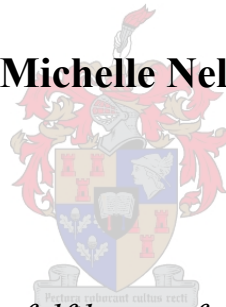


**An investigation into the lived experiences of visually
impaired
music students in the South African
system of higher education**

by

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*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Music (Musicology) in the
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University*

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April 2019

Plagiarism declaration

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Abstract

The present study investigated the lived experiences of visually impaired music students within the South African system of higher education. Due to the strong interpretative impetus of the study, the design of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was decided upon, whereby rich data was gathered via semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected via the method of snowball sampling, whereby 11 individuals agreed to partake in the present study, all of them either current music students or university alumni.

The findings identified three overarching themes, namely academic life regarding tertiary studies, with the sub-themes including transitioning from school to university, academic support, access to information, and interaction with faculty. The second theme is that of social life during university years, where the focus was on participation on campus, as well as peer support. Regarding the third theme, inner life of visually impaired students within the South African system of higher education, the focus was on participants' subjective experiences, where various personal coping strategies were identified, including self-advocacy, self-reliance, social support, and the masking of emotional hardship and pain. Finally, the issue of finding meaning within the university experience was discussed.

The stories of participants revealed that, despite democracy and the enactment of anti-discriminatory legislation and government policies and initiatives, there is still a significant gap between policy and practice, and that the pervasive problems of racial, economic, and social inequalities are still prevalent to some extent. Furthermore, it also became evident that the pervading medical discourse regarding disability prevalent in special schools within the country has a lasting effect on visually impaired individuals, who were subjected to these injustices, and that it works to silence the voices of visually impaired musicians and sometimes conditions them to internalise the deficit views and normalised assumptions of visual impairment. In addition, participants reported experiencing structural and psycho-emotional impairment within their university, which had an effect on their psychological well-being.

Finally, practical recommendations for relevant stakeholders are discussed.

Opsomming

Dié studie het die geleefde ervarings van siggestremde musiekstudente in Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite ondersoek. 'n Interpretatiewe fenomenologiese analise is toegepas op ryk data wat deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude ontgin is; die gevolg is 'n studie met 'n sterk interpretatiewe inslag. Elf deelnemers – almal huidige of voormalige musiekstudente aan 'n Suid-Afrikaanse universiteit – is deur 'n sneeubal-steekproef geïdentifiseer en by die studie betrek.

Die bevindings het drie oorkoepelende temas vasgestel: Die eerste tema – studente se akademiese lewe tydens hul tersiêre studies – sluit die oorgang van skool na universiteit, akademiese ondersteuning, toegang tot inligting en hul interaksie met akademici as subtemas in. Die tweede tema is hul sosiale lewe tydens hul universiteitsjare, waar die soeklig val op hul deelname aan kampusaktiwiteite en die ondersteuning van hul klasmaats. Die fokus van die derde tema – die gevoelslewe van siggestremde studente in Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite – is deelnemers se subjektiewe ervarings en hoe hulle persoonlike strategieë om situasies te hanteer, onder meer selfstandigheid, sosiale ondersteuning en die verdoeseling van hul emosionele teenspoed en pyn, tydens dié ervarings moes toepas. Laastens is die kwessie oor die soeke na betekenis in hul ervarings ook bespreek.

Deelnemers se bydraes ontbloot dat daar steeds noemenswaardige klowe is tussen (regerings- en universiteits)beleide en die toepassing daarvan, ondanks onder meer die koms van demokrasie, die verordening van antidiskriminasie-wetgewing en regeringsbeleide en -inisiatiewe; probleme met betrekking tot ras-, ekonomiese en sosiale ongelykheid is in sekere mate ook steeds algemeen. Verder het dit ook aan lig gekom dat 'n deurdringende mediese diskoers oor gestremdheid in spesiale skole in die land 'n blywende impak op siggestremde individue het; hul stemme word verdof en hulle word gekondisioneer om die mening dat siggestremdes 'n agterstand het te internaliseer en te normaliseer. Deelnemers het ook aangedui dat hulle strukturele en psigo-emosionele benadeling in universiteite ervaar het, wat hul sielkundige welstand aangetas het.

Die studie sluit af met 'n aantal praktiese voorstelle vir relevante rolspelers.

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It is of the utmost importance that I give distinct recognition to a central roleplayer in my academic journey, who I am very privileged to have as my supervisor. During my medical absence in 2015, my former supervisor reached the end of his tenure at Stellenbosch University (SU), but at the outset of 2016, Prof. Winfried Lüdemann very graciously agreed to take over the supervision of my research on rather short notice. My research straddles two very broad academic fields, namely music education and the interdisciplinary field of disability studies, both of which fall outside of his area of specialisation. Nevertheless, Prof. Lüdemann took great care to familiarise himself with my research in record time. His untiring support, commitment, and astute guidance in every aspect of my research has aided me greatly in upholding a level of true excellence in my work, and has made the solitary journey of research feel like teamwork. Throughout the year, he also availed himself to write numerous letters of motivation for my funding, and he has upheld an open-door policy regarding my every academic need as visually impaired student. For his exceptional understanding, guidance and support I will therefore remain ever-grateful.

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I wish to extend my sincerest thanks to every staff member of the IT department in the SU Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. In June 2016, my laptop broke beyond repair, and what complicated matters greatly at that stage, was that I had already moved to my new location,

with no access to a computer and necessary screen-reading software. In the course of only two days, they managed to arrange for a substitute laptop, which I was entitled to use for the remainder of my degree. In particular, I wish to mention the following members of staff: the IT manager, Mr Jan Louw; IT assistant manager, Mrs Petro Newman; the helpdesk technicians, including Ms Nomusa Hlongwa, Mr Richard Williams, and Mr Rudi le Roux, as well as the chief technical officer, Mr Andrew Stephens. Their willingness to accommodate me in my time of need, as well as the highly efficient, proactive, and tactful manner with which they sought to resolve my problem, is truly commendable. In lieu of my financial predicament, the help I received forms a crucial component to my academic progress, since I would otherwise have been obliged to face the unwelcome possibility of halting my research yet again.

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In closing, I as young scholar would like to salute Stellenbosch University as institution itself. Since my first year of study at SU, my experience as a visually impaired student with various special needs has overall been a very positive one. I received optimal opportunity to hone and develop my skills as both musician and scholar. Along the way, my ample share of challenges have been met with an even greater measure of support and encouragement, not only proving that SU is an establishment with strong values and sound infrastructure but also one which takes good care of each student in their own right as well.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Preamble

The continuation to higher education marks a very significant step in the life of any young individual, since it is during this period that several important life processes come into fruition. These developments span across a rather broad spectrum, including the achievement of greater independence, broadening of social relations, making long-effecting life decisions, and most importantly, the evolution and realisation of their true academic potential. At university level, students can exercise greater control over their future, such as selecting the general direction they would wish to specialise in, and they would consequently be expected to make major and long-term decisions.

For many musicians, it is the first time that they are granted the optimum opportunity to truly develop, raise, and refine their level of musicianship, since they can now seek guidance from expert mentors in the field. It is a vital step towards the young musician's pursuit of a professional career in music.

1.2 Background and motivation for the study

The theme of this thesis holds profound significance for me on a personal level, particularly since I myself am currently a visually impaired music student. Ever since an early age, I was introduced to and developed a keen interest in music, and was furthermore in the fortunate position of receiving musical training up to grade 12, at the special needs school in which I was enrolled. Throughout this time, I was taught to read and write music according to the Braille music code, to develop and improve my ability to memorise from a Braille score, as well as to hone other skills part of musicianship, such as the development of good technique, hearing ability, musical analysis, and so forth. Additionally, I had a wealth of support and encouragement from both my parents and teachers, and was taught to consider my visual impairment as an aspect of my existence, which, though hampering in certain ways, should by no means prevent me from exercising my interest in music, be it on whichever level. Thus, I finally came to the decision to apply for a bachelor's degree in music, and was subsequently

accepted at Stellenbosch University (SU), my university of choice. However, as can be duly expected, I am confronted almost daily by the far-reaching implications my visual impairment holds, both for me and those involved in my day-to-day living, be they family, peers, or university faculty.

Commencing the first day of my university career in 2005, I clearly recall becoming instantaneously aware of my new environment, which included unfamiliar physical surroundings that had to be explored, new people – including peers and lecturers – to become acquainted with, and a workload that promised to be very challenging at best. Contrary to the previous 12 years in a special needs school, I was now the only visually impaired member of a much larger class of sighted students, and I gradually became conscious of the fact that my university experience grew to be somewhat different from that of my peers.

On an academic level, all manners of special arrangements had to be established, such as contacting Braille transcribers and notifying my lecturers and other support bodies of my visual impairment (and what it entails). On a practical course level in particular, these factors included technological difficulties, such as struggling to take part in class activities involving the use of, for example, prescribed music editing software, as well as attempting to attain the correct information and expertise regarding assistive technologies in this regard; keeping up in class with explanations, especially where the extensive reference to and analysis of printed notation formed part of the lecture; learning at more or less the same pace as my peers, despite the management of time-consuming tasks such as having to memorise advanced music notation for practical subjects, and having to print voluminous quantities of texts in Braille.

On a conceptual level, factors such as successfully relaying my difficulties to lecturers and often simultaneously having to (attempt to) present them with appropriate and effective solutions regarding my sufficient understanding of explanations and illustrations, also had a particular influence on my academic well-being and progress.

On a non-academic level, I had to deal with a number of factors influencing my day-to-day adjustment to student life. First and foremost, my physical environment had to be successfully negotiated, which entailed that sufficient time was dedicated to learning important routes around town and campus. Of perhaps equal importance, it was necessary to focus on the building and strengthening of a sound and reliable social support network in and outside of the

classroom. Thus, all things considered, the abovementioned benefits of developing, raising, and refining my level of musicianship offered by tertiary studies was not always a tangible possibility.

1.3 Problem statement

The concept of the “blind” musician is not foreign in music history. In the existing literature – as will be briefly discussed in Chapter 2 – numerous accounts are found of blind bards, church musicians, and later even famous instrumentalists and conductors (both choral and orchestral) practicing their trade across Europe, particularly the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. However, the prospect of tertiary education for musicians with a visual impairment in South Africa only became a tangible reality by the first half of the twentieth century (Kruger, 1988:223–225). In congruence with the practice of institutionalisation relevant since the nineteenth century, and also following the British trend of the day, it was firmly believed that the formal education of those with a visual impairment should be undertaken in a separate facility, removed from the broad community, in order to cater for their “special needs” most effectively. Thus, with the commencement of formal music education for the visually impaired in South Africa in 1894 – at the Worcester Pioneer School for the Deaf and Blind (henceforth: Pioneer School), as it was known at the time – the learning institution was regarded “as the origin of and specialized training centre for their [the visually impaired’s] entire music education and ultimate careers”, especially after the arrival of Harry Greenwood (1868–1948), a recruited British scholar from the Royal Normal College at Upper Norwood (Kruger, 1988:24). Inspired by the first director of this institution, Francis Joseph Campbell, Greenwood established a tradition of thorough music education for the visually impaired, including a sound basis in Braille music, staff notation, theory, history, and harmony. Apart from equipping them to become competent music teachers, Greenwood additionally trained his students to qualify as organists and piano tuners, which was in congruence with the abovementioned British (and European) trends of the day. Consequently, visually impaired musicians during that time were not expected to acquire any tertiary academic qualification within the field of music, since Greenwood aimed to provide them with meticulous training, both academically and technically, structured with particular regard for their unique situation and autogenous difficulties. This approach to the musical training of the visually impaired prevailed throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

However, the appointment of Frederick J. Stahl in 1946 ushered in a new era for the musical education of the visually impaired at the Pioneer School. Being the first sighted music teacher at the establishment, he – and all consequent successors – recommended the benefits of tertiary education for the visually impaired, having studied music at a conservatory himself. It was thus during this time also that the first pupils from the Pioneer School enrolled for higher education (Kruger, 1988:223–225). The new view was that

“the school at Worcester was not a conservatory. No music student was compelled to follow a career in music and no decisions were made on their behalf. If such students intended pursuing within the field they should attend a university to acquire the necessary qualifications” (Kruger, 1988:224).

It was thus with the advent of this new era that the musician with a visual impairment could exercise their own choice to enter into the world of the sighted, and compete with peers in this new environment; therefore, segregation and isolation was no longer inevitable.

The enactment of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (henceforth: “the Constitution”) in 1996 represented a significant transformation to the face of the legal system in the country. This document, inter alia, serves to minimise any forms of inequality that existed in the past, and promises redress in the appropriate scenarios (Howell & Lazarus, 2003:290). The Constitution recognises the right or necessity to “human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms” in section 1 under subsection 1 (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:3). In accordance with this sentiment, section 9 subsection 1 states that all citizens are “equal before the law”, and that the abovementioned rights and freedoms are to be promoted and protected by the law in the achievement of equality (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:5). Furthermore, according to subsections 3 and 4, the state may not discriminate unfairly, directly or indirectly, on the grounds of disability, and that “National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination” (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:6). In accordance with this governmental pledge for the enactment of anti-discriminatory legislation, act 29 (education) was developed, asserting that (1) all citizens have the right to (a) a basic education and (b) higher or further education (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:12).

Consequently, key documents, such as the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS) (Republic of South Africa, Office of the Deputy President [ODP], 1997) and

an education white paper on building a special needs and inclusive education system in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, Department of Education [DE], 2001) were drafted in order to address the abovementioned pleas for equality, non-discrimination, and the promotion of rights and freedoms within an educational context in South Africa. Therefore, a system-wide transformation and reconstruction of South Africa's higher education system was part of broad governmental aims of eradicating past social injustices (Republic of South Africa, DE, 2001:14).

South Africa's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) (United Nations, 2006) in 2008, symbolised a global renewal of the pledges made in the Constitution and education white papers for equality and inclusivity, particularly in view of disabled citizens. However, according to the Green Paper on Post-school Education, which was drafted in 2012, all the abovementioned disability-related policies have not been fully implemented; despite various attempts to do so, the matter of disability within the post-school sector is still handled in a fragmented manner (Republic of South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2012). As a result of the aforementioned, the particular support and learning needs of students with disabilities have yet to become part of the broader transformation and diversity programmes at tertiary level (Republic of South Africa, DHET, 2012:54–55).

Finally, the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Republic of South Africa, 2015) renewed the abovementioned pleas for inclusion, integration, and equality, referring among others to South Africa's ratification of the UN CRPD, and underlines the very important sentiment that people with disabilities should be regarded as uniquely talented human beings, who, just as their fellow non-disabled citizens, should be granted the opportunity to develop their talents to the full.

As the review of various notable studies will show (to be further discussed in Chapter 3), increasing (international) scholarly attention is being paid to the personal experiences of students with disabilities, in the recognition that policy development cannot be the only way to address the situation of students with disabilities in higher education. However, although there is a considerable body of literature about special needs and music, most sources are only applicable on school level, is fairly elementary in nature, and none of these particularly address

the instruction of visually impaired musicians. As an illustration of this statement, the following academic examples will be cited here:

- studies concerning the choice between mainstream or special education of disabled music students on school level, for example the studies conducted by Gfeller, Darrow, and Hedden (1990), Thompson (1990), Frisque, Nieburg, and Humphreys (1994), and Hammel (1999, 2001, 2004);
- a study conducted by Hawkins (1991) that assessed the attitudes of music educators towards physically impaired music students, as well as a study by Whitehurst and Howells (2006) that focussed on the perceptions of non-disabled music learners regarding their disabled peers;
- case studies on instructing intellectually impaired learners (Hammel & Hourigan, 2013; Bell, 2014; Wong, 2015), as well as studies dealing with learning disabilities in the music classroom (Colwell, 2003; McCord, 2004), the special needs of disabled music learners in general (Cassidy, 1990; Darrow, 1990; Hagedorn, 2002, 2004; Adamek, 2001, 2002; Young, Burwell & Pickup, 2003; Abrahams, 2005; Adamek & Darrow, 2005; Wong & Chik, 2016), inclusion and music (Lubet, 2009, 2011a) and universal design (Mazur, 2004; Morris, 2009), the role of musical therapists when educating music learners with severe disabilities (Darrow, 1999; Wilson, 2002), and research concerning physically impaired musicians and adaptive instruments (Nabb & Balcetis, 2009).

Apart from a wealth of Braille teaching guides on beginners and advanced level, music transcription guides, music teaching manuals, as well as numerous published articles and even two qualitative studies on topics such as students with visual impairments in school settings, were also noted (see e.g. Spanner, 1956; Jenkins, 1960; De Garmo, 1970; Simpson & Simpson, 1976; Dikeman, 1978a, 1978b; Krolick, 1979, 1996, 1998; Dykema, 1984; Goldstein, 1994, 2000; Taesch, 1994, 1999, 2007; Botes & Taljaard, 2003; Smiligo, 2005; Wootton, 2005; Johnson, 2009; Moss, 2009; Scott, 2009; Power & McCormack, 2012; Abramo & Pierce, 2013). The topic of the visually impaired musician is, however, fairly “under-researched” insofar as large-scale research projects are concerned.

