the inclusion of SVI had taken the 'easy route' of meeting the needs of SVI in education by omitting materials, avoiding adapting visual elements of the courses, facilitating the success of SVI in exams. All of this may have its influence on the level of attainment which some SVI believed to be equivalent to their peers (mainly those who attended Type-2 and 3 schools) while others (those who attended Type-1 schools) did not. Similarly, teachers had different views regarding the level of attainment of their students.

SVI who joined mainstream education after being in special schools reported getting used to the inclusive environment gradually but had relative preference to being with people who share their disability, whilst those has been included since early educational stages had no issue being in an

inclusive environment and had preference to being with non-disabled peers. Those who attended Type-3 schools had no contacts with those with a disability.

Peers had generally positive attitudes towards supporting their SVI-peers. They also believed in the capability of their SVI peers and understood the limitations SVI may face in engaging in visual subjects.

Training in SEN was restricted. All teachers of Type-1 and 3 schools received no training in SEN. For those who received training (mainly those attended Type-2 schools), it was of an introductory level. The rest had 'negotiation' types of support with the NGO on possible ways of meeting the needs of their SVI. LSTs faced obstacles in supporting secondary SVI. Their level of training was limited and they had to build their knowledge through experiencing working in the field of VI. LSTs relied on subject teachers to include SVI in their classes due to the challenges incurred by supporting students at this educational level. These teachers themselves were not equipped with the necessary skills to include all learners, particularly in scientific subjects.

Organisations followed different approaches to inclusion. The common approach they followed was by identifying schools that could constitute the basis for their inclusive programmes. The support that they provided, however, varied based on their capacity to provide the needed support.

Barriers to inclusion were numerous; some were attitudinal, others related to the physical environment, the readiness of schools and their staff for inclusion, the availability of financial support to meet the additional needs of those who required SVI, the available specialism in different types of SEN and the available team in place to support the implementation of inclusion.

CHAPTER 5: THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER, DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBLE AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

CHAPTER 5 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER, DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBLE AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter, made up of five sections, considers the main findings of my research, supported by relevant literature, adopted approaches and theory. Section one provides a reflection on my role as the researcher in charge of conducting the current study. In section two, the contribution of my research to knowledge is then demarcated. Section three discusses the implications of the qualitative data in relation to the different RQs sequentially, followed by consideration of the implications of the questionnaire data in section four. Finally, section five discusses the limitations of the study and areas for future research.

5.1 Reflection on the role of the researcher

Having experienced nearly two decades in mainstream education in Lebanon, prior to my participating SVI, I aimed through this study to explore the experience of disabled students, particularly those with VI in a) school identification; b) perceptions towards experiencing inclusion in education; and c) existing inclusive practices in mainstream schools in Lebanon that disabled students face, both from their perspectives and from the perspectives of those who are in direct or indirect contact with them. In doing so, I have not only provided an account of the current situation of disabled students in mainstream education, for I have also demonstrated the extent to which this education and those who work towards the inclusion of disabled students in Lebanon can enable or disable their students.

When exploring the factors that can disable those with impairment, I adopted a social model of disability supported by emancipatory principles. That is, I considered disability to be caused by external factors and not by the impairment of the individuals. I believe I presented a faithful account of the participating SVI, investigated issues of concern to them from a social perspective and I involved them throughout the different stages of the development of the research, as further explained in Section 1.5.

Adopting an emancipatory approach in investigating the experience of SVI in mainstream education was driven by the reality that very limited research has

explored the experience of disabled people themselves, especially those with VI, in Lebanon. In adopting this approach, I avoided the danger of supporting models that do not look at disability from a socio-political perspective. This method enabled me to consider the differences that exist between disabled students and to present the different issues SVI can face. Moreover, consulting the views of SVI all through the different stages of the development of this research helped me to avoid making individual decisions about issues of general concern e.g. the language used to address disabled people (Subsection 3.1.2).

It has been argued that emancipatory research has the potential to bring change to the life of the population being investigated. Under this lens, I explored issues that are of direct relevance to implementing inclusion, such as the external barriers that SVI face as opposed to considering these barriers in terms of how they resonate within disabled people themselves. Despite adherence to the social model of disability, I was nonetheless aware that personal characteristics, such as the type and severity of the impairment, influence the experience in inclusion that SVI may have. This awareness of the interaction of the disabling barriers with the impairment and/or difficulty of the individual was also acknowledged in the work of other disabled scholars (Lourens & Swartz, 2016a; Thomas, 1999). The impairment of the individual is central to the social model of disability (Cameron, 2014b), however, by adopting this model I focused on what needs to be changed through collective action, rather than focusing on those things that do not need to be changed or cannot sometimes even be changed, such as the impairment of the individual. In sum, the focus of my research was on investigating, as the findings demonstrated, the barriers that impact on the collective experience of SVI in mainstream settings and ultimately, on practising inclusion in mainstream education in Lebanon.

As a disabled researcher who had a somewhat similar experience to those of the participating SVI, the question about my role as the researcher in developing the research was of great importance to me. This is even though my experience of inclusion at the two mainstream schools I attended during my schooling, was devoid of any external support that schools and their SVI could receive from NGOs. In fact, I might have had a relatively different experience from those of the

participating SVI who attended Type-1 (supported by special schools) and Type-2 schools (supported by NGOs), but a similar one to that of those who attended Type-3 schools (received no external support). The experience of inequality and unfairness that I encountered throughout my educational journey is an issue that I intended to bring to the research, as this is a common issue facing many disabled people, regardless of whether their inclusion is supported. This is further demonstrated by the data regarding their experience. The findings of my research showed how SVI had to adjust to the schooling environment and that little or no adjustments were put in place in preparation for their educational and social inclusion.

My aim through conducting this research was to contribute to improving the education experience of disabled students in mainstream education by exploring the experience of SVI from their perspectives and the views of those who are around them, while also investigating the current inclusive practices. By doing so, existing barriers could be identified and possible solutions suggested. As part of this process, recognising my own position in the research was critical, as I have a full understanding of what it means to have vision impairment. Whilst this can be criticised for possibly lacking detachment of oneself from the research, there are advantages in that I could draw on this experience and knowledge for the benefit of the investigation. Furthermore, it seemed that conducting this research by a disabled researcher had a positive impact on some of the interviewees that led to them revealing information about the types of impairments they interacted with including their disabled family members. In a society where disabled people are considered a burden on their families, it is not usual to discuss disabled relatives in positive terms. In sum, some participants might have felt empowered to show their knowledge of different types of disability, because as they were being interviewed by a researcher who had an impairment herself.

Moreover, conducting the research by an insider to the field of impairment led to most the participating SVI and their parents enquiring, at the end of their interviews, about my experience in furthering my education and studying abroad. In a country where employment for those with VI is exclusive to positions that are believed to compensate for their disability, such as musicians, language teachers,

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translators and telephone operators, it seemed that my undertaking doctoral research had inspired some SVI and those around them, thus perhaps stimulating their future ambitions. Given the traditional employment positions available for those with VI in Lebanon at present, there seems to be little aspiration amongst SVI to attend HE, which highlights the need for parents and their children to receive information about a range of different opportunities to support their decision making in terms of their future lives. In fact, a lack of information that could be useful while identifying a school, university or a course of study was an issue I faced previously and it appeared that it is one of the major issues that the participating SVI still face. This lack of information means the decisions still depend on whether a school will accept them and can provide the appropriate support, as will be discussed in Subsection 5.3.1. Before discussing the research findings, a summary of the contributions of my research to knowledge is provided.

5.2 Contribution to knowledge

As the methodology chapter of my thesis demonstrated, in identifying the schools that comprised the framework of my study, I followed a range of different strategies. These enabled me to identify the clear majority of schools that have SVI included in their secondary stage of education, i.e. the criteria followed to identify participating schools in my research. Given that the visited 12 schools represented most urban schools that have SVI enrolled in their classes, this allowed me to present a comprehensive accurate account of the different forms of inclusion applied in schools for SVI in Lebanon. That is, the findings of my research appear to reflect the way inclusion is applied, perceived and practiced generally in Lebanon in schools that have SVI enrolled in their secondary stage of education.

On the theoretical level, I investigated inclusion from an ecological perspective, through which, secondary students with vision impairment were at the centre. Their inclusion in the secondary stage of education through time was explored from their perspectives along with the views of those around them. Using the ecological model to investigate the inclusion of this population in mainstream education added depth to the presented findings. It demonstrated the importance of looking at

inclusion from different perspectives located in different settings as opposed to the limited available research that has investigated it from perspectives located in particular environments. Using this model has allowed for the different factors that can directly or indirectly influence and be influenced by the developing person in a certain environment to be uncovered. It has also been possible to identify the interlinking factors influencing in and between different levels of the model. By applying this model, I have demonstrated the importance of investigating the overlapping issues that cannot be separated from each other when carrying out research on inclusion.

At the participatory level, my research has offered a powerful approach, through which not only were the experiences of concerned individuals investigated, but their perspectives supported by the perspectives of those who were directly or indirectly connected to them were considered. This work is salient, as research investigating the experience of disabled people in Lebanon from the perspective of disabled people themselves is scarce. Furthermore, involving disabled students' views on a topic of direct relevance to them along with the perspectives of those who were directly and indirectly involved in their education not only increased the validity of the collected data, but also helped to eliminate bias in that the gathered information about the inclusion of disabled people was not just from their point of view.

On a methodological level, as an insider with VI, I aimed to bring a difference to the way disability-related issues are investigated, applied and practiced in Lebanon. My emancipatory approach has not been previously employed in disability research in Lebanon which, beyond increasing the importance of my findings, also helped in presenting a faithful account of the participating SVI, their experience regarding inclusion and the way it is practiced.

Using a range of data collection methods (one-to-one, group, face-to-face, phone interviews and distributing questionnaires) also increased the robustness of my findings. This was further strengthened by investigating the perspectives of several different types of participants (SVI, peers, parents, teachers, headteachers, LST, HET and NGOs). The use of questionnaire data supplemented with the collected interview data allowed me to provide a rich and robust picture of the experience

and practices of inclusion in Lebanon. In sum, the application of varied methods and gathering different perspectives has provided a greater understanding of the experience of SVI and the available practices in schools that enroll them than was previously available, to which I now turn to discuss.

5.3 Discussion related to RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3

The previous chapter followed a thematic analysis supported by quantitative analysis to present the findings of the research. In what follows, the emergent themes and sub-themes of the presented data in Chapter 4 are discussed, considering the relevant literature and the applied ecological system theory. However, before discussing the main findings of my research, a summary about its theoretical framework and how it was applied in my study is deemed appropriate.

The ecological system theory is founded on the person, environment and the continuous interaction between the two. It involves looking at all social interaction around the developing person in a certain environment, which Bronfenbrenner referred to as the biosystem. In addition to this, it pertains to analysing the influencing factors that people in a particular environment have on each other, which can directly or indirectly influence the developing person. The biosystem in my study was represented by secondary students with vision impairment (SSVI), who were present in the school and home environment. Consequently, their immediate interaction was with their peers, teachers and parents who occupied the microsystem. Influences between these different microsystems in the educational environment and settings outside the classroom constituted the mesosystem, i.e. LST, who cooperated with teachers to include SVI in their classes, and the headteachers of the different schools who accepted them in their schools on a full-time basis.

Influences on the biosystem from settings that did not include members of the microsystems constituted the exosystem, which in my study were represented by higher education tutors (HET). That is, those who provided SEN training for educators together with individuals from GOs and NGOs, who worked on implementing projects targeted at inclusion in education, but had never personally

entered the classroom or home environment. An overarching macrosystem was represented in the available policy, values, beliefs and culture. This could impact on the biosystem directly or through other layers of the system. The chronosystem, that is the mutual influence between and among different layers through time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), pertained to the Brevet students with vision impairment (BSVI) and university students with this impairment (USVI). These were the SVI before and after the secondary phase of education, respectively, who represented the influence of time on the developing person before and after the secondary stage of education.

5.3.1 RQ1: School identification / school selection

The RQ about school selection stemmed from my own experience of the challenges that SVI face in identifying an appropriate secondary mainstream school in Lebanon. It also emanated from the current literature (Mann et al., 2015), which suggests that whilst parents in some countries are able to choose the school that best meets theirs and their children's needs, for parents with children requiring support provision this does not necessarily imply that they are free to choose. My research involved investigating school selection and influencing factors on the decisions of parents and their children with VI in Lebanon when trying to identify a suitable secondary mainstream school. Extant literature reviews on selecting a secondary school for children described as having SEN (Byrne, 2013) have noted the tendency of these students to remain in the same type of educational provision, either a mainstream or special school, through all the different phases of education. In my research, whilst this tendency was apparent, some SVI and their parents were actively seeking mainstream provision before staying in either form. The belief of some parents in the suitability of either provision for the needs of their children and themselves was also apparent (Subsections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2).

In contrast, Byrne (2013) ascertained that the tendency of parents in the UK to settle in special provision, established in the literature of last century (Male, 1998) demonstrated the limited experience in mainstream education that parents of children described as having SEN had twenty years ago. Byrne further argued that

these perceptions might have changed over recent decades, in that mainstream education has become increasingly desirable for children requiring SEN provision and their parents. This was also found by Mann and her colleagues' (2015) during a study regarding school choice in Australia. The authors determined a tendency for parents to keep their children in mainstream provision, despite the reported dissatisfaction of some parents with this arrangement (Mann et al., 2015). This indicates not only the tendency of parents to select a mainstream school for their children, but also the struggle they face to maintain the placement of their children in mainstream settings.

Whilst the retention of SSVI in the same provision was evident in my study, so too was the struggle that parents faced in maintaining the placement of their children where they wanted them to be. My findings showed that half of those attending Type-2 schools had changed mainstream schools prior to attending the current private mainstream school, as parents initially tried enrolling their children in the same schools as their siblings. This demonstrated not only the struggle that parents face when identifying and maintaining a place for their children in mainstream education, but also revealed how some actively sought this provision for their children. It also reflected a natural desire of parents to keep all siblings in the same educational environment.

It has been noted in the literature (Hess, Molina & Kozleski, 2006; Jennings, 2010) that attending the same school as most children in the local community can help to enhance self-esteem and result in more parental satisfaction. My research shows that except for those attending Type-3 schools, none of the students attended the local mainstream school as their siblings. The consequences of this could be limited friendship building in the local communities, which children usually develop through their interaction with their peers or members of their neighbourhood. This is evident in the responses of parents of those who attended Type-1 and Type2 schools reporting the limited social inclusion of their children in their communities (Subsection 5.2.3).

In Lebanon, only those attending private schools are able to stay in the same school all through their different educational stages. The rest have to transfer to a secondary school on completion of their intermediate schooling (Subsection 1.7.1).

My findings demonstrated the struggle parents face in maintaining placement of their children in the same private school and only one participant who attended a Type-3 school could stay in the same school all through their schooling. The rest (n=5), who attended Type-2 schools had to change mainstream schools before they settled in their mainstream private schools (Subsection 4.1.2). This limited period of settlement in the same school could influence their maintaining friendships in the local community.

The literature (Byrne, 2013) has demonstrated the concern of parents, as members of the microsystem level of the ecological model that the disability and academic support needs of their disabled children increase with the increasing age of their children. Jessen (2012) further noted that this concern might be a result of parents' choices being narrowed during higher educational stages. In comparison, my findings showed that parents of children attending both Type-1 and 2 schools had the support needs of their children since the early educational stages as a common priority in school identification (Subsection 4.1.6). For example, the Braille access requirements for the vast majority of these SVI and their parents depended on who can provide Braille when selecting a mainstream school. Indeed, these parents had not only relied on special schools and NGOs to identify suitable schools for them, for they also had to accept enrolling their children in the school recommended by those organisations for the educational requirements of their children to be met.

The lack of alternative special schools to mainstream education in the secondary level of education in Lebanon would thus suggest that the number of SSVI attending this form of education should increase at this stage, especially if they want to carry on with their schooling. The alternative for this group is to either join a vocational college run by either their special school, attend a mainstream vocational college, or drop out of education entirely. My study identified only four SSVI in their first secondary year of education, compared to six in special schools, who were ready to make a transition decision for the following stage of their education. This suggests that a clear majority of SVI do not proceed with secondary education. Instead, they would appear to join a vocational school or drop out of education. Indeed, a follow up call to investigate the school provision that the participating BSVI after passing their Brevet official examination

demonstrated that none of them subsequently attended a mainstream education, with all joining vocational schools run by their respective special schools.

Vocational education in Lebanon has traditionally been considered to have less value than general education and it has also been considered an appropriate option for low-achieving students (Vlaardingerbroek & El-Masri, 2008). Remaining in the same provision (special schools) not only suggests there were concerns that the students and their school would not be able to manage the demands of secondary mainstream education, for it also reveals the tendency to remain in the same provision that some SVI, supported by their special schools, deemed to be more suitable rather than joining mainstream education. However, these schools appear to often steer their SVI towards vocational education that does not necessarily lead them obtaining decent employment, the further investigation of which is beyond the scope of this study.

My findings from the responses of the SSVI who attended Type-3 schools (Subsection 4.1.2) suggest that when support requirements of SVI are manageable by their schools, SVI and their parents can make independent school identification. The findings from these participants suggest that what makes a good school, when the needs are minor, can be no different from those expressed by parents and their children, generally. Additionally, this suggests that 'normalisation' (Wolfensberger, 1983), whereby people feel required to act in a way that is recognised as being acceptable by society and do not appear different from what is considered the norm, would lead to them making independent decisions. In addition to a lack of autonomy when identifying a school, the severity of their impairment on SVI also perpetuates the notion of their being different from the norm. Florian (2007) has asserted that in some countries, including those of the Middle East region, people who are similar are perceived as normal and those who are different are perceived as deviant. Armstrong (2003) further argued that some disabled people, driven by societal conceptions, prefer to be perceived as conforming to these norms, which can in turn limit the extent to which they are open to their own and others' differences. In fact, being enrolled in mainstream education meant that those who attended Type-3 schools had limited, if any, awareness of disability-related support. They also had no interaction with other disabled fellow students and instead, their

interest was reflected in attending a school in their area of residence. These 'normalisation' behaviours are significant, as they suggest that SVI are not nurtured to value their differences, but rather conform to societal norms in their behaviours and actions.

The influence of decisions made by members at the exosystem level on the developing person was apparent in the dependency of some SVI on special schools in identifying a suitable secondary mainstream school. This dependency had an impact on the place of residence of some SSVI, as special schools supported only those in schools local to them. This meant for SSVI whose parents did not reside in the vicinity of a special school had to board at school to be able to manage commuting to and from their mainstream schools. By contrast, those whose parents resided in the locality of the special schools were able to remain living with their parents. This suggests that the support requirements influence the type of school SVI can attend, as for some it has an impact on their residential situation, i.e. whether they live with their parents and siblings or not. Special schools offer accommodation for SVI since early educational stages, mainly those whose parents do not reside nearby. One implication of living away from family is that this can have psychological consequences for the children concerned. That is, whilst it might help children to develop their social skills, at the same time it can also leave them emotionally vulnerable. In addition, this can make SVI themselves feel they must pay the burden of their impairment by having to live away from their parents.

Indirect influences on school selection resulting in a lack of autonomy for SVI and their parents were found to be present throughout the different educational stages. This lack of autonomy can be seen in my study by comparing the school identifications of SVI who were pre-secondary, with those who had just completed the secondary stage of education, which, according to Bronfenbrenner's (2005) typology, refers to the 'chronosystem'. Factors from different levels of the ecological model had their influence on the inclusion of SVI throughout their educational stages. For example, the availability of special schools for the participating BSVI led to the majority of these students (83%) who started their education in mainstream education moving to such schools due to the difficulties

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they faced when trying to continue their education in a mainstream setting (Subsection 4.1.1). Accordingly, findings from the literature (Leyser & Kirk, 2004) suggested that parents question the suitability of mainstream schools for their children in later educational years, although they have found mainstream schools suitable during early educational years. Other researchers (Jenkinson, 1998) also contended that whilst social inclusion motivates parents to send their disabled children to mainstream schools in early educational stages, the social and educational gaps widen as the disabled children grow older. In my study, social and educational influences have been found to impact on the decision to move from mainstream to a special school in the case of the termination of 'an inclusion project,' for this meant that support was no longer available for SVI in the mainstream school. Where mainstream schools that provided support for SVI were limited, attending a special school was the only choice for these students. This suggests that in addition to educational and social factors influencing SVI placement in mainstream schools, this can also be influenced by decisions made from above. Decisions made by individuals located at the mesosystem or exosystem levels thus influences both the support SVI can receive from individuals located in the microsystem and the (lack of) alternative special education provision for disabled students in the country.

Several factors that influenced SVI regarding their HE identification were uncovered in my study. For a majority of 80% of those who had attended Type-1 schools, support requirements had influenced their university selection, whereas for those who had attended Type-2 schools (Subsection 4.1.4), the salient factors were university acceptance and their economic situation. The literature (Soorenian, 2013) has ascertained that for disabled students to make an independent university selection, they need to obtain information regarding the available disability, academic and social support. Morris (2005) further noted that leading an independent life for disabled people requires them to be able to make their own decisions when identifying a suitable HE. However, my findings indicate that the vast majority of USVI had their university selection influenced by a range of different dependent variables, including the type of school they had previously attended and whether their chosen university would accept them.

Similar to secondary school, it emerged that USVI opted for non-visual subjects at HE under the belief that this would facilitate their sense of inclusion. Moreover, none of the participants reported disability-related information about available support as having an influence on their university identification. Considering that the university stage can constitute a stepping stone to forming an independent life, this appeared not to be the case for USVI in Lebanon, where a range of factors outside of their control dictated where and what to study. Similar to SSVI who attended Type-3 schools, USVI who received the least support in relation to their VI, were more concerned about selecting a university that supported their education and future careers. This is consistent with the literature (Bagley et al., 2001), suggesting that academic quality is the most common factor influencing students when identifying an educational institution. This suggests that those who had no affiliation with NGOs tended to 'normalise' themselves and act in a way that was like other non-SVI. I should note that whilst all SSVI attending Type-3 schools were sight impaired, all those at HE who had no affiliation with NGOs had severe sight impairment. This suggests that while the severity of their impairment does influence the support required, 'normalisation' is not necessarily influenced by the severity of VI.

Nonetheless, the opinions of the supporting organisations in Lebanon on school and HE identification were influential on those attending Type-1 and Type-2 schools. This is consistent with findings from the literature (Damaj, 2014) arguing that parents of disabled children in Lebanon trust the expertise available at special schools and often believe that they themselves do not possess the specialised knowledge that their children require. More generally, Brannen and Nilsen (2005) stressed the influence of the opinion of experts on parents not questioning the existing order of things.

In comparison, my findings showed that those whose children attended Type-1 schools relied fully on special schools to identify secondary schools for their children and those affiliated to the UNRWA relied on it to find a suitable school for their children. Of SSVI who attended Type-1 schools, 90% relied fully on special schools to identify a suitable mainstream school for them when reaching their secondary stage of education. The remaining 10% were referred to a different

mainstream school through a headteacher, who believed that his school was not capable of offering support similar to that for those who were supported by special schools. This suggests that the opinion of professionals not only influences SVI and their parents' decisions but also impacts on schools accepting, retaining or rejecting such students.

My findings at the microsystem level showed that all parents prioritised the wellbeing of their children when identifying a suitable school for them. Whilst those who sent their children to Type-1 schools trusted the expertise of special schools, those who sent their children to Type-2 were interested in the support and recommendations that NGOs could offer their children in finding and attending certain schools. Only one parent reported dissatisfaction with the school choice made by an NGO and had moved their daughter from mainstream to special and back to a mainstream school five times, relying on their network of contacts to identify a local school supported by a different NGO (Subsection 4.1.6).

By contrast, those who sent their children to Type-3 schools, whilst also prioritising the wellbeing of their children, were interested in schools that had a good reputation and taught their preferred second language. This concern again closely resembles how parents of non-disabled children in Lebanon identify a school for their children, as has been noted in the reviewed literature. Whilst my findings showed that these parents had their decisions informed by their belief in the ability of their children to manage in mainstream education, one third were advised by medical professionals of the better quality of education that their child could receive in mainstream school as opposed to that of special schools (Subsection 4.1.6). In contrary, Whitburn (2013) ascertained that medical professionals, who can influence parental school provision selection, believe that special schools are the only option for SSI. Nonetheless, the influence of the advice received from educationalists on identifying a suitable school and on selecting the provision for their children was still apparent in my findings.

It has been ascertained that well-informed parents can do as well as education professionals in choosing a school for their children (Bast & Walhberg 2004). It has also been argued (Thompson & Beymer, 2015) that if parents select a school for their children, they will take more responsibility in the education of their children

and in the choices they make. In contrast, the findings at the exosystem level would appear to indicate that NGOs have a vested interest in the way in which SVI are educated in Lebanon. This could make their advice better represent this, rather than the student and their parents, who seem to be seldom consulted on issues of direct relevance to them (Subsection 4.1.9). This control on school selection could also indicate that organisations running or taking part in inclusion projects are interested in sustaining the "industry" or their status quo in Lebanon, for which they are paid, recognised and funded.

Other indirect influencing factors on parental school identification included the decisions made by mainstream schools when admitting students who required support provision (a feature of the mesosystem level of the ecological model). This admission, in turn, was influenced by a range of different factors, including the type of support the school could receive, the philosophy of the school and the level of support that SVI would require (Subsection 4.1.7). This shows that in Lebanon schools are not fully open to inclusion, but rather their acceptance of SVI is dependent on the support schools can receive and offer as well as on that the students require. This also demonstrated that the 'right for all' and 'open for all' slogans are not applied in practice. All in all, the needs of their SVI and the support schools can receive from external sources has a major influence on the decisions schools make regarding whether to accept or reject these students. Consequently, certain schools could be deterred from accepting students requiring support provision, which ultimately would widen the gap between schools that are considered inclusive and those that target certain ability groups.

Whilst all NGOs supporting Type-1 and Type- 2 schools believed that adaptability, suitability and acceptance of the concept of inclusion informed their school selection process, their main concern was about reducing costs. This meant that they had to group their students in certain schools, which additionally narrowed the school choices for parents and their children. Furthermore, none of the NGOs considered the preference of the parents when deciding whether to support students in certain schools and instead, they and the schools were at the centre of the school selection. As the findings of my research demonstrated, the criteria that these NGOs followed illustrated their control over the school identification. This

could be argued as contradicting the ethos of inclusion that advocates having the person at the centre of the inclusive process (Allan, 2008). As my findings revealed, having the person at the centre was not the philosophy of any of the participating schools.

The restricted consultation of parents and disabled students about their school preference has been reported in the literature. Cook et al. (2001) in the UK found that disabled students were not consulted when changing their provision from special to mainstream education. Whilst it would appear that nearly two decades ago this stance was adopted in the UK, not seeking the views of disabled students and their parents was found to be pervasive in the current study. In Lebanon, it seems that when the special school option existed, then some parents considered it to be their only option. However, when special school provision was not an available option, parents would make no contribution in identifying a suitable school, especially if their child required support, as the decision would rest with the special school or the NGOs and any school able to accept their children. In this respect, parents were rarely given the opportunity to express an interest.

Cook et al. (2001) further contend that changing educational provision (special to mainstream) for disabled students should involve the active participation of the students themselves. Whilst this appears to highlight a global North perspective in increasing autonomy of students, this might not be the case in countries of the global South and in Lebanon where interdependence is more highly valued than independence. This cultural difference could lead to students and their parents to prefer decisions made for them in relation to school identification.

To summarise, my findings have indicated that despite the interest in selecting mainstream education for their children, in reality there was no choice. SVI and their parents had to accept what could be made available for them, whether by devoted NGOs educating them in mainstream settings or by schools who were willing to take them. As Barton (2010) established, limited choices can change an entire life experience. Accepting any educational provision available suggests that the choices made were, in fact, imposed on SVI and their parents, which means there was not really any choice at all. Should these decisions be controlled by them, attending a local school and exposure to a different experience of inclusion

would possibly happen. On the other hand, when autonomy in decisions was identified, it was connected to normalisation, whereby the students would distance themselves from their impairment by considering themselves as different from others, but not disabled. This, according to Cameron (2014), might imply that such students are disqualified from full social acceptance, as they do not appear to fit into either group. This will be further discussed in Subsection 5.3.3 of this chapter. Having discussed the findings of RQ1, in what follows I discuss those in relation to RQ2.

5.3.2 RQ2: Experiences and perspectives of disabled students of mainstream education

This study was also aimed at revealing the experiences and perspectives of disabled students and others around them in mainstream education. This originated from my experiences and those of other disabled people (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; Shah, 2007; Soorenian, 2013; Whitburn, 2013), who suggested that mainstream settings are still not ready for inclusion and that disabled people are not treated fairly in mainstream education. This also stemmed from the literature review (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011), which indicated that no fully positive attitudes towards inclusion have been reached and that the barriers facing disabled students in mainstream settings are still numerous.

My findings revealed the influencing factors on the experience of SVI in relation to: 1) existing barriers to educational inclusion; 2) limited training opportunities in SEN and inclusion; and 3) the unavailability of social inclusion provision for SVI in mainstream schools. These factors influenced the educational and social inclusion of SVI in education, as I discuss below.

1. Access related barriers influencing the educational inclusion of SVI

Extant literature (Alkhateeb et al., 2015) has contended that barriers facing the inclusion of disabled people across the Arab world, in general and those with VI in mainstream education are still manifold. Moreover, Douglas, McLinden, McCall,

Pavey, Ware and Farrell (2011) noted that accessing visual information is a common barrier facing the inclusion of SSVI globally. Similarly, my findings showed that access related barriers were a major issue facing SVI, as noted by the vast majority of my participants. These participants were located at different levels of the ecological model, with some having direct contact with SVI, whilst others had an indirect connection, but influenced the setting where they were present.

Responses from participants located at the biosystem level of the ecological model revealed that the 90% majority of SSVI attending Type-2 schools used Braille to access information. However, lack of Braille books and the restrictions to accessing visual parts of their courses, point to substantial limitations in their educational inclusion. Douglas et al. (2009) noted that the literature is united about the dangers of denying access to Braille regarding the educational outcomes of those who need it. Khochen (2012) further supported the assertion of the importance of reading through touch as an alternative method for accessing information for those whose sight does not allow them to access print. My findings revealed that the problem lies not only in the lack of Braille books, but also the unavailability of resources that would enable SVI to access visual information by touch or remaining residual vision. The restricted access to information for SSVI would suggest negative implications in relation to their educational experience. Specifically, not being able to access the educational materials required for secondary stage of education on an equal level with their peers would arguably suggest creating a gap in knowledge between disabled and non-disabled students, especially given that the secondary stage of education is considered a preparatory stage for HE.

Similarly, using adapted laptops for taking notes in classroom was noted by nearly half (40%) SVI attending Type-1 schools as being problematic. Considering that all Type-1 schools are government schools (figure 1), which are more populated with students than private schools in terms of the numbers attending each class, this can lead to the acoustics hindering SVI hearing the voice of their screen readers. Hence, the outcome is an ineffective use of technology in aid of their educational inclusion.

Barriers related to accessing information were also found from participants located at the chronosystem level. In that BSVI who attended special schools noted the

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limited educational resources available in their special schools. Literature from the global North (French, 2005), in the UK, has noted that SI during the first half of the previous century, were advised by their special schools not to use their sight for reading and writing. Regarding this, scholarship of this century from countries of the global South (e.g. Gogri, Al Harby and Khandekar, 2015, in Oman; Abu-Hamour and Al-Hmouz, 2014, in Jordan; Mohammad, 2011, in Sudan) highlighted that SVI who attend special schools before moving to a mainstream environment accessed information through Braille format, regardless of whether or not they had residual vision. However, my findings showed that this was not the case in Lebanon where those who had residual vision accessed print format and those who had none used Braille. Nevertheless, issues related to accessing visual materials were acutely affecting those with SSI, regardless of their school placement, and it emerged that only limited adjustments were made for those who could access print format. The adjustments that were made indicate insufficient knowledge regarding SI and those around them in relation to what could be made available. It also shows that SI accessing information were poorly supported in their respective schools, rather than aiming to put on an equal level to their non-disabled peers.

The outcomes from the participating USVI located at the chronosystem level of the ecological model also faced information access related barriers. Because HE is a more advanced stage of education, accessing information is far more significant, as noted by half of the participating USVI (46%). Some of those who had used Braille previously to access schooling materials had had to change their medium from Braille to audio, as Braille books were not provided for those at HE level and the use of assistive tools was also restricted (Subsection 4.2.4). Whilst the use of technology was notable in this stage of education, its use was restricted. USVI relied on computers to take notes, but not for accessing course materials, thus suggesting there were limitations regarding the reading texts available, which could have hindering their acquisition of the required knowledge. The restricted use of advanced assistive tools (Braille note takers) was in part due to their unaffordability and because carrying around and listening to screen readers in busy classes was not always possible. Additionally, whilst using audio recorded materials is a cost-

effective way for special schools and NGOs of providing access to HE materials, it caused major problems for some of the students (mainly those for whom information through listening was not their preferred format) and demonstrated the negative impact of changing the medium of accessing information.

Extant literature (Orlando, Klinepeter & Foster, 2016) has contended there will be improved long-term learning outcomes for disabled students in mainstream education. Researchers (Whitburn, 2014) have also suggested that when disabled students spend a long time in mainstream education, their learning outcomes become more similar to their non-disabled peers when they reach HE. By contrast, the restricted information access and changing the medium of access at this stage of education is evidence of the growing educational gap in HE in Lebanon between USVI and their non-USVI peers.

In my research, barriers to accessing information were additionally connected to the unavailability of skills and resources for creating accessible materials by individuals located at the mesosystem level. There was also a lack of capacity to provide information in alternative formats so that SVI could choose which would best work for them. Indeed, my findings showed that no SVI reported receiving information in enlarged font or electronic format. Those were SSI and hence, could access print materials were provided with photocopying, but very often this just a facsimile copy of the handwritten notes of their classroom peers. This suggests not only that schools still do not use technology to enforce the inclusion of SVI, but also, that these students have to find a solution to accessing hand-written materials by themselves, if they were not able to do so in the format provided. That is, the burden of the VI falls on the individual with the impairment and limited effort is made to identify, never mind to solve existing barriers.

Barriers related to accessing information were also an issue revealed by participating parents who were located at the microsystem of the ecological model, where the biosystem was also present. Whilst parents had a direct influence on their children, their decisions were dependent on a range of factors found at different levels of the ecological model. Those whose children attended Type-1 schools had relied on the capacity of the special schools to provide for the educational requirements of their children. By contrast, the 80% majority of parents

of children attending Type-2 schools had experienced the challenge of an absence of Braille school materials, which the NGOs did not have the financial and technical capacity to provide in full. However, what was more challenging for the 70% majority of parents was the lack of information relating to the short- and long-term future of their children. For example, whilst being increasingly concerned about the employment and the lifelong wellbeing of their children upon completing their secondary education, they had no information about the support that their children could receive when entering HE. This demonstrated the continuity of barriers from one stage of education to the other that SVI and their parents face. It also showed that whilst there are overarching barriers to the inclusion of SVI in mainstream education, each educational stage has its own specific challenges. Whilst accessing information and being socially included were issues in relation to inclusion during the secondary stage of education, the limited information that parents were able to access regarding HE and the wellbeing of their children, in HE or in respect of future career, was a concern to those whose children were about to start HE (Sections 4.2 and 4.3). It can be reasonably argued that the limited information available for parents influenced the decisions they made regarding their children with VI, which impacted on USVI experience in HE and hence, their later lives.

Accessing information was also hindered by the limited available resources, as noted by the participating teachers who were located at the microsystem level of the ecological model. All teachers of Type-1 schools and slightly less than half (33%) of those of the Type-2 schools reported a lack of availability of classroom resources for them to use to illustrate the visual elements of some courses to be problematic (Subsection 4.2.8). In the literature (Whitburn, 2014b), the paucity of resources at the classroom level was highlighted as restricting the educational inclusion of SVI by limiting the amount of information they can comprehend. In addition to this, my research shows that the unavailability or limited use of their Braille books in classrooms by teachers of Type-1 schools is problematic, reiterating that the amount of information SVI could access at the classroom level is less than their non-SVI counterparts.

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The limited use of Braille books in classrooms can possibly be attributed not only to their incomplete books, but also to the relatively slow speed of accessing Braille when compared to print (Douglas et al., 2009). Their inability to follow materials at the same speed as their peers may leave many SVI behind during sessions. The limited use of Braille books could also explain the limited participation of these students during sessions, as expressed by some of their teachers. Other resource related challenges that over half of teachers of Type-1 schools (60%) noted as hampering the educational inclusion of SSVI, was the lack of available human support during sessions for helping in accessing visual subjects, such as in maths and English.

In fact, the vast majority of all participating SSVI, regardless of the type of school they attended, reported preference to text-based subjects, and some were explicit about their disengagement in visual subjects. Indeed, contrary to the existing literature demonstrating negative attitudes towards the inclusion of certain types of difficulties, for example, those with SLD and SEBD, all participating teachers, regardless of the type of schools they worked in, had negative attitudes towards including SVI in visual/scientific based subjects owing to their belief of the inability of these students to engage with their content. This suggests an inconsistency in existing attitudes towards specific types of impairment in that teachers were generally positive about the inclusion of SVI in their classes, but they still considered that the burden of the impairment lay with the student. In other words, they were failing to look at the barriers facing the inclusion of their students from a social perspective. If these teachers had adopted such an approach to the inclusion of their SVI, they would have seen it as being their responsibility in terms of making these subjects accessible for all their students, including those with VI. The lack of support teachers received from LST and headteachers, who were located at the mesosystem level, appear to have had a negative impact on their perception. The literature (Douglas et al., 2009) that has reported positive attitudes towards the inclusion of SVI in mainstream education, mainly those with a single impairment, should not be interpreted in the Lebanese context as meaning that these students are included at an equal level to their peers. As modifying visual subjects requires specialised skills, which the available LST do not possess, this

restricts their capacity to have an impact on inclusion in the classroom at the mesosystem level.

Some studies noted that barriers to accessing the curriculum have a direct influence on the educational inclusion of disabled students and ultimately, on the outcomes of their education (Douglas et al., 2009). The findings of my study demonstrated that the issue of accessing the curriculum had been left for teachers supported by LST to deal with. In fact the post of LST, when available, was located at the mesosystem level of the ecological model, as they did not work in the classroom with the students. Whilst the participating teachers of Type-3 schools revealed their negative attitudes towards the inclusion of SSVI in visual subjects, they noted no major drawbacks to having these students in their schools. This observation perhaps reveals the limited attention that SVI received in these schools, where the aim was to treat all the students as a homogenous group. Consequently, this should not be interpreted as meaning that these students were not facing barriers in accessing information. Rather, they were expected to 'normalise' themselves so as to not be different to the others in their classroom.

Whilst the unavailability of LST was noted to be problematic in Type-1 schools, in Type-2 schools, where LSTs were available to assist in accessing visual information, barriers facing the inclusion of SVI in classrooms persisted. This was due to the excessive caseload of the LST, who had to support all the disabled students requiring SEN at school and owing to their limited capability in supporting access to information at this level of education. Furthermore, as aforementioned, the LST in these schools were located at the mesosystem level and not that of the microsystem level, which demonstrates their limited interaction with SVI in the classroom setting. Extant literature (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown & Webster, 2009) has questioned the effectiveness of this role in fostering the inclusion of those described as having SEN in the classroom environment. Given that the LST support in my study was restricted to outside the classroom environment, the usefulness of their support in facilitating inclusion at the microsystem level is also questionable. As my findings have shown, they were not able to provide access for SVI to visual aspects of courses, which could nurture the educational gap between them and their non-disabled peers. One could argue that if accessing visual

materials is an issue that has not been resolved in schools that have LST, then the educational gap between SVI and their peers is greater in schools that do not have such human support.

In fact, Whitburn (2011) found that SSVI could attend and actively participate in classes without the presence of an LST, whose attendance could limit their educational as well as their social inclusion. His participants, however, asserted the enabling role of the support of the teachers' aid in providing access to aspects of their studies, as the role of the LST is called in Australia. In my research, none of the students reported their being supported by an LST inside the classroom. Moreover, the limited knowledge of teachers about inclusive practices and skills in performing their responsibility of teaching inclusively emerged in the attitudes of teachers. These attitudes were represented by many of them shifting the responsibility of inclusion onto LST, whose role was not active in their schools. They suggested that the LST should assist SVI in accessing their lessons, thereby engaging with the inclusion of all their students, including those with VI. In addition, the limited available human support evidenced the very limited effort dedicated to enforcing inclusive practices in mainstream schools by the schools themselves or the NGOs that support the inclusion of their SVI. This lack of human support was attributed to financial limitations, which was also reported by some headteachers as restricting their ability to accept more students who required support provision.

Barriers to accessing information were also brought up by headteachers located at the mesosystem level. The majority (75%) of headteachers of Type-1 schools believed that their teachers were not able to offer additional educational support for SSVI. This not only suggests that SVI experience restrictions when accessing information, but also demonstrates the human, financial and environmental barriers that these schools face which ultimately have their impact on the access experience of SSVI. In contrast, very few headteachers (20%) of the Type-2 schools considered the limited additional educational support that their teachers could offer their SVI as being problematic. Considering that schools of Type-1 are government and those of Type-2 are private, the former may be much more restricted regarding available resources, while the latter are more concerned about the experience that disabled students receive. Moreover, the support that schools

could offer their SVI related to the support they also could receive from NGOs, which were located on the exosystem level of the ecological model. Factors influencing the mesosystem owing to decisions made at the exosystem level took the form of limited and unsustained funding that NGOs receive for providing support aimed at inclusion in certain schools. Similar to their teachers, none of headteachers of Type-3 schools reported any educational barriers facing the inclusion of their SVI. Rather, all identified barriers were social, financial, physical and human related barriers. In fact, these barriers were noted by Mattar (2012) as issues facing government schools in Lebanon generally. This not only confirms the common issues that schools in Lebanon face in general and those that are government run for it also demonstrates the poor perception of the barriers that schools have when taking on students with mild impairments.

Barriers were also present at the HE level, thus demonstrating that access related barriers are not exclusive to schooling environments. For Example, environmental barriers at this level of education became a recognised problem for SVI in that HE campuses are substantially bigger than schools and consequently, much harder to get to know. Hence, the restriction in moving independently in the university premises was recognised. This restraint was also noted by 75% of participating HET, who noted the inaccessible physical environment for many of their students (Subsection 4.2.11). The unfamiliarity of SVI with their HE environment was another restrictive barrier to their inclusion. The failure of HE to provide information in an accessible format for their SVI and their inability to perceive how these students needed different modalities for accessing information, suggest that HE also shifts responsibility for providing accessible information onto either NGOs or the SVI themselves. This perhaps explains why HE institutions in Lebanon are still not able to provide examples of successful models of inclusion for SVI or their student-teachers.

It has been argued (Allan, 2008; Barton, 2005) that inclusion starts from oneself and that we need to critically revise and criticise our practices to understand how our systems can exclude those who we work towards including. Indeed, in my research, a number of interviewed HET (30%) gave examples of denying access for two severely disabled students on the grounds of their impairment, betraying an

attitude of blaming the individual for their disability. One could argue that if educators (HET in my study) have negative attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled students with severe impairment, this will make it difficult for them to contribute to building positive attitudes in their trainees, who should be encouraged to enter the educational arena with the belief that all students can learn.

My findings also revealed the blaming of individuals for their impairments by NGOs supporting Type-1 schools who, instead of recognising their responsibility to gain the capacity to make visual materials accessible for the SVI, considered the problem as lying with the students themselves. The limited available skills of NGOs in converting visual materials into accessible Braille materials were noted in 1/3 of the responses of NGOs who supported Type-2 schools. A common barrier among NGOs supporting Type-1 and 2 schools was the inability to convert documents into Braille in a relatively short time. This meant that in some schools, Braille books were carried over from one year to the next, causing another problem in that the Braille font can become degraded if overly used or stored sub-optimally for a long time. The lack of specialised individuals responsible for inclusion in GOs demonstrated that inclusion within government schools is still in its infancy. This has been confirmed in the literature (Damaj, 2014), demonstrating that private schools are more accepting of students requiring SEN than government schools, who feel ill-equipped to deal with the diverse needs of learners.

To conclude this section, my findings showed that access-related barriers influenced by a range of different factors have been hindering the inclusion of SVI in mainstream education in Lebanon. These factors range from attitudinal, environmental to financial. There also continues to be limited human support and specialisation, as is further discussed in the subsequent subsection. The research outcomes also revealed that barriers facing the implementation of inclusion exist regardless of the type of school SVI attend. However, these barriers are more acknowledged in some schools (Type-1 and 2) than in others (Type-3). Furthermore, in some schools where limited human support was considered problematic (Type-1), the availability of such support in another type of school (Type-2), did not remove existing barriers to a great extent. In summary, I conclude that the barriers facing inclusion of SVI in different schools is being facilitated in

different ways, but efforts to identify these barriers so that they can be addressed are generally not being exerted.

2. Limited specialism in inclusion and SEN

An additional influencing factor regarding the experience of the participating SVI in mainstream environment was associated with the preparedness of teachers to teach inclusively. My study found that over half of the SSVI, who comprised the biosystem of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, attending both Type-1 (60%) and Type-2 (60%) schools had been subject to non-inclusive teaching practices during their secondary education. These students not only felt excluded in sessions that relied on vision and that were explained in only a visual way, for they also perceived the reluctance of teachers to perform basic teaching adjustments. My findings supported the literature from other countries of the global South in revealing the influence of the severity of the impairment on the teachers' ability to include SVI in their lessons. Lynch and his colleagues (2011) found that students with mild VI in Kenya joining mainstream schools could rely on their teachers' instructions. However, this can be problematic for teachers whose teacher training does not prepare them to accommodate the needs of those with severe sight impairment, as my study found.

In comparison, in my study, the difficulties faced by SSVI caused by the unreadiness of their teachers for inclusion were not only regarding visual scientific subjects, but also for the non-core visual subjects, e.g. physical education (PE) lessons. In schools where PE was taught, only those who had residual vision were able to join in. Given the participation of those with severe sight impairment was restricted by a scarcity of inclusive adaptations, it is not surprising that only one example was provided of an occasion where a student with severe sight impairment was supported by the teacher in taking part in PE. In this case, efforts were made to make simple verbal adaptations, resulting in making the student feel included. Another example was provided by another SSI student who received the support of peers to be able to do PE.

In fact, the effectiveness of using peer support in PE sessions in relation to

successfully implementing the inclusion of disabled students has been noted in the literature in countries of the global North (Douglas et al., 2009). Regardless of whether the practices of students in the current study reflected wider successful inclusive practices or not, they did demonstrate that random individual efforts that teachers and peers can make in support of including SVI in PE lessons do have the potential to contribute to successful inclusive implementation. However, for peers to be able to support disabled students with consistent and desirable outcomes, they need to be trained and provided with certain skills. What would be more important than training peers in this is the acknowledgement and understanding of educators regarding the role of peers in supporting the implementation of inclusion and ultimately, bringing a positive experience for their disabled peers in education. In sum, one way of recognising peers' role is by having trained teachers who are able to benefit from these existing human resources in support of implementing inclusion on the microsystem level.

Indeed, teacher training on inclusion has been generally noted to be limited in countries of the global South. Abu-Hamour and Al-Hmouz (2014) in Jordan and Lynch et al. (2011) in Kenya have noted the generic training in SEN that subject teachers receive in support of implementing inclusion in their classes. This generic training has the potential to leave teachers unclear about the best way of supporting their students in mainstream settings. Further complications arise when there is a need for specialism in VI to amend and adjust learning materials for access by students with severe sight impairment. However, in contrast to the findings from Jordan and Kenya, my research found that the interviewed teachers of Type-1 and 3 schools had not attended any form of SEN-related training. The very few from Type-2 schools who had received training (33%) stated that the training they received about addressing VI was introductory. Others mentioned that their training took the form of consultation with the LST. Conducting introductory or consultation-based training for teachers with SVI attending their classrooms implies that teachers build their inclusive teaching skills through teaching classrooms with SVI. This exposes the inadequacy of the training for implementing inclusion in practice, as those with SI may be able to manage with the limited available support. However, those with SSI who would require additional support from their

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teachers may feel further excluded. This points to the need for a comprehensive review regarding existing training in terms of such matters as recruitment procedure, level of intensity and content relevance. The outcomes of such a review would help to identify good practice and also root out that which is unhelpful in supporting students when aiming towards their inclusion.

All LSTs and mobile teachers held university degrees, but very few (20%) were qualified in SEN. LSTs attended 10 days training in VI from individuals located at the exosystem level. Their role in their schools was to give hands-on practical support for teachers in supporting SVI in class. However, one could argue that taking the role of offering support for secondary school teachers in scientific and visual subjects would not only need subject specialism but also specialism in the education of VI. The unavailability of specialist support and lack of available training might explain the unreadiness of teachers at the microsystem level to include disabled students in their classrooms, particularly those with VI, thereby leading to their negative attitudes regarding the participation of SVI in visual subjects.

Whilst Forlin, Sharma and Loreman (2013) in Hong Kong argued that equipping teachers with the necessary skills, support and knowledge in relation to teaching classrooms with different ability groups would enable them to teach inclusively, it can also be argued that providing them with the necessary competencies for teaching inclusively on their own is not enough. For, they also need to embrace the values and beliefs of inclusion as part of their general teacher training as well as their continuous professional development (CPD) training, if they are to be able to include all students in their mainstream classes

Whilst some LSTs, echoed by their headteachers, both of whom were located on the mesosystem level of the ecological model, expressed difficulties in supporting SSVI due to the required specialties in supporting students academically at this level of education, 1/3 of those providing support in Type-1 schools believed that the informal discussions they provided for mainstream teachers were sufficient for including SVI in their classes. This demonstrated the limited knowledge of some of those located at the exosystem level, who oversee inclusion in mainstream schools and ensuring there are effective inclusive practices. These perspectives also

explain the unavailable training in SEN for the vast majority of mainstream school teachers. For, if those located at the exosystem level do not appreciate the value of possessing specialised training, the implications are availability of teachers who can cater only for students of the same ability groups.