Apart from the evident gap in existing literature, as illustrated above, the last decade or so has seen a gradual move towards the intersection of music and disability studies. Notable examples include Lerner and Straus (2006), Honisch (2009), Lubet (2011b), Straus (2011), and recently even the *Oxford handbook of music and disability studies* by Howe, Jensen-Moulton, Lerner, and Straus (2015). In Lerner and Straus (2006) in particular, there is a focus on the disabled body within the context of music (to be further discussed in Chapter 2), yet no in-depth focus on disability or visual impairment for that matter, as an embodied experience for musicians. Therefore, despite the aforementioned philosophical turn in music and disability studies, and also the focus on the experiences concerning students with disabilities within higher education, the issue regarding interpretative research about the lived experiences of visually impaired music students is a domain hitherto largely unexplored.

1.4 Research question(s) and objectives

Based on the argument developed in the previous section, the main research question will be stated as follows:

What are the lived experiences of music students with a visual impairment in the South African system of higher education?

Supplementary to the main inquiry, the following sub-questions will be stated additionally:

- What can the personal experiences of visually impaired music students reveal about visual impairment as embodied experience within the context of music and higher education?
- What can these personal accounts reveal about their university experiences concerning their various needs within and beyond an academic context?
- From their perspectives, what possible adaptations and accommodations are necessary to facilitate their success at university?

In order to answer the above research questions, this study aims to achieve the following:

- to examine the lived experiences of visually impaired music students at university;

- in doing so, to reveal the personal accounts of participants regarding visual impairment as embodied experience within the context of music and higher education, and
- to formulate guidelines for adaptations and accommodations to facilitate access, participation, and success of music students with visual impairments.

1.5 Design and methodology

As stated above, the aim of the present study is to investigate the lived experiences of visually impaired music students in South Africa. In congruence with this particular emphasis on the experiential, the focus is on visual impairment as embodied experience. Therefore, the qualitative methodological approach employed in the present study is that of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as defined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) (to be further discussed in Chapter 4).

In IPA, the method of data collection usually takes place by way of a semi-structured interview with a limited number of participants. In this study, participants were identified by way of snowball sampling. A single interview of roughly 60 minutes was carried out, during which each participant was given the opportunity to respond to a key set of open-ended questions. The data used during the data analysis was the verbatim transcriptions of each interview.

Broadly speaking, the research project should be understood within the context of what has by now become known as Disability Studies. It takes cognizance of the theoretical underpinnings of this discipline and notes the ideological, conceptual and methodological shifts that have made themselves felt over the course of its existence. These are discussed in some detail in Chapter 2. Even if the immediate focus falls on visually impaired individuals, ultimately the study aims to make a contribution to the discipline as a whole.

1.6 The researcher

At the outset of the study, I was a music student enrolled at a South African university, and, like the participants in this study, living with a vision impairment. This positioned me as insider to the world of the visually impaired, which in many cases set the scene for meaningful and productive conversing between myself and the participants during the interviews. Despite my

privileged position, I nevertheless had to guard myself against bias, coloured by my own personal experiences and perceptions as visually impaired musician, with regards to the assumptions I made in the study and how I interpreted the accounts of participants. By way of a process of interpretation, I constantly engaged critically with my work, and in addition I also used my supervisors as sounding boards in order to gain objectivity and sound perspective throughout the conducting of the research.

1.7 Assumptions

As suggested by the problem statement to the study in section 1.3 of this chapter, it was clear at the outset that the present study filled a gap in research (and its practice), in that there is a limited amount of research that only broadly relates to this inquiry. On the one hand, it was expected that the findings of this inquiry may reflect what was found during other research, but that uncharted territory would also be ventured into, particularly when focussing on subject-disciplinary aspects of studying music on tertiary level. Furthermore, this study is in line with an increasing trend within disability research, in that I as investigator have the role of insider. On the one hand, this means that I have privileged connections, information, or knowledge that non-disabled researchers may or may not have. But at the same time, the danger exists that I may have preconceived ideas or long-held biases. However, as visually impaired music student myself, I recognised that others in my position should be granted the opportunity of sharing their life stories, particularly about their time at university, and that it should take place in a supportive milieu with the listener receptive to what is being relayed. Finally, the present study may conceivably create a gateway for future research within the arts.

1.8 Structure and presentation

The thesis will be structured according to the following outline:

- This chapter introduces the background and rationale of the study, problem statement, and its purpose and research questions. Furthermore, brief reference is made to the applied research methodology, its underpinning assumptions, as well as the structure of the study.

- Serving to create a sound theoretical basis against which the remainder of the study should be read, Chapter 2 commences with a discussion on the positioning of the visually impaired musician in existing literature, after which a discussion on various conceptual models of disability is provided, how the feminist and also interpretative turn in disability studies came about, as well as various issues pertinent to particularly a phenomenological perspective regarding disability and, more specifically, visual impairment.
- To contextualise the study in lieu of Chapter 2, Chapter 3 will consist of a literature review, which will present the various trends existing in disability literature regarding studies about the student with a disability within higher education, after which relevant studies directly relating to the phenomenological stance of the present inquiry will be introduced and discussed.
- A theoretical discussion of the research design and methodology of the present study will follow in Chapter 4.
- The data and findings will be presented in Chapter 5, by describing the main themes generated during the investigation.
- In Chapter 6, my interpretation of the findings will be provided, by way of an in-depth discussion.
- Chapter 7 will conclude the study with a summary of the main findings, as well as recommendations for future research.

1.9 Summary

In this chapter, the motivation and rationale behind the current inquiry was discussed, in order to provide a coherent backdrop against which the remainder of the study should be read. First, the background and motivation that gave rise to the study was introduced, after which the problem statement ensued, in order to underline particular relevant aspects to be considered. Following this, the main research question and subsequent research aims and objectives were stated. The final segment of the chapter consisted of a discussion regarding the research design and methodology, sampling of participants, data collection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter 2

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD OF DISABILITY STUDIES, AND THE CASE FOR A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1 The visually impaired musician

The visually impaired musician is certainly not an unknown figure in music history throughout the ages. In this context, Lubet (2011b:60) writes that visual impairment, and blindness in particular, is the impairment most frequently associated with disabled musicians. Since antiquity, and even as far back as ancient Egypt, confirmation exists of professional visually impaired musicians serving as bards in magisterial courts, choristers, church musicians, and the like (Kruger 1986:160; 1988:230; Barasch, 2001:3–4; Lubet, 2011b:69).

However, throughout Western history, society has not managed to come to terms with visual impairment as a general phenomenon. Ambiguous treatment of the blind, either as saint or sinner, can be witnessed throughout history, as is specifically documented in disability history. As numerous sources confirm, Western society has frequently responded to disability, including visual impairment, with social exclusion, misconception, stigmatisation, and stereotyping. As a consequence, impaired individuals have been subjected to negative attitudes and discriminatory practices, on various levels of their existence ever since (Hutchinson, Atkinson & Orpwood, 1998:6; Duckett & Pratt, 2001:816; Rieser, 2006:136). It is important to note that misconceptions, unrealistic beliefs, and a negative stance towards disabled people often stem from ill-informed, ambivalent, or dichotomous attitudes towards disability. Rieser (2006:137) and Satterlee (2010:36) support this view when they point out that disabled individuals were frequently regarded by society as sinners or outcasts, who – as opposed to being regarded with reverence and heroism – deserve punishment from God, and who may even be in possession of psychic powers.

Early examples of social exclusion can already be found in Greek mythology. One such case is Hephaestus, who was born as the god of fire but who was ultimately forced to reduce his divine status and live as an outcast among the other gods, due to a foot deformity (Rieser, 2006:143). This example has to be seen in the context of the Greek and Roman ideal of the

beautiful body, as well as the Olympic notion of aspiring to all facets of godliness (Rieser, 2006:143–144).

The historical position of the visually impaired is certainly no exception to the above-stated themes of myth and legend (Hutchinson et al., 1998:6). Throughout Western history, we come across numerous forms of discriminatory practices to which the disabled were subjected. In this regard, Rieser (2006) cites a host of examples that include the termination of disabled newborns (a practice proposed for perhaps the first time by Aristotle); the great witch hunts of the medieval period; the practice of institutionalisation of disabled persons during the period of industrialisation of the 1800s, and the eugenics movement of the twentieth century. In all these cases, disabled individuals are disregarded and excluded from society as a result of strong but unsubstantiated beliefs (Rieser, 2006:159–162).

Similarly, Kruger (1986:6; 1988:166) underlines the fact that, since antiquity, blind and visually impaired individuals have endured a lengthy struggle, in order to secure a level of status in society that would emancipate them from being regarded as evil, outcast, and unclean, and in order to be looked upon as worthy of protection and assistance. Meaningful progress was only achieved with the advent of the Enlightenment, greatly inspired by the writings of leading thinkers during this period of intellectual awakening. In this context Kruger (1988:130) mentions notable thinkers such as Charles Montesquieu (1689–1755), Voltaire (1694–1778), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and Denis Diderot (1713–1784), who “pleaded in their writings for the recognition of human rights, including the rights of the less privileged”, thus acknowledging the plight of disabled individuals in their work.

However, in contrast to the above, blind individuals who were able to become musicians were generally received with favour and could even secure economic status, in a time when other disabled persons were generally marginalised and discarded from society. Referring to particular ancient Egyptian drawings, Barasch (2001) writes that blind harpists, for example, enjoyed an elevated societal status. One particular image is analysed as follows: “The bulges of the stomach suggest that the musician is well nourished; his garment indicates a distinguished social position; his bald head designates physical purity” (Barasch, 2001:3). Numerous other examples of blind musicians – performers or composers – who achieved fame and recognition are known in music history. One of the notable examples is the Italian trecento composer and organist Francesco Landini (c. 1325/1335–1397), who was blinded by smallpox

at an early age but who went on to become one of the most influential musicians of his age. During the nineteenth century, the African American Thomas Greene Wiggins (1849–1908) – a blind and autistic savant, better known as “Blind Tom”, who was also enslaved for the greater part of his lifetime – gained incredible popularity as concert pianist and composer. Twentieth century popular music also boasts several well-known blind musicians, like Art Tatum (1909–1956), Ray Charles (1930–2004), and Stevie Wonder (1950–), while Andrea Bocelli (1958–) has achieved a very successful career as an opera singer.

In contrast to the notion of physical purity and the beautiful body, as mentioned above, impaired people as a minority group have always had to deal with stereotyping, typical in respect of any minority group. Two opposing yet equally detrimental responses emerge: over- and underestimation of visually impaired musicians’ abilities (Kruger, 1986:7; 1988:195; Honisch, 2009:772). In the case of underestimating, Isaacs (in Kruger, 1986:13) states that “the most destructive attitude results from a denial of their capabilities”. Within a musical context, this would directly translate to the belief that blind or visually impaired musicians are not able to stand in equal stead to their sighted counterparts, and will therefore not be able to achieve comparable outcomes. On the other hand, an overestimation of the blind or visually impaired musician’s musical capabilities can be equally detrimental. This includes the view of the blind or visually impaired musician as a musical savant, who is typically endowed with the gift of absolute pitch (Kochavi, 2009), or even as a saint endowed with supernatural and mystical musical abilities. The latter view is influenced by records of blind musicians who indeed had extraordinary gifts, like the blind Egyptian harpist mentioned earlier. Of him, Barasch (2001:3) writes: “The very act of playing music endows the harpist with an aura: while he was playing his instrument, so it was believed, ‘he was in direct communication with the deity’.”

But these reports about blind musicians’ skill are the exception rather than the rule. Expecting all visually impaired musicians to be like that stems from ignorance and is detrimental to the individuals concerned. Jensen-Moulton (2006:200) even argues that disability and musical aptitude or skill do not necessarily coincide. In fact, until about a decade ago, music and disability were only associated with each other in the field of music therapy (Honisch, 2009:767), a tendency which prevails. It is only recently that the literature began to grow, and a small number of notable publications gradually ushered in a new era. Now, the horizon of musical scholarship would broaden so as to allow for an intersection with the field of disability studies. Consequently, narratives which appear in disability studies literature were being taken

note of by music scholars; these include not only visual impairment but also other impairments and illnesses. Examples are Attinello (2006), Cizmic (2006), and Jones (2014). Lerner's (2006) study deals with the "horrors" of body dysmorphism, while Straus (2011) discusses the narrative of overcoming an impairment with reference to the life of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827).

2.2 Conceptual models of disability: A historical overview

The social theorist Michael O'Brien (in Silverman, 2005:96) argues that, in research, the application of a particular theoretical perspective may ultimately result in "the world under investigation" also changing shape or revealing new or different facets. By way of illustration, he refers to a kaleidoscope: It is an object

"consisting of a tube, a number of lenses and fragments of translucent, coloured glass or plastic. When the tube is turned, and looked down the lens of the kaleidoscope the shapes and colours, visible at the bottom, change. As the tube is turned, different lenses come into play and the combination of colour and shape shift from one pattern to another" (O'Brien in Silverman, 2005:96).

Thus, in the same way as a particular theoretical perspective determines one's view of a phenomenon in the social world, the selection of a particular model of disability will determine the outcome of a research project like the present one. In this context, it is necessary to note that "[d]isability – much like other social categories – is itself contested in terms of what it signifies, what its origins are said to be, how it is produced and what its boundaries are" (Coleman-Fountain & McLaughlin, 2013:133).

Similarly, in a book on disability, Colin Barnes (2012:12) writes that, in order to comprehend the significance of contemporary understandings of disability, it must be considered that until quite recently the "medicalized" view of disability has been predominant in Western culture. In their historical overview of various conceptual models of disability, Masala and Petretto (2008:1236) write that, according to the medical model, disability was long regarded as a physical deficit or affliction (e.g. a visual or hearing impairment, being paralyzed, or intellectually challenged), requiring medical treatment or cure; in this sense, it was also seen as a personal tragedy. Accordingly, such individuals' limitation or restriction, as in the case of

a mobility-impaired individual who is unable to climb stairs, is of a biological nature and is thus understood to be located in the body itself.

In protest to this “disability-illness paradigm” (Lourens & Swartz, 2016) and the resultant relegated status in society of the respective disabled persons (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation [UPIAS], 1976; Oliver, 1990; Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Watermeyer & Swartz, 2008), the 1970s saw the stirrings of a lengthy and growing campaigning of activists in favour of a different view. This was later followed by what has been described as the “first-wave disability scholars”, such as Michael Oliver and Colin Barnes. They fervently advocated that impaired individuals’ actual disability is influenced or determined largely by inaccessible environmental factors, ineffective policy provision, and societal values (see Swain, French, Barnes & Thomas, 2004; Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Oliver & Barnes, 2012; Shakespeare, 2014). This viewpoint was officially termed the social model by Oliver (1986:15) during the 1980s. In the words of Barnes (2012:3):

“No longer, they argued, should disability be seen as a problem of the individual’s ‘body’ and thus something to be treated by health and social care professionals, but instead it should be seen as a political and socially constructed problem with a focus on the disabling barriers faced by people with an impairment.”

According to Lourens (2016:568–569):

“It was not their bodies that hindered them from participating fully in mainstream society, but rather social exclusion, stigma and physical barriers imposed upon them [...] If mobility impaired persons could not climb stairs, it was no longer seen as a result of their disability, but rather as a result of inaccessible buildings with no ramps.”

This paved the way for disability research being viewed as a domain for political activism and emancipation (Oliver, 1990).

With the social model still being regarded as relevant by most of the original proponents, Goodley, Hughes, and Davis (2012:1) write that disability studies has since developed “across, through and with” the social sciences and humanities, including the gradual intersection with the vast field of musical scholarship (Lerner & Straus, 2006:1). (Up until the present, the social model still has its followers, but disability studies has broadened to include other theorising

about disability, which in some cases are opposing, i.e. although disability mainly developed as a result of the social model, it has since broadened.)

While accepting the liberating and emancipatory aspects of this view, scholars from various epistemological locations critiqued the social model for its linear and one-dimensional conception of disability. Here, the general consensus is that just as gender or ethnicity have their self-evident physical or biological basis, so does disability: Any given medical, or rather physical, condition such as blindness, deafness, or cerebral palsy are factual and objectively diagnosed impairments. Nonetheless, similar to the terms “gender” or “ethnicity”, disability is endowed with social meaning shaped by the broader cultural context within which it is situated. Therefore, just as feminist theory differentiates “sex” from “gender”, or critical race theory between “race” and “ethnicity”, so disability studies (broadly speaking) distinguishes between “impairment” and “disability” (see Lerner & Straus, 2006:1).

In particular, the most prominent work done in this regard emanated from the disability feminist paradigm, which asserts disability – along with gender, class, and ethnicity – as a fundamental category of cultural analysis (Garland-Thomson, 1997; Thomas, 1999), and that the lived experiences of people with disabilities should receive closer scholarly attention.

At this point, it is important to note that there exists a prevailing tension between social model advocates and disability feminist critics. This is the result of social model advocates, who fear creating or reinforcing “pervasive stereotypes” labelling disabled people as “‘incomplete’, ‘vulnerable’ or needing rehabilitation” (Watermeyer, 2009:91), which by implication strongly rejects interpretative research for its “endangering” or “undermining” effect on the emancipatory impetus of disability research (Watermeyer, 2009:91). Tom Shakespeare (1992:40), the notable British proponent of the social model, takes the following position: “To mention biology, to admit pain, to confront our impairments, has been to risk the oppressors seizing on evidence that disability is really about physical limitation after all.”

On the other hand, disability feminists argue that the social model is merely a political tool, which proffers that an impaired individual’s disability is the result of material factors. In so doing, it fails to address those disability-related issues that are concerned with the personal and psychological aspects of being disabled and living with an impairment. By upholding this strong emphasis on the political perspective, the very real and inescapable psycho-emotional

effects resulting from an impairment are disavowed or disregarded (Watermeyer & Swartz, 2008; Watermeyer, 2012; Lourens, 2016).