It has been noted in the literature (Lynch et al., 2011) that not all SVI would require extensive support from a specialist teacher in VI, for some would benefit from simple adaptations to the teaching and learning materials. This could include providing access to the teacher's notes, amending teaching strategies as well as providing additional support for SVI and their teachers, which LST of the visited schools could deal with. However, the absence of any form of specialised accommodation, whether for SI or SSI was evident in my research (Subsection 4.3.2).

Evidence from other countries of the global South (Best & McCall, 1993; Lynch et al., 2011) suggests those who have severe sight impairment present a particular challenge for teachers in mainstream settings and require more than providing simple adjustments to their learning materials. My findings showed that those with SSI and their teachers were receiving simple guidance. This contrasts with the literature suggesting that those with severe sight impairment require support from a specialist in VI in order for them to access the curriculum on an equal level to their non-VI peers. In fact, as found in the UAE by Arif and Gaad (2008) and confirmed in my study, teachers and their LST would appear to opt to take the easy route of omitting visual materials that they consider to be challenging.

Consequently, SVI are studying less material than their peers. This implies not only that the LST possess limited skills for supporting teachers and their SVI in accessing visual subjects, for it could also show that educators still embrace the belief that the problem is with the SVI and not with the teaching methods. That is, they continue to fail to consider that they need to provide SVI with equal access to the educational curriculum as others. However, the restricted training educators in the current research had received, would suggest that taking the easy option of omitting materials was preferred, rather than taking action by engaging with individuals located on the mesosystem level, in particular, LST. Ultimately, the limited available training could also be due to those at the exosystem level having

a weak capacity with regards to identifying and providing appropriate training.

The background information about available courses in SEN noted by participants from HE, who were located at the exosystem level of the ecological model, suggests that there is growing interest in specialising in SEN in Lebanon. However, whilst the data showed that courses in SEN at HE started a decade ago, their contribution to enhancing the readiness of schools for inclusion is still questionable. As my findings revealed, the majority of available qualifications in SEN were introductory in content and mainly in SEN and LD, with there being an absence of specialised courses aimed at specific areas of impairment, e.g. sensory impairments. A lack of qualified tutors in specific areas of SEN combined with the limited mandatory courses in SEN as part of general teacher training programmes at HE was also revealed (Subsection 4.2.11). The absence of such specialised component at this level suggests that student-teachers of HE can graduate with qualifications that do not necessarily equip them with the skills required for teaching in inclusive classrooms.

Indeed, Allan (2008) in the UK argued that HE Institutions where teacher education takes place are driven by the standards agenda and are themselves hardly models of inclusiveness. Consequently, if HE courses are not reformed so they reflect the new competencies that teacher students need to possess and also embrace the diversity and promotion the equality of learners, then it has the potential to reproduce social injustice. Responses from HET regarding the adjustments that their institutions apply towards implementation of inclusion, indicate that providing equal opportunities in teaching and learning for all their students is still not part of the policy and practice applied at this level in Lebanon. Hence schools supposedly working in the name of inclusion would appear to be perpetuating the exclusion of their disabled students.

The unreadiness for inclusion was also echoed in the reports of the participating organisations located at the exosystem level of the ecological model. For example, some of them considered mainstream teachers to be lacking the necessary training to teach inclusively. Furthermore, 1/3 of NGOs supporting Type-2 schools revealed the difficulties in conducting training for already recruited teachers. While one could argue that the need to conduct introductory training in SEN for already recruited

teachers could demonstrate the inadequate teaching preparation teachers had, conducting teacher training would be needed to remedy this. However, this can be prohibitively expensive. Conducting training for already-recruited teachers is challenging. Not only because secondary mainstream teachers are often hourly paid and belong to different age ranges, have varying years of experience and have different subjects of specialty, for it can also be difficult to change existing attitudes including the need to attend such training. Designing CPD training based on the specific needs of teachers in their schools could help in supporting them to teach inclusively. Indeed, providing CPD training for already recruited teachers would give them supplementary skills in support of the learning process. However, this may also demonstrate the need to equip teachers with the necessary inclusive teaching related skills during their initial teacher training programmes so that they can deliver their sessions in an inclusive way in practice right at the start of their careers.

In my research, where teacher training was available, 2/3 of GOs that supported Type-2 schools reported that it was introductory in nature. Hence, the training most likely does not equip teachers with the necessary skills or confidence to deal with students with severe and complex needs. Similarly, Amr (2011), in Jordan, argued that the majority of training in the Arab world is still introductory in content. This was also found elsewhere in my research, with many of those who had received training lacking the necessary skills to amend visual elements of the curriculum so as to make them accessible for their SVI. Moreover, it has been argued (Brown, 2005) that training in IE in the global South context is very often designed and conducted by trainers from the global North, who have not personally participated in the educational environment targeted by the training. This is a serious problem facing inclusion not only in relation to the adequacy of the training, but also it is expensive, as the payment rate of international trainers is higher in comparison to that of local ones. Nonetheless, training is also noted to be insufficient in countries of the global North. Even though it could be argued that funding might not be an issue in countries of the global North, limited qualified individuals in certain specialisms, nonetheless, still exist (Peters, 2007). Consequently, negative or unfair experiences in relation to inclusion in HE for disabled students in the global

North context are still present (see Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; Soorenian, 2013). One could argue that if HE in countries of the global North do not expose their student-teachers to successful models of inclusive implementation, then, their contribution to international training does not necessarily lead to improving its implementation of inclusion. That is, whilst many of the models regarding inclusion can provide a sound theoretical knowledge in relation to IE, trainees need to have a clear understanding of how these can be translated into successful practice that is flexible so as to address different environment effectively.

What the above training related discussion has demonstrated is that teacher training in Lebanon, when available is introductory in nature. It also indicates that HE in Lebanon do not offer a model of inclusion, as those responsible only make minor adjustments in support of the inclusion of their SVI and they offer few specialised courses in SEN. Hence, their contribution to enhancing inclusion in the country is still questionable. The level of understanding of NGOs regarding the required skills in the classroom for the inclusion of SVI, indicate that individuals at the policy-making level need to build their understanding and knowledge of inclusion, if it is to be rolled out effectively in practice. Given the introductory nature of the current training, be it for already recruited teachers or for student-teachers, I conclude that individuals concerned with inclusion, regardless of their location in the ecological model in Lebanon, have been largely building their knowledge and skills in relation to this and SEN through working in the field rather than by obtaining the appropriate qualifications. This has appeared to result in the perpetuation of the exclusion of disabled students in schools where the initial aim was the promotion of their inclusion.

3. The absence of social inclusion provision

Another emerging issue of this research was the restricted social inclusion that I, as with other disabled academics (Soorenian, 2013; Whitburn, 2013), experienced in the mainstream educational environment. In fact, there is much evidence in the literature that the mainstream environment does not help in building social relationships between disabled students and their non-disabled fellows.

Furthermore, the extant scholarship has also suggested that SVI and their parents often pay more attention to building independent skills and obtaining academic capabilities in the later educational stages than during the early ones, where more interest in social inclusion is found.

My findings revealed the somewhat restricted social relationships that SSVI were able to build in their mainstream educational settings. They also demonstrated that whilst SVI who joined mainstream schools during the early educational stages were used to being surrounded by non-disabled peers, those who did so only at the secondary stage of education, having previously attended a special school, found they had to adjust their behaviour in order to fit in. This adjustment had to be driven by the students themselves, with very limited efforts dedicated to aiding their social inclusion by their mainstream or special schools. This raises the matter as to whether the physical presence of SVI in the mainstream environment meant they were experiencing social inclusion or not.

Overmars-Marx, Thomése, Verdonschot and Meininger (2014) ascertained that social inclusion does not automatically happen when moving to mainstream schools. Ozkubat and Ozdemir (2014) further determined that special schools generally create fewer opportunities for disabled students to interact with non-disabled students and to acquire social skills. The literature, worldwide (Lourens & Swartz, 2016a; Ozkubat & Ozdemir, 2014; RNIB, 2016), has provided evidence that many disabled students experience rejection by their non-disabled peers in mainstream settings, whether they attended special schools earlier in life or not. Despite the experience of rejection and the feeling of difference that disabled students endure in mainstream settings, there is a growing belief that inclusion for disabled students since childhood can play an important role in facilitating the development of social skills.

My findings elicited that most of those who attended special schools prior to attending mainstream schools (Type-1) adjusted over time to their new mainstream environment through their own efforts. However, an 80% majority expressed a preference to being around people who shared their same impairment. According to Male (2007), similarities between and among students are considered to be one of the factors that supports forming friendships between and among the same

group. Lourens and Swartz (2016b) found that SVI among their disabled fellows can enjoy the experience of being seen and accepted just the way they are. In my research, similarity in type of impairment of students attending the same school was found, as the 80% majority of SVI who attended Type-1 and 2 schools did so alongside other SVI, even if they did not always belong to the same class. This suggests that creating an environment where the formation of friendship with those who are similar was possible, but the implications were restriction in their experience of social inclusion with their non-disabled peers.

The very limited opportunities for experiencing inclusion and interacting with peers in the school environment outside their classrooms highlights other obstacles to building social inclusion, as was the case for those attending Type-1 and 2 schools (Subsection 4.3.2). The absence of inclusion provision in non-classroom activities and the unfamiliarity of some SVI with the schooling environment had restricted the interaction of over half (60%) with their peers. Those SVI (40%) who could interact and participate in non-classroom activities, had used their personal characteristics to participate in out of classroom subjects without the need for special adjustments, i.e. they were able to normalise themselves in order to gain access to their non-disabled peer groups. Consequently, their social experience mirrored the practices of integration, whereby it was left to the students to fit in to an unchanged environment. Whilst the findings demonstrated that the 90% of SVI attending Type-2 schools were familiar with the mainstream environment and expressed no issues being around non-disabled peers, this should not be interpreted as meaning that they were experiencing successful social inclusion, for their schooling environment was seen as a matter of great concern to nearly half (40%) of their parents (Subsection 4.2.6). The limited concern that this student group demonstrated towards social inclusion does not just suggest that these students had become especially adjusted to being surrounded by non-disabled peers, because they had been in a mainstream environment since their early educational stages, for it also indicates that social inclusion had become of less concern to them as they had found a way to fit into the existing school structure.

By contrast, social inclusion linked to building friendships and moving independently in the school environment was a more pressing concern for SVI

attending Type-3 schools, who through their limited remaining vision were better able to manage the academic demands of secondary stage of education. That is, whilst this group lived with their parents and the vast majority of them (66%) attended local schools with their childhood friends, issues related to their social inclusion resulting from their VI were of greater concern to them than the rest of the SVI. It could have been the case that whilst these students had developed social skills, the unavailability of plans in the schools to aid their inclusion was a factor that proved an obstacle to their independence and limited their social relationships. The encountering of rejection in childhood that 2/3 of these students reported further emphasises that social inclusion does not automatically happen. Hence, there is a strong argument that it needs to be structured and included as part of schools' inclusion plans. Nonetheless, all the students attending Type-3 schools developed their own techniques for building relationships and in managing their independence, whether at school or in their daily activities.

Participating BSVI who were located at the chronosystem level of the ecological model had encountered negative experiences during childhood from peers in the different mainstream schools they had previously attended (Subsection 4.2.1). Bayat (2014) has asserted that the major benefit of including disabled children in mainstream settings is the social learning outcome for the child. However, the opposite has been found in my research, whereby if parents were interested in the social skills that their children could build in mainstream schools, then the outcomes of their early inclusion were counter to this. It could be argued that the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream settings without supporting this with a social inclusion plan hinders both their social and educational inclusion. However, this raises the question whether those who interact with SVI would be able to facilitate their social inclusion.

Whilst social inclusion was not recognised as being an issue for some of those at HE, the limited awareness of their peers and educators of the need to communicate and interact with them was apparent (Subsection 4.2.4). Some USVI were able to adjust themselves to the new environment and used their personal efforts to build their social connections at HE, whereas others did not experience social inclusion at this stage of education. Instead, they shifted their concern to

being able to find practical solutions to aid their academic inclusion. An illustration of finding practical solutions resulting from the restricted support offered for this group at HE, is that some 40% of USVI availed themselves of the utility of using the long cane as a walking aid to facilitate reaching their classes, nevertheless, none of the SSVI reported receiving training on using the cane in the HE environment. Whilst finding solutions to support their academic inclusion was left to the SVI themselves to manage, the social restrictions that some experienced at HE appeared to subject them to the risk of social exclusion over the long term. That is, some personally chose to opt out of the wider social interactions. Hence, the evidence indicates that social inclusion of all students, including those who were disabled, was not part of university policy and practice. Instead, it was the efforts of the students themselves, having to rely on their personal characteristics, to make their inclusion a reality.

This is consistent with the literature (Whitburn, 2014b), which suggests that disabled students and particularly those with severe impairment do not often experience social inclusion in mainstream settings or experience equal and fair treatment. Palmer (2003) further emphasised that vision impairment can affect social behaviours owing the restricted engagement in social reaction that is received and conveyed through visual channels. Hence, there is a need to support SVI in interpreting and understanding the social environment surrounding them. Failing to do this, as my findings demonstrated, hinders their social inclusion and hence, limits their HE experience. This raises the matter of their inclusion in their local communities.

Social inclusion and building friendships in the local communities was of concern to the 80% of parents of those children attending type-1 and 2 schools. Not being able to attend the local mainstream, and often residing far from their local community, limited these children's opportunities to form friendships. This was also confirmed by the responses of their non-disabled peers, the 70% majority of whom did not experience meeting with their disabled-peers after school hours.

The few examples parents gave about the social inclusion of their children in the locality, mainly those who attended Type-1 and 2 schools (25%), were mainly through religious routes. This supports Hagrass' (2005) argument about the

influence of faith in a religious context, such as in the Middle East region, which provides support for those considered weak or vulnerable in the society, in this case disabled people. This leads to the social involvement of disabled people in local activities being largely restricted to faith related activities, where they feel welcome and supported, as the findings of the current research have demonstrated. The social inclusion of SVI through religious means should, however, be interpreted with caution. For, this form of social inclusion would appear to be underpinned by the notion of SVI being considered as weak and needy members of the society, rather than pertaining to an empowering form of social interaction that embraces equality as fundamental to their inclusion. Hence, this form of social inclusion would appear to provide a limited interpretation of the phenomenon.

Inclusion and building social relationships in the locality of residence was not of a concern to parents whose children attended Type-3 schools, despite the reported difficulties of meeting with school peers after school hours. This again suggests that some disabled people act to normalise themselves so as to not be different from others. Whilst the differences that exist between individuals can be valued for representing different individual needs and interests, in societies that value people who are similar, 'difference' can be interpreted as an indicator of a lower status and value, which can perpetuate inequalities and unfair treatment (Norwich, 2007). The implications of these values of similarities between people can lead some disabled people, themselves, to give more value to being similar to others and thus, embrace some non-disabled techniques in order to hide their differences.

Attempts by teachers who were located at the microsystem level of the ecological model to include SVI socially in the school environment were applied on an individual basis and hence, did not show any significant patterns within the data as a whole. The literature has highlighted that teachers need to foster positive communications between disabled students and their non-disabled peer to nurture social relationships. Kazim (2007), in the UAE, noted that non-disabled peers can become supportive to their disabled friends when they are made aware of the impairment or and difficulties of their peers. This matter is particularly apposite for those with VI, who need support in learning the social skills that non-VI people

develop through imitating others. Considering the limited efforts to build social inclusion in the different types of schools found in my study, together with the random type of support in the social inclusion, this suggests that the vast majority of SVI did not experience social inclusion regardless of the type of school they attended and irrespective of their educational stage. The lack of programmes to support SVI in building their social and communication skills meant that many not only experienced poor social inclusion at secondary school, for this also had implications for the long term, in relation to them finding it difficult to fit into society at large.

The restricted social inclusion was also apparent in the limited interaction between disabled and non-disabled peers outside the school environment. In fact, non-disabled students' interaction with their disabled peers was restricted to the school environment and to families, when the presence of a disabled relative was acknowledged. Moreover, not only do non-disabled peers experience limited social interaction with their disabled peers, for in these schools there is also little diversity in terms of students with different impairments. The restricted social inclusion practices found in all three types of schools would also suggest that non-disabled students were not being exposed to successful models of social inclusion. Instead, they belonged to a largely unchanged schooling structure and hence, social inclusion was made their responsibility. When it was apparent, it invariably came about through normalisation. This would appear to indicate that peers and others around disabled people endorse the belief that SVI need to act as if they are non-disabled for them to be socially included.

The social inclusion of SVI was not a concern for most headteachers. For instance, those of Type-1 schools believed that their students were socially included. One of the headteachers gave examples of previously included students who succeeded in building good relationships with others, which demonstrated the individual approach to disability that this headteacher embraced. Whilst they considered that building friendships represented an indicator for SVI's success, they also expressed the view that this was the responsibility of the SVI themselves. Another headteacher gave the example of inviting their graduate SVI to take part in Christmas events by singing carols at the school, thus representing an instance of

the charity model to approaching disability, which is used to stimulate sympathy and pity towards those who are less fortunate in society. This model is completely the opposite to the concept of the social model of disability, which considers it to be situated in the socio political and cultural practices of society (Goodley, 2004). These examples suggest that when social inclusion was noted, it was built by the efforts of SVI themselves. Equally, when unsuccessful, it is the SVI who suffer, having to bear the burden of their impairment regarding social inclusion.

Whilst examples of both positive and negative social inclusion were noted by the headteachers of Type-3 schools, all noted the occurrence of stigma in their schools. That is, feeling ashamed of the impairment or difficulty, which resulted in some parents denying the disability of their children (Subsection 4.2.10). The issue of stigma has been widely reported in the literature of countries of the global South. In Asia, including the Middle East region, people often still feel ashamed to declare or show their disabled family members (Miles, Fefoame, Mulligan & Haque, 2012). In schools where the support for disabled students is absent and the rights of this population to equal access to education and to the school are not recognised or practised, this can create an environment that reinforces the feeling of stigma that some parents have. For these parents, admitting the disability of their children means their being perceived as different and hence, they are rejected from societies that appreciate the similarities that exist between people.

It has been noted in the literature (Khochen & Radford, 2012) that interaction between disabled and non-disabled students can support removing prejudices that each group has towards the other. Very limited interaction between the two groups was found in my study (Subsections 4.2.7, 4.2.8, 4.2.9 and 4.2.10). In my research, some of those SVI who used Braille for reading and writing, were made aware by their peers that the sound of the Braillers distracted them and hence, they were seen as a burden to others. This demonstrated that whilst these schools showed, through the responses of their headteachers, commitment to inclusion, accepting others and understanding the differences that existed between one another was not the culture applied in any of these schools. However, one could pose the question why is it imperative that schools provide a successful model of inclusion?

Schools provide education with the aim of creating good individuals, but education

cannot change society directly. For, in order to change society, it must do so through the individuals it prepares (Chitty, 2002). Hence, schools have the potential to transfer inclusive thinking and behaviours to their students, who in turn, can transfer it to the society where they come from. This process could involve supporting the reproduction of social inclusion. By not considering the social inclusion of disabled students as an essential part of their mainstream education, the concept of inclusion will most likely not transfer to society and consequently, it will be difficult for the inclusion of disabled people in the educational environment and in society at large to progress.

To conclude this section, my research showed that social inclusion was not part of the inclusion plan implemented in any of the different types of schools. Rather, it was left to the efforts and responsibility of SVI themselves to manage. Whilst those who had been included in mainstream schools since the early educational stages, had got used to being surrounded by non-disabled peers, those who joined later on in life had to adjust by themselves to the new environment. What was mutual between the vast majority of students attending these two types of schools (Type-1 and 2) is that their social inclusion better represented the practices of social integration rather than inclusion. It was also apparent that social inclusion was not of great concern to these SVI. This could have been because they shifted their attention away from it, to focusing on those who were similar to them or they built their friendships using their personal characteristics. On the other hand, those attending Type-3 schools had social inclusion as their main concern. The lack of such provision in support of SVI suggests that there was limited understanding of individuals at the different levels of the ecological model regarding the importance of incorporating it as an essential element of these students' experience. It also demonstrates that inclusion in Lebanon is still seen as a physical matter regardless of the type of school SVI attend.

By applying the ecological model, I explored the experience of disabled students in mainstream settings and revealed the existing beliefs about their inclusion from the perspectives of SVI and those who were directly or indirectly connected to them. My findings identified the factors influencing the experience of SSVI in mainstream education, which include their personal characteristics, barriers to accessing

information, limited resources, whether physical, human, assistive or financial, the unreadiness of the teaching environment for inclusion, the limited understanding of the principles of inclusion and the absence of a whole school approach. Having discussed the findings in relation to the experience and perception at the secondary stage of education (RQ2), in what follows I discuss the findings regarding inclusion practices in mainstream education.

5.3.3 RQ3: Implementing inclusive practices in mainstream settings

In this subsection, the current practices of inclusion in Lebanon are discussed. It is divided into two main parts, with the first considering the existing model of inclusion in relation to the support available and the impact that inclusive application has on the level of attainment of SVI. The second part focusses on the impact of the support available during official exams as a demonstrative example of how inclusion is being enacted in Lebanon in practice.

1. The implemented model of inclusion in secondary mainstream schools in Lebanon

For my research, I investigated the implementation of inclusive practices in secondary mainstream education in Lebanon, and the extent to which the provided support served in implementing inclusion in practice. The motivation stemmed from the literature, suggesting that whilst inclusion has become a stated aim in the majority of countries worldwide, what is applied in practice reflects, to a large extent, the notion of integration. In fact, the extant research has provided limited evidence in support of a best model of practising inclusion in education for disabled students, including those with VI. However, it has also been acknowledged that there is no single teaching strategy that can be effective for all children. Allan (2008), in the UK, argued that to implement inclusion in practice, educators need to meet the individual needs of all their students. For, they should acknowledge that each student is an individual, and that they are different. The American Foundation for the Blind (2015) has further asserted that for there to be successful inclusive practices for SVI, providing a range of different options in addressing each

student's unique educational needs is required.

In contrast to where there have been successful inclusion practices, my findings suggested that those SVI in the different types of schools, based on the severity of their impairment and the format they were able to access, received support in two different homogenous ways (Subsection 4.3.2):

Braille readers: those who received their Braille books and Braillers from their special schools or NGOs, were offered seats in the front row of their classes, had their exam responses transcribed to allow access for their teachers, were provided with a reader and writer during exams or with Braille exam questions and an allocated place for their examinations. Some of their parents and/or peers supported them in noting down inaccessible material and provided them with additional explanations together with some of their teachers.

Print readers: those who were supported with photocopying materials also offered sitting in the front row and received enlarged class sheets. Very few used magnification aids. Some were supported by their peers and teachers in copying and explaining materials.

It has been contended in the literature (Allan, 2008) that treating all students in the same way does not mean that they are treated in an equal manner. In not adopting a person centred approach to assess the individual needs of SVI, this would suggest that there could be some additional needs that are not identified and hence, not met. The homogenous type of support that SVI received, not only infers that there was limited understanding of the effective implementation of inclusive practices by schools and those supporting them, for it also meant that fair and just inclusion had not been achieved in any of the participating schools. But why would identifying the individual needs of students be necessary?

Evidence indicates that the numbers of disabled people with additional or multiple impairments on top of their dominant impairment are growing. Examples include a national study by the RNIB of the UK, showing that slightly over half of children with VI have additional difficulties or impairments. Of these, slightly over 20% have multiple difficulties (RNIB, 2011). The literature (Douglas et al., 2009; Orlando, Klinepeter & Foster, 2016) also reports that only those with a single impairment are

likely to receive their education in mainstream settings. Literature from the Arab countries (Kazim, 2007) has indicated that those with severe and additional impairments to their VI are not likely to be in mainstream education. Further to these findings, the results from my study suggest that the vast majority of SVI, generally and those with severe impairment, specifically, do not reach the secondary stage of education, given the range of different needs that these students have and the restricted existing provision of support available for them in mainstream schools. In fact, very few SVI (n=2) in my research revealed their additional difficulty or impairment as an influencing factor regarding their inclusive experience, thus suggesting that the additional difficulties or impairments that SVI might have are still not considered in Lebanon. Ultimately, this also suggests that those who have multiple impairment and or difficulties in addition to their VI are not included in mainstream education.

Generally speaking, a lack of available support for SVI at the microsystem level in secondary education, from individuals at different levels of the ecological model, was revealed, which indicates that their schools were failing to provide fair and equal treatment in their practice. Reporting on what should be considered a high quality of education for students with VI, Douglas et al. (2009) noted, among other things, the need to identify and assess the requirements, conduct teacher training, use support from a qualified teacher in vision impairment (QTVI), offer CPD training, provide access to specialised resources and the need to assist people by providing hands-on support. Whitburn (2011) of Australia further added that teachers can enable their students to reach an equitable level of education to that of their peers, if they provide a range of inclusive practices 'including: appropriate communication modes (verbal class instructions and modelling), providing intuitive descriptions and/or using 3-dimensional realia to represent diagrammatic material, making accessible resources available to students in a timely manner, and being approachable outside of classes for individual consultations' (Whitburn, 2011, p.8). Additionally, for SVI to be able to approach their teachers outside the classroom environment, they need to be familiar with their educational environment and their interaction with others should be facilitated.

In my research, whilst SSVI received additional support from their peers, teachers

and/or parents, the lack of accessible resources and the tendency to adopt the strategy of omitting the visual elements of their courses were prevalent. One could argue that this contributed to the unfair and unequal educational experience that these students had in mainstream education, thereby negatively impacting on the level of education that they could achieve. In fact, nearly half (40%) of the SSVI attending Type-1 schools believed that they obtained a lower level of education to that of their non-disabled peers, because they had the false impression that when they went to special schools their level of attainment was the same due to their being effectively supported (Subsection 4.3.2). The difference in the level of education between the two settings was attribute by these SSVI to the lower level education that they had received in special education, with a watered down curriculum which brings into question the educational inclusion implemented in special schools.

Very close to half of those who attended Type-2 schools considered themselves as excelling or being at the same level of attainment as their peers. Researchers (Hassan, Alasmari & Ahmed, 2015; Jahanian & Mahjoubi, 2013) elicited that there is a strong relationship between self-efficacy, the belief in one's self, and academic attainment. I should note here that in my study about half of the SSVI who attended Type-2 schools gave brief responses, only elaborating when prompted to do so, thus exhibiting a low level of belief in themselves and also reporting that they had a lower level of attainment compared to that of their peers.

Considering the specific circumstances of these mentioned five SVI of Type-2 schools, (one had had VI since birth and had joined a school with an LST recently, the rest resided in Palestinian camps), it can be argued that offering assistance on its own might not motivate them to achieve. The limited future opportunities for non-VI in similar circumstances can demotivate and hold back these students (Shuayb, 2014). Having VI can further put them at the bottom of the employment ladder in a country where gaining employment is difficult for all citizens generally and particularly those who are disabled, hence leaving them feeling pessimistic about their future prospects. To support these students, wellbeing, as well as educational and social provisions at school, would need to be considered.

It can be argued that omitting visual elements of their course materials could give

SVI the belief that they are not being offered the same course content as others. As a result, they might feel that their level of education is lower than their peers, which can affect their self-concept. Indeed, findings from the literature (Datta & Talukdar, 2015) having elicited that the majority of SVI obtain low total self-concept scores, as they often compare themselves with sighted peers. However, not all SVI in my study noted lower levels of attainment to that of their peers. In fact, the responses varied, some of them were very confident about their equal or even higher level of attainment when compared to their non-disabled peers. Whilst investigating the self-efficacy of SVI was beyond the scope of this research, my findings suggest that their level of attainment can be influenced not only by their level of this, but also, by other variables, including the attended previous and current type of school, the received support and the background of their parents.

However, the support available was restricted for other SVI in Type-3 schools and at HE. For instance, some had to advise their educators about their impairment and meet their requirements themselves. Whilst some scholars (Oliver & Barnes, 2010) have argued that disabled people are experts on their own individual needs, not being aware of the different facilities that could be made available for them in support of their inclusion can result in their requesting similar types of support to what was made available to them previously (Subsection 4.3.3). Consequently, disabled people themselves can participate in the reproduction of the traditional ways of supporting disabled students, which might not necessarily promote equal inclusion practices.

Another source of support that SVI were able to receive was from participants located at the microsystem level of the model, namely, their parents. They, influenced by their mutual interaction with their children, generally offered their support based on their experience of raising a child with VI in terms of what they thought would be helpful. Relying on their faith to accept the VI of their children was a strategy adopted by nearly half of the parents. This, as mentioned earlier, is driven by the charity model of disability that can be easily activated in a religious and family orientated environment, such as those of the Arab region. While adopting a faith approach could provide a supportive technique for some parents, the implication is that it can put parents in the position of adopting and reproducing

a charity approach of disability in which their children are considered to be needy members of their families and ultimately, of society.

In addition, at the microsystem level where peers were located, the educational support provided by non-disabled peers was revealed to be significant. My findings showed that peers acted as the main support providers to the education of their disabled counterparts (Subsections 4.3.1, 4.3.4 and 4.3.6). Indeed, the literature from the global North context (Douglas et al., 2009), has shown the influence of the support provided by peers in terms of possible ways of supporting those with VI in the successful implementation of inclusive practices. In my study, the support offered by peers, whilst demonstrating a positive response to disability that appeared to be rooted in their religious beliefs, also revealed the value of using them for successful inclusion practices. It should be noted that the right of disabled students to be in mainstream education was significant in the responses of Type-2 and 3 schools, thus demonstrating a shift in attitudes of peers from a charity approach in relation to supporting disabled students to a rights-based one. The human support made available for SVI at theType-1 and 2 schools played an essential role in supporting them, although what they could offer was quite limited (Subsection 4.29). This does raise the question as to whether the LST were equipped with the necessary skills and understanding that would allow them to provide effective support for SVI.

In the UK, LST, when located at the mesosystem level, often bear the main responsibilities of producing teaching materials in alternative formats. In contrast, my findings showed that rather than the LST, where present, converting the visual aspects of their curriculum into accessible formats, their interaction with teachers at the mesosystem level had led to these parts being dealt with at the microsystem level by either omitting them from the SVI curriculum or substituting them with a text based explanation. This reflects the limited training in adapting visual materials available from individuals at the exosystem level, thereby restricting the extent to which SVI could access educational materials. Hence, the limited support the LST could provide took the form of transcribing their answers into handwriting, converting exam sheets to Braille format and/or reading as well as writing for them during exams, meant that SVI were receiving an inferior input when compared to

their non-disabled peers.

Whilst knowledge of the LST about the types of impairment they work with has been found to be necessary (Douglas et al., 2009), most those interviewed in my study had received only limited training and believed that they had built their knowledge mainly through practising working with SVI. Only one LST had experience of supporting SVI through being VI themselves. However, not receiving general training in supporting SVI meant that their advice was based on their personal experience, which was not necessarily appropriate for all the students they were working with, given the variation that exists between disabled students, in general, and those with VI, in particular.

In a country such as the UK, identifying the needs of SVI is based on assessing the needs of each individual. In Lebanon, in contrast, the lack of relevant specialisms in VI at HE and the lack of qualified personnel has resulted in the absence of a reliable assessment for the needs of SVI in their schooling and what they will require if they attend HE. Hence, the support offered, as my study has shown, is based on what LST and schools (often with little or no formal or specific training) and NGOs can offer in terms of what they believe will help, rather than what the SVI require, as determined by a rigorous assessment procedure. For example, offering SVI additional time when they do not need it, can give them an advantage over their peers, thus representing another form of unfair treatment.

In fact, LST and mobile teachers received their advice and training from participants located at the exosystem level, who had built their experience regarding inclusion mainly through their working practice in relation to disability related issues, rather than being formally trained. As argued by Khochen and Radford (2012), building experience in SEN solely through practice will mean that professionals will only have it in relation to already encountered cases and so when faced with a new challenge in this regard, they will not know the best course of action. My findings demonstrated that the participating SVI had their needs met in one of only two different ways, and that most of them did not report having additional impairment, which would suggest that professionals had only managed to acquire limited knowledge in relation to identifying and meeting the needs of those with multiple difficulties in Lebanon.

Indeed, inclusive practices are still relatively new in the Lebanese context. Hence, schools still have limited knowledge (largely based on personal experiences) about successful inclusion practices. I should note that even in countries of the global North (Orlando et al., 2016), disabled people are still facing barriers in relation to their inclusion. A study conducted by the RNIB of the UK earlier in this century, noted that whilst some SSVI were satisfied and had experienced successful inclusion in mainstream schools, some were not fully included in visual subjects, received their notes in inaccessible formats and had issues with the technology they used (cited in Douglas et al., 2009). In comparison, my findings showed limited use of assistive tools for the focal SSVI (only Braillers), no additional skills were acquired (mobility, social skills) and no modifications regarding visual subjects (e.g. PE, biology, maths and geography). These require specialist knowledge and hence, funding for resources as well as training, which participants at the exosystem level noted was restricted, if at all available.

As the need to provide access for disabled students in education would inevitably incur costs, this raises the issue of who should provide the funding for supporting disability. In Lebanon, parents bear the main cost of the impairments of their children (Subsection 4.3.6). In the schooling environment, NGOs support the disability needs of SVI (Subsection 4.3.12). Whilst most parents and NGOs are heavily restricted financially, their knowledge and understanding of inclusion is also limited, which further constrains the support that SVI can obtain.

In summary, this section has demonstrated the limited knowledge, skills and capacities that individuals at different levels of the ecological model possess for implementing inclusion in practice in Lebanon. Specifically, it has shown that the individual needs of SVI were not considered nor was this is the approach practised in meeting the needs of SVI. Whilst they received different levels of support depending on the type of school they attended, the efficacy of it in terms of their level of attainment, regardless of the school type, is questionable. Treating SVI as a homogenous group not only means they suffer from unfair treatment, for it can also impact negatively on their results for official exams, to which I will now turn to discussing.

2. The implemented model for conducting official exams

A further issue that SVI raised in my research was the assessment in milestone exams, i.e. the official Brevet and Baccalaureate exams that students in Lebanon must take for entry to the secondary stage of education and to university, respectively. This emerged from my own experience of the poor adjustments that were made available for me while undertaking the Lebanese official exams. It is also present in the literature (Damaj, 2014), where it has been suggested that including disabled students requiring support in Lebanese official examinations does not necessarily represent an accurate measure of the progress of these students. My findings showed that all the SVI who sat the official Brevet and Baccalaureate official exams had successfully passed apart from one student, who failed in the first round, but passed the second round of the same year. Hence, the 100% success of these SVI in official exams would seem to be impressive.

The literature on Lebanese official exams (Vlaardingerbroek, Shehab & Alameh, 2010) reported the empathy that exam invigilators feel towards such candidates, thus leading them to aid cheating overtly during official exams. The success of SVI found in my study can be interpreted in this context, as the majority (80%) of those examined in a special examination centre (Type-1) were quite open about cheating during official exams. By contrast, many of those examined in parallel mainstream classes to their peers (Type-2 and half of those who attended Type-3 schools, 80% and 50%, respectively) only revealed receiving the required support, with very limited help from their readers and writers. These findings provide evidence that cheating for SVI in official exams is happening in Lebanon, as even the limited cheating reported by those examined in parallel classes would also provide evidence in support of this.

In the literature (Vlaardingerbroek et al., 2010), it has been noted that having a few examinees with a handful of invigilators, which could be just one candidate, has the potential to create a friendly and secretive atmosphere, which can nurture cooperation between the two groups. This can lead to collective responses during an examination as well as making cheating less open as there are fewer people to witness it and consequently, it is less likely to be reported. In the case of those attending special examination centres, open cheating, in terms of talking, receiving

and giving information to each other, supported by the invigilators, writers and readers, was more open and had been noted by nearly all those attending this type of examination. The sympathy that invigilators and helpers had for these SVI, means that open cheating would appear to have become the norm practised in these centres, with some of these students anticipating it.

In their efforts to monitor disabled examinees during official exams strictly, the MEHE in 2012 required heads of examination centres to be aware of those requiring special provision and to provide waiting areas for the companions of SVI examinees allowed entry into their centres (MEHE, 2014). This raises the question as to whether strictly monitoring the exams would lead to more accurate results. My findings revealed examples of some SVI being assisted during exams with a reader and a writer familiar to them (Subsection 4.3.3). This breaching of the requirements of the MEHE not only brings into question the rigorousness of official exams in terms of offering reliable examination outcomes, but also whether strictly monitoring the exams is sufficient. Davies, Elliott and Cumming (2016) argued that providing human support in the form of a scribe can be an effective adjustment for some disabled students who require support. However, the outcomes can be questionable, especially if the scribes are not trained. Regarding which, training for invigilators and scribes during official exams is not required by the MEHE. This suggests that regardless whether the scribes were familiar to the SVI or not, the lack of training leads to variability in performance, thereby having an unhelpful impact on students' assessment results.

Taking into account the variation of official exam assessment applied in Lebanon for those requiring support provision, it can be reasonably argued that there is no assurance that the support offered during assessment and therefore, the results of them are an accurate representation of the competencies they aim to measure. Failing to measure accurately disabled students acquired competencies can result in widening the achievement gap between disabled and non-disabled students, the consequences of which could be negative implications for their future accomplishment.

My findings also raised the inconsistency of identifying the required arrangements for SVI during official exams and the extent to which these were suited to the

needs of the examinees. Fuchs, Fuchs and Capizzi (2005) of Australia found that the diversity that exists among disabled people negates the suitability of using one set of adjustments to be appropriate for all. Woods et al. (2010) in the UK furthermore noted the need to follow an individualised approach to assessing the individual needs of disabled students for official examinations. My findings demonstrated that some students were provided examinations in different formats to what they normally accessed during the scholastic year.

Based on the responses of the SVI, examination special arrangements included providing:

- Access to exam questions in different formats, e.g. electronically, Braille, enlarged fonts, standard font and / or a human support reader;

- Recorded responses using different methods, e.g. a human assistant writer, adapted computer (with Arabic and English screen readers), a Brailler machine or hand writing.

- Different examination settings, e.g. in a special centre for disabled students or in parallel classrooms to their peers in mainstream schools;

- Modified exam questions, e.g. describing visual parts, transferring the content of an image to a table format or replacing some visual questions with text based ones.

My findings elicited that having a reader and writer did not happen on an ongoing basis in government schools and for those supported by special schools. This was due to the limited available human resources that the special schools could provide for their SVI in government schools, with them only making occasional visits to their SVI and only providing this kind of support during milestone exams. This not only demonstrated the inconsistency in the adopted exam adjustments during the year in comparison to that during official exams, for it also suggests that the success of SVI during exams was largely dependent on their support providers' skills levels. In official exams, as aforementioned, SVI often get helped unduly by their support providers, possibly because they do not believe in their capacities. This can then provide a false impression as to their true ability (Smith & Douglas, 2014), as demonstrated in the findings of my research. This also suggests that

support providers are taking an easy route of implementing inclusion. The implication would be the avoidance of investigating possible ways that may help SVI to reach their potential and hence to be assessed accordingly.

In their attempt to deliver fair results for official exams, Woods et al. (2010) suggested applying access arrangement protocols for meeting the needs of disabled students during official exams. The proposed protocols place emphasis in building the adjustments into official exams as provided during the scholastic years along with considering the voices of the students and their parents in terms of what is required. The mediating role of the NGOs in organising the required adjustments during official exams and the absence of the role of parents was identified in my study. As the disability requirements of SVI in Type-1 and 2 schools was left for special schools and NGOs to deal with, the choice of provision of support during official examinations was dependent on the location where their NGOs were able to provide them with support. This dependency demonstrates the influence of the support received regarding the place of examination as well as on the exam results. The central role of NGOs in official exams raises the matter of the role of the parents in this process.

The literature (Maher, 2016) has pointed out that consulting the opinion of parents on issues of direct relevance to them has been the policy practised in countries of the global North. In contrast, in the presented data there was an absence regarding the role of the parents in deciding upon the examination arrangements for their children. It could be argued that so as provide consistency in the support arrangements during exams as well as that received during the year, the views of the parents need to be considered. That is, parents could be best situated to give advice on this matter, especially those who have their children residing with them. However, one could also contend that if parents could report on the support their children should receive, they might have insufficient knowledge about the best form of provision for their children when taking exams.

Responses from participants located at the mesosystem level, e.g. LST and headteachers, showed that schools did not receive guidelines on what was required and what was omitted for the SVI during official exams. Moreover, their schooling curriculum did not reflect the competences that their SVI would be

assessed against during these exams. These perspectives demonstrate that SVI were considered as a homogenous group, rather than individuals, in terms of their support requirements. As aforementioned and as the literature has demonstrated, disabled students are not a homogenous group and therefore, assessing the individual access need of each student separately is required for fair results in assessments.

Requesting special adjustments to the curriculum for those with VI would suggest that those responsible for their education and inclusion still believe that they are a homogenous group. This would explain why the same generic adjustments in the curriculum were reported by the clear majority of LST (70%) for the SVI they supported, rather than a consideration of the different needs that exist for individuals (Subsection 4.2.9). The debate relating to accommodating or modifying the curriculum for disabled students is both widespread and persistent in the Arab region. This debate was revealed in the views of participating GOs, who raised the matter of the unavailability of experienced individuals in the relevant government departments to consult and pointed out there has been consistent disagreement between the different specialists about the best way to implement curriculum change (Subsection 4.2.12). This disagreement demonstrates not only that issues related to disabled students are disputed at the policy making level, but also, that disabled people in the Arab world, including in Lebanon, are still considered as being a separate group, similar to each other, but different from those who are non-disabled. Consequently, the prevailing view is that their needs can be met by either accommodating them or modifying the curriculum.

The literature has highlighted that the outcomes of the Lebanese official exams are very often used by schools to promote their standard of education (Jurdak & BouJaoude, 2009). This means the failure of SVI in official exams would result in lowering the success rate of schools and hence, there attractiveness. Indeed, the heated debate about the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream schools and its contribution to lowering schools' performance in league tables constitute a major issue facing inclusion policy and practice. However, the support provided by the NGOs they were affiliated with facilitated the success of the SVI in official exams. That is, as my findings revealed, these NGOs were the main support providers for

the inclusion of this segment of the population in mainstream education. Hence, it could be argued that they would be concerned about the implications of the failure of SVI not only in implementing inclusion in the schools that accepted them, but also with regards to the continuity of their inclusion projects. This approach to facilitating the success of SVI would appear to distract NGOs and GOs from implementing an inclusive agenda, one that enforces the culture of differences between students and promotes the continuing presence of these students in mainstream schools.

To conclude, the 100% success rate of SVI during official exams is questionable. Not only because the received support during the year was not aligned with that received in official exams, but also, because there was no training for scribes nor were the needs being addressed based on accurate assessment that took their individual differences into consideration. What the findings of this subsection have revealed is the need for the different stakeholder organisations to expand their knowledge in relation to conducting accurate measures of exam assessment and the need to have the individual at the centre of their inclusion process, rather than simply focusing on the continuation of SVI presence in mainstream education. The absence of accurate educational measures for SVI would appear to indicate a widening of the educational gap between them and their non-disabled peers, the consequences of which are lack of readiness for the job market and/or an insufficient level of education. The goal of GOs and NGOs should be to enforce an inclusive agenda in which the academic differences between students are supported rather than avoided.

Having discussed the results of my research in relation to the three RQs, in what follows, I will discuss teacher's perspectives and practices in implementing inclusion in their schools and the implications for the included SVI.

5.4 Teachers' responses to questionnaires

The responses of the teachers who completed questionnaires not only reflected their perceptions on implementing inclusion, for they also demonstrated the way inclusion was being practised in their respective schools. Only one of these

teachers identified themselves as being disabled. Poor representation of disabled teachers in schools that accepted SVI, was probably a key reason as to why these schools failed to present a model of inclusive schools for their disabled students. The ideal model should involve fully accepting SVI in their classes as well as having a team responsible for promoting the interests of those who are disabled.

Another influencing factor on the implementation of inclusion is related to the number of years that teachers stay in education. In my research, the age group of the participating teachers varied slightly between private and public schools. That is, more private school teachers were leaving teaching before retirement age than those in government schools (Chapter 3, Table 2). Whilst it could be argued that teaching in government schools provides a secure and in many circumstances, an additional source of income for teachers, as many of their teachers are engaged in more than one job (Najjar, 2008), they tend to stay in the same job(s) for an extended period. By contrast, those who teach in private schools, for unclear reasons, very often progress in their careers and do not stay in the same role up until retirement, possibly because of overload and low starting salaries. Thus, the turnover of teachers found in both government and private schools, could have negative implications for building the capacities of teachers in dealing with SEN. Given that many of the teachers reported how they built their knowledge of this through their direct interaction with disabled students, rather than through specialist training, hence the longer in education teachers remain, the more experience they could gain. In sum, the higher the teacher turnover, the greater the negative implications in relation to the implementation of inclusion.

In terms of the implementation of inclusion, in the literature (Rapp & Arndt, 2012) it has been asserted that teachers need to possess skills that will enable them to deliver their lessons for students with different educational needs. The teachers in my study gave their perceptions on whether they believed they had obtained the necessary skills to teach inclusively. The results show that whilst the vast majority from both Type-1 and 3 schools either strongly agreed, agreed or slightly agreed that they did not have the necessary skills to teach a classroom with SVI, those of Type-2 schools were divided between strongly agreed, agreed or slightly agreed, and strongly disagreed, disagreed or slightly disagreed (Subsection 4.4). These

findings were also mirrored in the responses of the interviewed teachers of Type-2 schools. Teachers of Type-1 and 3 schools had not received training and only a limited number of those working in Type-2 schools reported receiving only introductory training (Subsection 5.2.2).

The division in the responses among teachers of Type-2 schools who completed the questionnaire provides evidence that not all teachers are confident about the skills that they possess for teaching inclusively because secondary school teachers have different specialities. Notably, teachers of this type of school were also divided regarding the need for training. Considering the received introductory training and their different specialities, one could argue that attending training was not of substantial benefit for them in terms of implementing inclusion in their practice. In fact, many of them took the view that their skills were built through practice. Moreover, given the 60% of SVI attending Type-2 schools reported the unreadiness of teachers regarding teaching inclusively, this would suggest that the training on offer was insufficient. Teachers can receive general training on inclusion, but they also need to receive training tailored so that they are able to support particular students once their needs have been identified.

Additionally, the literature (Khochen & Radford, 2012) has provided evidence that exposure to disabled people can have an influence in changing existing attitudes. Whilst the 79% of teachers of Type-1 and 90% of Type-2 schools, who had experienced teaching SSI, believed that mainstream secondary school teachers require training in VI, only half of those who taught in Type-3 schools and who had taught SI, were of the view that such teachers needed this. This suggests that the severity of the impairment impacts on the perceived attitudes towards the need for mainstream teacher training. In sum, whilst those who had experienced teaching students with severe sight impairment believed in the need for mainstream teachers to receive training, those who had exposure only to those with SI believed that mainstream teachers could manage by applying some basic inclusion strategies.

Furthermore, a review of the literature (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011) reveals that teachers who receive the necessary training and are provided with support are more likely to possess more positive attitudes towards inclusion than those who

receive no such training. This has been found in this study too, as the teachers of Type-2 schools who had received some training and believed they had the necessary skills, were more upbeat about including those who used Braille to access information in their mainstream schools. This contrasted with those who did not believe that they had acquired the necessary skills to teach a classroom with SVI, namely, those in Type-1 and 3 schools, who did not receive support.

However, as the interviews with teachers in my research demonstrated, those of visual subjects believed that teaching SSI was the responsibility of the LST, thus leading to some of them avoiding taking the responsibility for including SVI in their classes. In countries of the global North (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Slee, 2011), the responsibility of teachers for all students, including those described as having SEN, is well established. However, as the findings of my research shows, the approach of considering the problem as being within the student who needs special support that the teacher is not able to provide, was prevalent. Consequently, some teachers diverted their responsibility to LST. This perception suggests that teachers need to be made to understand their responsibility in delivering appropriate teaching to all their students. They also need to shift their attitudes towards their disabled students by considering them as a positive resource and not a deficit. These teachers would also need to recognize that there is no one method of teaching that works for all students. Hence, knowing their students in terms of their strengths, weaknesses, preference, likes and dislikes is necessary. This would help them to differentiate and challenge each student by providing a level of work that is stimulating and achievable, thereby helping them to become independent learners. Whilst this is an approach generally followed in private mainstream schools in Lebanon, the paucity of available training for UNRWA and government mainstream school teachers is recorded in the literature. This could explain the positive responses by nearly half of teachers of Type-2 schools, those that comprise UNRWA and private schools, which included SVI in the early educational stages (Table 5a).

Scholars (Rapp & Arndt, 2012) also established that teachers need to be supported if they are to meet the diverse needs of their students. In my study, far fewer than half of teachers (27%) of theType-2 schools stated that they had received regular

support in adapting the teaching resources to meet the needs of their SVI, while nearly half (48%) responded either not often or not sure. Taking into consideration that these schools have LST in place and are supported by NGOs, this brings into question the quality of the support provided and whether it can meet the needs of SVI and their teachers. Equally, this could suggest that these teachers shifted responsibility for the SVI onto support staff and external organisations, who they perceived as possessing the specialist expertise for supporting SVI that they themselves lacked.

The limited ability of LST to support students at this level of education as revealed by LST themselves and their headteachers, suggests that SVI are not getting full access to their educational curriculum nor are they receiving the required support from the appropriate people. The literature (Evans, 2007) has asserted that identifying the individual needs of each disabled student is an effective way of meeting their individual needs. However, identifying these needs is not enough, for as Allan (2008) contended, teachers need to take the responsibility of teaching all their students and to recognise that learning is not only about conveying subject content. They also need to become cognisant of the reality that students vary in the way they learn, including SVI.