Corresponding to the feminist critique of the social model (and in an attempt to overcome the Cartesian mind-body divide that could also be seen to lurk somewhere within its workings), another group of scholars, known as disability phenomenology scholars (see Hughes & Patersen, 1997; Paterson & Hughes, 1999) argue in favour of an interpretivist consideration of the impaired individual. Whereas social model thinking locates disability in material and political forces external to the impaired body itself, the processes of which are termed “disablism”, essentially marking it as a “passive recipient to social forces”, the interpretative scholars proffer that the issue of “bodily agency” is fundamental to the life world of disabled people (Paterson & Hughes, 1999:597). The former approach can thus be understood as disembodied because it denies social processes such as disablism oppression their very real and embodied effects on the disabled individual’s Lebenswelt, effects which are part of such persons’ reality (Paterson & Hughes, 1999:597). Watermeyer and Swartz (2008:600) support this viewpoint when they write:

“If the psychological is not given its rightful place in the political theory of oppression, there is a potential paradox here. It has always been part of disabled people’s oppression that their own personal feelings and struggles have been seen as epiphenomenal and secondary to the objective reality of impairments. If the social model is incorrectly read to imply that thinking about psychological aspects of disablism are secondary to more obvious political concerns, these same personal struggles may become delegitimised in the service of a movement which emphasises the need to challenge societal boundaries and discrimination from a position of strength.”

2.3 Disability and culture: A phenomenological perspective

An extensive body of literature exists on disability conceptualisation and various concomitant matters, including much emphasis on cultural perceptions of disability and the effects these will have on people with disabilities. Being a member of a particular minority group may bring with it psychological experiences of oppression and exclusion, something which is mostly acknowledged by social theorists but also by disability phenomenology scholars such as Watermeyer and Swartz (2016) and Lourens (2016). Watermeyer and Swartz (2016:271), however, argue that “[t]he predicament of disabled people is different, as the circumstances of such individuals are often forgotten, not mentioned, or seen as a very unusual case”. Rosemarie

Garland-Thomson (2011) also writes about disabled people as “misfit”, in so doing highlighting the reality of living in a society mapped out for the exclusive use of non-disabled others. A further complication is the fact that this “misfitting” remains for the most part concealed and excluded from debates surrounding social exclusion (Garland-Thomson in Watermeyer & Swartz, 2016:271). Visually impaired author Heidi Lourens (2016:569) echoes this statement by writing that “[t]he politics of silence is central to disability experience and the field of disability studies”, and argues furthermore that “disability related silences result from the convergence of inaccessible physical and social environments [...] and the psychological internalization of these realities”. When the aforementioned statements are considered, it becomes very clear that the lot of people with disabilities and the marginalisation they encounter are, in fact, rather complex and multifaceted. To this end, some arguments will be presented here, but should by no means be viewed as all-encompassing.

2.3.1 Confronting ableism

Despite advancements in the conceptualisation of disability, authors such as Loja, Costa, Hughes, and Menezes (2012) argue that impaired individuals continue to be marginalised by the attitude that the able-bodied part of society are the norm, and they are, therefore, given a predominant status; the term ableism has been coined to describe this attitude. It refers to a social process in which the “normal” or non-disabled body is projected or valued as the norm, as perfection, and that any bodily difference is not viewed as a variation of “normality” but rather as “abnormality” in need of mitigation or cure. In the jargon associated with this stance, it is said that the ableist gaze approaches the impaired body rather condescendingly. Through his/her “charitable” gaze, the able-bodied person mobilises the medical model, forgetting that this can only be at the expense of disability as an identity in its own right. In the words of Garland-Thomson (1997:6): “Subjects are produced and placed within a hierarchy of bodily traits that determines the distribution of privilege, status, and power.” Beauchamp-Pryor (2011) writes about the medical tendency to normalise the impaired body, so as to conform to normative and acceptable standards. Thus, the impaired body is deemed undesirable; it is not accepted for what it is but is deemed to be in need of cure: “This difference may be central to the impaired individual’s identity” (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2011:6).

In a similar way, Loja et al. (2012:203) make an argument for what they call an “embodied politics of recognition”. This notion aims to destabilise the dominant ableist conviction or

standard of the normative body in favour of recognizing bodily difference or diversity. It calls for a recognition of “the equal value of different ways of being”, and for the renegotiation and legitimising of disability embodiment.

2.3.2 Psycho-emotional disablism

The notion of psycho-emotional disablism (at first termed “psycho-emotional dimensions of disability”) was first introduced by the disability feminist Carol Thomas in her book *Female forms: Experiencing and understanding disability* (1999). Later, this was officially changed to “psycho-emotional disablism”, in order to align impairment with other forms of social oppression, such as sexism, racism, or ageism (Thomas, 2007). Accordingly, Thomas (2007:73) reconceptualised the official Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) definition of disablism as follows: “Disablism is a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being.”

Consequently, Reeve (2012:79) distinguishes between two types of disablism: The first is known as structural disablism, which results from sources such as physically inaccessible environments, physical and social exclusion, and discrimination. Whilst structural disablism places the focus on the social realm in accordance with the social model, the negative impact on the psycho-emotional well-being of the impaired individual should not be lost sight of. This turns the focus towards what is termed “psycho-emotional disablism”. In this respect, Reeve differentiates between two types of psycho-emotional disablism, i.e. direct and indirect psycho-emotional disablism. The first kind, i.e. direct psycho-emotional disablism, results from adverse “relationships the impaired individual may have with others or themselves” (Reeve, 2012:79). On the other hand, indirect psycho-emotional disablism, i.e. the second kind, is the emotional effects experienced by a disabled person as a result of structural disablism (Reeve, 2012:79). Reeve (2012) writes that direct psycho-emotional disablism could include expressions of prejudice, such as invalidation of someone’s impairment, inappropriate comments, being avoided, or in turn directly stared at. In addition, direct psycho-emotional disablism can also take on the form of “internalised oppression” arising from the adverse relationship an impaired individual may have with himself. In the main, this is about the impaired individual who internalises the external prejudice about disability and consequently

invalidates him/herself. This can even impact on such an individual's identity construction (Reeve, 2012:78, 79, 81).

Indirect psycho-emotional disablism, on the other hand, is a direct result of structural disablism, which evokes a particular response such as frustration, anger, and the feeling of being left excluded. Therefore, although structural disablism may not be deliberate, it will nonetheless have an undesired effect (Reeve, 2012:82).

2.4 Interpretative research in disability studies: Visual impairment and lived experience

A more recent model of thinking about disability and impairment is derived from the domain of phenomenology. It should be explored for the new perspectives it opens up, possibly taking disability studies forward in a meaningful way. This is especially valid for the study of disabled persons who are involved in the arts.

The vast and multifaceted domain of phenomenology (Schwandt, 2001) has been central in overcoming the dualistic Cartesian notion of the mind-body divide, particularly within disability studies (Hughes & Paterson, 1997). The unique and compelling viewpoints of music as an art form (and the human agents involved in it) opened up by phenomenology can be utilised very productively by the music scholar in the field of disability studies (Hughes & Paterson, 1997:321; Schwandt, 2001:191). Since phenomenologists generally reject the empiricist idea of a mind-independent world and of a disengaged knower living in it, they insist on "the careful description of ordinary conscious experience", also called the lifeworld (Schwandt, 2001:227). For Merleau-Ponty (in Steiner, 2013:451), there exists a very real interrelationship between self and world:

"Where Descartes had argued that human consciousness involves a detached, disembodied and contemplative knower who is capable of establishing absolute certainty about his own mind and the material world, Merleau-Ponty reasoned that underlying discontinuities and ambiguities form a fundamental part of the relationship between self and world, and that consciousness involves embodied awareness of and within the world."

Therefore, the body should be the place from which the world should be understood (Steiner, 2013:451). For disability phenomenologists Kevin Paterson and Bill Hughes (1999), there

cannot be a divide between the bodily state of the impaired individual and the social and material world it lives in. Therefore, when understood according to Merleau-Ponty's language, impairment is embodied consciousness "within" the world, and disability consciousness "of" the world, which cannot be experienced in separate Cartesian compartments. This means that while the individual with a disability experiences bodily "affliction" and "affectivity", they also experience the social processes of oppression and exclusion as an integral part of that affliction; the one cannot be experienced independently from the other. Paterson and Hughes (1999:336) articulate this as follows:

"Disability is experienced in, on and through the body, just as impairment is experienced in terms of the personal and cultural narratives that help to constitute its meaning. Impairment and disability meet in the body not as the dualistic clash of inner and outer phenomena, but insofar as impairment structures perceptions about disability and disablement is part of the 'felt world'."

At the centre of experience is the impaired body, which is not merely an experience in itself, but the actual fleshly sentient basis, or "window" to the world. These novel perspectives are not without consequences for the study of impairment. In this respect, it is of much relevance when Jenks (2005:148) states:

"I believe we live in a society where blindness obliterates other aspects of individuality. Only recently has the topic of blindness and visual impairment begun to be studied in terms of gender, race, socioeconomic status, religion, sexuality, and other characteristics that are often assumed to be appropriate attributes to consider when studying sighted individuals."

The visually impaired author Rob Michalko (1998:67–68) adds his views on the endeavour of researching the lives of visually impaired people to the debate. He places such research in opposition to prevailing normalising assumptions about eyesight and the absence thereof, because they seem to cloud sighted peoples' perceptions regarding the life stories of those with visual impairment:

"Blindness, when compared with sight, becomes a thing of shadows [...] Anything seen as a mere shadow of its former self is understood as less than or not as good as the original [...] Sight is status and is a status former to blindness. Sight is not a mere shadow of its former self since it has no former self. Thus, sight is not regarded as needful of restoration."

Therefore, the visually impaired body cannot be viewed as a subordinate version of the “non-visually impaired” body, since it is a lived body with its own unique personal history and characteristics, a sole entity in its own right. Thus, “blindness” phenomenologist William Rowland (1985:43) states the following:

“[...] the analysis of individual situations has the special value of bringing the direct experience of the blind person into focus. It is at this point that we need to find a way to pass beyond what the expert ‘sees’ to discover what the blind person ‘senses’, ‘feels’, and lives through.”

2.5 Summary

In the present chapter, the aim is to provide a conceptual backdrop against which the remainder of the study should be read. First, the chapter commences with the topic of the visually impaired musician as figure in history and cultural artefact, after which attention is drawn to the growing tendency to intercept music with disability studies. Taking forward the issue of disability, the section thereafter discusses conceptual developments regarding views on disability, starting with the medical model and the social model, followed by the introduction of disability-feminist thinking, which ultimately set the stage for an interpretative consideration. In light of the fact that interpretivist disability scholars are concerned with the psycho-emotional effects of disabled people and the world they live in, the next section of the chapter deals with cultural tendencies of thought surrounding the impaired body and its place in society, focussing on such pervasive issues as ableism and psycho-emotional disablism. The chapter concludes by building a case for interpretative research in disability studies, but in particular focussing on the visually impaired musician. In lieu of this imperative, the following chapter will deal with the matter of research conducted in this regard.

Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction to the literature on students with disabilities

Research about the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education is increasingly becoming a matter of global concern. The body of literature concerning such students has broadened to include research from a human rights perspective (Young & Kwibell, 2000; Veck, 2002; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2004, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013; Tinklin, Riddell & Wilson, 2004; Riddell, Tinklin & Wilson, 2005; Cole, 2006; Gibson, 2006; Houghton, Piggott & Armstrong, 2006; Madriaga, 2007; Matshedisho, 2007a, 2007b; Chataika, 2010; Chataika, McKenzie, Swart & Lyner-Cleophas, 2012; Lovett, Nelson & Lindstrom, 2015; Roberts, Ju & Zhang, 2014; Seale, Gibson, Haynes & Potter, 2015); the identification of barriers to access and participation, with particular emphasis on the removal of physical, structural, and attitudinal barriers (Fichten, 1995; Getzel, 2008; Hadjidakou, Polycarpou & Hadjilia, 2010; Ryan, 2011; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2014), and the review of teaching practice and pedagogical strategies (Hall & Stahl, 2006; Grace & Gravestock, 2009; Hlalele & Alexander, 2012; Kranke, Jackson, Taylor, Anderson-Fye & Floersch, 2013). The latter kind of literature focusses on such areas as accommodation during lectures (Hutchinson et al., 1998; Healey, Bradley, Fuller & Hall, 2006; Reindal, 2008; Magnus & Tøssebro, 2013) and assessment (Hanafin, Shevlin, Kenny & McNeela, 2006; Konur, 2006; Hong, Ivy, Gonzalez & Ehrensberger, 2007).

Gradually, research of a purely theoretical nature has made way for qualitative studies. The perspectives of students with disabilities themselves have increasingly been taken note of, with notable examples including Hall and Tinklin (1998); Riddell (1998); Borland and James (1999); Tinklin and Hall (1999); Lehmann, Davies, and Laurin (2000); Holloway (2001); Fuller, Healey, Bradley & Hall, 2004; Tinklin et al. (2004); Jacklin, Robinson, O'Meara, and Harris (2006); Getzel and Thoma (2008); Leyser and Greenburger (2008); Fuller and Healey (2009); Low (2009); Roberts (2009); Roberts, Georgeson, and Kelly (2009); Scott (2009); Madriaga, Hanson, Heaton, Kay, Newitt, and Walker (2010); Matshedisho (2010); Moraña (2010, 2017); Vickerman and Blundell (2010); Brandt (2011); Hopkins (2011); Moswela and Mukhopadhyay (2011); Riddell and Weedon (2014), and Lopez-Gavira, Moraña, Melero-Aguilar, and Perera-Rodríguez (2016). This trend coincides with the gradual interpretative turn

in disability studies, which was described in the previous chapter. Despite this growing interest in experiential research in studies seeking to include the voices of students with disabilities in the scholarly discourse on inclusion, research has, up to recently, largely failed to provide accounts of their embodied experiences while living in a tertiary environment (Lourens & Swartz, 2016:240). Furthermore, the voices in all the above-mentioned studies represent students with general learning disabilities (Ryan & Struths, 2004; Reed, Lewis & Lund-Lucas, 2006; DaDeppo, 2009; Reed, Kennett, Lewis, Lund-Lucas, Stallberg & Newbold, 2009; Evans, 2013; Prevett, Bell & Ralph, 2013), or students with a broad range of impairments (Fichten, Asuncion, Barile, Robillard, Fossey & Lamb, 2003; Fuller et al., 2004; Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer & Acosta, 2005; Chataika, 2007; Claiborne, Cornforth, Gibson & Smith, 2011).

In South Africa, numerous publications about disabled students within the tertiary system have seen the light, many of which reveal the gap between policy and practice at the institutions concerned. They focus largely on the provision of support for these students, as in Crous (2004a, 2004b); Howell (2005, 2006); Matshediso (2007a, 2007b, 2010); Naidoo (2010); Mayat and Amosun (2011), and Lyner-Cleophas, Swart, Chataika, and Bell (2014). A wide variety of impairments characterise the student groups represented in these studies (Parker, 1999; Swart & Greyling, 2011), including students with impaired mobility (Losinsky, Levi, Saffey & Jelsma, 2003), impaired hearing (Bell, 2013), cerebral palsy (Bucholz, 2017), as well as visually impaired students (Seyama, 2009; Mokiwa & Phasha, 2012; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013).

It is telling that the voices of participants represented in all the aforementioned studies, local and abroad, are of students from the natural and health sciences, mathematical sciences, law, political science, social sciences and humanities, and even from the visual arts, but that none represent the voices and lived experiences of visually impaired music students. In fact, literature concerning music students with a vision impairment in a tertiary environment is very limited. Although a small number of publications on visually impaired students have indeed emerged over time, they are of a more general nature, making the case for reforms in curriculum and teaching praxis, as in Simpson and Simpson (1976), de Zeeuw (1977), and Kochavi (2009). However, none of these publications are based on actual fieldwork conducted among the students in question. Consequently, the lived experiences of visually impaired music students remain a largely unexplored domain.

3.2 IPA studies on students with disabilities: A general overview

The literature review will now be narrowed down to the kind of publications that approach disability studies in the context of university students, from the perspective of embodied phenomenology (more specifically, IPA). In recent years, there were at least four publications internationally that merit close consideration; they reported on research conducted in Canada, Ireland, Australia, and South Africa. The studies each focussed on one respective university only (although perhaps several campuses), with the exception of Lourens (2015), who included two universities in her enquiry.

In line with the kind of design suggested by Smith et al. (2009) (see Chapter 4 for a further discussion), all studies to be discussed here included between 4 and 13 participants. As data collection method, the studies used in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The exception is Lourens (2015), whose large-scale doctoral study included 23 participants. In accordance with suggested options in studies following the IPA design, Lourens also conducted additional focus-group interviews with some participants.

Various disabilities were represented in these studies; two of the four included participants with a fairly diverse range of impairments. For example, the study by Redpath, Kearney, Nicholl, Mulvenna, Wallace, and Martin (2013) included students who had been diagnosed with one or a combination of the following impairments: physical disabilities, such as arthritis and cerebral palsy; mental-health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and stress; mental conditions, such as epilepsy, dyslexia, and Asperger's syndrome, and the eye condition nystagmus¹. In the study conducted by Mullins and Preyde (2013), the selected participants were diagnosed with a range of hidden disabilities, which entailed mostly mental-health conditions, including dyslexia, mental-health disorders, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The remaining two studies focussed on participants diagnosed with distinctive impairments: The research population in the study by Ward and Webster (2018) consisted of students with

¹ Here it must be noted that, although nystagmus entails constant involuntary movement of the eye, which may impair an individual's ability to focus, it is usually a condition that is present along with affected vision. However, on its own, it is not classified as a visual impairment in the full sense.

autism spectrum disorder, and in Lourens (2015), selected participants were diagnosed with a range of visual impairments.