However, teachers would also need to be supported for them to be able to deliver their sessions effectively for all their learners. This is of great relevance to the Lebanese context, where classroom sizes are relatively large (average of 30 students in private classrooms and 40 students in government and UNRWA classrooms). Hence, the need for teachers, especially those of scientific and visual based subjects, to be provided with assistance so that they can manage the demand of teaching large sizes of classes and thus be able cater for the diverse needs of their students, whether they are disabled or not. Failing to provide teachers with the necessary support puts those requiring support at a disadvantage, for in the absence of such support teachers usually tend to focus on those who are considered similar before considering the needs of those who are disabled.

Furthermore, because some government secondary school teachers in Lebanon are hourly payed, a further issue arises: any additional support outside their

teaching hours is considered voluntary. However, the additional support offered by teachers was not of any greater magnitude in private schools, where teachers were monthly paid. For example, less than half of the teachers (35%) of Type-2 schools reported that they gave their SVI additional time during their sessions, whilst nearly the same percentage (32%) of teachers said otherwise. This demonstrates that offering additional support was down to their individual discretion regardless of their contracted hours. This could also be dependent on the subject taught in that some teachers might not feel confident to offer additional support in relation to visual based materials. Hence, the need for teachers to be supported not only by providing human support when needs be, but also in being given the necessary specialised support in terms of amending teaching strategies, adjusting subject content and creating resources. By so doing, all their learners can access their subject content, which was the case in relation to the focal teachers as the findings of my study showed.

It has been noted in the literature (Rapp & Arndt, 2012) that some disabled students requiring special provision need certain objectives to be modified and be supported by additional activities. This is of special relevance to those with SSI, who face difficulties in understanding certain concepts when having to rely only on auditory methods of learning. The findings of my study demonstrated that teachers were again diverging regarding this matter. Whereas slightly over half of those of the Type-1 schools either did not set individual educational objectives to support their students with 'SEN' at all or not often, slightly less than half (41%) either set individual educational objectives all the time or often. Similarly, half of teachers of Type-2 schools either reported that they not set individual objectives for their students requiring SEN at all or not often, and slightly less than half (40%) stated that they did so all the time or often. In contrast, the vast majority of those of the Type-3 schools (70%) reported that they only occasionally set individual objectives for their students.

According to the responses of teachers about the received training and support highlighted in the subsection above, setting individual objectives for students requiring support was not practised consistently in any of the schools. The limited expertise that the teachers had regarding teaching inclusively led to them being

concerned mainly about students who did not require specific adjustments. This example provides evidence that practising inclusive education was not general policy in any of the schools, but rather, it was left to individual teachers to decide on the level of inclusion they wanted or could roll out in their classrooms. This was evidenced in the influence of the severity of impairment regarding teachers' willingness to set additional individual educational objectives, and those who taught SI not believing their students needed any additional support (Table5a). Whilst those with SI might not have required any additional individual objectives being set and could have managed to gain access to school materials with very limited additional support, this was still absent in the education of these students, as the interviews with both SSVI and teachers demonstrated (Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.3.8).

My findings from the teachers' responses demonstrated broadly in favour of inclusion, but early all of those interviewed had reservations about whether it could be fully implemented. In addition, the findings revealed the limited interaction of the secondary school teachers of the different types of schools with disabled students, and these where they did exist, were nearly exclusive to those with VI in their classrooms, with very their having limited experience of teaching students with physical impairment, hearing impairment, LD or those with SEBD.

As far as the inclusion of SVI in the secondary stages of education is concerned, whilst over half (55%) of teachers of Type-1 schools believed that they were fully included in their lessons, nearly the same percentage (40%) perceived that this was not the case or were not sure about their degree of inclusion in their lessons. Similarly, whilst slightly less than half of teachers of Type-3 schools (43%) perceived that their SVI were fully included in their sessions, half of them (50%) believed that they were not or were not sure. On the other hand, 77% of those in Type-2 schools believed that their SVI were fully included and only a very small percentage reported that they were not or were not sure. This indicates that there was no full inclusion being practised in any of the different types of schools. Considering that the participating teachers taught different subjects, some of which were visual and others were text based ones, it could be argued that whilst SVI were included in text based subjects, as the vast majority of them reported, this not necessarily mean that they could be included in visual based

ones as well. For, inclusion in the latter would require specialised support that has already been noted by its absence.

As the findings of the questionnaire demonstrated, SVI were included in largely unchanged schools in which teachers were not supported in practising inclusion and they did not acknowledge their responsibility for teaching all their students. They also were not cognisant of their responsibility for eliminating any barriers to the inclusion of their disabled students. However, to do so effectively, they would need to believe in the abilities of their students and their right to receive an equal and fair level of education as others in their classrooms, a disposition that very many of the surveyed teachers lacked. Education is not only about being physically in a classroom, for it is also about social interaction and building short and long term skills that students can carry forward to their following stages of education and their future lives. Teachers need to recognise that this should be the outcome aimed at for all their students regardless of their differences.

5.5   Limitations of the study and areas for future research

In what follows, I discuss the limitations of the study in relation to its analysed data, language used, its research design and other limitations. I then move on to suggest possible areas for future research.

5.5.1 Limitations of the study

Analysing the collected data

Due to the large amount of data gathered from the conducted interviews (105) and the inaccessibility of available analysis software, such as ATLAS.Ti or NVivo, because of their incompatibility with the screen reader I use, a causal coding approach to identifying the key themes and sub-themes emerging from the interviews was followed. The coding was analysed by noting them on an MS Excel spreadsheet, which I designed. This took a greater amount of time than would have been taken to collate the relevant data had it been possible to use an

analysis software package. Additionally, the coding approach meant only considering codes that were of direct relevance to the study to make it possible for me to handle the large amount of data. Whilst this could suggest possible limitations in relation to the omitted codes which, if included, could have added value to the findings, this procedure was deemed appropriate as it helped me to address the posed RQs robustly.

The inaccessibility of SPSS or any other statistical software using screen readers, , restricted my investigations of the correlation between the demographic information of the teachers in relation to the subject taught or type of school. This also constrained the results that could be drawn from the collected questionnaire data. Were accessible analysis software available, a more in-depth analysis could have been conducted.

Language and translation

The use of the term 'SEN' to refer to those with special educational needs in the study has its limitations. Having admitted adherence to the social model of disability would have necessitated avoiding its use. However, the term is referred to in the relevant literature and among those working on SEN related projects in Lebanon (Subsection 1.7.3). Hence, avoiding its use would also create other limitations by changing the language that was used in the literature to refer to this population. However, instead of using the term 'students with SEN', I referred to this population as those who are described or identified as having SEN. I also referred to them as requiring special provision so as to avoid referencing them in terms of having SEN. This avoidance is to indicate that I do not subscribe to considering SEN to be the property of the individuals. Instead, I consider some students to require special provision in support of removing the barriers facing their educational inclusion.

Another limitation is in relation to the use of some disability associated terminology when translated into Arabic as translating some terms meant possibly changing their meaning. During the interviews different terminologies were used demonstrating not only the variation in disability related language used in Lebanon,

for this also showed the importance of adding the Arabic words to their English translation. The American term 'LD' was used in the interviews to refer to reading and writing difficulties. This broad categorisation could have created misinterpretation regarding the difficulties it referred to, if further explanations were not provided. Having used two languages in conducting the interviews and presenting their results would also suggest having translation related limitations. As Subsection 3.4.1 of the methodology chapter showed, the interviews were conducted in Arabic and then transcribed and translated into English. Whilst the transcribed interviews were visited several times during the analysis as well as when quoting someone, possible linguistic shortcomings might have limited the quotations presented.

Not being able to access Arabic written materials due to the unavailability of suitable assistive tools, meant that very limited such resources were reviewed. It thus meant that the vast majority of the reviewed literature about the Arab region was written in English. Should I have had the necessary facilities, I could have enriched my research with further work about the Arab region.

The design of the research

While the majority of the identified schools were of Type-3, it was the category that had the fewest number of schools participating in the study, as Figure 1 has demonstrated. This was mainly because of their geographical location and the political situation in the country, which restricted my access to these schools. Consequently, only three different schools of this type could be visited, but those that were provided useful insights into the inclusion experience and practices where support for SVI is virtually non-existent. During the data collection stage, the public sector held a secondary school teaching strike, which lasted from 19th February to 26th March 2013. This delayed processing the permission to visit these schools and postponed the interviewing of school students (Subsection 3.2.1). Ultimately, this limited me in being able to visit all the selected schools as the permission arrived too late, at the end of the field work stage. However, being able to visit 12 schools in different geographical locations enabled me to include data

from all three different types of schools.

An additional limitation that arose at the visited schools was in relation to recruiting teachers for face-to-face interviews. In the visited 12 schools, the headteachers were asked to identify two teachers who were available for either one-to-one or a group interview during the time of my visit. They were also asked to help in distributing the questionnaires to the secondary mainstream teachers. This could be considered as limiting, as teachers were identified by their headteachers, which might have resulted in them being selective in identifying who was to be interviewed. It could also have been the case that only teachers who were interested in the topic under investigation volunteered either to be interviewed or completed questionnaires. In reality, only those who happened to be having their break during the school visit and were happy to be interviewed had taken part. The high response rate (56%) of teachers who completed questionnaires would suggest that this delivered fairly comprehensive coverage of their current perceptions at the time. A range of interviews was conducted with a variety of different participants located at different levels of the ecological model. For each level, some of the interviews were conducted with participants one-to-one and others, on a group basis, with some being by phone and others face-to-face. It could be argued that each method has its strength and weakness; however, using a range of different methods minimises any possible bias that could occur from relying on data gathered through just one.

The research did not involve focusing on issues related to gender. It did, however, deliver general information about the demographics of the participants, including their gender. Whilst the gender gap of the participating SVI was narrow in Type-1 and 2 schools, each had 60% male and 40% female, all SVI attending Type-3 schools were male. This male dominance in Type-3 schools could point to a gender issue mainly in relation to who can manage in the mainstream system with VI and limited support. However, exploring the gender issue was beyond the scope of this research.

Other limitations

The applicability of using the ecological system theory in investigating the different factors that may directly or indirectly influence the inclusion of the developing person in a particular environment has been ascertained in the literature, as also explained in section 1.6. By adding the time dimension to his theoretical framework, Bronfenbrenner (2005) introduced an original way of studying the development of the person through time. Applying this addition would require conducting a longitudinal study in which different stages of the life of the developing person would be considered. In the current study, the development of SVI in three consecutive stages of education (pre-secondary, secondary and post-secondary) was investigated. Consequently, a limited age range amongst the participating students was involved. This limited age range and time gap between the three stages of education could arguably compromise the richness of my data regarding the longitudinal aspect. Whilst I cannot claim to have conducted a longitudinal study regarding the inclusion of SVI, by focusing on these three sequential educational stages, I was able to provide greater insight in relation to the inclusion of SVI be it in special or in mainstream education. This would have not been possible, if my research had covered a wider age range, e.g. nursery, secondary and employment due to the difference in settings between each of these stages and ultimately the variety of factors that may influence the inclusion of SVI in each of these stages. In addition, conducting longitudinal research as part of PhD research would be impractical, given the time constraints involved.

An ethical limitation arose regarding the expectations of the participating SVI about what being interviewed for the research meant. To avoid raising expectations, I had to explain in more detail than originally anticipated the aims and objectives of the study and how the information collected in the interviews would be used. This was so that the interviewees do not anticipate changes in their individual situations because of the research outcomes. Another limitation is that ideally disabled people should be involved throughout the different stages of an emancipatory research. Given the fact that this research is for a PhD degree, this was not achieved to any great extent. I was, however, fortunate enough to be able to consult with two disabled academics whose comments were invaluable at various

stages of the research (Subsection 3.1.2).

5.5.2 Possible areas of future research

My research was aimed at exploring the inclusion applied and practised in secondary mainstream schools in Lebanon (Section 1.1). Using 'students with vision impairment enrolled in their secondary stages of education' as the criteria for school identification meant that the study focused only on those with VI. This shift in focus, from investigating inclusive practices for disabled students, generally, to only those with VI, in particular, was because in the vast majority of schools only those with this impairment were accepted. The limited diversity of disabled students included in the identified 12 secondary schools indicates the need to investigate the experiences of students with a range of different impairments and difficulties during the secondary stage of education in terms of the schools that accept them and the support that is provided for them. Of equal importance is researching who can join the secondary stage of education and what their alternatives could be. This is particularly salient, given that the schools identified that enrolled disabled students, only did so for SSVI and real inclusion would require students with a range of different types of impairments and disabilities to be admitted.

Having been unable to visit schools with SVI located in non-urban areas meant that it was not possible to compare the experiences of these students in both settings (urban verses suburban) or to investigate the experience of those in the latter. Therefore, future studies aimed at comparing the experience of inclusion in both urban and non-urban areas are warranted. This is also of importance given the assertion that the high prevalence of disability existing in non-urban areas. SVI in Lebanon after the Brevet stage may attend either "regular" or vocational schools. Having only selected a sample from secondary schooling, future research investigating the educational paths that SVI in Lebanon after completing their Brevet would prove beneficial. Equally, the suitability of the selected provision to the needs of SVI would also require future investigation.

As mentioned in Subsection 3.4.1 of the methodology chapter, only a very limited

number of non-disabled peers (12) from a few schools (4) could be interviewed during the school visits. Moreover, the interviews had to be very short as they were conducted during teaching hours. Because of the role non-disabled students play in the inclusion of their disabled-peers, broader and more depth interviews of the former regarding their experience of the inclusion of the latter in their classes would need to be considered. Another area for future research is in relation to the applied theoretical framework. Applying the chronological model of the ecological system theory would require studying the influence of inclusion over time. Having selected a sample whose age ranges were close to each other was convenient for my study, for it helped in addressing the research questions. However, to investigate the trajectory of inclusion across time, selecting a sample with a greater age range would allow for in depth understanding regarding the development of inclusion for SVI and hence, should be considered in future studies.

Applying a thematic analysis meant that my study focused on identifying themes that provide answers for the posed RQs. However, my research revealed that the stories of parents, not examined in detail here, would be useful to contextualise further in future research. This would involve collecting the narratives that parents have regarding the issues they face in the process of identifying a suitable school for their children, thus shedding light on the struggle that this population face in selecting an appropriate school. Furthermore, the long and short term influences of the attended provision and type of schools on the employability and future attainment of disabled people is an area that requires serious investigation. Understanding the underpinnings of each type of provision would help in informing the relevant stakeholders about the future direction that the education of disabled students needs to take, if it is to serve their requirements more effectively, especially those requiring support provision.

Conducting interviews with a range of different groups of participants who were linked to SVI in different ways might not have provided an extensive picture of the perceptions of each group regarding inclusion and hence, perhaps the experience of each group should have been explored separately. Given the limited number of prior empirical studies that have investigated issues related to inclusion in Lebanon, examining the experience of each group in relation to the phenomenon

separately would prove beneficial. Furthermore, given the considerable scope of my research domain, as aforementioned, investigating the influence of gender on social and educational inclusion for SVI and others at different levels of the ecological model was not possible. Hence, examining inclusion in the context of gender is proposed.

Having presented the limitations of the study followed by suggesting possible areas for future investigation, I turn in the following chapter to provide a summary of the research findings. Subsequently, I offer my insights regarding ways to improve current inclusion practices in Lebanon that emerged from the findings of my study and then I conclude this thesis.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS, INSIGHTS FOR IMPROVING INCLUSION PRACTICES AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS, INSIGHTS FOR IMPROVING INCLUSION PRACTICES AND CONCLUSION

Following on from the discussion in the previous chapter about existing inclusive practices in mainstream secondary schools in Lebanon, this chapter includes a summary of the research findings and offers my insights into possible ways of enhancing inclusion implementation and practices in Lebanon.

My research has adopted a social model of disability, considering disability to be caused by external factors and not by the impairment of the individual. It also applied Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of understanding the complex ecology where human beings live, as well as investigating the environmental factors influencing human development, that is those with VI in my study (in pre-secondary, secondary and university stages of education). To this end, my study discussed existing external barriers faced by SVI in accessing information; experiencing social and educational inclusion; and being supported in mainstream schools and during standard examinations. My findings showed that while SVI were included in schools and subjects, their needs were not being met. It also demonstrated that SVI were assessed for educational competencies without having an effective assessment approach in place to measure their attainment in a manner that was fair. As a result, one could argue that SVI in Lebanon do not experience equal inclusion. The restricted inclusion of SVI in scientific and visual subjects and their focus on text-based subjects, as revealed in Section 4.3, raises the issue of whether teaching practices are inclusive enough to meet the needs of all students joining the same classroom, including those with VI. Nonetheless, for some scholars, the inclusion of SVI in mainstream education is also linked to the skills that this segment of the population may need to possess in support of accessing the educational curriculum on an equal level to others. Hence, discussing this topic has been deemed to be appropriate before the thesis concludes.

6.1 Reflections on theoretical framework and broader literature linked to the educational curriculum of students with vision impairment

Broadly speaking, an educational curriculum is meant to take into account both the needs of its students and their societies. One of its core purposes is therefore to ensure that students graduate with the necessary knowledge and skills to become effective members of their societies, equipped simultaneously with the knowledge and skills that they would require them to possess (Kelly, 2009). As far as the education of those with VI is concerned, the question would be, is the general curriculum suitable for students with VI in acquiring the knowledge and skills required by them and their societies, or should there be additions to the curriculum that would support this segment of the population to acquire the necessary skills in support of accessing the general curriculum on an equal footing as their non-VI peers?

Within the current global trend towards implementing inclusion in mainstream classrooms, some scholars (Ware, 2014) relate the inclusion of all in the general curriculum to teachers and their teaching practice, others (Douglas et al., 2011) also relate this to the access skills that SVI need to possess and utilise in accessing the general curriculum, including the use of assistive tools, mobility and social communication skills. These skills comprise the content of the additional curriculum that has been central to the education of those with VI for decades (NFB, 2016). Whilst the importance of acquiring these additional skills by those with VI is agreed upon by scholars, incorporating them into the general schooling curriculum is still debated. In what follows, I present current arguments in support of each approach and argue in favour of the former, before I conclude this section with suggestions for future work.

As explained in Subsection 2.1.3, there is no consensus as to what an inclusive approach would mean in practice: whether it means that all students should follow the same curriculum in the same classroom or whether some need to follow a partly different curriculum and partly outside of the classroom. Advocates for implementing inclusive general curriculum (Ware, 2014) argue that for inclusion to

be implemented in practice, students should undertake equal access to the same curriculum and in the same educational environment. This is arguably especially the case for those who have a single impairment or whose impairments and/or difficulties can be met in the classroom environment. Inclusion in this case can be implemented through applying different methods of teaching and learning aimed at meeting the diverse needs of students in the same milieu. This could include implementing differentiation in teaching and learning, using a range of different resources, providing students with accessible materials based on their requirements, considering the need of some students having additional time and explanation and the use of classroom assistants in support of the inclusion of some students. How these issues are addressed has a profound influence on the social and educational inclusion of SVI as well as on their psychological well-being (Norwich, 2013).

Differentiation of curricular content has been deemed to constitute a major factor in developing effective inclusive practice for all students, including those with VI (Miller, Keil & Cobb, 2005). Whilst evidence shows that the number of VI who have multiple impairments is growing, very few (n=2) of my sample disclosed information about their additional impairment and/or difficulties. The demographic data (see Section 3.3) showed that the participating SVI age range was, to a large extent, appropriate to their educational level. Their cognitive development appears to be on equivalent level to their peers and therefore it seems reasonable to expect that they are able to achieve the educational competences required for their age range, if the barriers that hinder them from doing so are removed.

Indeed, Miller and her colleagues (2005) have argued that assessing and meeting the individual requirements of each SVI can lead this segment of the population to access the general curriculum on as equal level as their peers. It has also been argued that accessing additional curriculum elements to those of their peers, in support of building skills that some SVI specifically require, is fundamental in support of their inclusion (McLinden, Douglas, Cobb, Hewett & Ravenscroft, 2016). However, advocates of the social model of disability (Ainscow & Booth, 2011) consider this approach as more aligned with the medical model, situating the cause of disability within the student and thus, marginalising the influence of the

environment in creating the disability. This is what Norwich (2013) refers to as the dilemma of the curriculum. The issue of accessing general education through inclusive teaching approaches, supported or not with an individual education plan and supplemented (or not) by an additional curriculum, continues to provoke tension amongst educationalists worldwide.

Reflecting on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, including (or not) additional curriculum coverage as part of the education of those with VI, has an influence on inclusive practices taking place at the microsystem level, where the developing SVI is present. That is, Bronfenbrenner (2005), explained that the development of an individual is affected by their ecology, which is defined as involving:

scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (Bronfenbrenner, 2005 p. 107)

In this study and as far as accessing the curriculum by SVI is concerned, the mutual relation between the mesosystem and the exosystem settings could have a direct influence on the inclusion of SVI, ultimately on the implemented educational approach at the microsystem level. Similarly, the expertise, knowledge and skills available regarding those present at the exosystem level (individuals from HET, GOs and NGOs in the current study) can influence its application to the mesosystem level (headteachers and LST in my study). These two layers can also be influenced by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), all of which may influence the development of an individual in a given setting and at a certain time of their life. Informed by this model, the ensuing passages demonstrate how obtaining the skills required for those with VI are influenced by individuals located at different layers of the ecological model.

Indeed, some scholars (Douglas et al., 2009; Pavey, Douglas, McLinden & McCall, 2003) have argued that SVI need to be supported to learn some skills that those with non-VI are able to acquire through observing others. The acquisition of such

skills would not only support this segment of the population to access the curriculum on equal level to their peers, but it could also prepare them for life after compulsory education (Hewett, Douglas, McClinden & Keil, 2017). Based on this perspective, it has been argued that the SVI general curriculum would need to address, in addition to the academic subjects that are part of the national or general curriculum, additional matters in relation to the learning of otherwise visually obtained skills. This additional curriculum is referred to in the US as the 'expanded core curriculum' and in the UK as the 'additional curriculum'.

In fact, there is no consensus as to what this curriculum should entail (Pavey et al., 2003); whether it should focus on mobility and orientation skills or whether it should also include daily independence skills, such as money management, dressing and social interaction skills.

Furthermore, many of these skills are embedded and could overlap with the content of the general curriculum (Douglas & Hewett, 2014). For example, team work leading to social interaction with others in the classroom could be incorporated into daily teaching practice (Bosanquet, Radford & Webster, 2016). Hence, advocates of the implementation of inclusive curriculum support integrating some of these skills into the general curriculum. This approach could also reduce the amount that additional curriculum elements are learned at the expense of core skills and knowledge that need to be mastered in a scholastic year. However, some of these skills, e.g. mobility and orientation, will necessarily be learned separately for those with severe sight impairment. SVI could then take these skills with them to the new microsystem environment, in which orientation and familiarity with its layout would still be required. Whilst all of these skills are necessary for enabling the independence and consequently, the inclusion of those with VI, teaching these skills in a separate curriculum is noted in the literature as being problematic (Douglas et al., 2009). Similarly, SVI's lack of these skills has been noted to have its negative implications in relation to accessing the mainstream settings at an equal level to their non-VI peers.

The limited amount of expertise available in Lebanon to train SVI and the poor physical infrastructure that does not support the independence of disabled people generally render somewhat irrelevant the issue of where these skills should be

taught. Rather, the environmental barriers in Lebanon may further enforce the dependency of this segment of the population and restrict their autonomy. Whilst in Lebanon Special schools and NGOs may support their students in receiving some mobility training, the restriction of the use of these skills in the microsystem level was noted. Furthermore, the absence of mobility and orientation training in mainstream environments to support the independence of these students would appear to further restrict this population. In the limited contribution of SVI in activities both inside and outside the classroom, the repercussions are manifold, e.g. limited interaction between SVI and their peers, unfamiliarity with the schooling environment. This meant mainstream environments have further contributed to the exclusion of those with SSI, as opposed to those with SI who were able to manage for themselves. Hence, it could be argued that the mainstream schooling environments with SVI contributed to supporting the normalisation approach which is adopted by some students, but led to the further disabling of others.

In addition to acquiring mobility and independents skills, the acquisition of ICT skills using assistive tools (hardware and software) is argued to support the independence of SVI (Douglas et al., 2009). Its salience in the lives of disabled people and those with VI, particularly for accessing information, has been ascertained in the literature. Issues, such as the suitability of the chosen assistive tool, when it should be introduced and how it can be used have been at the centre of the literature over recent decades in countries of the global North (Douglas et al., 2009). However, this should not be interpreted as meaning that by using technology, information can be fully accessed by SVI. Indeed, Seale (2014) claims that equal access to information between those who use assistive tools and those who do not is related to those who interact with disabled students and the extent to which their knowledge and understanding of accessibility informs the creation of accessible information for all that can be accessed by this segment of the student population. Furthermore, issues regarding access to advanced stages of education using the available assistive tools are in many cases still insurmountable, examples of which include the advanced stages of chemistry and maths by SVI (Mulloy, Gevarter, Hopkins, Sutherland & Ramdoss, 2014). Hence, the issue of whether to incorporate these skills into the general curriculum or introducing them

as part of an additional curriculum remains.

Arguably, the limited use of assistive tools in the educational settings by those whom they would benefit suggests a negative influence on accessing educational materials, as well as on the application of inclusion in their respective schools. Conversely, the availability of technology will impact on the acquired ICT skills and the usability of such skills in the future.