Finally, three of the four studies mentioned the fields of study for which participants were enrolled: Redpath et al. (2013) and Mullins and Preyde (2013) listed the disciplines represented in their respective studies; these included art, history, politics, law, sociology, and computing. Lourens (2015) listed similar disciplines for her study, with the addition of one postgraduate student who studied music.

A more detailed discussion of the actual findings of these studies is called for. The findings in summarised form follow next.

3.2.1 The first study

In the qualitative study conducted by Redpath et al. (2013), the focus was on participants' lived experiences regarding their transition from school to university. The study was conducted at a tertiary institution in Northern Ireland, and the research population included current and former university students. First, participants were invited to share experiences regarding physical barriers they reportedly encountered on campus. These pertained to the physical layout of the academic and living environment as experienced by participants with mobility impairments, the support provision available to them, as well as further recommendations for reasonable accommodations. The study found that the barriers experienced by students included a lack of information pertaining to their transition from school to university, overlapping information regarding on-campus support for students with disabilities, and untimely delays in on-campus support provision. Some participants, particularly those diagnosed with a mental-health condition, reported experiencing feelings of depression, anxiety, and a sense of isolation in the apparent absence of the appropriate support services, as well as insufficient information regarding the course structure of subjects. However, the study revealed that provision of disability and psychological counselling was actually in place, but that this was poorly communicated to the students. Hence, it was recommended that more effective means of communication should be devised and put in place, such as appointing a mentor who could then also assist students before the beginning of the academic year.

Another matter raised was that of academic support: Participants in the study felt that assessment methods were not flexible and inclusive, and recommended that the curriculum should be more responsive and adaptable to the particular needs of students. However, it was emphasised that “inclusive assessment” is not exclusively intended for students with disabilities but the student body at large. Thus, in the opinion of participants, the level of awareness of university faculty regarding particular impairments needed closer attention.

Finally, Redpath et al. (2003) reported that participants frequently chose not to disclose their disability for fear of stigmatisation and discrimination, especially those with hidden disabilities, such as depression.

3.2.2 The second study

A study conducted by Mullins and Preyde (2013) sought to investigate the lived experiences of ten female students with hidden disabilities at a Canadian university. During the interviews, participants were requested to share their experiences of attending university as students with a hidden disability, focussing specifically on those that participants felt had impacted their lives significantly.

In contrast to Redpath et al. (2013), all participants in this study voluntarily reported their disabilities to their university. However, making use of all the accommodations and support measures at their disposal, students still felt stigmatised, especially since their impairment would then become apparent and draw unwanted attention from fellow students. Furthermore, comments about their disabilities (often due to a lack of understanding or because of negative perceptions) resulted in their personal experiences being invalidated, leading to feelings of exclusion. A negative result of the aforementioned factors is that these negative experiences lead participants to internalise public stigma, also termed self-stigma, which adversely affected their sense of self.

An important finding of the study was that participants often had to take extra time to complete prescribed work, such as assignments or course readings. This applied particularly to those with dyslexia or ADHD, which necessitated these students to develop good time-management skills. As can be expected, participants reported feelings of frustration and fatigue as a result of the extra effort required from them to stay on track academically. In particular, they felt

frustrated because they did not regard their performance to reflect their true abilities and potential.

Furthermore, Mullins and Preyde (2013) reported that some participants with dyslexia experienced the teaching system to be inflexible to their needs: Lecturers did not provide multiple options for the presentation of learning material during lectures, nor was there flexibility in modes of assessment. Additionally, it would seem to participants that the lecturers were afraid that the accommodation made for them would give them an unfair advantage over non-disabled students. However, various course-related adjustments were made, such as allowing some participants to complete tests or examinations with the help of a scribe in a separate venue, and providing additional devices such as a text-to-speech computer programme.

Despite all these obstacles, participants on the whole experienced the university to be accommodating to their needs and to promote a feeling of acceptance. The study also reported that the accommodation made for impaired students extended beyond the academic sphere: The student centre provided a safe space for students with disabilities to discuss personal matters, while counselling services were put at their disposal. Prescribed medication was even offered.

Finally, participants recommended that more information about their disabilities should be made available, as well as more funding for adaptive technology. Greater public awareness should be created.

3.2.3 The third study

In a phenomenological study seeking to examine the lived experiences of university students with autism spectrum disorder at an Australian university, Ward and Webster (2018) conducted interviews with four participants, two male and two female. During each interview, the focus was on factors contributing towards or posing a barrier to their success in higher education. Attention was also given to the presence of a significant person in each participant's life. Ward and Webster (2018) found that there seemed to be two overarching factors, which contributed to or posed a barrier to their success: internal states (positive and negative emotional effects)

and mediating influences that are elements in each participant's university experience (either internally or externally derived), which, in turn, impacted their internal states.

The first mediating influence identified was that of "awareness, understanding, and empathy of university faculty" (Ward & Webster, 2018:375). Participants expressed significant feelings of guilt at requesting accommodations from lecturers, which led to feelings of anxiety and depression. Participants felt significantly more encouraged when lecturers possessed a sound level of awareness regarding their condition and consequently displayed empathy toward them, as well as when lecturers understood their particular learning needs and were able to, for example, effectively break down concepts to improve participants' understanding.

The second mediating influence was "peer relationships and friendships" (Ward & Webster, 2018:375). Participants reported to the investigators that they would withdraw from peer relationships and friendships whenever they experienced academic stress.

The third mediating influence identified was "accessing help and support" (Ward & Webster, 2018:375). In the face of academic pressure, participants would often wait until a situation had reached the point of becoming a crisis before reaching out for necessary help and support. However, participants who did access help and support generally felt less anxiety and isolation.

When it came to "problem-solving and coping strategies" (Ward & Webster, 2018:375), i.e. the fourth mediating influence, participants often consulted self-help books in order to improve their understanding of the social aspects of interacting with other peers. They also reported that additional interests of a non-academic nature had a positive and non-distracting effect on their well-being.

Finally, the fifth mediating influence was identified as "self-awareness" (Ward & Webster, 2018:375). The researchers found that participants had a heightened sense of self-awareness and that they were very much in tune with the emotions they experienced. When participants had positive experiences with the five mediating factors, it affected their internal states positively, resulting in increased motivation and determination. Negative experiences, however, could lead to depression, anxiety, and feelings of isolation.

3.2.4 The fourth study

The remaining study to be discussed here is of particular interest. It was conducted on visually impaired university students in South Africa, and is the most relevant research within the context of the present research project. Lourens (2015) conducted a phenomenological investigation into the lived experiences of visually impaired university students at two tertiary institutions in the Western Cape. Similar to Redpath et al. (2013), she reports that visually impaired participants also addressed the problem of adapting to the physical environment during their transition from school to university. In this case, however, the participants explained that it was more about orientating themselves to a new and unfamiliar environment than anything else.

Similar to Mullins and Preyde (2013) and Ward and Webster (2018), Lourens found that participants struggled with the psychological impact of their new environment. In this respect, a significant topic was that of social interaction: When interacting with non-disabled peers, visually impaired participants reported that they were often stared at or, inversely, ignored, both of which left them feeling “not seen” for the individuals they are (Lourens, 2015:173). In response, those participants whose visual impairment are not necessarily outwardly visible to others, would frequently choose to withhold or perhaps even downplay their impairment, and would also take steps to hide the emotional pain resulting from such experiences.

Confirming the findings of similar studies, Lourens reports on the obstacles visually impaired participants experienced within their academic milieu. First, participants were sometimes confronted with lecturers who seemed to be unwilling to comply when steps needed to be taken to make the learning environment more inclusive. This included lecturers writing on the blackboard without explaining to visually impaired students present in the lecture what they were writing. It also applied to cases where other visual media, such as slides, images, or even film presentations, were employed. Furthermore, lecturers did not always make course material available on time, in order for it to be converted into Braille, which is a very time-consuming process. However, the participant in the study who was a music student articulated that lecturers were mostly very understanding and accommodating, in respect of the typical learning needs of a visually impaired student. For example, various means of assessment were allowed in music theory, where the visually impaired participant was allowed to perform exercises on the piano, instead of notating them on paper. Furthermore, submission deadlines were extended

whenever necessary and even private tutor sessions were offered. However, due to the fact that the conversion of music into Braille is a complex and lengthy process, the participant was often obliged to take on the laborious process of transcribing prescribed material for music theory and aural tests him/herself. In some cases, this even included transcribing music for practical lessons at rather short notice, requiring an assistant to read out the notation note by note, which the participant would then transcribe manually using a Perkins Brailler (a Braille typewriter). Since Braille notation cannot be sight-read but has to be memorised line by line – the right and left hand separately – the participant required more time when having to learn new piano repertoire. Lourens reports that the participant would sometimes receive an excerpt of music in a practical subject such as advanced accompaniment merely a week before it had to be performed. The participant found it very difficult to cope with such demands, but often the relevant lecturer would compensate by reducing the amount of work the particular student would be expected to memorise. The participant also reported to Lourens that lecturers were also very timely in sending test papers to the university's Braille office, where it was converted into an accessible format. While it is possible to do this quite easily with regular language texts, conversion of music required a trained Braille music transcriber. Even though lecturers frequently did more than was required of them, long periods of memorisation and concentration left the participant fatigued.

According to Lourens, participants developed and practised self-advocacy, as well as taking the onus upon themselves to arrange for their needs to be accommodated. She also found that visually impaired students often befriended other disabled students, including their visually impaired peers, in order to gain social contact and support. However, the main finding of this study was that, despite great strides being made in the right direction, the visually impaired participants in the study were still not fully included on university campuses.

3.3 Summary

An analysis of the findings gleaned from the studies presented in this literature review, reveals that the experiences of university students with disabilities are multifaceted, dynamic, and varied. Each participant represents a unique set of circumstances, which includes the particular nature of their impairment, personality type, school history (i.e. whether a participant attended a mainstream or special school), university environment (i.e. the availability or not of support structures), and social experiences or encounters with lecturers, fellow disabled and non-

disabled peers, and/or course of study. This suggests that each participant has their own, distinctive personal history and a reality uniquely shaped by factors known or unknown. Students with disabilities should, therefore, not be viewed as a homogenous group.

This literature review reveals a growing awareness of the situation of impaired students in university environments; it is to be welcomed. However, future research would have to differentiate to a greater degree the particularities that pertain to students in different disciplines, to counter the perception that they are a homogeneous group. In this respect, Lourens's study is of particular value for highlighting the lived experiences of a visually impaired music student, even if it is in respect of a single student only. At the same time, it is an indication that further investigation into the situation of visually impaired music students at South African universities is called for, if a more nuanced understanding of their particular circumstances and needs is to be gained – which is the aim of the present research project.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research paradigm

The research paradigm, otherwise understood as the framework of scientific inquiry, refers to the theoretical stance from which an inquiry is approached. The fields of music or, more specifically, music education and disability studies have not traditionally been associated with one another, such as the natural link between, for example, music history and general history. Furthermore, music education and disability studies do not share a theoretical framework that would suggest obvious overlaps in research interest or topics of investigation. At first sight, the two disciplines do not even share common goals, represent the same stakeholders, or address the same audience. Disability studies frequently has a more political agenda, while music education addresses questions regarding teaching praxis. Despite these differences, a shared or common purpose between these two disciplines can be recognised in what is understood as a person-first approach, an approach that places the individual human being at the centre of interest. Lerner and Straus (2006:1) write that, just as race, class and gender have gradually appeared on the already vast landscape of music scholarship, the area of disability, and therefore the impaired musician as an individual, has also gradually become of scholarly interest.

Thus, research conducted within the fields of music education and disability studies take for its subject “the music-making individual with a physical impairment”, in whichever capacity, and involves the study of their participation with this art form (Lerner & Straus, 2006:1). The point is that the act of making music is one of the most profound ways in which an individual can express their humanity and dignity, and make the claim for these to be recognised. This applies in a very special way to individuals with an impairment.

The traditional way in which we as scholars view music does not allow much room for the disabled body. Nonetheless, music as multifaceted art form has a very real physical or bodily aspect to it; whether practiced or merely perceived, it engages the senses: auditory, kinaesthetically, even visually. When performing music, it is not simply about understanding the phrasing, chord progressions, dynamics, rhythm, and the like, but also about technique that

has a physiological basis, which includes bodily functions like controlled breathing, arm movement, bodily posture, and muscle memory. Add to this an acute sense of touch that is not limited to what is commonly called correct fingering but includes the “feel” of the finger on the keyboard, string, or valve, or what could be called “listening through the fingers or through the body”. An illustration of this sense occurs every time one attempts a new instrument: It is not sufficient to simply hear it – one has to play it physically, in order to get the full aural sensation. A similar sensation is located in the voice: A singer does not only hear a pitch or timbre – it is also felt in the vocal organ or wherever else it is produced. Finally, the acoustics of a hall or other venue and the musician’s location within those acoustics are a very real physical sensation.

Within the field of disability studies, these factors have not received much scholarly attention. This is perhaps so because the study of art music in particular – its performance, analysis, social context, and embeddedness, as well as its aesthetics – has placed the musical work and its score at the centre of concern over the course of the last century, largely to the exclusion of other aspects that could also be seen as pertinent. The advent of so-called “new musicology” has broadened the horizons to such an extent that the discourse about music in its various manifestations has also become a subject of inquiry. However, even this has not brought about a surge of interest in the question of the bodily embeddedness of music in addition to its social embeddedness. Disability studies in music has to be broadened to include precisely these embodied aspects of the art form. In some of the above cases there will be no difference in the way how non-disabled and disabled persons deal with them. In other cases, disabled persons will rely to a heightened degree on these physiological aspects, in order to compensate for their respective impairments.

While there will continually be merit for research that has the musical work of art as its central point of interest, one should not lose sight of the fact that music encompasses the many strata that have been alluded to in the previous paragraph. Therefore, practicing music as an art form is not merely an intellectual process but a complete embodied experience. It is in this way that the intersection of music, disability studies, and phenomenology is justified. If, according to Merleau-Ponty and in the words of Steiner, “the body is an irreducible lived perceptual horizon which is absolutely fundamental to our encounter with the world” (Steiner, 2013:451–452), then that applies – to a heightened degree – also to persons with disabilities. It implies that

disability studies in music is not exhaustive when they concentrate only on the medical, social, or political aspects thereof.

When considering the research question of the present study regarding the lived experiences of visually impaired music students within the South African tertiary system, several key questions arise. First: How do visually impaired people perceive the world they live in? How do these musicians, furthermore, engage with their art form in its various manifestations? And finally, what adaptive strategies, personal or otherwise, do they employ when meeting whichever challenges they might encounter along the way, resulting from their impairment?

It is the aim of the present investigation into each of the aforementioned points that an enhanced and more nuanced understanding of each research participant's lifeworld emerges. It is an appeal to recognise and respect the embodied aspects of the lived experience of musicians with vision impairment. Besides, the knowledge garnered of such personal accounts could be of benefit to all music students and other musicians at large. It could add an aspect to their training and education that may hitherto have been underemphasised.

4.2 Research design and method

The present study represents an investigation of the lived experiences of visually impaired music students within the South African tertiary system. To this end, numerous qualitative approaches could have been considered in answering the research question, but due to the focus of disability as embodied experience, the qualitative mode of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed.

According to Smith (2011:10), IPA involves “the detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience”.

As could be deduced, the roots of IPA are grounded within the discipline of psychology (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006), although it has grown internationally to include research conducted within the fields of the human, social, and health sciences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011; Slatman, 2014), and even music education (Joseph, 2014).

In accordance with the above-mentioned definition of IPA, as provided by Smith (2011:10), it should be understood that this discipline is grounded in three traditions: (1) phenomenology, which seeks to uncover meaning; (2) hermeneutics, which entails the interpretation of meaning, and (3) idiography, which focusses on the details of each case or scenario individually. Although the focus of IPA concerns the experiential, this, therefore, does not merely imply a descriptive account of the visually impaired participant's experiences at university but rather the detailed examination of each participant's embodied account of living as music student with a visual impairment, and what each participant's personal interpretation of their own experience was, where after the individual cases were analysed in order to ultimately identify convergent and divergent themes across all cases (Joseph, 2014:95).

For the purpose of the present inquiry, the method of interviewing was regarded as most suited to the nature of the research (Schwandt, 2001:135; Merriam, 2009:34). Due to the fact that both the participants in the present study and myself are visually impaired, this created a sound basis for a dialogical space, where they could share their lived experiences with the knowledge that I would be receptive and understanding toward their stories. Interviewing as qualitative methodology is here linked to phenomenology (Owens, 2007:291). More specifically, the present study has tried to gather rich data by way of a semi-structured interview with participants, as recommended by Smith et al., (2009:58). Consequently, each interview consisted of a key set of open-ended questions to which participants could respond. During the interview, participants were invited to share their personal experiences at university, including their initial impressions about studying music at a tertiary institution; how they experienced the academic milieu in terms of classroom experiences (which included how they experienced a lecturer's curriculum delivery, and how these students felt they were or were not accommodated effectively, as well as their personal experiences of coping within the academic environment), and what university life was like for these participants (focussing on the social aspects of studying at a university), after which room was allowed for participants to focus on any additional matters regarding their study at university as music students with a visual impairment and how it impacted them on a personal and/or psychological level.

4.3 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting that which is to be observed in a study. In a world filled with possibly immeasurable types and quantities of phenomena that could be studied, various

sampling techniques could be employed by a researcher to drastically increase the likelihood of the appropriate “data sources” or phenomena the researcher will select (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:164). When conducting an inquiry, there are several “judgement calls” or design choices that have to be exercised (Yin, 2011:71). The great challenge with reference to sampling is to know which units of data collection must be selected and to what end, as well as the number of units focussed upon. An important factor to consider is that one of the choices guiding the selection of sampling method is that the unit(s) of data collection should yield the most relevant data pertinent to the study.

Within the realm of social research, studies are conducted for various reasons and on varying scales. Within the quantitative paradigm, well-known approaches include censuses, social surveys, or Chi-squared tests. The data collected would be captured electronically and researchers will rely on computer software when conducting data processing and analysis, which will yield quantifiable results. Characteristic in this regard is that findings are usually generalisable within a particular context. When handling quantitative data, the number of data collection units could, therefore, typically be quite high.

Merriam (2009:63) states that sample selection in qualitative research is usually non-random, purposeful, and small, as opposed to the opposite in quantitative studies, where it is more likely. The main objective guiding a choice exercised with regards to sampling relates to what will be done with the data collected.

In comparison to the scale in quantitative research likely being large, the scope in qualitative data would be smaller – but the focus more in-depth. To this end, whatever the sampling method may be, the generalisability of findings will be less probable, as it will be more in-depth and interpretative in nature. Therefore, in qualitative research, the data collection will eventually allow for thick description and in-depth analysis, which is impossible to achieve in a quantitative study.

Babbie and Mouton (2001:176) and Henning, van Rensburg, and Smit (2004:76) distinguish between various approaches to sampling, such as theoretical, snowball, and convenience sampling. The participants in the current study were purposefully selected by way of snowball sampling (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:167; Henning et al., 2004:71). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:71,167,270), snowball sampling is one of the non-probability sampling

techniques, also considered as accidental sampling, employed in cases where the members of a “special” community are particularly hard to locate. Snowball sampling is a procedure that entails the collection of data on those members of the target group the researcher is able to locate, upon which those individuals will also be requested to provide accumulative information, which may help to locate other members of the group they happen to know (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:171). In line with the nature of the present study, the following aspects served as selection criteria for participants who were identified:

1. visually impaired music students currently studying a full-time music degree at a South African tertiary institution, or
2. visually impaired musicians who already attained their tertiary qualification(s) within the past 44 years.

In the apparent absence of any organised records, such as directories or electronic databases, snowball sampling was thus regarded as particularly appropriate in locating participants for this study. This means that contact details of potential participants were gathered mainly through word of mouth, including through various social media platforms. Following this, they were contacted via email or telephonically, to obtain their consent and schedule appointments for the interview. See Appendix A for the letter of informed consent.

Due to the idiographic nature of IPA, the research population of a study would usually be very small, with the aim being that the sample should be reasonably homogeneous, in order for convergence and divergence to be analysed in some detail (Smith et al., 2009:3). Consequently, the number of participants equal 11. Demographically, they varied across a very broad spectrum, including age, geographic location, as well as level of qualification (see Table 1 in Chapter 5).

4.4 Data collection and analysis

Yin (2011:129) describes data as the foundation of a research study, which is a collection of organised and recorded information, usually the result of experience, observation, or an experiment. However, data is not simply information in the world one gathers, and what constitutes as data in a particular context depends on the research question as well as the aims and objectives of the study (Schwandt, 2001:108; Merriam, 2009:86). When comparing the

quantitative and qualitative paradigms in terms of data collection, the primary distinction lies in the difference in depth and orientation (Henning et al., 2004:3). The type of data gathered in a qualitative study would most likely be verbal, either spoken, written, or audiovisual.

The data collection method, also known as data sources, refers to the particular technique employed to collect data, and will vary according to the nature of the inquiry. Seeing that the focus of qualitative research usually moves to gain depth and understanding, the type of method to be employed will typically generate verbal data, for example, by way of an interview, that will ultimately call for the researcher's interpretation.

When considering interviewing as a data-collection method, researchers have a range of options, from structured to unstructured interviews (Creswell, 2007:120). The main difference between the various types of interviews, is to what extent participants have control over the process and content of the interview (Corbin & Morse, 2003:353). In congruence with the proposed design of IPA, and as recommended by Smith et al. (2009:3), the semi-structured interview is in most cases the chosen method of data collection within the IPA design, during which the interview schedule is used flexibly with the participant as primary stakeholder having an important say in what is discussed.

It is generally recognised that IPA presents the researcher with a framework when undertaking experiential research about the lived experiences of participants and how they make sense of these experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006:87; Smith et al., 2009:3; Joseph, 2014:91). Furthermore, in an IPA study, the focus will typically be something that is of significance to a particular individual, such as a major life decision or a major transition, and how they make sense of it. The present study is phenomenological, as it is concerned with visually impaired musicians' subjective accounts about studying at a tertiary institution, and the hermeneutic component is that the present study also takes account of how these musicians interpret and make sense of those experiences. What lends the idiographic element to the study is that each specific participant's lived experiences are examined in great detail, after which patterns of meaning are identified and analysed in order to uncover convergent and divergent themes in the data. It is on particularly the idiographic level that the process of data analysis, therefore, takes place.

All interviews are reality constructing and meaning-making events (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995:4). It is an event where interviewer and interviewee co-construct data to be analysed but should by no means be viewed as a setting that automatically allows direct access to an individual's authentic inner reality (Roulstone 2003:120). According to the model of IPA, a human being is constantly involved in a process of sense-making or interpretation regarding what happens to them. Upon relaying a particular experience to someone else, they are in actual fact in the process of interpreting the particular experience. Therefore, upon listening to another individual relaying a particular experience, it is not the raw experience itself being presented but an interpretation of that experience. As stated by Smith et al. (2009:33):

“Experience is itself tantalizing and elusive. In a sense, pure experience is never accessible; we witness it after the event. Therefore, when we speak of doing research which aims to get at experience, what we really mean is we are trying to do research which is ‘experience close’.”

Writing about Merleau-Ponty's particular concern with subjectivity and embodiment, Smith et al. (2009) furthermore refer to the example of emotional responses: for the perceiver of another's display of emotion, certain behaviour or expression may signify, for example, anger or grief, but while recognising it and empathising with the particular response, these emotions cannot have exactly the same significance. The perceiver observes these emotions from a place of difference or their own position of embodiment. For the other, it is lived through their own body, but for the perceiver it is displayed (Smith et al., 2009:19). In line with what music author Joseph (2014:100) states about the positioning of the researcher when undertaking IPA research, I as the researcher, therefore, took account of my own context and perceptions by way of a process of interpretation, when the data analysis was embarked upon. At this particular juncture of the research, I therefore recognise that this process of reflexivity based upon the interpretations of participants, is what Smith et al. (2009:81) and Smith (2011:9) refer to as a double hermeneutic:

“Although the primary concern of IPA is the lived experience of the participant and the meaning which the participant makes of that lived experience, the end result is always an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking.”

4.5 Data management and processing

As previously indicated, the raw data for this study was captured via a semi-structured interview with each participant. All the interviews were (audio) recorded and later transcribed verbatim, in order for the verbal data to become accessible for eventual analysis, with all the sound recordings and text documents (collectively termed the “data corpus” or “data log”) being stored on a password-protected computer for later retrieval (Schwandt, 2001:86).

According to the recommendations by Smith et al. (2009), the initial data analysis for this study took place as the detailed examination of the data, conducted case by case, which is in line with the idiographic commitment of IPA. Consequently, the raw data of each individual interview transcript was studied line by line, throughout which abundant notes were taken and comments made regarding semantic content and language use, in the hope of discovering various ways according to which each participant speaks and thinks about a given matter, and also how they form their interpretation and understanding about it. As the examination of each case deepened, the identification of emergent themes was made, after which these themes across all cases were clustered into subordinate groups based upon my personal interpretation of the thematic material, in so doing “moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative” (Smith et al., 2009:80). Yin (2011:102) writes that in qualitative research, the primary instrument of data collection is, strictly speaking, the researcher, which means that, although the initial events or phenomena being recorded would likely be external, what is reported and how it is reported are filtered through the researcher’s own thinking and the meaning that is imputed into the data collection. Therefore, the data cannot be regarded as purely external (Yin, 2011:102). In this way, the double hermeneutic referenced in the previous section was achieved.

Thus, prominent global themes were eventually derived, which enabled me to identify and discuss “both convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance” across all cases (Smith et al., 2009:81). Finally, these themes evidenced the findings that were made, which in turn served to answer the research question of the study (Smith et al., 2009:81).

In order to provide a trail of evidence through which the data analysis of the present study would be illustrated, I will include examples of raw data to demonstrate the various levels as they progressed.

4.6 Validity and reliability: Trustworthiness of the study

4.6.1 Internal validity

Internal validity, also referred to as research integrity, can be understood in simple terms as trustworthiness of the researcher and the work produced. Internal validity in research is concerned with the credibility and authenticity of a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:237). It must become clear by way of examining the research that the methodology, process of data transformation, and analysis reflect a coherent and truthful representation. In quantitative research, internal validity typically reverts to the very core of experimental objectives, as well as causality (Graziano & Raulin, 2000:151).

In turn, upholding research integrity in qualitative research is particularly important since “designs and procedures” can be more flexible, making it necessary to provide sufficient proof that “the researchers have gone to great lengths” to do research as accurate and fair as possible (Graziano & Raulin, 2000:151). In general, disclosure about such aspects as research methodology, data analysis, and the ethical issues within the study must be provided by the researcher. In qualitative inquiry, it is furthermore very important that researchers provide disclosure about their personal role and traits that may affect the research, and also identify the reflexive elements within the field-setting of the research that may affect the eventual findings and conclusion (Schwandt, 2001:253).

In line with the recommendations of Smith et al. (2009:81), regarding the process of data analysis in an IPA study, I therefore took the following three precautions:

1. I opted for supervision in order to interrogate and develop “the coherence and plausibility of the interpretation” of my data and development of themes. In simpler terms, I therefore used my supervisors as sounding boards, in order to gain better perspective regarding the development of themes and sound reasoning.
2. Next, I presented the reader with “a full narrative” consisting of “a detailed commentary on data extracts”, which accompanied the introduction of one theme at a time.
3. Finally, as will be further discussed under section 4.9, I acknowledged my position and function as researcher in the present study by way of a reflexive approach regarding my own “perceptions” and “conceptions”.

In addition, I enclosed an excerpt of the raw data, so as to illustrate the level of transparency and credibility upheld in the study.

Furthermore, this chapter is an important step in ensuring that internal validity in the present study is achieved. Critically addressing such issues as research paradigm, design, sampling method, data analysis, data processing, considering ethical matters, and the role of the researcher, are each a component in a trail of evidence that is provided about the study.

4.6.2 External validity

External validity, in some instances also termed generalisation or generalisability, is understood as one of the primary objectives of social research, and involves the particular relevance of an inquiry beyond the given boundaries of the study itself (Schwandt, 2001). Schwandt (2001:88) distinguishes between three types of generalisation, namely empirical, statistical, or theoretical. For the purposes of the current study, the focus will be theoretical generalisation. The particular logic behind the last-mentioned does not imply the reliance on representative sampling. The main criterion is to what extent the selected units, groups, or cases directly contributed to the relevance of the theoretical account, which was constructed by way of this study. Hence, the concern is not with how the selected case is representative of other cases within a broader context but rather to what extent it supported and/or negated the argument that was developed, and the degree of transferability to situations beyond the context of the research (Schwandt, 2001:88).

4.6.3 Reliability

When addressing the matter of reliability in research, it is traditionally associated with the reliability of a particular test or scale (Creswell, 2009:125). In quantitative research, reliability is measured according to what “degree the selected instrument of measurement will produce equivalent results in repeated scientific trials” (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2005:125). When considering the qualitative paradigm in its broadest sense and following the aforementioned claim by Yin (2011:102) stating that the instrument of data collection is technically the researchers themselves, reliability here could therefore be understood as a concern with the scholar conducting qualitative research and the choices they exercise regarding, for example,

design, the selection of data-collection method, as well as the quality of interpretation involved in the process of the data analysis and findings.

Concerning interpretative research in particular, disability scholar D'Alessio (2013:15) writes the following: "[...] researchers are not neutral to the research production and it is necessary to articulate ones' assumptions and presuppositions, in order to add to the validity and reliability of the research conducted." As qualitative research method, IPA therefore stands in direct objection to the positivist notion of the neutral and objective researcher in relation to the study being conducted, since, as Brocki and Wearden (2006:87) point out, IPA is "inevitably subjective" as the same data could be examined by various researchers and will most likely yield many different analyses. In accordance with the claim made by Merleau-Ponty about the body being the window to the world that perceives other bodies from a position of difference, coupled with the understanding that the IPA agenda supports the notion that analyses and findings are always open-ended and subjective, one therefore has to allow room for the fact that, just as multiple realities exist, different interpretations about phenomena may arise.

In recognition of the strong interpretative element present in this study, and in acknowledgement of the open-ended nature of the findings, I involved my main and co-supervisor in the research from the planning phase. Consequently, I drew upon their knowledge and expertise as experienced academics, and frequently consulted with them throughout the process of data collection and analysis. This called for a level of transparency, since raw data was often the focus in order for them to provide sufficient feedback.

As previously stated, and in line with the suggestion made by Silverman (2005:220) and Smith et al. (2009:81), the data analysis, furthermore, also included verbatim quotes from interviews with participants, in order to make the "evidentiary base" of the findings "transparent". In this way, the evidence for these findings are accessible to the reader to form their own opinion on the analysis and findings of the study. Therefore, although "the truth claims of an IPA analysis are always tentative and analysis is subjective", this subjectivity at the same time is "dialogical, systematic and rigorous in its application and the results of it are available for the reader to check subsequently" (Smith et al., 2009:81).

4.7 Ethical considerations

Beyond any methodological or philosophical aspects, a primary requirement in social research is fidelity to the phenomena under investigation. Therefore, second to the conceptualisation of a study, the question of ethical conduct and proof of research integrity follows (Yin, 2011:105). Flick (2009:301) writes that in truth, researchers face ethical issues in every step of the research.

In any research involving human participants, one of the highest priorities for the researcher is to ensure that these persons are treated with dignity and respect (Corbin & Morse, 2003:355; Flick, 2009:301), and that the primary principle of “do no harm” is maintained. In order to uphold research integrity (Yin, 2011), enforcing an ethical code of conduct by an institutional review board is one way of ensuring transparency in terms of how participants’ interests were protected. According to such a system, researchers are required to carefully indicate and also implement the various measures instated to protect human participants in a study (Yin, 2011:106).

It is vital for a researcher to be fully aware of the research-ethics guidelines, since it could greatly aid in the identification, avoidance, and handling of undesirable or potentially risky issues that may arise. Everyone, researchers or participants, are human and could hence be affected by the research process in some way (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009:22). Therefore, the rights and responsibilities of researchers and study participants need to be considered (Webster & Mertova, 2007:89).

In line with the ethics code of SU, ethical clearance was obtained (Project number: HS1208/2016) in order to gain access to potential participants. The institutional review board of SU concerned with human research, the Humanities Research Ethics Committee, conducts the same level of scrutiny as would be the case in biomedical research. Various risk areas are addressed, such as physical harm, emotional distress, or psychological harm, as well as confidentiality and anonymity. The main document relevant to this process is the application form which seeks to establish the primary details about the study, such as the title, aims and objectives, the nature of the study, and the question of risk areas, including whether the research would be conducted on members of a vulnerable population. In order to commence with the

data collection, institutional permission was obtained. As part of this process, the current researcher was obliged to submit the instrument of data collection, as well as the official letter of informed consent that was later disseminated among potential participants to request their partaking in this study. Participants were introduced to the present study by way of the background, and aims and objectives as enclosed in this document. The last-mentioned was supplied to these individuals in Microsoft Word format, but it was also offered in Braille or multimedia (Duckett & Pratt, 2001:815). The majority of participants did not deem this necessary, since they could access the information through various forms of assistive technologies, such as screen-reading or magnifier software. In addition, it was made clear that participation in the present study was voluntary and that respondents could withdraw without reason or prejudice.

To maintain sound ethical standards within social research, information about research participants is private and should only be disclosed with their permission. When people agree to be participants in a research project, they frequently negotiate terms in turn for their consent, including that this privileged information obtained by them will solely be used by the researcher and only in particular ways (Schwandt, 2001:74).

Furthermore, Schwandt (2001:75) writes that participants in social research could suffer damage in two major ways: through the process of insensitive data collection, such as the asking of inappropriate questions, or during the unearthing of sensitive information, for example, traumatic events (Corbin & Morse, 2003:335). However, potentially even more dangerous, is what might become of the data once it has been collected (Schwandt, 2001:75). To this end, I provided official assurance to participants by way of the letter of informed consent. The first entailed the preserving of confidentiality by way of methodological measures, such as altering names and geographical particulars, and the omitting of any other identifying details or attributes of a participant during the data processing stage.

Furthermore, in order to prohibit theft of data or improper disclosure, all information pertaining to the study, such as sound recordings of interviews, interview transcripts, field notes, etc., were stored on a password-protected computer to which only I and my research supervisors had access (Schwandt, 2001:76).