Indeed, providing those who are disabled with technology in the classroom settings is growing globally. The extent that the provided technology is grounded into the content of the educational curriculum is nevertheless questionable (Dieker & Powell, 2014). In Lebanon, ICT skills are part of the schooling curriculum in private schools that can incorporate the teaching of these skills into the general curriculum. However, my findings did not show any particular adjustments made by the school to enable SVI to acquire the necessary ICT skills in a systematic way.

Moreover, research findings from countries of the global North (Douglas & Hewett, 2014) have noted that peer pressure and not wanting to look different can lead to some SVI being reluctant to use assistive tools in the classroom. My findings showed that the use of assistive tools by SVI in the educational environment were also restrictive (Subsection 5.3.2). This was due in particular to expense, along with environmental restrictions, such as acoustics. Furthermore, whilst computers were noted as being made available, obtaining the necessary books in an electronic format was difficult. The outcome is limited benefits from using technology in education.

Whilst the cost of assistive tools can be high, certain existing devices have accessibility features (screen readers, magnification options) incorporated into their design, hence supporting equal access to all and supporting the implementation of inclusion. The use of this type of technology supports the argument of the advocates of inclusive teaching approach as opposed to those of the additional curriculum, as this could well support the building of skills through removing barriers and creating an inclusive environment for all.

Including the additional curriculum as an integrated part of the schooling education has been argued to support the acquisitions of such skills by SVI, through having

assessment frameworks in place to ensure and to track their progress. However, inclusion advocates (Goodley, 2011; Ware, 2014) have argued that whilst adopting a different schooling curriculum for disabled students requiring support provision might support them to learn targeted skills, it could negatively reinforce the perceived differences between them and other students. For example, teaching SVI communication and social skills could enforce the belief that SVI are dependent and need to acquire additional skills to be normal and fit into their societies, rather than nurturing the impression that differences exist between individuals, and consequently that people should be accepted as they are.

The social inclusion of disabled students could arguably become a reality, if teachers adopt inclusive teaching skills in their classrooms that support interaction amongst those who would benefit from such an approach (Bosanquet et al., 2016). It has been contended that including additional curriculum elements as part of the schooling curriculum could have particular negative effects with regards to obtaining equal access to the general curriculum, especially in relation to post mandatory education onwards. In this later stage of education, the general curriculum becomes more extensive (Norwich, 2014) and differences between students are more recognised. The literature has ascertained that some SVI already require additional time in support of their educational inclusion. Spending this extra time outside of general educational sessions building additional skills may negatively impact their equal access to an academic education.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this thesis indicates that the educational gap between disabled students and their peers widens at more advanced stages of education, indicating a need for supplementary academic support for disabled students in aid of equal access to the general curriculum. Having to include additional curriculum in support of the independence of disabled students would require disabled students to deduct time spent on the educational curriculum and this can have negative implications for their level of education, as well as their perception of inclusion. It also has an influence on their social inclusion, since students requiring additional curriculum input will have less interaction with their peers than those attending the general schooling curriculum on a full-time basis.

Whilst there is consensus that SVI need to possess skills in support of their

inclusion (Douglas et al., 2011; AFB, 2016), the incorporation of these skills in a schooling curriculum might render them being seen as different, which would neither support their inclusion, nor foster understanding of the concept among their peers. Researchers (Douglas et al., 2011) have ascertained that the issue of looking different from their peers remains a significant barrier facing the inclusion of SVI. This barrier becomes more significant with the growing age of the SVI. The consequences may be less motivation to obtain these additional skills in a schooling environment. Hence, I argue that failure to adopt an inclusive general schooling curriculum approach for all students prevents the inclusion of these students in mainstream education. This includes those with VI, especially those whose impairment or difficulties has rendered their cognitive capacity incommensurate with their age. Consequently, enhancing the quality of teaching to meet the needs of diverse students rather than creating further separation on the grounds of needing to extend their educational curriculum would better support the implementation of inclusion.

Decisions regarding additional curriculum are usually made by individuals at the mesosystem- and exosystem levels. The mutual relation between those on the exosystem level about what inclusion means and how it could be implemented in practice can influence its application to individuals at the mesosystem level. Simultaneously, as the reviewed literature has demonstrated, there has been very limited involvement of disabled students regarding this and other issues which affect them foremost. This shows not only the need for more involvement of disabled students in issues that have a direct influence on their education provision, but also demonstrates how major issues such as curriculum content are made by professionals located on very different levels of the ecological model. As established by the literature (Douglas et al., 2011), some SVI prefer to be treated on an equal level to their peers.

Further research has led me to the conclusion that two issues are imperative, namely: investigating perceptions of individuals concerned about additional curriculum and where it should be taught; exploring inclusive teaching practices so they foster inclusion of disabled students on an equal level to their peers.

6.2 Overview of the findings

In this research, I enquired about the school selection that SVI and their parents in Lebanon follow to identify a mainstream secondary school; investigated the experience of disabled students in mainstream education from the perspective of those with VI and those around them; and investigated the way inclusion is applied and implemented in practice in the schools that have SVI enrolled in their secondary stages. The reviewed literature showed the tendency for parents to choose a mainstream school for the education of their children as opposed to a special one. It also highlights the struggle that parents of children described as having SEN face in retaining places for all their offspring in the same school. My findings also revealed the struggle that parents and their disabled children face in remaining in the same mainstream school as their siblings. It also revealed that the decisions made by professionals had a major influence on SVI attending, changing or staying in a particular school. Whilst in some countries consulting disabled people on issues related to them is widely advocated, in a Middle East region and in Lebanon, in particular, interdependency appears to have led many parents to depend on the advice made for them and not to question the order of things. However, when the autonomy of parents and their children with VI in school identification was recognised, this was connected to 'normalisation', which led students to act and behave in a way that they considered it to be acceptable by society.

The experience of SSVI in mainstream education was influenced by a range of different variables, including the type and severity of their impairment, constraints in accessing information, restricted resources, whether physical, human, assistive or financial, the unreadiness of the teaching environment for inclusion, the limited understanding of educationalists about inclusive principles and the unavailability of a whole school approach to inclusion. These factors had their direct and indirect influence on the educational and social experience of SVI in secondary mainstream education as well as in the stages before and after this level of education.

Whilst accessing information was of major concern for all the participating SVI, facing negative social and restricted educational experience in mainstream schools

was the main reason that motivated some students who were before Brevet to move to special schools. Being in a special school environment with students who shared the same impairment supported their social inclusion, but full educational inclusion was not observed here. While limited teacher preparation for inclusion and the omission of visual elements of the curriculum were issues facing secondary students with severe sight impairment in Type-1 and Type-2 schools, SSVI who attended Type-1 schools additionally faced problems regarding the use of technology in crowded classrooms and those at Type-2 schools faced issues related to their incomplete Braille books. At HE, the need to change the medium of learning (from Braille to audio) can be considered a major issue facing SVI at this stage of education. In addition, the use of technology in HE was more acknowledged, along with its unaffordability and restricted use. Moreover, restricted social inclusion was noted by those who attended Type-1 and 2 schools as well as those in HE. This was of greater concern for those attending Type-3 schools when compared to educational inclusion.

Furthermore, disability related educational and social support for SVI across all the different stages of education and in all different types of schools was found to be limited. Whilst the restricted availability of human support in Type-1 schools was noted to be problematic, in schools where it existed it did not support the inclusion of SVI to a great extent. At HE, disability support was found to be restricted, which led USVI to accept the limited support that NGOs could offer and otherwise having to manage for themselves by finding their own strategies in dealing with the obstacles they encountered. Parents generally expressed their concern about the wellbeing of their children both whilst they were attending HE and in relation to their future career prospects.

All the participating teachers, regardless of the type of school they worked in, had negative attitudes towards including SVI in visual/scientific based subjects due to their belief in the inability of such students to engage with their content. This demonstrated that the teachers still considered that the burden of the impairment falls on the student and hence, were not considering the issue from a social perspective. In schools that treated their students as a homogenous group, SVI received limited attention from teachers and had to 'normalise' themselves so they

would not be considered as being different to others in their classroom.

Peers, as demonstrated in my study, have the potential to support the implementation of successful inclusion practices, should they be guided and motivated by others on different levels of the ecological model. However, the influences that occur between different microsystems have an impact on and are impacted by the mesosystem level, where LST and headteachers represent its participants in my study. These participants reported on the limited training available for them and what there had been was only introductory in nature. These people, located at the mesosystem level, were influencing inclusive practices in the classroom and in the school at large. However, the absence of specialism at this level had negative repercussions in relation to the inclusion of SVI in general.

Challenges related to the educational inclusion were present at the HE level in relation to the readiness of that sector for inclusion. That is, HE institutions are still not able to provide examples of successful models of implementation of inclusion either for included SVI or for their student-teachers and hence, the latter's contribution to enhancing the implementation of IE in mainstream schools when qualified would appear to be limited.

The evidence shows that disability is still not considered from a social model perspective, where each individual should take their role in identifying barriers that hinder the full participation of disabled students that they should work to remove. Instead, there remains a tendency to blame individuals for their impairment, as the findings regarding the participants at the different levels of the ecological model have shown. Some of the participating NGOs located at the exosystem level of the model were satisfied with the existing practices. This not only suggests limited knowledge of the required training needs, but also, not being aware how SVI can be included at an equal level to others. This would suggest limited influence that individuals on this level of the system can have on the implementation of a successful model of inclusion.

Whilst SVI undertook the official exams through different formats and had their responses recorded in different ways, the adjustments made for their exams papers demonstrated the homogenous treatment that they received from

individuals located on the exosystem level, who are in charge of the official exams. Furthermore, the lack of training for scribers and the absence of provision for assessing the individual needs of students in order to make the support provided during exams consistent with that they usually received during the schooling year, had contributed to the inaccuracy regarding the outcomes. Failing to measure accurately disabled students acquired competencies is probably resulting a persistent achievement gap between disabled and non-disabled students that could even be widening, which has negative implications with regards to the employability and future attainment of this population. Moreover, with the current educational system in Lebanon that values standards in education and the schools scores on league tables, facilitating the success of this population would help avoid any possible negative influence on schools that accepted disabled students. Such support would also provide a motive for these schools to include disabled students that otherwise could opt out of accepting them.

The findings from my study suggest that whilst inclusion is still relatively new on the Lebanese agenda, it is increasingly becoming the stated aim in many schools to be implemented. However, the approach taken in schools that have SVI suggests that the current practices can be better described as facilitating the attendance of SVI in mainstream education, rather than including them on equal terms to others. In fact, their experience in social inclusion, whether it is at the schooling or HE levels, resonates more with a model of social integration. The failure to meet the individual needs of students, to recognise the additional support that students require, to provide fully accessible schooling material and to adapt a whole school approach to inclusion, are all continuing to impact negatively on the educational and social inclusion of SVI and hence, are damaging their employability and future aspirations.

The responses of the teachers to the questionnaires suggest that in spite of some positive attitudes existing among some of them, no unreservedly positive attitudes exist in any of the schools. Many of those who believed that SVI were fully included in their classes did not believe that they had an equal level of ability as their non-disabled peers. As my findings demonstrated, SVI were included in largely unchanged schools in which teachers were not supported in practising inclusion

and also, did not acknowledge that they should be taking full responsibility for teaching all of their students appropriately.

Since late last century, projects aimed at implementing inclusion, mainly for those with VI, have been ongoing in Lebanon (Subsection 1.7.3). These have demonstrated a growing interest in the adoption of an inclusive agenda by the government, supported by national and international efforts. However, in spite of inclusion being implemented in some schools for over a decade (Subsection 4.2.10), none of the schools investigated was even close to implementing full inclusion for this population. Moreover, it has emerged that organisations that support inclusive practice can have different aims and different approaches to implementing inclusion. These are influenced by their skills, capacities and knowledge, which if not well informed could lead them to exclude those who they are supposed to be working towards including. In sum, having illustrated examples regarding the inclusion of SVI in mainstream education, my research outcomes suggest that inclusion practices in Lebanon have a long way to go before SVI's experience could be seen as being an inclusive one.

6.3 Insights for improving the implementation of inclusion

In this section, I offer my insights into possible ways of enhancing the way inclusion is applied and practised in Lebanon. My aim is to put forward solutions for improving the experience of disabled people in mainstream education, in general and those with VI, in particular. I also make suggestions regarding how the experience of everyone involved in their inclusion could be enhanced.

For disabled students and their parents

Receiving information about their right to have access to educational establishments and all public places on an equal level to others, along with information about the support that they can receive. This would support the establishment of the culture of choice among concerned individuals and give parents and their children control over issues of direct relevance to them. It would

also support disabled students and their parents in their advocacy and counter dealing with the impairment as a problem as well as avoid reproducing traditional ways of supporting disabled students.

Helping parents and their disabled children to understand how the influence of external factors act to exacerbate the impairment. By so doing, parents and their children would come to see the impairment as not being problematic and would instead, begin to question the limited support that is provided for those who are disabled. Understanding the influence of the use of language on situating the disability within external factors as opposed to situating it within the individual and considering the impairment as a personal property would also be necessary.

Learning about different educational and career related possibilities and how they can be adjusted to meet the individual needs of SVI. Thus, parents and their children could make concrete decisions about what they would like to achieve in the long term.

Understanding what full inclusion means in practice and how SVI could be successfully included in education. This understanding can be built through learning about the different support provision that can be made available in support of different needs.

For schools

Transfer their commitment to inclusion into a policy that its implementation mechanisms are enforced. Based on this, schools may Create and distribute disability related information about the services available in schools and universities, accessible to all those who would benefit from them. This information should include guidelines about disability-support that can be made available, academic related support for disabled students and support in relation to social issues.

Schools should be encouraged to make a public commitment to inclusion of disabled students and that their commitment should be made widespread. This information should also include the approach that the educational institution takes

to assess and meet the needs of all their students including those who are disabled.

Considering implementing wellbeing, social and educational plans in support of the inclusion of their disabled students, thereby demonstrating a much more proactive approach to inclusion.

Encouraging and supporting SVI to build their ICT skills. Ultimately, incorporating technology into the implementation of inclusion in the classroom. Furthermore, introducing some advanced assistive tools that can be used in the classroom to aid the inclusion of SVI and hence, support teachers in taking full responsibility for all their students in their lessons. For example, if SVI had Braillers that could type print and Braille at the same time along with books that have Braille together with print, this would better support implementing the concept of inclusion by making the teacher directly responsible for the progress of all their students including those who are VI.

For educationalists

Focusing on building teachers' capacities in inclusion and SEN through one channel, preferably through HE. Incorporating SEN related training as part of all teacher training courses, as well as in CDP courses. In doing so, the teaching forces of trained teachers in SEN in Lebanon can be increased.

Using evidence based research to inform research policy and practice on inclusion. This could help in identifying what could work in the Lebanese context, for whom and with regards to what forms of support. Consequently, reviewing current training programmes, their design, their contribution to enhancing the implementation of inclusion and the background of those delivering them is required. Programmes would allow for identification of the pertinent skills gaps in teacher training regarding IE, which could then be addressed so as to the support need of students, thus leading to the possibility of there being a whole school approach to inclusion.

For government and non-governmental organisations

Unifying the inclusion and disability related language in the Lebanese documentation and providing clear guidelines as to what inclusion means in the Lebanese context along with what it aims to achieve.

Establishing an authorised educational assessment centre to assess the individual needs of each student and to provide or recommend the necessary training, assistive tools and adjustments for teachers in their teaching delivery as well as for exams.

Considering to run individualised as well as group training programmes on mobility, orientation, technology and daily living skills for SVI, especially those receiving education in mainstream settings. These programmes could run in school holidays, in the afternoons or during summer breaks. The purpose of this training would be to equip this segment of the population with skills necessary to their education and in future careers.

Informing those with vision impairment and their parents about available services in eye clinics and hospitals where ophthalmologists can refer their patients to sources of advice about the social and educational services that could be made available for them once the impairment is identified.

Allocating government budget or funding schemes that disabled students are entitled to apply for in support of the cost of their disability, be it in relation to education or employment, thereby acknowledging the rights of disabled people and eventually ensuring equal access for all.

For official exams

Reviewing the existing arrangements made for disabled students during official exams by making them less disability focused and more accountable to the official examination rules.

Adopting an individualised assessment arrangements approach for disabled students during official exams, which would involve assessing the required support of each student nearer to the exam time. The assessment should be conducted

through collaboration with schools, students and parents. Schools should be asked to document systematically all adjustments made available to all disabled students during the scholastic year, including their additional learning needs in the classroom and during assessments. This would inform the required adjustments for disabled students during official exams, thereby ensuring consistency in terms of the required support during official exams and the scholastic year.

Providing training for invigilators, scribers and those responsible for the official exams about the different impairments and difficulties that students can have. In addition, they need to be informed about the effective ways of supporting, interacting or guiding disabled students during official exams, such that the outcomes are a true reflection of these students' ability.

6.4 Conclusion

This research was aimed at exploring the factors that can influence the decisions that SVI and their parents make when identifying a secondary mainstream school. It also had the purpose of providing an account of the experience that disabled students face in mainstream education in Lebanon from the perspectives of SVI and those directly or indirectly connected to them. Furthermore, the aim was to investigate current inclusive practices in mainstream settings that accept those with VI. The ultimate goal is to help improving the experience of disabled students in mainstream schools in Lebanon and to support better implementation of inclusion.

Despite the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream education and in secondary and HE stage of education having been growing for the last decade in Lebanon and even before that, studies that investigated the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream schools generally and from the point of view of disabled students, in particular, are still scarce in the literature. This study has provided an account of current inclusive experiences and practices that could be of help to disabled students and their parents as well as to practitioners, legislators and policy-makers. This is of significant importance, especially given that the involvement of the Lebanese government in the implementations of IE related projects in Lebanon is very topical. The model implemented in Lebanon in relation

to SVI could also inform IE practices in different countries across the region that are working towards implementing an inclusive agenda. Some SVI across the region have participated in mainstream secondary and HE for more than a decade, even before the notion of inclusion came to the fore. However, the extent to which they have experienced successful inclusion in mainstream schools given its prominence on today's agenda remains highly questionable.

The findings of this study are very pertinent as they have demonstrated that in Lebanon, existing practices better reflect the implementation of integration instead of inclusion, as is the case in several other countries of the global South. The current practices, in fact, mirror those seen in the last century in countries of global North, when the implementation of IE in mainstream schools was still in its infancy, thus showing that Lebanon has a long way to go before inclusion becomes a reality.

Given the growing diverse population joining the Lebanese educational system as well as across the region, the implementation of inclusion as a concept should encompass much more than just disabled students. That is, implementing effective IE practice means creating an educational environment that value the participation of everyone, including refugees, those with different ethnicities and regardless of gender or religion. In other words, inclusion should refer to everyone regardless of their differences.

Projects targeting the inclusion of those with LD and other disabled students have recently started to attract further national and international interest in Lebanon (Subsection 1.7.3). These projects have the tendency to support the implementation of inclusion in primary stages of education. The findings of the implemented model of inclusion in relation to SVI in secondary mainstream education are considered to provide accurate evidence of how inclusion is being experienced by this cohort in Lebanon today. Moreover, the outcomes from the model's application should be seen as a valid description of existing inclusion in those schools that have been accepting students with vision impairment for over a decade. Inclusion should not be seen simply in relation to facilitating the attendance of students described as having SEN in primary mainstream schools or just about building the capacities of educationalists for the short term or during the

implementation of a project. Rather, it is about the long term impact that if implemented effectively it can bring about in relation to the social and educational growth of students. Accordingly, it requires the continuing development of everyone involved if IE is to become a reality in Lebanon. Having the concerned individuals at the heart of inclusive projects should be the ultimate goal of any implemented inclusion projects. Recognising and valuing the differences that exist between individuals, whether they are disabled or not, should be the culture fostered by schools, universities and organisations concerned with inclusion, regardless of whether in countries of the global South or North.

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APPENDICES

7.1 APPENDIX I

This is an information sheet to tell you about my research study, its aims and the ethical issues that you have approved.

Summary of research

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the group discussion / the interview.

Your contribution is of great importance as it will help my research into how special educational needs learners (SEN) experience mainstream education in Lebanon.

<u>Background of the research</u>

My research is concerned with the inclusion of disabled students in secondary mainstream schools in Lebanon or its equivalent. It will look at how different needs are assessed and met in educational mainstream settings.

 It will also look at whether students requiring special educational need (SEN) support feel included or get an equal level of education as their peers.

The research aims to identify factors that contribute to better inclusive practices for disabled students. The ultimate aim is to contribute to improving the experience of this segment of the population in education in Lebanon.

Issues that I had your consent for, include:

-        recording the interview, provided that it is only myself and the transcriber who will have access to it and that it will be deleted from our computers once we finish typing up the notes.

-        sharing notes from the interviews with my supervisors and in any research writing.

-        the anonymity of all participants is assured and all names will be withheld.

I thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Your contribution will be important for my research. For further information or for any enquiry related to the research in question, please contact me at mahakhechen@hotmail.com.

Maha Khochen

Researcher

Institute of Education, University of London

School of Psychology and Human Development

Hosted by

The American University of Beirut

Centre for Civic Engagement and Community Service

Summary of my research: Arabic version

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مها خشن

تحتوي هذه الصفحة على معلومات حول الدراسة البحثية التي أنا بصدد اجرائها، أهدافها والنقاط التي وافقت عليها.

ملخص البحث

شكرا لموافقتك على المشاركة في المناقشة الجماعية / المقابلة. لمساهمتك في هذا البحث أهمية كبيرة لأنها سوف تساعد بحثي الذي يعنى في تجربة الطلاب من ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة في التعليم النظامي (غير المتخصص) في لبنان.

خلفية البحث

يعنى بحثي بموضوع دمج الطلاب من ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة في المدارس الثانوية النظامية أو ما يعادلها في لبنان. فضلاً عن ذلك سوف يتطلع البحث في كيفية تقييم الاحتياجات المختلفة في المواضع التعليمية النظامية، و إذا كان الطلاب المدموجون يمارسون تجربة دمجية جيدة و يحصلون على مستوىً تعليميٍ موازٍ لأقرانهم.

يطمح البحث إلى تحديد العوامل التي تساهم في تحسين الممارسات الدمجية للطلاب من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة. مع العلم أن الهدف الأول و الأخير لهذا البحث هو المساهمة في تحسين تجربة هؤلاء الطلاب في التعليم في لبنان.

الأمور التي وافقت عليها تتضمن:

- سوف تسجيل المقابلة، بشرط أنه لا يحق لأحد غيري و للشخص الذي يساعدني في كتابة الملاحظات الاستماع إليها، و أن التسجيل يحذف من كلا جهازينا فور الانتهاء من كتابة الملاحظات.
- اطلاع المشرفين على بحثي على بعض الملاحظات الماخوذة من هذه المقابلات. هذا بالاضافة الى امكانية نشر بعض الكتابات التي تستند الى بعض من هذه الملاحظات.
- أؤكد ان جميع اسماء المشاركين سوف يتم حجبها.

بموضوع: أشكر موافقتك على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. لمساهمتك أهمية كبيرة لبحثي. للمزيد من المعلومات و الاستفسارات المتعلقة البحث، يرجى الاتصال بي على

</div>

mahakhechen@hotmail.com

مها خشن
الباحث

Institute of Education, University of London

School of Psychology and Human Development

Hosted by the American University of Beirut

Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service

Confidentiality agreement for support workers

Linked to the field work of Maha Khochen, a student researcher at the Institute of Education, University of London

I am (title and full name), a (position), currently residing in Lebanon. I have agreed to act as a support worker for Maha Khochen during the course of her fieldwork which starts on 7th January and finishes by 12th April 2013. The fieldwork covers different institutions in different geographical locations across Lebanon.

Maha Khochen has explained to me what my role and duties will be as I act for her as a support worker. These duties are:

1. Escorting to schools/universities/sights based on the requirements of the conducted research.

2. Visiting libraries, assisting with the search for relevant published and non-published materials.

3. Converting the contents of hard copy and PDF materials into MS Word format when required.

4. Converting the completed hard copy Arabic questionnaires into E-English format as instructed by the researcher.

5. Providing walking assistance throughout the support time with the researcher.

I (title and full name) agree to fulfil the role and duties listed above and accept that I will need to receive training for this role and duties. I also understand that there may be other educational disability related needs that may occur during the supporting time that I may need to assist with.

I also understand that during and after the period of the appointment as support worker to Maha Khochen. I may not divulge the names or any other information about the persons I meet, interact with or seek the views of, or of places I visit as part of the data gathering aspects of the field work that I shall undertake under the

direction of the researcher.

This means that I will not inform any third party by any means of what I see, hear, read or record and shall not share, pass on, duplicate or transmit in any form any information in Arabic or English (or any other language) by text or by speech that I have access to or use.

I also understand that the researcher would need to mention the provided support during the field work while writing materials out of the collected data, however, I fully understand that my name will be kept anonymous in any written material that will be produced out of this research.

My name in full is:

My signature:

Date:

7.2 APPENDIX II

Demographic data english version

Participant												
Title	Miss	Mrs	Ms	Mr	Dr	Professor	Other, please specify					
Age range	18 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 45	46 to 55	56 and above							
Gender	Male	Female										
Job title/ position												
Nationality												
Origins												
Religion	Prefer not to say	Muslim, Please specify if preferred	Christian, Please specify if preferred	Secular	Other, Please specify if preferred							
Level of education	Incomplete Degree	Completed Degree	Incomplete Diploma	Completed Diploma	Incomplete Masters	Completed Masters	Incomplete PhD	complete PhD	Incomplete Vocational qualification, please specify	complete Vocational qualification, please specify	Other, please specify	

Years of work experience in the current position	Less than a year	1 to 3 years	4 to 6 years	7 to 10 years	11 to 15 years	16 to 20 years	21 to 30 years	31 +				
City / area of residence												
City / area of origin												
Type of disability	non-disabled	hearing impaired	visually impaired	have mental health issues	Have learning difficulties	Physically impaired	Other, please specify					
Acquired knowledge in disability through	being certified	own reading	attending lectures	attending university short courses	attending training	disabled friend of mine	disabled relative of mine	working with people with disabilities	volunteering with people with disabilities	being disabled myself	No knowledge or skills have been developed yet	other, please specify

Demographic data Arabic version

						Other, please specify	Professor	Dr	Mr	Ms	Mrs	Miss	المشارك
						Other, please specify	Professor	Dr	Mr	Ms	Mrs	Miss	اللقب
								٥٦ وما فوق	٥٥ ـ ٤٦	٤٥ ـ ٣٦	٣٥ ـ ٢٦	٢٥ـ ١٨	الفئة العمرية
											أنثى	ذكر	الجنس
													العنوان الوظيفي/الموقع الوظيفي
													الجنسية
													الأصل
								غير ذلك، الرجاء حدد إن	علماني	مسيحي، الرجاء حدد إن ترغب	مسلم، الرجاء حدد إن	أفضل أن لا أقول	الدين

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						ترغب				ترغب		
	غير ذلك، الرجاء حدد	شهادة مهنية مكتملة	شهادة مهنية غير مكتملة	دكتوراه مكتملة	دكتوراه غير مكتملة	ماجستير مكتملة	ماجستير غير مكتملة	دبلوم مكتملة	دبلوم غير مكتملة	شهادة مكتملة	شهادة غير مكتملة	مستوى التعليم
				٣١ +	من ٢١-٣٠ سنين	من ١٦- ٢٠ سنين	من ١١- ١٥ سنين	من ٧-١٠ سنين	من ٤-٦ سنين	من ١-٣ سنين	أقل من سنة	سنوات خبرة العمل في الموقع الوظيفي الحالي
												مدينة / منطقة الإقامة
												مدينة / منطقة الأصل
					غير ذلك، الرجاء حدد	إعاقة جسدية	صعوبات تعليمية	أمراض صحة نفسية	إعاقة بصرية	إعاقة سمعية	غير معوق	نوع الإعاقة
غير ذلك، الرجاء حدد	لا أملك أي معرفة أو خبرة حتى الآن	كوني من ذوي الإعاقة	التطوع مع أشخاص	العمل مع أشخاص	قريب معوق لي	صديق معوق لي	حضور صفوف قصيرة تدريبية	حضور صفوف في الجامعة	حضور المحاضرات	قراءاتي الخاصة	كوني مجاز	اكتسبت المعرفة في موضوع الإعاقة من خلال

			من ذوي الاعاقة	من ذوي الاعاقة							

7.3 APPENDIX III

7.3.1 Interview questions with secondary students with vision impairment (SVI)

1. **(Q)** Tell me a bit about yourself:

- Your name, age, - Where are you from?

- Do you live with your parents?

- What is your eye condition and how much remaining sight do you still have?

- What is your reading medium?

2. **(Q)** Why did you join this school in particular?

- Did you have other choices?

3. **(Q)** What does being with nondisabled people mean to you?
- In education
- In society

4. **(Q)** Do you feel included in all subjects at the same level?

- Able to participate

- Able to understand

- Which subject do you like the most

- Which subject do you like less?

- Why, can you elaborate on your answer?

5. **(Q)** Do you take part in PE sessions? If so, what adjustments are made to facilitate your participation?

- Can you give examples?

- What about geography lessons?

6. **(Q)** What about core lessons? What adjustments are made to help you fully engage in the sessions?

- Can you give example for each core course?

- Arabic, English, Math and Science?

7. **(Q)** What is the support that you have in place to help your learning?

- Human support, assistive educational tools, physical adaptations.

8. **(Q)** Can you tell me some of the challenges that you face at school?

- In the classroom, with peers, teachers, and any school staff members?

9. **(Q)** To what extent are you happy with your academic attainment?

- In what ways do you think that you are gaining an equal level of education as your peers?

- Can you give examples? For example, doing the same work in lessons; the type of support during exams; the work you do in preparation for exams and course work.

10. **(Q)** How long have you been studying in this school?

- Where did you complete your previous schooling years?

- Was it a private or a public school, mainstream or special?

- How would you describe your education prior to secondary level?

- Better than now, worse or about the same. Can you elaborate?

- What support did you have in place previously to support you with your education?

(Q) What about your experience with the Brevet official exams?

- Can you tell me about the accommodations that had been made to help you to undertake this exam?

- To what extent are you worried about the official exam that you have to undertake by the end of the secondary stage?

11. **(Q)** What are your plans for after you finish secondary stage?

- If you are planning to go to the university, which university and major are you thinking of?

- Why did you choose this one?

12. **(Q)** To what extent do your parents contribute to the decisions you make?

- In which ways do you consider yourself to be independent?

- In which ways do you consider yourself to be less independent?

- What about your mobility and orientation, have you built these skills?

- Can you give examples?

7.3.2 Interview questions for parents of SVI

1. **(Q)** Tell me a bit about yourself:

- Educational background, how many children do you have and how many of them have a disability?

- Can you tell me briefly about the type of disabilities that your child has; what has caused it and how has it developed?

2. **(Q)** What can you tell me about the educational history of your child?

- Which schools did she/he attend?

- Why did you choose those schools in particular?

3. **(Q)** What support do you provide for your child in meeting their educational needs?

- At home and at school

- Assistive tools, homework

- Have you had any outside help or advice with that?

4. **(Q)** What support do you receive from external bodies generally?

- In educational and social issues related to having a child with VI?

5. **(Q)** What forms of social activities and networking with relatives, friends and neighbours does your son/daughter take part in?

- What activities are you happy for him/her to do on his/her own?

- Inside the house/outside the house.

6. **(Q)** In what practical ways do you encourage your child to be independent?

- Indoors and outdoors?

- What about the outdoor activities that you engage in as a family? Can you tell me a bit about that?

- What sort of help have you had in teaching your child the skills to be independent?

7. **(Q)** In what ways do you as a parent of a disabled child feel that you are treated on an equal level with others among your neighbours and the he community in general?

- What do you think about their acceptance of the disability of your child?

- Do you feel that their level of acceptance is the same as it has always been?

8. **(Q)** What sort of issues do you consider doing in order to accommodate the needs of your child?

- House adaptation?

- Other?

- Are there practical areas that you don't feel able to help your child with?

9. **(Q)** Are you able to tell me about your self-esteem and wellbeing regarding having to raise a disabled child?

- Who provides you with emotional support, for example?

- Can you give examples about occasions you felt empowered and others when you felt that you lacked the necessary support?

10. **(Q)** What about the level of education that your child is able to achieve. Do you feel that he/she is on a competitive level as others? What has led you to say that?

11. **(Q)** What support do you think you would need to have as a family with a VI child to help you to live comfortably, that you are not already receiving but you wish that it would be provided?

7.3.3 Case study group interview questions for peers

1. **(Q)** Can you please tell me a bit about yourselves?

- Your name, age, where are you from and how long have you been studying in this school for?

2. **(Q)** What activities do you help your disabled peer in your class with?

- Inside classrooms, in which sessions you help him/her the most? Why?

-       Outside the class room?

3.   (Q) When do you think that your disabled friend does not need your help?

-       In which classroom activities? Outside classroom settings? Can you give examples?

4.   (Q) What opportunities do you have to meet your VI classmate outside schools activities?

5.   (Q) To what extent do you feel that your VI classmate is getting the same level of education as yourselves?

-       In core subjects?

-       In other subjects?

6.   (Q) Do you have other classmates with any other kinds of disabilities?

-       If yes, ask if they need any kind of help from other pupils.

7.3.4 Interview questions for subject teachers

1.   (Q) Tell me a bit about yourself.

-       Your educational background, the subject you teach and how long have you been teaching this subject for?

-       Have you experienced teaching a classroom with disabled students?

-       If so can you tell me a bit about the types of difficulties that you have/had experienced in your classroom?

2.   (Q) To what extent do you think that disabled students can be fully included in the subject you teach?

-       Can you please give examples?

3. **(Q)** What adjustments do you think you could apply in your lessons to accommodate the special needs of the SEN / visually impaired learners?

4. **(Q)** To what extent do you believe that your SVI can get an equal level of education as their peers in the subject you teach?

5. **(Q)** To what extent do you consider the teaching training that you received to be helpful for you to teach a class that includes disabled students?

6. **(Q)** To what extent do you feel confident to interact and communicate with disabled students?

- What extent do you believe that sighted peers are able to communicate and interact effectively with SVI during classroom activities?

- Do you think that SVI are able to communicate and interact effectively with sighted peers during classroom activities?

7. **(Q)** What human resources are available to support you in teaching lessons?

- What physical resources are available for you during your lessons?

- What problems do you believe could be faced when delivering lessons for classroom with disabled students attending?

8. **(Q)** What do you think of the self-esteem level of your SEN learners?

9. **(Q)** What do you think of the amount of student parental involvement with the school?

7.3.5 Interview questions with headteachers

1. **(Q)** Tell me a bit about yourself

- Name, origins and educational background

- How long have you been leading this school for?

2. **(Q)** When did you first start receiving disabled students in your school?

- What makes you accept disabled students in your school?

- Was it the school own initiative or was it part of an implemented inclusion project?

3. **(Q)** Do you accept all disabled students of those requiring support provision at your school?

- What are the types of disabilities that you have welcomed in your school so far?

- Mild or severe?

- How many disabled students do you have in your school at present?

- What are the different types of SEN that you have at your school?

4. **(Q)** What criteria do you use to decide to accept a disabled student?

- In terms of the severity of the disability, the necessary support for the disabled learner, the extra cost of inclusion and the school charges?

5. **(Q)** How does inclusion work in your school?

- For example: full; in parallel classrooms; partial, with or without a support worker – please elaborate

6. **(Q)** What support do you put in place for disabled students at school throughout the scholastic year?

- What does the school provide and what does the school receive external support with?

7. **(Q)** What are the challenges that your school faces in terms of applying inclusion for disabled students?

- faced by the school, teachers, peers, the parents etc

8. **(Q)** To what extent do you think that disabled students are experiencing good inclusion practices?

- Are they able to gain an equal level of education as their peers?

9. **(Q)** What training did you receive regarding leadership of an inclusive school?

- Was it satisfactory? Delivered by? Its length?

10. **(Q)** Could you tell me about the training that your staff receives in terms of inclusion and SEN?

- In-service training, ongoing professional training and its frequency

- Pre-teaching training

- The quality of the in-service training?

11. **(Q)** What do you think of the readiness of your school, to support the inclusion of disabled students requiring support provision?

- As this relates to human and physical resources; training; advice and guidance.

12. What do you think should be in place to support your inclusive initiative and to help your school to be more inclusive?

7.3.6 Interview questions for Higher Education Tutors (HET)

1.   **(Q)** Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

-       Your educational background and where did you study?

2.   **(Q)** Could you please tell me more about the inclusive-related courses offered at the university? i.e. when did you start running them,

-       Their content,

-       Subject speciality, and

-       What the attendees would gain out of attending these courses?

-       Are the special needs, inclusion and disability related courses on offer core courses or optional?

3.   **(Q)** What about the profile of the students who attend such courses i.e. who are the students mainly attracted by your inclusive-related courses?

-       Those already in the SEN field or completely new to it? Are they from different geographical locations in the country? Are they diverse?

-       Is there any other information about your students that you can provide me with? (for example, are any disabled?

4.   **(Q)** What about the profile of those who teach such courses? i.e. who teaches these courses?

-       Are they PhD holders?

-       Are there exceptional circumstances when they do not hold a PhD degree?

-       Can you tell me about the extent of the skills and qualifications in inclusive learning that the tutors have, and where they gained that expertise?

5.   **(Q)** Can you share with me examples of the achievements of your graduates of the SEN courses?

-       Jobs they occupy, contribution to the field they had that you are aware of.

-       Whether they worked in mainstream or special schools in Lebanon, overseas, or perhaps went into a completely different type of work?

6. **(Q)** Are there any disabled students that you are aware of who have been studying at your university?

- Type of disability, gender, where from and what courses did they study?

7. **(Q)** How are the needs of those who would require support provision assessed and met?

- What facilities did the university put in place to aid their inclusion?

8. **(Q)** Do you think your university is ready to accept learners with different needs and abilities?

- Can you please elaborate? Physical and human resources, necessary support etc.

- What are the limitations that face the university to accommodate the needs of all disabled students at your institution?

7.3.7 Interview questions with heads of NGOs and special schools

1. **(Q)** tell me a bit about yourself:

- Your educational background, how long have you been in this post and what positions did you occupy before reaching this post?
- How did you build your experience and knowledge in the field of inclusion and SEN?

2. **(Q)** Can I have some background information about the support for disabled students generally,

and for the type of disabilities that you cater for in particular, that your institution offers in secondary stages?

- Your educational support, social support

3. **(Q)** What are your perceptions of inclusion at secondary level for disabled students?

- Do you think that mainstream schools are prepared to accept learners with disabilities?

- Do you think that learners with disabilities are experiencing good inclusion practices?

4. **(Q)** What criteria do you follow to select the mainstream schools which support disabled students?

5. **(Q)** What are the challenges that you face to identify suitable schools for the students that you support at secondary level?

- Location of the school

- Private or public

- Accessibility

6. **(Q)** In what ways do you think the available support could be improved?

- For disabled learners in mainstream settings

- For the types of disabilities that you cater for in mainstream settings

7. **(Q)** What about the quality of education that disabled learners are able to get in mainstream schools? Can I have your opinion on this matter?

- Do you think that the disabled learners that you support in mainstream education are on the same level academically as their peers?

- In core subjects?

- In other subjects?

- Can you please give some examples based on the different types of disabilities that you cater for in secondary education

- What do you think of the self-esteem level of your disabled students?

8. (Q) to what extent do you contribute to the teachers' training in mainstream settings in inclusion and disability related issues? Can you please elaborate?

- its speciality, whether it is intense, who conduct it and how often it is conducted?

If you do not contribute to teachers' training, do you know if inclusive education is included in the training of teachers?

- can I have your opinion on it?

9. **(Q)** What do you think should be in place to support your inclusive initiatives which is currently not available?

- Financial
- Human
- Physical
- Disability related support

7.3.8 Interview questions for key individuals at governmental organisations

1. **(Q)** Tell me a bit about yourself:

- Your educational background, how long have you been in this post and what positions did you occupy before reaching this post?

- how did you build your experience and knowledge in the field of inclusion and SEN?

2. **(Q)** What can you tell me about the involvement of the MEHE in projects around the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream education?

- Previous projects

-        Current projects

-        Any plans already considered for future inclusion-related projects?

3.   (Q) What are the main limitations that the MEHE faces in supporting inclusive-related projects?

-        Financial, human, physical, technical expertise

4.   (Q) How would you identify suitable schools that could be inclusive or part of an inclusive project that is supported by the government?

-        private or public

- the location of the school

- the types and severity of the disabled learners

5.   (Q) In what ways do you consider public schools in Lebanon to be ready to take part in an inclusive project?

-        What initiatives have been done/are taking place to improve the readiness of public schools in terms of inclusion?

-        What support does the MEHE provide for those requiring support provision?

6.   (Q) What special arrangements are currently made for Lebanese official exams for disabled students generally, and for students with vision impairment specifically?

7.   (Q) To what extent do you think disabled learners are receiving fair and equal treatment?

- During exams, as well as throughout the scholastic year?

8. **(Q)** What do you think of the quality of education that disabled learners are able to gain in secondary mainstream education?

- Comparing it to non-disabled students?

- the level of education that they are able to achieve

7.4 APPENDIX IV

Questionnaire for teachers of the secondary mainstream education and its equivalent

Dear Teacher,

Enclosed is a questionnaire which aims at gathering information for a study of how disabled students experience mainstream education in Lebanon. You have been approached because you teach an inclusive classroom with a student with vision impairment (VI) joining one of the secondary classrooms that you teach at present or its equivalent. Please only fill in the form if you meet this criteria.

Background of the research

My research is concerned with the inclusion of disabled students in secondary mainstream schools in Lebanon. It looks at how different needs are assessed and met in educational mainstream settings. It also looks at whether disabled students feel included or get an equal level of education as their peers.

The research aims to identify factors that contribute to better inclusive practices. The ultimate aim is to contribute to improving the experience of disabled students in education in Lebanon.

The questionnaire consists of **seven sections.** The first section asks some demographic questions regarding your personal profile and educational experience. The questions in each of section two, three, four and five are in the form of statements and you need to answer if you agree or disagree with each statement, where applicable. These sections explore your perceptions of disabled students generally and those with VI in particular, around inclusion in education; the support provided for teachers to support teaching inclusively; the contact you make with your learners with different types of special educational needs and how you feel about your interaction with these students. Sections six and seven of the questionnaire includes some open-ended questions. If you

would rather provide the answers to the last two sections by telephone, please provide your name, contact details and the best time to call you as requested at the last page of the questionnaire.

Note that all answers in this research will be used for the purpose of the research topic stated above. I can reassure you that all participants will be kept anonymous in any research writing that will be produced out of this study and that all names will be withheld. Completing the questionnaire in full should take you no more than one hour.

I thank you for agreeing to take part in this study and for helping with the completion of the questionnaire. Your contribution is of great importance for my research. For further information or for any enquiry related to the research in question, please contact me at mahakhechen@hotmail.com.

Maha Khochen

Researcher

School of Psychology and Human Development

Institute of Education, University of London

Hosted by Centre for Civic Engagement and Community Service

American University of Beirut

7.4.1 Section 1- Background information

Q1. Name of your
school: …………………………………………………………………………………
……

Q2. Type of school:

   a) Secondary   b) Vocational

Q3. Subject(s) you teach (please list all the subjects you currently teach):

…………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………….......................……………………
………………………………………………………

Q4. What age range in years applies to you? (Please tick)

a) 18 to 25

b) 26 to 35

c) 36 to 45

d) 46 to 55

e) 56 and above.

Q5. What gender are you? (Please tick)

        a) Male   b) Female

Q6. What level of education have you reached? (Please tick all that apply)

a) Incomplete Degree

b) Completed Degree

c) Incomplete Diploma

d) Completed Diploma

e) Incomplete Masters

f) Completed Masters

g) Incomplete PhD

h) Completed PhD

i) Incomplete vocational qualification

j) Complete vocational qualification

k) No academic qualifications

l) (Other, please specify)

Q7. Other than teaching in secondary stage (Cycle four - BTs), do you teach any other level? (Please tick all that apply)

a) Nursery

b) Cycle one

c) Cycle two

d) Cycle three

e) BP (Brevet Professional)

f) Vocational TS (Technical Science)

g) Vocational LT (License Technique)

h) Higher education (University)

i) Others, please specify

Q8. How many years of teaching experience do you have? (These do not have to be consecutive)

a) less than a scholastic year

b) 1 - 3

c) 4 - 6

d) 7 - 10

e) 11 - 15

f) 16 - 20

g) 21 - 30

h) 31 +

Q9. How many years of working experience in teaching mainstream classrooms with visually impaired learners do you have? (These do not have to be consecutive)

a) less than a scholastic year

b) 1 - 3

c) 4 - 6

d) 7 -10

e) 11 -15

f) 16 - 20

g) 21 - 30

h) 31+

Q10. How many years of experience in teaching classrooms with students with special educational needs do you have? (These do not have to be consecutive)

a) less than a scholastic year

b) 1 - 3

c) 4 - 6

d) 7 - 10

e) 11 - 15

f) 16 - 20

g) 21 - 30

h) 31 +

Q11. Which of the following impairments and/or difficulties do you have experience of working with? (Please tick all that apply):

a) Language and communication difficulties

b) Hearing impairment

c) Visual impairment

d) Physical difficulties

e) Learning difficulties

f) Social, Emotional and Behavioural difficulties

g) Multiple difficulties (please specify) …………………………………

h) Other, please specify

Q12. How did you acquire your knowledge and skills in the field of disabilities and special educational needs? (Please tick all that apply)

a) Being certified in the topic

b) Own reading

c) Through attending lectures

d) Through attending university short courses

e) Through attending training sessions

f) Through a disabled friend of mine

g) Through a disabled relative of mine

h) Through working with people with disabilities

i) Through volunteering with people with disabilities

j) Being disabled myself

k) No knowledge or skills have been developed yet

l) Other resources (please specify)

7.4.2 Section 2 - Teaching VI in mainstream.

Please tick the **<u>one</u>** answer that best applies to you on the scale for each question (There are seven choices ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)

1.

	Question	*S A	**A	Slghtly agree	Not sure	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Students who cannot read standard print and need to access Braille format should not be in mainstream classes.							
2	Enlarged material should be made available at mainstream schools for those whose sight does not allow them to read standard print.							
3	Teachers at mainstream schools should acquire the necessary skills to include blind and partially sighted students in their classrooms.							
4	Teachers at mainstream schools are not adequately trained to teach classrooms which include VI students.							
5	I do not consider myself to have obtained the necessary skills to teach a class with visually impaired students.							
6	I would benefit from the help of a VI advisor on how to amend teaching objectives so that they can be accessed by my VI students.							
7	I would benefit from the guidance of a VI specialist in all aspects of teaching a classroom with VI students.							
8	VI students whose academic achievement is two or more years below the other students in the grade should not be included in mainstream classes.							
9	VI students are below the level of other students in the subject I teach.							
10	Disabled students are on a competitive level educationally with others.							
11	Students who have disabilities should be in mainstream classes.							

7.4.3 Section 3 - Support for teachers in teaching students with SEN.

Please tick the **<u>one</u>** answer that best applies to you on the scale for each question (There are five choices ranging from 'Not at all' to 'All the time' on each scale).

	Question	Not at all	Not often	Not sure	Often	All the Time
1	Teachers organise all additional resource services for students with special needs within the school.					
2	Teachers receive support with organising and adapting the teaching resources so they can be accessed by all of their students.					
3.	The human support that teachers receive in classroom with students with SEN is not adequate.					
4	Teachers set individual educational objectives for each student with special needs in their class					
5.	I myself set individual educational objectives for each of my student with special needs					
6.	Teachers give extra support time for their students with SEN during teaching sessions.					
7.	Teachers give extra support time for their students with SEN after some of their teaching sessions.					
8.	Teachers make adjustments to the layout of classrooms to make it accessible for students with special needs					
9.	Teachers make adjustments to the grouping of students to include students with special needs					

7.4.4 Section 4 - Contact with different types of disabled students

	Question	At least once a day	At least once a week	At least once a month	Maximum three times a year	No contact
1	How much contact do you have with students with language and communication difficulties?					
2	How much contact do you have with students with a hearing impairment?					
3	How much contact do you have with students with a visual impairment?					
4	How much contact do you have with students with a physical impairment?					
5	How much contact do you have with students with learning difficulties?					
6	How much contact do you have with students with emotional and behavioural difficulties?					
7	How much contact do you have with students with multiple difficulties?					

Please tick the **one** answer that best applies to you on the scale for each question (There are five choices ranging from 'At least once a day' to 'No contact' on each scale).

7.4.5 Section 5 – How do you feel about the following issues:

Please tick the **<u>one</u>** answer that best applies to you on the scale for each question (There are five choices ranging from 'I totally like it' to 'No contact' on each scale).

	Question	I totally Like it	I like it to a certain extent	I do not mind either way	I do not like it very much	I do not like it at all	No Contact
1	How do you feel about your contact with students who have language and communication difficulties?						
2	How do you feel about your contact with students who have a hearing impairment?						
3	How do you feel about your contact with students who have a visual impairment?						
4	How do you feel about your contact with students who have a physical impairment?						
5	How do you feel about your contact with students who have learning difficulties?						
6	How do you feel about your contact with students who have emotional and behavioural difficulties?						
7	How do you feel about your contact with students who have multiple difficulties?						

7.4.6 Section 6 - Your perceptions towards inclusion of students with VI in your schools

(If you would rather provide the answers to this section by telephone, please provide your name, contact details and the best time to call you as requested at the last page of the questionnaire)

Q1a. Do you feel that your students with a VI are fully included in your lessons? (Please tick one answer)

    a) Yes   b) No   c) Not sure

Q1b. Please explain your answer more fully, giving examples where you can:

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Q2. What adjustments do you apply in your lessons to accommodate the special needs of your students with a VI?

    Could you please elaborate? …………………………………………………………………………
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Q3a. Do you think your students with a VI are getting an equal level of education as others in your classroom?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Not sure

Q3b. Please explain your answer more fully, giving examples where you can:

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7.4.7 Section 7 - The training you have received.