Regarding the concern about psychological harm or emotional distress, researchers are required to provide contingency steps in the event that something untoward occurs (Corbin & Morse, 2003:336). Within the context of the present study, the contact details of the SU Centre for Student Counselling and Development was included in the informed consent sheet, which was provided to each participant.

The interviews took place according to the following two possibilities: at the SU music department, or by telephone.

All interview discussions were (audio) recorded and later transcribed in verbatim fashion. To this end, I was able to use direct quotations when referring to a particular statement by a participant, which serves to raise the level of transparency and credibility in the study.

4.8 Role of the researcher

In scientific inquiry, researchers are generally called upon to adopt a stance of objectivity with regards to that which is being researched. This means that the researcher is required to develop a scientific awareness (Schwandt, 2001:15) about the nature of the study, what her/his function is in the research process, and how to identify the important factors impacting the study in various ways.

As previously stated (under section 4.4), the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis within the qualitative paradigm, since the quest for understanding asks for an entity that is responsive and adaptable to data collected and analysed (Merriam, 2009:15).

The extent of the researcher's role in the field will depend on the type of study that is being conducted: Insider research takes place when a researcher conducts a study in which context they have privileged real-life roles or connections to (Yin, 2011:51). I am visually impaired and studying music at a South African university, which means that this study is conducted from an emic stance, thus positioning me as insider within this context in terms of impairment. Irrespective of the researcher's position in relation to the study, the scholar conducting an IPA inquiry might adopt a more passive or neutral role during data collection, particularly if it is to take place by way of a semi-structured, one-to-one interview, as was the case in the present

study. The aim of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with participants was to garner as much information as possible regarding the lifeworld of these individuals, and by way of the interview schedule that was prepared at the outset of the present study, I posed various open-ended questions to participants which they could respond to as they saw fit.

As I was conducting insider research, it was of particular importance to identify and critically evaluate those reflexive conditions (Yin, 2011) pertaining to my role in the research process, as well as the position of those being studied. When conducting research on members of a vulnerable population, in this instance persons with disabilities, the matter of the researcher-participant relationship has long since been a hotbed of contentious debate and ideologies. Frequently, it involves the interrogation of the conventional hierarchy of non-disabled researcher and impaired research participants. Within this framework, common areas of focus include power relations between researcher and participant featuring strongly in emancipatory research, and the binary conception of “us and them” – also understood as othering, addressed within ethnography (Hammer, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016) – and the broader cultural dynamics of staring and the non-disabled gaze influenced by feminist disability scholars (Garland-Thomson, 2009, 2011; Lourens, 2016; Lourens & Swartz, 2016). It is the complex interplay of these foregoing aspects that perhaps best encapsulates the politics of doing research among individuals who are visually impaired. Often the subjects of medical research or intervention, and almost always disabled participants overseen by a non-disabled researcher (Gordon, 2014), people with visual impairment run the very real risk of being “misknown” (Watermeyer & Swartz, 2008) or paradoxically overlooked (Lourens & Swartz, 2016).

When considering visual impairment research (Duckett & Pratt, 2001; Whitburn, 2014) grounded in phenomenology (Rowland, 1985), the function of the scholar researching from the inside might be ostensibly uncomplicated, as well as uncontested. Indeed, a strong critical trend has been established within disability studies that greatly values the views and expertise of disabled people themselves.

Arguing for the value of researching from the inside, Allan and Slee (2008:139) points out that sometimes there is knowledge which might be obvious in some circles, yet foreign to others. The source of this difference may be situated in geographical, cultural, psychological, or in this case, physical aspects, but sometimes an insider is able to grasp and appreciate something in

the way which an outsider is not able to, and therefore conduct research that is all the more credible resulting from their privileged position.

Theorising about conducting research from the inside, feminist disability scholar Vernon (1997:158) writes the following:

“[...] the closer our subject matter to our own life and experience, the more we can expect our own beliefs about the world to enter into and shape our work, to influence the very questions we pose and the interpretations we generate from our findings.”

While conducting data collection, and later during the process of data analysis, I continuously endeavoured to exercise self-reflexivity. Last-mentioned is a process through which a researcher seeks to identify any reflexive conditions present in the study that may affect eventual conclusions (Yin, 2011:99). To this end, I continuously took reflection notes throughout the stages of data generating, processing, and analysis. Supervisors and other disability researchers were also used as sounding boards, in order to allow various perspectives into the work to gain a level of healthy objectivity. In addition, I also followed up with participants to confirm that all statements were understood correctly and relayed effectively (Merriam, 2009:16).

The blind American writer Georgina Kleege (1998:1) articulates her experience that, despite being congenitally blind, having to theorise about her impairment as outward manifestation and personal experience, within the context of a largely visual world, finally allowed her to learn just exactly what it meant to be blind. In the same way, conducting visual impairment research as insider within the field of music necessitated me to carefully consider all the possible aspects relevant to this type of impairment, and the ways according to which different visually impaired musicians engage with and experience the world and their art form in their own personal and unique ways.

Regarding the researcher's position as insider, there are various positive aspects, as well as potential pitfalls that must be considered concerning dynamics with participants. Someone who may not be a member of a given cultural or ethnic group may initially find it difficult to develop a relationship of trust and acceptance with research participants (Swartz, 2011:51). Therefore, participants might feel more at ease relaying their personal experiences during the interview,

since the researcher could be considered a part of the music community within the society of visually impaired South Africans. In general, there may well be parity in the viewpoints of the researcher and participants of a study (Kitchen, 2000:22), yet a shared experience does not by implication guarantee an identical experience (Martinez & Merlino, 2014:990), even if they share broadly similar bodily variations, a principle which applied in the present inquiry (Kleege, 1998; French, 2004; Kuusisto, 2006; Nell, 2013; Rousso, 2013; Wheeler & Hopwood, 2015; Lourens, 2016; Lourens & Nell, 2016).

When conducting research among people within a vulnerable population, there is often the fear and actual risk that the dynamic between researcher and participant might become unbalanced, perhaps resultant of the participant feeling misunderstood, exploited, or marginalised by a researcher, who possibly is not attentive or perceptive enough to interpret information correctly, or inadvertently disregarding important sensitive issues. Despite the sharing of referential knowledge and even the possible converging of personal life histories, this does not by any means signal that mutual respect and trust may have developed optimally or automatically between researcher and participants in the present study. Due to the community of visually impaired musicians spread across the country being rather limited, a situation may have occurred where a participant privately or overtly chose to withhold certain information during an interview for fear of improper or involuntary disclosure. This, however, is true for any research participant. In addition to these aforementioned issues, Yin (2011:99) writes that “data might get ignored because it did not support the study’s main propositions”.

In certain research fields featuring subjective narratives in one way or another, the most extreme example being that of autoethnography, the issue of voice and authenticity is frequently raised (Schwandt, 2001:15). Arguing for the need to develop collaborative and non-hierarchical methods when researching peoples’ lived experiences, Pink (2009:13) and Nightingale (2009:108) underscore that this would bring to the foreground the question of whose voice is being heard. As Pickering (2009:20) furthermore articulates:

“It is desperately easy to assume what is involved in the experience of research participants (such as could be the case between the researcher and participants of the present study sharing a wealth of referential knowledge on many levels), and perhaps as well feel one has the intellectual authority to configure this on their behalf. The whole emphasis on experience [...] is designed as a counter to these tendencies.”

When writing about the lifeworld of disabled people and the ways according in which meaning could be drawn from it, and with reference to the aforementioned notions of visually impaired people being “misknown” and overlooked by sighted others, disability authors Lourens and Swartz (2016:240) state the following: “[...] despite the physical ‘over’-visibility of disabled bodies, many intricate parts of their personhood remain obscured and invisible.” In line with the approach of IPA (Smith et al., 2009; Joseph, 2014), I sought to engage with participants in a meaningful way by way of, first, listening to the lived experiences of these students as they relayed their respective stories, and carefully interpreting their narratives in all their multileveled nuances, as fellow visually impaired musician with my own subjectivities and insider’s perspective, but also as observant, critical, and objective inquirer (Lourens & Swartz, 2016:240). Ultimately, it is in this way that the liberating and emancipatory power of interpretative research is realised within this study: the recognition of the cardinal importance that the voices of musicians with vision impairment are heard, and that their embodied and social stories are understood, since it will reveal changeable conceptual and social truths, as Watermeyer (2009:100) states: “[...] it will let them know that their lives – with both losses and joys – deserve to be heard.”

4.9 Summary

This chapter commenced with a case being made for the closer consideration of the visually impaired musician and their experience of embodiment. Following this, the research design and method was introduced and discussed, where the study was positioned with the paradigm of IPA, as the focus is on the lifeworld of participants in the present study, and the consequent method of data collection identified as the semi-structured interview. Thereafter, the matter of sampling in research was discussed, and a case was made for snowball sampling, which is regarded as most appropriate in this study. It was also stated that the value of the semi-structured interview in part lies in the fact that the participant or interviewee has greater control concerning the progress and direction of the interview being conducted, and the three dimensions of IPA research – namely phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography – were explained. Regarding data transformation, the matter of organising raw data according to various stages, in order to construct global themes, were discussed. Following this, the matter of validity and reliability of the present study was dealt with, focussing on both internal validity or trustworthiness of the research, as well as external validity or generalisability; the researcher’s reliability was also touched upon. Next, the matter of ethical considerations

relevant to the present study was dealt with, the being placed on issues such as research integrity, research ethics guidelines – including physical harm, emotional distress, or psychological harm – as well as confidentiality and anonymity. Finally, the chapter concluded with a theoretical discussion regarding the role of the research in the field, whereby I positioned myself as insider researcher, and described what my role ought to be during the process of data collection, i.e. the conducting of semi-structured interview with participants, as well as the matter of dynamics between researcher and participant, and the issue of authenticity and voice.

Chapter 5

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The primary research aim of the present study is to investigate the lived experiences of visually impaired music students within the South African system of higher education. The investigation includes such aspects as barriers and enablers within an academic context, academic and support services available, social support from peers, as well as the development and application of personal coping strategies, and finding meaning within the university experience. The key findings are presented within this chapter, which was obtained via 11 semi-structured, one-to-one interviews.

5.2 General information of participants

As indicated by the table below, the ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 78, and they obtained their respective qualifications within the last five decades, i.e. as early as 1974. Although this very broad time span may seem too wide a scope, I made the allowance for the following two reasons: First, a concealed aim of the study was to place the focus on how, if at all times have developed over the past four and a half decades, and what participants' experiences would reveal about the level or absence of change. Secondly, in the recognition that the findings of a qualitative study have a fairly low degree of generalisability (see section 4.6.2), I aimed to include as many participants as possible, in order to enhance the diverse picture that will eventually emerge by way of the thick description and in-depth analysis of each life story. This is in line with the particular strength of qualitative research, as it would go a long way in representing the multilayered global picture formed by each individual life story, which unfolded according to the various unique factors that impacted the nature of participants' lived experiences.

Table 1: Participants' general information

	Pseudonym	Age	Qualification	Degree of visual impairment	Type of school attended
1.	Carmen	30	PhD	Partially sighted	Mainstream
2.	Ruth	65	BMus	Partially sighted	Special
3.	Jonathan	33	MMus	Blind	Special
4.	Thomas	24	BMus	Blind	Special
5.	Richard	40	BMus	Blind	Special
6.	Elenore	67	BA (Music)	Partially sighted	Special
7.	Freddy	78	PhD	Blind	Special
8.	Christelle	37	MMus	Partially sighted	Mainstream
9.	Charly	32	BMus (Hons)	Blind	Special
10.	Mark	33	MMus	Partially sighted	Mainstream
11.	Steven	52	PhD	Partially sighted	Special

In terms of primary reading medium, five participants make use of literary Braille and Braille music, which they alternate with audio recordings; four of these participants employ screen-reading software when working on computers. Four of the other six participants make use of large-print texts and magnification software, while the remaining two are as follows: The first initially relied on enlarged texts, but it was later substituted with Braille, while the second initially made use of Braille but was able to employ visual media after undergoing corrective surgery.

Finally, four South African universities were represented in this study: Stellenbosch University, University of Pretoria, University of the Free State, and University of the Witwatersrand.

5.3 Participants' demographic information

5.3.1 Carmen

Carmen, a partially sighted cellist who matriculated from a mainstream school, attended two universities throughout her tertiary studies. At the second university, she successfully obtained a master's degree in musicology, followed by a PhD some years later.

5.3.2 Ruth

The oldest of six children, Ruth attended a special school for the visually impaired alongside two other siblings, who were diagnosed with the same eye condition. Hailing from a very musical family and displaying an aptitude for the art form, Ruth took up piano and organ, which she continued to pursue throughout her tertiary studies in the 1970s. After a challenging university career, she graduated with a BMus and is now a full-time music teacher.

5.3.3 Jonathan

Jonathan, a black pianist, commenced his schooling before 1994. Up until the advent of democracy in South Africa, the special needs school system in the country was skewed along racial lines, and the school for the visually impaired from which he matriculated was located in a rural and poverty-stricken district. Consequently, the school had very limited resources, and despite music always being on offer at the two schools where white learners were enrolled, formal music training was never a tangible possibility for any learner in black visually impaired schools, like Jonathan's. During his secondary school phase, a musician from the community provided music training on an informal and voluntary basis. However, seeing as this music teacher was not at all familiar with the Braille music code, learners were trained by ear.

As Jonathan continued with these informal lessons, which later also included playing in various jazz ensembles made up of fellow visually impaired learners from his school, his interest in the art form deepened, and the faint notion of him making a living from it eventually solidified in him enrolling for a BMus degree some years later. Today, he is a university graduate, who obtained a master's degree, and he is a well-known jazz pianist both locally and abroad.

5.3.4 Thomas

Thomas attended two universities throughout his tertiary studies. After attending a special school for the visually impaired, he enrolled for vocal performance and graduated with a BMus degree at his second university.

5.3.5 Richard

Richard enrolled at a special school for the visually impaired. He developed a keen interest in piano, which he later pursued at university; because he was eager to learn new instruments, he also tried his hand at organ, oboe, and recorder. Throughout his studies, he also eagerly participated in cultural activities on campus and led a musical band, which consisted of eight members in total, who became quite popular on campus and received invitations to perform at various events. He successfully graduated with a BMus degree, and today boasts a successful and lucrative business as professional musician.

5.3.6 Elenore

Elenore attended a special school for the visually impaired and consequently pursued her BA (Music) degree in the 1970s. Since she is partially sighted, a significant challenge for her was to adapt to new circumstances, as her vision continued to deteriorate. Since technology was not very sophisticated or accessible at the time and she was confronted with lecturers' medical-model thinking², maintaining high academic grades was an uphill battle for her. Despite the aforementioned, Elenore obtained her degree and became a professional musician.

5.3.7 Freddy

Freddy enrolled for his tertiary studies in music after he graduated from a special school for the visually impaired. By far the oldest participant in the research population of the present study, he only pursued his postgraduate studies later, during the 1980s, and eventually obtained

² Medical-model thinking, especially in an educational context, proffers that disabled individuals should adapt to the system, instead of them being accommodated by the system by way of reasonable accommodations and inclusive teaching practices – for more, see section 5.4.2.

both a master's degree and PhD in musicology. A very diligent and ambitious academic, Freddy's doctoral research led him to various countries in the world, including England, Germany, and the United States of America (USA). He is currently already retired, but keeps himself busy with compositions for solo piano.

5.3.8 Christelle

Christelle attended a mainstream school, since she only acquired visual impairment in her adult years. She was diagnosed with a form of macular degeneration known as juvenile Stargardt disease, a genetic eye condition that only presented itself in her early thirties; it resulted in the rapid deterioration of her vision, circumstances that she experienced to be quite traumatic. In part, the trauma for her lay in the fact that she experienced a significant loss of independence, since she could no longer drive or sight-read music notation as effectively. Last-mentioned ended her career as a performing vocalist, forcing her to change to a different vocation (in line with the anonymity clause contained in the letter of informed consent provided to participants – see section 4.7 – specific information in this regard cannot be provided here). Nonetheless, Christelle fought to transcend her many obstacles, which in part lay in the adaptation to her significant life changes caused by her fairly sudden vision loss; she eventually obtained a master's degree.

5.3.9 Charly

From an early age, Charly displayed a special musical aptitude at the special school in which he was enrolled. Following his matriculation, he undertook a BMus degree, followed by an honours degree in piano performance. Apart from piano, Charly also played recorder and violin, and particularly excelled at organ. At first, studying at university was a great challenge for him due to the logistical considerations connected to his vision impairment, yet he regards the experience as a great opportunity for growth and the gaining of greater independence.

5.3.10 Mark

Mark, a partially sighted French horn player, attended a mainstream school and was accustomed to being in the world of the sighted. Since school days, he prided himself on his tenacity and independence, and only requested assistance when he deemed it really necessary.

After earning his bachelor's degree in music, he continued with an honours and later a master's degree as well.

5.3.11 Steven

Steven was visually impaired from birth and consequently attended a special school, where he received his musical training. There, he was taught the Braille music code, which he employed throughout his school career. Following his matriculation, he enrolled as a music student, studying piano performance, and obtained his BMus degree in the allotted time frame. Consequently, he undertook postgraduate studies in music and eventually obtained a PhD.

Later, he underwent corrective eye surgery, which drastically improved his vision. Today, he is a professional musician and even employs regular music print in his vocation.