(If you would rather provide the answers to this section by telephone, please provide your name, contact details and the best time to call you as requested at the last page of the questionnaire)

Q1a. Was the training that you received helpful for you to teach a class including people with a VI?

    a) Yes

b) No

c) Not sure.

Q1b. Please explain your answer more fully, giving examples where you can:

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Q2a. Do you feel confident to interact and communicate with students with a VI?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Sometimes

Q2b. Please explain your answer more fully, giving examples where you can:

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Q3a. Do you think sighted peers are able to communicate and interact effectively with visually impaired learners during classroom activities?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Sometimes

Q3b. Please explain your answer more fully, giving examples where you can:

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Q4a. Do you think students with a VI are able to communicate and interact effectively with sighted peers during classroom activities?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Sometimes

Q4b. Please explain your answer more fully, giving examples where you can:

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Q5. What human resources are available to support you in teaching lessons? (Please tick all that apply)

a) Support worker

b) VI specialist

c) Volunteer

d) No support is available

e) Other, please specify

Q6a. On the occasions when you are teaching a class with students with a **VI**, the human assistant mentioned in question 5 is available how much of the time? (Please tick one answer)

a) During all sessions that I teach

b) 75% of the sessions I teach

c) 50% of sessions that I teach

d) 25% of the sessions I teach

e) 10% of the sessions I teach

f) 5% of the sessions I teach

g) Not available at all

h) Other please specify

Q6b. On the occasions when you are teaching a class with **disabled students**, the human assistant mentioned in question 5 is available how much of the time? (Please tick one answer)

a) During all sessions that I teach

b) 75% of the sessions I teach

c) 50% of sessions that I teach

d) 25% of the sessions I teach

e) 10% of the sessions I teach

f) 5% of the sessions I teach

g) Not available at all

h) Other please specify

Q7. How many students do they help at the same
time? ....

Q8. What physical resources are available for you during your lessons?

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Q9. What problems do you face while teaching a class with students with a VI
included?

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Q10. What do you think of the self-esteem level of your disabled students?

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Q11. What do you think of the amount of student parental involvement with the school?

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Q12. Would you be willing to discuss these issues with me in further detail? (Please tick)

(a) Yes   (b) No

If 'Yes' please provide your contact details and the best time for me to call you

Your
name: ………………………………………………………………………………
…

Telephone number:..

Best time(s) to call
you?...and ………...
....

Your Email
address: ....

Thank you for your time. Your contribution will certainly enrich the findings of the research and will be of great assistance to improve the education for disabled people generally and those with visual impairment in particular in Lebanon.

7.5 APPENDIX V

Demographic Information about interviewed participants

7.5.1 Table 1: Brevet students with vision impairment (BSVI) demographic information (BSVI)

Participants No	Gender		Age	Resides in					Sight level*		years in current school
	F	M		N	S	B	BK	M	SI	SSI	
BSVI1		1	14		1					1	4
BSVI2	1		14		1					1	4
BSVI3	1		16		1				1		5
BSVI4	1		17			1				1	1
BSVI5	1		14			1			1		4
BSVI6	1		19	1					1		15

Note:

* SI= severe impaired, SSI= severe sight impaired

7.5.2 Table 2: Secondary students with visual impairment (SSVI)

Participants No	Gender		Age	Resides in					Sight level		Lives with/at:*		School type			School category		
	F	M		N	S	B	BK	M	SI	SSI	P	B	T-1	T-2	T-3	G	P	UN
SSVI1		1	18	1					1		1				1		1	
SSVI2		1	18	1						1	1				1	1		
SSVI3		1	17		1					1	1				1	1		
SSVI4		1	19	1						1	1			1			1	
SSVI5		1	17	1						1				1			1	
SSVI6		1	17	1					1		1			1			1	
SSVI7		1	18			1			1		1		1			1		
SSVI8	1		17		1					1	1			1				
SSVI9		1	18					1	1		1		1			1		
SSVI10		1	19	1						1		1	1			1		
SSVI11		1	18				1		1			1	1			1		
SSVI2	1		15	1					1			1	1			1		
SSVI13	1		16					1	1			1	1			1		
SSVI14		1	18		1					1		1	1			1		
SSVI15		1	24	1					1			1	1			1		
SSVI16	1		18		1				1		1		1			1		
SSVI17	1		18	1					1			1	1			1		
SSVI18		1	17	1						1	1			1				1
SSVI19		1	15	1						1	1			1				1
SSVI20		1	17	1						1	1			1				1
SSVI21	1		17	1						1	1			1				1
SSVI22	1		17		1					1	1			1				1
SSVI23	1		17		1				1		1			1				1

Note:

*P=parents, B= boarding school

7.5.3 Table 3: Post-secondary students with Vision Impairment follow up (PSVI)

Participants No	Gender		Age	Resides in					Sight level		Live with/at:		School type			School category		
	F	M		N	S	B	BK	M	SI	SSI	P	B	T-1	T-2	T-3	G	P	UN
PSVI1		1	17	1					1		1			1				1
PSVI2	1		17		1					1	1			1			1	
PSVI3		1	18				1		1			1	1			1		
PSVI4		1	19	1						1	1			1			1	
PSVI5		1	18	1					1		1				1		1	
PSVI6		1	17		1					1	1				1	1		
PSVI7		1	18					1	1		1		1			1		

7.5.4 Table 4a: University students with Vision Impairment (USVI)

Participants No	Gender		Age	Resides in					Sight level		Live with/at:	
	F	M		N	S	B	BK	M	SI	SSI	P	B
USVI1		1	21			1			1		1	
USVI 2	1		21				1			1	1	
USVI 3		1	21					1		1	1	
USVI 4		1	21	1						1		1
USVI 5		1	21	1					1			1
USVI 6	1		21		1					1	1	
USVI 7		1	21			1			1		1	
USVI 8	1		21	1						1		1
USVI 9	1		20		1					1	1	
USVI 10	1		22					1		1	1	
USVI 11	1		38		1					1	S*	
USVI 12	1		39					1		1	I*	
USVI 13	1		18				1			1	C*	

Note:

*S=sister, I=independent, C=AUB Campus

7.5.5 Table 4b: University students with Vision Impairment (USVI)

Participants No	T of school:			School category		
	T-1	T-2	T-3	G	P	UN
					1	Special
USVI1						Special
USVI 2				1		Special
USVI 3					1	Special
USVI 4				1		Special
USVI 5				1		U
USVI 6					1	Special
USVI 7				1		Special
USVI 8					1	No affiliation
USVI 9					1	Special
USVI 10					1	Special
USVI 11					1	Special
USVI 12					1	No affiliation
USVI 13						

Participants No	Gender		Resides in					School type			School category			Educational level*				Live with/at	
	F	M	N	S	B	BK	M	T-1	T-2	T-3	G	P	UN	BS	CS	UC	UiC	P	B
Pa1	1		1						1				1		1			1	
Pa2	1			1						1	1						1	1	
Pa3	1		1							1		1		1				1	
Pa4	1			1					1			1				1		1	
Pa5	1		1					1			1				1				1
Pa6	1		1						1			1			1			1	
Pa7	1		1						1			1				1		1	
Pa8	1		1					1			1			1					1
Pa9 & Pa10	1			1					1				1	1	1			1	
Pa11			1					1			1				1				

7.5.6 Table 5 - Parents (Pa)

Note:

* BS = below school; CS = complete school; UC = university complete; UiC = university incomplete

7.5.7 Table 6: Peers (Pe)

Participants No:	Gender		T of School			School category			Resides in					Class attended*		
	F	M	T1	T2	T3	G	P	U	N	S	B	BK	M	1	2	3
Pe1		1	1			1					1					1
Pe2		1	1			1					1					1
Pe3	1				1	1				1						1
Pe4	1				1	1				1						1
Pe5	1				1			1		1					1	
Pe6	1				1			1		1					1	
Pe7		1		1			1		1						1	
Pe8	1			1			1		1						1	
Pe9		1					1		1							1
Pe10		1					1		1							1
Pe11	1						1		1					1		
Pe12	1						1		1					1		
Pe13	1						1		1					1		

Note:

* 1= Secondary; 2 = Bac1; 3 = Bac2

7.5.8 Table 7a: Teachers (T)

Participants No:	Gender		School type			School category			School location:					Subject taught:*						
	F	M	T-1	T-2	T-3	G	P	UN	N	S	B	BK	M	S	M	L	H	PH	E	Soc
T1	1				1	1				1							1			
T2	1				1	1				1								1		
T3	1			1				1		1				1						
T4	1			1				1		1							1			
T5	1			1				1		1						1				
T6		1		1				1		1										1
T7		1		1			1			1				1						
T8	1			1			1			1					1					
T9	1			1			1			1						1				
T10	1			1			1			1							1			
T11		1	1			1					1			1						
T12		1	1			1					1					1				
T13		1		1			1		1							1				
T14	1			1			1		1					1						
T15		1		1			1		1								1			
T16		1		1			1		1					1						
T17		1	1			1					1				1					
T18	1		1			1					1			1						
T19		1			1	1										1				
T20		1			1	1							1		1					
T21	1				1	1							1						1	
T22		1	1			1					1					1				
T23		1	1			1					1				1					

Table 7a: Teachers (T) continued.

Participants No:	Gender		School type			School category			School location:					Subject taught:*						
	F	M	T-1	T-2	T-3	G	P	UN	N	S	B	BK	M	S	M	L	H	PH	E	Soc
T24	1		1			1					1		1		1					
T25		1	1			1					1									1
T26	1			1				1	1											1
T27	1			1				1	1					1						
T28		1		1				1	1							1				

7.5.9 Table 7b: Teachers

Participants No:	Educational level**				Experience (years)					
	D	IM	M	ID	-3	3 to 6	7 to 11	12 to 20	21 to 29	30+
T1	1							1		
T2	1							1		
T3	1					1				
T4	1						1			
T5	1					1				
T6	1					1				
T7			1			1				
T8			1			1				
T9	1						1			
T10	1					1				
T11	1								1	
T12	1									1
T13	1					1				
T14	1					1				
T15			1				1			
T16			1		1					
T17			1		1					
T18	1								1	
T19	1								1	
T20	1									1
T21	1						1			
T22				1						1

Table 7b: Teachers (T) continued

Participants No:	Educational level**				Experience (years)					
	D	IM	M	ID	-3	3 to 6	7 to 11	12 to 20	21 to 29	30+
T23	1						1			
T24	1									1
T25	1					1				
T26	1					1				
T27	1					1				
T28							1			

Note:

*S=Science, M=Math, L= Language and Literature, H=Humanities, Ph=Philosophy, E=Economics, So= Sociology

** D=degree, IM= incomplete masters, M= masters, ID= incomplete doctoral degree

7.5.10 Table 8: Learning Support Teachers (LST)

Participant No:	Gender		School location:					Level of education:			Age range			Experience (years)				Having an impairment	
	F	M	N	S	B	BK	M	D	ID	M	26 - 35	36- 45	46- 55	1 to 3	4 to 6	7 to 10	11 to 15	Y	N
LST1	1			1				1				1			1				1
LST 2	1			1				1			1					1			1
LST 3	1			1				1				1				1			1
LST 4	1			1				1				1					1		1
LST 5	1		1					1			1				1			1	
LST 6	1		1					1				1				1			1
LST 7	1			1				1					1			1			1
LST 8	1		1					1				1			1				1

7.5.11 Table 9a: Headteachers (HT)

Participant No	Gender		School type			School category			School location					Level of education:				
	F	M	T1	T2	T3	G	P	UN	N	S	B	BK	M	D	IM	M	iPhD	PhD
HT1		1		1		1			1						1			
HT2	1			1		1				1						1		
HT3		1		1				1		1				1				
HT4		1		1				1	1							1		
HT5		1		1				1		1				1				
HT6		1	1			1					1					1		
HT7	1		1			1					1			1				
HT8		1	1			1					1					1		
HT9		1	1			1					1			1				
HT10		1			1	1							1			1		
HT11		1		1			1		1									1
HT12		1		1		1				1						1		
HT13		1		1		1						1		1				
HT14		1			1							1		1				

7.5.12 Table 9b: Headteachers (HT)

Participant No	Age range				Experience (years)							LST present	
	26 to 35	36 to 45	46 to 55	56+	1 to 3	4 to 6	7 to 10	11 to 15	16 to 20	21 to 30	31+	Yes	No
HT1		1	1		1							1	
HT2									1				1
HT3				1	1							1	
HT4		1			1							1	
HT5	1						1						1
HT6				1							1		1
HT7				1	1								1
HT8			1		1								1
HT9				1							1		1
HT10				1							1		1
HT11		1				1							1
HT12				1					1				1
HT13			1		1								1
HT14				1					1				1

7.5.13 Table 10a: Higher education tutors (HET)

Participants No	Gender		University category		location					Level of education			Age range			
	F	M	G	P	N	S	B	BK	M	M	iPhD	PhD	26 to 35	36 to 45	46 to 55	56+
HET1	1			1			1					1		1		
HET 2		1		1			1					1		1		
HET 3		1		1			1				1				1	
HET 4	1			1					1	1			1			
HET 5		1		1			1					1			1	
HET 6	1		1				1					1			1	
HET 7	1			1	1						1		1			
HET 8	1			1	1							1		1		
HET 9	1			1			1					1			1	

7.5.14 Table 10b: Higher education tutors (HET)

Participants No	Experience (years)							Having an impairment	
	1 to 3	4 to 6	7 to 10	11 to 15	16 to 20	21 to 30	31+	Y	N
HET1			1						1
HET 2			1						1
HET 3			1						1
HET 4			1						1
HET 5				1					1
HET 6					1				1
HET 7	1								1
HET 8				1					1
HET 9					1				1

7.5.15 Table 11a: Government organisations (OG) and Non-Government organisations (NGOs)

Participants No	Gender		Location			BK		Level of education				Age range			
	F	M	N	S	B		M	D	M	PhD		26 to 35	36 to 45	46 to 55	56+
GO1	1				1			1						1	
GO2	1				1			1							1
GO3	1				1			1					1		
GO4	1				1			1						1	
NGO5		1			1			1	1					1	
NGO6	1				1					1				1	
NGO7		1	1							1				1	
NGO8		1			1			1						1	
NGO9		1			1									1	
NGO10	1				1			1							1
NGO11	1						1		1						1
NGO12	1						1	1					1		

7.5.16 Table 11b: Interviewed personnel from GOs and NGOs

Participants No	Experience (years)							Having an impairment Y= yes; N=no	
	1 to 3	4 to 6	7 to 10	11 to 15	16 to 20	21 to 30	31+	Y	N
GO1				1					1
GO2							1		1
GO3			1						1
GO4						1			1
NGO5	1								1
NGO6			1						1
NGO7					1			1	
NGO8					1				1
NGO9					1			1	
NGO10							1		1
NGO11							1	1	
NGO12				1					1

7.6 APPENDIX VI

Demographic information about surveyed teachers

7.6.1 Table 1: Section 1 Gender of the participants

Gender	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
Male	8 (29.6%)	17 (40.4%)	6 (37.5%)
Female	19 (70.3%)	25 (59.5%)	10 (62.5%)

7.6.2 Table 2: Section 1 Participants age range

Age range	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
18 to 25	3	8	0
26 to 35	6	11	3
36 to 45	5	9	9
46 to 55	7	13	3
56+	6	0	1
No Response	0	1	0

7.6.3 Table 3: Section 1 Subjects taught

Note: In this section teachers were asked to write down all the subjects that they teach.

Subject	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
Math	2	5	2
Science (Biology, Physics or chemistry)	7	6	2
Economics	1	5	1
Humanities and Religious studies (Geography, History, Sociology, Civic education, Islamic education)	8	15	5
General Philosophy	1	4	0
Arabic language and its literature	5	5	3
French language and its literature	1	2	0
English language and its literature	1	5	2
Physical Education	0	2	0
Computers	0	0	1
No Response	1	1	0

7.6.4 Table 4: Section 1 Level of education

Note: In this section teachers were able to enter multiple responses.

Education level	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
Incomplete Degree	0	0	0
Completed Degree	6	23	1
Incomplete Diploma	1	1	1
Completed Diploma	5	7	3
Incomplete Masters	1	2	5
Completed Masters	9	5	2
Incomplete PhD	3	1	1
Completed PhD	2	1	2
Incomplete vocational qualification	0	0	0
Complete vocational qualification	0	2	0
No academic qualifications	0	0	0
Others	1	1	1
No Response	0	2	0

7.6.5 Table 5: Section 1 Other teaching levels

Note: In this section teachers were able to enter multiple responses.

Other teaching levels	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
Nursery	0	0	0
Cycle one	0	0	0
Cycle two	0	1	1
Cycle three	6	9	5
BP (Brevet Professionnel)	1	1	0
Vocational TS (Technical Science)	0	0	1
Vocational LT (License Technique)	1	1	0
Higher Education (University)	2	2	3
No other teaching level	19	31	8
No Response	0	0	0

7.6.6 Table 6: Section 1 Experience - years of teaching experience

Teaching experience	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
1 to 3	0	5	0
4 to 6	2	4	0
7 to 10	2	8	2
11 to 15	7	6	7
16 to 20	4	5	2
21 to 30	4	10	5
31+	7	3	0
no response	1	1	0

7.6.7   Table 7: Section 1 VI Experience - Years of mainstream teaching experience with VI included

VI teaching experience	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
less than a scholastic year	2	5	4
1 to 3	15	17	9
4 to 6	4	12	2
7 to 10	4	4	0
11 to 15	0	1	0
16 to 20	0	0	0
21 to 30	0	0	0
31+	2	0	0
no response	0	3	1

7.6.8 Table 8: Section 1 SEN Experience - years of teaching experience with SEN learners included

SEN teaching experience	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
less than a scholastic year	3	4	3
1 to 3	9	16	9
4 to 6	5	8	2
7 to 10	5	3	0
11 to 15	0	3	0
No response	5	8	2

7.6.9 Table 9: Section 1 Disabilities you have experience working with;

Note: In this section teachers were able to enter multiple responses.

Disability experience	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
Language and communication difficulties	1	6	8
Hearing impairment	8	3	2
Visual impairment	23	36	7
Physical difficulties	9	9	3
Learning difficulties	5	12	6
Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties	2	6	5
Multiple difficulties	0	1	0
No response	3	2	0

7.6.10 Table 10: Section 1 Acquired skills and knowledge in the field of SEN and disabilities

Note: In this section teachers were able to enter multiple responses.

Disability/SEN knowledge	Frequency Type 1	Frequency Type 2	Frequency Type 3
being certified in the topic	0	2	0
through own reading	10	13	11
through attending lectures	4	7	3
through attending university short courses	2	2	2
through attending training sessions	1	2	2
through a disabled friend of mine	1	3	0
through a disabled relative of mine	2	3	0
through working with people with disabilities	12	14	1
through volunteering with people with disabilities	0	2	0
being disabled myself	0	1	0
no knowledge or skills have been developed yet	1	5	2
other resources; unspecified	0	3	0
other resources; television	0	0	1
others; working with SEN program supporters	1	0	0
no response	2	3	1

7.7 APPENDIX VII

Interrating examples

Table 1:

VI learners	
My themes	**Interrater's themes**
Autonomy	Inclusion in education – access to entry
Experience with inclusion	Experiences in education
Meeting the needs of VI in educational institutions	Parental attitude
Perceptions on inclusion in education	Recommendations
Challenges	

7.8 APPENDIX VIII

Visited schools, universities and organisations

Schools	Universities	Organisations
Al-Ashrafiyyeh secondary schools for boys and girls	Saint Joseph University	Youth Association for the Blind
Jubran Andarous Twaini secondary school	University of Balamand	Al-hadi Institution for deaf and blind
Hadath public secondary school	Lebanese university, 2nd Section	Al-Huda Institution, part of the Nazek Hariri Complex for Developing Humanitarian Capacities,
Al Abasieh secondary school for boys and girls	American University of Beirut	
National college of orthodox evangelical school of tripoli for boys and girls	Notre Dame University	Forum Of the Handicapped North Lebanon
	Hagazian University	
Husam AlDeen Hariri High School	Lebanese American University	Centre for Educational Research and Development
Rafik Hariri secondary public school- Harat al naima		Ministry of education and higher education
		Ministry of social affairs
sen el feel secondary		

school	441	
Amka secondary school		
Aqsa Secondary School		
Bissan School		

7.9 APPENDIX IX

List of universities in Lebanon as of April 2012

	Name of University	Location
1	Al-Kafaat University	Beirut
2	University of Tripoli	Tripoli
3	American University of Beirut	Beirut
4	American University of Culture and Education	Badaro, Al Hadath, Baalback, Baakline, Baouchrieh, Koura, Nabatieh, Tyre, Bint Jbeil
5	American University of Science and Technology (AUST)	Beirut, Zahle, Sidon
6	American University of Technology (AUT)	Halat, Tripoli, Tyr
7	Antonin University	Baabda, Bekaa, Mejdlayya, Karm Saddeh
8	Arab Open University	Beirut
9	Arts, Sciences and Technology University of Lebanon	Beirut, Jadra,
10	Beirut Arab University	Beirut, Debbiah, Tripoli, Bekaa
11	Beirut Islamic University	Beirut
12	Global University	Beirut
13	Haigazian University	Kantari
14	Hariri Canadian University	Mechref, Tripoli, Bekaa
15	Holy Spirit University of Kaslik	Jounieh, Zahlé, Chekka, Rmeich
16	Institut Universitaire Saint Famille	
17	Islamic University of Lebanon	Beirut

	Name of University	Location
18	Jinan University	Tripoli, Saida
19	Lebanese American University	Beirut, Byblos
20	Lebanese Canadian University	Aintoura - Kesrouan
21	Lebanese French University of Technology and Applied Sciences	Deddeh - Koura
22	Lebanese German University	Jounieh
23	Lebanese International University	Beirut, Bekaa, Saida, Nabatieh, Tripoli, Jdeideh, Sour, Rayak
24	Lebanese University	Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North Lebanon, South Lebanon, Bekaa
25	Makassed University of Beirut	Beirut
26	Middle East University	Beirut
27	Modern University for Business and Science	Beirut, Damout, Aley
28	Notre Dame University	North Lebanon, Shouf
29	La Sagesse University	Beirut
30	St Joseph University Beirut	Beirut
31	University of Balamand	Al-Kurah

7.10 APPENDIX X

Participation letter

Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service	مركز الالتزام المدني وخدمة المجتمع

To the attention of: Ministry of Education and Higher Education

Fax number: 961-1-772773

Date: 25th January, 2013

Subject: Research field work cooperation

Dear Mr. Fadi Yaraq,

To introduce myself to you, my name is Maha Khochen. I am a Lebanese researcher at the Institute of Education (IoE), University of London. I am currently investigating inclusive practices for learners with special educational needs in mainstream education in and across Lebanon. My research is currently hosted, in Lebanon, by the Centre for Civic Engagement and Community Service at the American University of Beirut in which I am collecting data for my study. Therefore, I would be grateful if I could have your cooperation with this research, further details about which are in the enclosed letter from my

university.

By interviewing key personnel at the governmental level, my research would benefit from finding answers to questions relating to:

a.   The involvement of the government in projects around the inclusion of special educational needs learners in mainstream education. This is in terms of:

-       Previous projects

-       Current projects

-       The plans that are already considered for future inclusion-related projects

b.   The aspects of work that could be considered to have helped in moving inclusion initiatives in the country forward.

c.   The main limitations that the government faces in support of inclusive-related projects.

d.   The opinion of governmental bodies on what needs to be done for inclusive projects to work better.

e.   The legislation and plans that are in place in Lebanon in support of inclusion:

-       National legislation.

-       International legislation that Lebanon has signed.

-       The way Lebanon is intending to comply with article 24 of the United Nations convention on the rights of people with disabilities.

f.   The methods that the government applies to identify suitable schools that could be inclusive or part of an inclusive project that is supported by the government.

g.   Information about public schools and their readiness to take part in an inclusive project. The initiatives that have been done/are taking place to improve the readiness of public schools in terms of inclusion. The support that the government provides for special schools

h.   Opinions on the readiness of private schools for inclusion i.e. whether what apply to public schools apply to private schools for inclusive purposes as well.

i.   The special accommodations that are currently made for special educational needs learners while undertaking the Lebanese official exams.

j.   Discussing opinions about the equal and fair treatment that disabled learners are getting in mainstream education, whether during exams or throughout the scholastic year. This is together with getting the opinions on the quality of education that disabled learners are able to gain in mainstream education in comparison to non-disabled learners i.e. the level of education that they are able to achieve

I would also appreciate obtaining any information about any mainstream schools that are currently part of an inclusive project being supported by the government. This is together with obtaining your help with getting in touch with any schools you identify as being inclusive so that I can seek permission to contact them and interview their head teachers, visually impaired learners at the school and to distribute questionnaires among their teachers.

If you have any query please contact me on my Email: mahakhechen@hotmail.com. Alternatively on: 03615441

I hope to complete gathering this data by the end of February so a prompt response from you would be greatly appreciated.

I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Maha Khochen

Researcher

School of Psychology and Human Development

Institute of Education, University of London

Hosted by,

Centre for Civic Engagement and Community Service

American University of Beirut