In line with the tenets of IPA, which was discussed in-depth in Chapter 4, the main question of the interviews (see Appendix B) aimed to elicit information that in turn would serve to answer the research question of the present study: What are the lived experiences of visually impaired music students within the South African system of higher education?

By way of in-depth analysis, three overarching themes emerged, each containing several sub-themes, which are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of overarching themes and sub-themes found in this study

Theme	Sub-themes
1. Academic life regarding tertiary studies	a) Experience of transitioning from school to university b) Academic support c) Access to information d) Interaction with faculty

2.	Social life during university years	a) Participation on campus b) Peer support
3.	Inner life of visually impaired music student within the South African system of higher education	a) Personal coping strategies b) Finding meaning within the university experience

Consequently, the remainder of this chapter will be devoted to a detailed and systematic discussion on the emergent thematic material. A primary aim of this data analysis is not only the identification and discussion of these themes, but also a critical focus on convergent and divergent thematic material.

5.4 Theme 1: Academic life regarding tertiary studies

Under this section of the chapter, the focus will be on participants' experiences concerning the academic environment within the universities at which they were enrolled, and in particular how they experienced it.

5.4.1 Experience of transitioning from school to university

The transition from school to university is a tremendous step for any individual, especially those with disabilities. Due to the fact that visually impaired musicians have, to some extent, different needs to their sighted counterparts, it is of paramount importance to ensure that the necessary support structures are set in place, in order for such individuals to function optimally. Therefore, it is vital for visually impaired students to establish contact with their university of choice, preferably prior to enrolment, in order for all the necessary preparations and support measures to be negotiated.

Although it was not brought up by the entire research population, each participant who commented on the matter relayed either positive or negative experiences.

Elenore indicated that although she possessed all the relevant qualifications that afforded her admission to her chosen programme of study, she nonetheless felt rather unprepared for the real impact of this significant transition in her life:

“I started out in 1970 at [mentions university], and academically I was very well prepared. I had Unisa grade 8, as well as the theory and all those things that I needed to have at that stage, but I don’t think that I was sufficiently prepared for what a university really is. I had been sheltered at [mentions school] because I had everything in Braille and I didn’t think further than my nose about what [mentions university] was going to be like. I was actually terrible with that. I didn’t prepare well enough.”

By way of Elenore’s response, it becomes clear that there were factors beyond academics which in truth would have warranted closer attention and prior planning. For her, moving from a small, sheltered, and familiar environment where the needs of the visually impaired learner were automatically met to the university milieu, which is essentially designed for non-disabled and sighted people, was in a sense traumatic and a transition she was clearly expected to make on her own. This final point becomes evident as Elenore locates the perceived unsuccessful transition within her own inability.

Two participants mentioned parental involvement regarding the transition from school to university, particularly with reference to the establishing of contact with their institution of choice. When posed, the question of whether he got in touch with his university prior to his studies, which commenced in 2005, Charly indicated that he considered various universities at first and took the time to visit those institutions he had identified along with his father:

“So, then my dad and I arrived at [mentions university] and immediately we went to speak with the disability unit. We also went to the music department and met some of the people there. So, that was quite a good experience and I just felt that this was the best university for me. We spoke a little with the head of department and we just spoke about how I would get everything in Braille and we also spoke about how they were going to teach me.”

The adjustment to the university environment was at first difficult for Jonathan, who enrolled for his bachelor’s degree in music in 2000, an experience which echoes that of Elenore. Although he never elaborated on the reason for his enrolment at the university of his choice or whether he had disclosed his visual impairment at the time of his application, he did discuss his experiences which took place at the start of his university career:

“I suppose, at first, obviously, it’s a shocker, you know? It’s been traumatic with specific reference to the fact that it’s drastically different from the high school setting. The school environment is a lot more protected than the university.”

There were also no disability support services available at his university of choice:

“By the time I went for my first week at school, it was hard. Because there was no kind of bracing, like, for example, some kind of programme for disabled students.”

For Thomas, his experience differed from one university to the next:

“If one considers the difference between my first and second universities in quotations ‘service delivery’, I had a better experience at my second university because it was just as if they paid more attention to what a blind student needed.”

He continued by elaborating as follows:

“[...] what happened, for example, at the first university, I would frequently ask a student to email me stuff, then he would always say to me ‘no, it’s fine, I’ll send it to you’. But frequently, when I would follow up, then there would still be nothing [...] And at the second university, I simply didn’t have that problem. If I asked for something, it would, for example, be given to me very quickly. To me, there was a lot more... a better tolerance for the fact that I have a disability. It’s not that I’m making excuses for my disability. It’s just that, because someone who is disabled needs other facilities, we as disabled people need to try and accommodate them through understanding that they won’t always be there when we need them right that moment. But they also need to understand that there are certain ways according to which we learn, according to which we have to do certain things and not able to do it differently.”

Despite his initial claim that the disability unit at the university of his choice seemed to have been up to standard, Charly stated later that the disability unit was indeed not equipped to provide in all his needs as visually impaired music student, who relies on Braille music notation:

“[...] we had books we had to work through, and I wasn’t able to get that in an accessible format because the disability unit does not do music Braille – just regular Braille.”

To this end, he consequently had to rely on the support provision of his music department.

Concerning disability services on campus, eight out of the 11 participants were not aware of the existence of any form of disability office present on campus during their studies.

5.4.2 Academic support

Although in the minority, accommodating the particular needs of visually impaired music students in academic courses or modules is vital to the success achieved by these students. Therefore, it is important for the situation to be assessed in order for the appropriate support measures to be set in place. This usually takes place in the form of reasonable accommodations, where the idea is for the effect of the visually impaired student's disability to be minimised, as well as inclusive teaching practices that may even benefit all students in class.

Overall, both blind and partially sighted participants experienced significant complications with notation-based subjects in particular, which warranted some form of accommodation. In general, participants indicated that the primary form of accommodations for processing the information was by way of the help of departmentally appointed assistants.

Participants accessed music notation via the following options: Braille music, large print, or audio recordings.

When asked about whether she received any form of assistance or concessions from her department concerning particular subjects which she regarded as necessary, Carmen, who was enrolled at two universities throughout her study career, revealed that her experiences in this regard drastically differed between the two music departments. Starting with her first university, Carmen indicated the following:

“Yes, I think... I failed my first year aural because of the notation. And then they got a tutor to help me; we were two people in the little group who got some extra help. So, we got some extra help with aural.”

As part of her PhD research at her second university, Carmen had to analyse music notation, a task that was very daunting to her. In contrast to her experiences with some lecturers at her first university, her research supervisor was clearly more understanding and proactive in his approach, and personally intervened with the musical analysis she had to complete:

“[...] my supervisor helped me with the analysis part quite a bit, because it was a full orchestral score of a piece of music of which there is only one or two recordings of. And it was written out by hand, so visually that was not really going to work. So, he helped me quite a lot. We listened to the music, we organized the analysis in a way that, instead of talking about small sort of very specific things, we could make statements about the music in a much more general way. For example, all the major movements and the major key changes... you know, that kind of thing.”

By way of adjusting the focus of her musical analysis, Carmen’s supervisor made a very necessary and reasonable adjustment to her work, which did not compromise the quality of her work, although it was more tailored to her abilities.

For Thomas, a particular subject warranting assistance was music theory:

“Theory was not the easiest of subjects [...] they gave us somebody to sit with us after hours or after class who’d say to us ‘okay, here is the homework, here’s what you’ve got, here is what was written on the board this morning, here is what he discussed. Are you able to remember? Did you record or whatever what he discussed?’ And then we’d say yes, and he’d say okay, apply this to the following because it is the homework that we’ve received.”

Sometimes, the nature of the presentation of the subject naturally lent itself to participants being able to follow in class. Therefore, although this may not have been a deliberate and reasonable accommodation with the visually impaired student in mind, it nevertheless helped them.

According to Charly:

“[...] we would always listen to pieces or then he would play an example on the piano. But with Schenker[ian] analysis, it was a little tricky because all the students would have the scores in front of them and I only had my hearing to rely upon. But now and again the lecturer would ask whether I’m keeping up, but sometimes it wasn’t that difficult. I could hear the voices moving and there the piece would change to new material. I simply had to listen very carefully and develop a kind of a map in my head.”

When taking the aforementioned into account, it becomes apparent that accommodations were offered to some participants, although not all the instances had a positive outcome.

Similarly, Elenore had problems with orchestration, another notation-based subject, and she felt that the lecturer lacked the necessary understanding about her particular challenges and concessions that could have been made. Despite feeling entitled to receiving help, she

apparently lacked the necessary sense of empowerment or self-advocacy skills to effectively address the situation:

“[...] no course is absolutely cast in stone, as in, this is how it is. Of course, there could be changes made off the record [...] I had a subject, orchestration. It drove me up the walls, because the print size of the reduction or the score was so small, and I had to sit with a strong light and a magnifying glass. I would have a migraine for days after that from trying to do it. And if I think back, orchestration wasn't a beginning and an end of my music degree. If I rather did another subject... if I had the courage to ask whether I could do something else in order to get the marks. It was horrible for me. And I never did well in it.”

For Richard, his experiences with notation-based subjects was decidedly more positive, since the lecturers in question apparently possessed the necessary sensitivity regarding his needs as visually impaired student, and they naturally employed instructional tools, which happened to be to his benefit. As a result, he was never placed in a position where he had to request any form of assistance or concessions in this regard. He explained that, in certain modules, the nature of the subject itself and the way according to which information was presented naturally lent itself to musical excerpts being played in class:

“My one lecturer would on principle play the stuff to us. It wasn't necessary to ask for it. My lecturers went to great lengths to grow cognisant of me and what I needed.”

Christelle relayed her experiences of losing track during a lecture as a result of not being able to follow the visual material that was presented:

“I felt, for example those RefWorks workshops we did at the library, I got totally lost because I couldn't follow on the screen; it was too quick for me. It would've been wonderful if I could've had an assistant to help me who could have said 'now we are here', 'the cursor is there', because it's too quick. That RefWorks is so valuable, but I lost half of it and it created problems for me later on with my referencing.”

This also latches on to the lack of self-empowerment that the majority of participants experienced.

Part of access to information was how participants were able to capture, handle, and process information according to their needs.

Although it is a well-known fact that visually impaired students often require a concession regarding workload adjustment, the only three participants who alluded to the matter were Carmen, Charly, and Christelle.

Regarding the research for her PhD, Carmen stated the following about the amount of information she had to process, which she found particularly challenging:

“It’s a crazy amount of reading. Really ridiculous. And I think that was really challenging in the sense that there is so much reading you have to do for a PhD in the social sciences. And I think that, although [mentions second university] has become very good with having OpenBook and a scanner in the library, which is something I actually pushed for, I think that the Braille office is not at a point where it is possible to process a large amount of material for postgraduate research. I think that they have become very good with converting notes for undergraduates. With students who are doing really high-volume reading research degrees, they can’t cope.”

The following is an example of a reasonable accommodation made for a participant in order to minimize the effect of their visual impairment: During his interview, Charly indicated that his honours degree was extended over a period of two years, as to ease his immense workload:

“I split my honours into two years because I just had too much work, too many pieces to memorise. And so, my lecturer and I decided to do it in two years, and it just would give us more time in which to do all of our things.”

Regarding accommodations, Steven indicated the following:

“When it pertains to specific subject-disciplinary aspects, such as practical or instrumental studies, where there are for example quick studies, one must be willing to make adjustments regarding certain adjustments when the student is not able to perform a certain task, not in the usual way. Thus, the need for adaptation or an alternative form of assessment.”

Despite the aforementioned suggestions by Steven, participants overall indicated three specific matters in various subjects, namely: (1) response adjustments regarding tests, assignments, and examinations; (2) time adjustments, and (3) the arrangement of a designated writing venue. However, by way of participants’ response, it once again became clear that some of them were accommodated in various ways, while others were at times forced to personally devise an alternative way of conducting examinations pertaining music notation.

Concerning assessment, Thomas explained the following:

“Oftentimes, when we’d write tests... sometimes I’d write them at the unit, other times we’d do amanuensis. At other instances, I would make use of the person who helped me with my theory; he would write down my answers and things. I would, for example, tell him my answers and he would write them down, and then later on he would hand the pages on which my answers were written to the lecturer.”

Consequently, assistance could also prove especially helpful in certain instances. Assistance is one example of a reasonable accommodation for participants, particularly in notation-based subjects such as music theory. Despite it being one of the typical accommodations regarding the assessment of visually impaired students, the issue of extended time for examinations briefly surfaced during some interviews, and the few times that participants did refer to it, the matter did not seem like a particularly pressing issue at all.

In the case of Mark and Carmen, they received extra writing time for tests and exams. According to Carmen, she got “15 minutes per hour extra”.

5.4.3 Access to information

The first consideration for a visually impaired music student regarding access to information relates to what their medium of choice would be when studying music, for example to learn new repertoire. For Freddy, who had been taught the Braille code in school, Braille music notation worked most effectively when learning new repertoire:

“I can play Sarie Marais and those types of things by ear, but that’s not part of my field of study. If I want to learn Chopin’s prelude, I learn it in Braille.”

Participants frequently referred to logistical considerations regarding gaining access to information. In the case of Richard, he indicated that he employed more than one medium, but that the obtaining and/or conversion of information into an accessible format was often a time-consuming process:

“Some of the stuff had to be put on Braille back then, my piano pieces. Other stuff had to be read on tape. Sometimes it actually took quite long to get everything done [...] Those days, the music library had to send us stuff via post, and it could take a long time.

And sometimes stuff would get lost in the post and then it was a whole mission. But it was never that bad that it would disadvantage me. They always... my lecturers would always sit with me at the beginning of each year, especially my piano lecturer, and then we would work things out for the rest of the year. Then one could order stuff earlier on so that you wouldn't land in a predicament later on."

Similar to Freddy and Richard, Thomas was also a Braille user in school, yet he chose to abandon the usage of the music Braille system, since he thought it to be too cumbersome for his particular purposes and abilities:

"Often the lecturer who taught us theory would try and accommodate me with Braille, but the thing is that Braille later on just became too slow for me. Half of the time, I couldn't keep up. If we, for example, would have to analyse something, I would, for example, find it easier to do it by ear because the Braille is just too many pages. There are too many lines and pages I have to read and where a sighted person simply has everything in front of him, Braille is just a little spread out more and it's a little more pages because they would have a music piece of about two, three pages and we would have something that is five to ten pages because all the intervals and stuff can't be written out the way they have it."

Regarding access to, the processing of, and even the production of music notation in particular, Jonathan by far faced the most daunting circumstances in comparison to all the other participants in the present study. He was not really musically literate, despite his acceptance at the music department on account of his musical potential. During his interview, Jonathan reported that because he did not attend the Pioneer School, he had been informed that he was not permitted to take the requisite course in Braille music, which is on offer there, and consequently he was not in a position to make use of the Braille music library at the Pioneer School, to date the only library of its kind on the African continent. Consequently, he was unable to learn and employ the Braille music code for learning new repertoire or complete music theory-related assignments in the usual way for a blind musician. Consequently, he was forced to adapt once again to seemingly impossible and insurmountable circumstances, and with the help of a willing lecturer and another staff member at the disability unit of the university, they were successful in devising an alternative and quite innovative, tangible music notation system, which Jonathan employed with considerable success:

"She figured out that there's a cellophane... you know, a cellophane packet... so it's attached to a paper. Now you've got two layers: you have the cellophane... but the layers are separable. But on each end of the cellophane, it's attached to the paper. So, think about it like an envelope. So, they would put a spongy substance that you could

insert between the two, then you draw on it. As you draw the embossed diagram, you can actually touch it. [...] If there are exercises, I would draw the staff lines. And I'd go to a tutorial to teach me how to draw the treble clef and all those things. So, I would study the same notation, instead of a transcription."

Following the aforementioned, a further consideration of great importance is that of visually impaired music students and their access to facilities, such as a university library or appropriate assistive technology. Concerning the university library, Christelle articulated that she experienced trying circumstances resulting from the severity of her eye condition:

"And I also had trouble searching for books in the library because, for example, I would stand there with my magnifying glass and my glasses upside down searching for names and digits."

Regarding the question of visually impaired music students in higher education, Steven remarked the following:

"I think what the lecturer must acknowledge is the fact that sources and resources aren't necessarily readily available to these students. I would assume that one has to possess a particular sensitivity and awareness regarding, for example, the regulation of these sources and resources pertaining to, for example, assignments to be completed – that it is not always readily available, or that it has to be processed in some way, or in some way made available or accessible for the usage of the student."

5.4.4 Interaction with faculty

In order for a visually impaired music student to receive all the help and support necessary to function optimally within the academic milieu, an important factor to consider is that of communication with faculty; an open channel of communication between student and lecturer could address and resolve problems resulting directly or indirectly from the students' visual impairment during lectures.

Ruth did not think that her visual impairment would create any problems with other lecturers:

"I don't really think that the lecturers had a problem working with me because of my bad eyesight or anything."

When asked whether he had much contact with lecturers, Freddy responded as follows:

“No, nothing special. Nothing different to the ordinary.”

Therefore, Freddy assumed full responsibility for his academic progress at university. The only time Freddy’s visual impairment was indirectly referred to was at the start of each new module:

“I took my tape recorder, and then I’d go to the lecturer at the start of the course and ask him if I was allowed to switch on my tape recorder, and then he’d say yes.”

When asked about the aforementioned lecturer in orchestration, which was the subject she experienced all these challenges with, the response Elenore gave suggested that the lecturer in question did not seem to have a high level of sensitivity or understanding about her visual impairment:

“It is a pity that I have to say it in his absence, but he didn’t. And he also saw how I made mistakes by way of me simply not reading through stuff correctly and chose lines mistakenly and assign notes to instruments which [I] could not at all handle. It was really the worst for me.”

Except for Freddy, who never addressed the matter during his interview, all the participants who enrolled for postgraduate degrees reported that their research supervisors were very supportive and understanding about their needs as visually impaired music students, and would frequently go the extra mile in aiding wherever necessary.

For the research for his honours degree, Charly received help from his supervisor in the following way:

“[...] when I did my honours dissertation, my research supervisor helped me a lot to get resources.”

For Christelle, the support of her research supervisor was a great help and very endearing, and it seemed that he indeed went a long way to accommodate her:

“What I found with him was he was incredibly nice. At that stage I had so many troubles, including the fact that I was unable to drive and therefore had no transport, he simply offered to come all the way down to my school to see me there. He really went to so much trouble for me and I had such appreciation for it. I never made use of it, but just that compassion. That he embraces your situation and would want to help and encourage you.”

5.5 Theme 2: Social life during university years

The second sphere to the lived experience of participants during their years at university was that of their social life. Encompassing this realm includes their integration on campus in student life, as well as the social support which they had access to.

5.5.1 Participation on campus

The focus shall now shift to how participants experienced student life and whether they integrated on campus at all. For some participants, participating in campus life – be it the building of a social network or partaking in an extramural activity – was not a foremost priority. When asked about her participation in campus life, Ruth explained that socialising was not a primary objective for her and that she was more concerned about her academic progress:

“[...] look, I wanted to play piano. I wasn’t terribly interested in all the other stuff, but I was interested in the practical component, so I practiced a lot. I’d rather do that than ‘social’, for example.”

For four participants, student life was very enjoyable, and they were especially eager to participate in cultural activities. According to Elenore:

“[...] I did sing in the choir. Not the university choir, but the church choir. I did that for the first two years.”

Richard seemed to have had a very busy social life and was eager to participate on campus whenever given the opportunity:

“I actually participated in things such as the varsity orchestra and stuff like that. [...] I did very little of what students do at the conserve. Everyone always thought that we were these washed-out weird souls and I was eager to prove the contrary.”

When asked whether he ever belonged to any student organisations while studying, e.g. for students with disabilities, Charly indicated the following:

“No, not while I was studying. I don’t really think that there were such organisations at all.”

For Christelle, she intentionally did not socialise with other individuals with disabilities, resulting from possible fear of stigmatisation and also self-stigmatisation, i.e. the internalisation of external stigmatisation possibly residing regarding persons with a vision impairment:

“[...] I was so scared to get in touch with other visually impaired people, get really in touch with them, because my situation was so awful, I felt that it would only remind me about it.”

5.5.2 Peer support

Due to logistical considerations relating to her visual impairment, Elenore chose the university residence closest to the music department, although she soon learnt that, since the residence was only meant for female students from second year of study onwards, she was the only first year resident living there:

“So, then I made a further error to go and live in [mentions residence], the hostel which was close to the old conservatorium, but that cut me off from the other first years, so I was very isolated. It truly felt to me that I was thrown into the deep end and [was] simply alone.”

Although he did not express feeling marginalised in any direct way, Jonathan did refer to the fact that there was a sociological divide or difference between him and his non-disabled/non-blind, non-black, and more affluent peers at university, and that he was all the more vulnerable because of it:

“[...] the kind of people I’m around now are occupying a different class [status]. Also, I must say, there is other class issues as well. I think if you’re black and blind and poor, the dynamics are rather hectic because when other students come here, their parents bring them, and they are assigned other people to help them.”

Similar to the experience relayed by Elenore, Jonathan at first experienced social isolation and almost alienation, which forced him to become innovative and self-reliant:

“So, for the first month you really have to tag along. I really felt alone.”

For Thomas, his social experiences at the second university he was enrolled were on the whole very positive:

“I was there the first day and I already had someone to talk to, or there were already people who would come up to me and ask me questions like what you are interested in, who I am, what I do... that kind of thing.”

When asked whether she ever asked for help from fellow students, Christelle said:

“One thing I’ve found is that people are very willing to help, but that they don’t always have the time.”

It seems that Charly had a fairly positive social experience as far as social support was concerned:

“There were a lot of people who helped me, with whom I became friends.”

Nonetheless, Charly relayed an experience which spoke of acute marginalisation and how his fellow students, in an incredible display of solidarity, worked with him in order to surmount the potentially catastrophic end result:

“In my third year, this one lecturer with music methodology, she explained how to teach children and she told me that I would never be able to teach people music. I don’t know why. My classmates and I decided that we would work out a system that I could do, in order for me to just pass the examination. We had these flash cards, which I could show the pupils in order to explain what I meant. Then my classmates and I said no, I was going to make it through this examination. I was precisely going to prove this lecturer wrong. I had some teaching afterward and then I simply did everything in Braille. So, I wrote myself flash cards, which I could use in the examination, and she was kind of astounded to see how it worked.”

About student organisations but more importantly peer support from perhaps other visually impaired or even disabled students, Ruth remarked the following:

“Sometimes you feel extremely isolated. You try to fit in, but you’re extremely isolated because you... no one knows what it must be like to stand in your shoes.”

However, when asked about her social life on university campus, Ruth responded as follows:

“There was a small group which I fit in, and in general... I never felt that it was an issue that I couldn’t see well; I felt acceptance there. But then there would be others who, when you weren’t able to see or when you had to look closer, would make remarks. But overall I had my few friends and that was fine; that was enough for me.”

5.6 Theme 3: Inner life of visually impaired music student within the South African system of higher education

The third level identified in the lived experiences of participants was that of their inner or subjective lives. Here, the focus shall specifically be on the psychological aspects of studying music at a South African university, as well as their personal perspectives about their tertiary studies.

5.6.1 Personal coping strategies

In this context, the concept of coping strategy is used to indicate a measure taken by an individual in order to adapt and function within a particular situation. Participants reported developing many personal coping strategies on academic, social, as well as individual levels.

The first personal coping strategy that was identified was that of self-advocacy, which mainly surfaced within an academic context. As an example, Carmen explains that whenever reasonable accommodations had to be arranged, she would usually take it upon herself to voice her suggestions to relevant lecturers:

“In general, my thing when I had a problem was usually to try and suggest something because I kind of realized that I would probably make a better suggestion than they would.”

Therefore, Carmen felt confident to speak up since she knew that she understood the challenges she faced and the abilities she possessed, and could not only articulate her needs effectively but provide appropriate solutions as well.

In particular, the skill or strategy of self-advocacy could also be very useful when the time arrives for a visually impaired student to ask for help. Although he regarded himself as independent, Mark indicated that he would seek for help – but only when he deemed it truly necessary:

“I was always one who would want to do his own thing, and I wanted to live as normally as possible, so I didn’t really ask for favours or anything. But if I really needed something – if I needed a book in large print, or I needed a machine, or something, or extra time – then I would ask for it.”

Unfortunately, for some participants, particularly for Elenore and Ruth, who studied during the 1970s, the skill of self-advocacy was never optimally developed. Both participants relayed experiences of being faced with unreasonable circumstances, which definitely warranted some form of reasonable accommodation, yet they never felt motivated or empowered enough in order to voice their needs in this regard. As an example, Ruth relayed the following experience in class about an obstacle she encountered during a music history test:

“[...] they showed these slides... I can’t remember... it was about a time period in history or an instrument or something, but I couldn’t see. I simply could not see it, but I also didn’t speak up and say that I couldn’t see it, you know. I just took a guess and I just wrote down anything, and I didn’t get any marks for it.”

When asked whether she would ever approach a lecturer about, for example, requiring extra elucidation during a lecture, Elenore merely replied:

“No, I was too skittish.”

Furthermore, although Elenore declared her disability during the application process, as indicated above, she expressed great trepidation about voicing her anxieties and insecurities with university faculty, as she envisaged the possibility that this admission may be to her detriment, perhaps being prohibited access to or even expulsion from her course of study:

“[...] I was truly extremely fearful about sounding anxious about not getting my stuff done – because what if they kicked me out?”

The second coping strategy practiced by participants was self-reliance; participants strove to be self-reliant and function autonomously as far as possible. In some instances, this led to a reluctance to seek help when necessary. In spite of his visual impairment, Freddy adamantly regarded himself as entirely self-reliant and endeavoured to function autonomously:

“[...] I never expected any special treatment from them. I never stood on the fact that I can't see. Nothing like that. It was ridiculous to do it.”

For those participants who seemed reluctant to practice self-advocacy when necessary, self-reliance became a key objective. For Ruth, who was never offered departmental assistance in one way or another, her viewpoint was as follows:

“[...] you simply had to do everything yourself. You simply had to figure out a way to let the whole business work.”

In the case where a particular service could not be rendered, participants felt obliged to assume the responsibility on their own. Referring to the disability unit at the university where he studied, Charly explained that Braille services were provided. However, this did not fulfil in all his needs as visually impaired music student, as the transcription of music print into Braille music is a specialized service, with the continent of Africa only housing two trained Braille music transcribers. Furthermore, other media such as graphic material was also inaccessible to him:

“At one stage there was one book on music history which was filled with pictures which they told me ‘sorry, we can't print this book for you’. Later on, I basically learnt to do the scanning by myself.”

However, while self-reliance was apparently regarded as optional for some, it appeared to have become a last resort for others, like Jonathan, especially when faculty, institutional, or peer support was lacking:

“[...] if my friends weren't available, it was really hectic. But it helped me in the sense that within those times, I was forced to find a different alternative, you know, than most people.”

Conversely, the third coping strategy is that of social support. In a sense, this coping strategy is viewed as an alternative to self-reliance, particularly when participants experienced the foregoing in certain scenarios to be ineffective. For some, social support in this regard was sought within the institution itself, while in certain instances, participants felt more secure in seeking help from individuals who were not affiliated with the university.

Regarding access to information, Elenore was left to her own devices. In the apparent absence of support from the university in this regard, she was essentially forced to rely on the benevolence of the general public for assistance with her work:

“Through the church, one would get people who are willing to help. Because I was new in town, so in this way I tried to work through a friend of mine who was also a churchgoer, in order to get hold of someone to read the class notes for me on a cassette. [...] It was an uphill battle.”

Similarly, she also reported that she later received some help from her classmates as well:

“Well, my classmates, as I got to know them better, I would sit next to someone whom I could quietly ask. Or if I'd get lost, they would help me find the place again on the score or whatever. And often I would walk with some of them to class, so that it would be easier for me and less stressful to get to the next classroom. But I didn't really ask one of them to read something to me or whatever. Although, I did meet a friend late in my first year, and he meant wonders to me in that he could at least drive me to people who were willing to read to me. And if there was a crisis, he could jump in and read something to me. He couldn't do everything because he was also just a student.”

Although Freddy indicated being opposed to ask for help from lecturers or his university, and vehemently regarded himself as autonomous, he nonetheless sought support from his wife regarding tasks which he as blind and Braille-using musician could not perform:

“My wife, of course, is sighted. She knows music. She doesn't play herself, but she knows. She writes everything that I right in Braille over into sighted print.”

The fourth coping strategy is that of the masking of emotional hardship and pain. Participants who elaborated on the matter hid their subjective emotions either for fear of the negative perception it could create about them as individuals whose feelings of self-worth were affected, or because some emotions are simply too painful to face, and they do not feel equipped to deal with it. Steven's statement could be grouped under the first reason:

“You must keep your hand as closed as possible; people must not know what you're going through. It's a precarious sort of situation: people must not know that you've done this and that much, since people have a way of negatively regarding this. You ought to know yourself that you have to work harder, do more, and that things take more time to be worked through and processed.”

Following Christelle's vision loss, one of the things that affected her independence was the fact that she could no longer drive:

“You know, that is the thing of becoming visually impaired later on, or becoming visually impaired like I have because I have peripheral vision but no central vision, then it doesn't look like you have an eye problem if you have to start reading a menu or whatever. And then one of my friends told me: ‘But it doesn't look like something is wrong with your eyes’, because it was kind of jokingly. So, I told him: ‘I'm only ignoring my car’, because it is a joke, you see. And therefore, in my mind, I told myself that I was fine and just tell little jokes about it. I'm always on my own and laughing and jokes are my saving grace, but it doesn't heal inside.”

Therefore, Christelle's disavowal of her deep-seated emotional turmoil and pain was in the form of her seemingly light-hearted attitude and joking about her loss of autonomy.

Elenore relayed a story of acute marginalisation at the hand of a music lecturer, whose subject she was enrolled for. Perhaps as a lack of self-empowerment, or as a result of her fears as mentioned above, or even perhaps because she internalised the views of this particular lecturer, she kept silent about this very negative experience:

“At the end of my second year, I don't want to mention names, but I was with a piano lecturer who said to me he couldn't believe that I was accepted for BMus; he didn't think I would make it. I was with him for two years. I never, never discussed this with anyone. You try and pull through because you know that you would have to earn your bread and butter at the end of the day.”

5.6.2 Finding meaning within the university experience

Studying at university is a very important and meaningful time in the life of every individual undertaking a tertiary qualification. Therefore, the final prominent sub-theme that emerged during the interviews with participants was their personal perspective regarding their tertiary studies and what it meant to them in the long run. Despite having faced numerous challenges along the way, all participants felt their tertiary studies were meaningful endeavours.

For Charly, studying at university was on the whole a very enriching experience:

“It was really very nice. I learnt a lot and I met many people, and it was just so nice being part of the student life for about five years.”

When asked whether his overall experience of his university career was positive or negative, Thomas said:

“I can honestly tell you that my days at university were the best years I’ve ever had. I learnt a great deal. Because I was very far from home for a while, I learnt many survival skills. I had many experiences that made me as an individual more positive. There were just so many things I could take with me from university and carry on with it for the rest of my life. If it wasn’t for university, I wouldn’t have been the person I am today.”

Therefore, his university career afforded him the independence he always wanted, as well as an opportunity for significant personal growth.

As a budding musician, being able to study in a direction he felt extremely passionate about was a momentous milestone for Mark:

“It was a wonderful experience for me, since I could focus on what I really wanted to do: music.”

Although he never divulged any particular details regarding his personal journey during his years enrolled at university, Steven did however articulate his personal opinion regarding the achievement of success as visually impaired music student within higher education:

“Look, visually impaired music students must, of course, be able to get good advice, but at the same time be aware of what they themselves can and cannot do. I think that, to a great extent, it entails a degree of self-examination or soul-searching and the garnering of good advice. [...] Live as positively and as ‘normally’ as possible, since in the end, it’s always the end result that matters the most.”

5.7 Summary

The current chapter commenced with a basic outline regarding the focus of the study, with reference to the findings presented. In order to provide a contextual backdrop against which the findings should be read, the following section provided background information of each research participant, followed by a presentation of their demographic profile. Next, the first main finding was introduced, namely academic life regarding tertiary studies, within which the issues of transitioning from school to university, academic support, access to information, as well as interaction with faculty were discussed. The second theme, social life during university years was introduced and discussed by way of focussing on the matters of participation on campus, as well as peer support. Finally, the focus shifted to the third theme, inner life of visually impaired music student within the South African system of higher education, where the focus fell on personal coping strategies that had been identified in the data, as well as what meaning the experience of studying at a tertiary institution held for participants on a personal level.

Chapter 6

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to interpret the findings that emanated from the individual case studies and interviews reported on in Chapter 5. The purpose is to generalise these findings in such a way that an account can be given of the silent – or even silenced – voices of visually impaired music students. In line with the statement of Michalko (cited in Chapter 2) regarding normalised assumptions of the lives of people who are visually impaired, participants' stories were listened to as lived experiences in their own right and not as shadows of sighted musicians. In this way, Rowland's recommendation (cited in Chapter 2), i.e. that in research of this kind the "analysis of individual situations" has to be considered, is followed as far as possible. However, as Merleau-Ponty cautions regarding the conducting of IPA research, we can never have direct access to the lived experience of another. However, we can observe and perceive what is shown to us, be it by taking note of another's actions or by listening to another's life story, in order to arrive at an interpretation that has value as a research outcome..

6.2 Personal backgrounds of participants: Confronting inequality

According to the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (Republic of South Africa, DHET, 2012:1) the education system in South Africa still "bears the marks of apartheid", in spite of the transformation that has taken place since 1994. Inequalities, continued discrimination, and sub-standard levels of education in former black institutions have still not been eliminated completely, despite the vast resources that have been poured into the system. This is a highly regrettable state of affairs and an indictment of those responsible for the education of the young generation. Comparing the story of Jonathan, the only black participant in the present study, to those of the other participants, a clear and perturbing picture about racial and material inequality in the so-called "blindness sphere" in South Africa emerges.

Concerning the two formerly white schools for visually impaired learners in South Africa, financial hardship rarely threatened the infrastructure of these institutions during former years.

Frequent and substantial financial injections from the Dutch Reformed Church were received, who must have regarded the school as an excellent opportunity to put into practice its calling to be of diaconical service to the less fortunate members of society. Furthermore, a great deal of effort was put into organising all manner of fundraising events to collect financial donations from the general public. These practices were in line with the welfare mentality located within the medical discourse surrounding visual impairment, proffering that such individuals are reliant on the benevolence of well-doers and the alms of generous benefactors, and deserved to be given opportunities which would prevent them from falling into an otherwise “inevitable”, pitiable demise. Music would have been seen as one of the disciplines in which visually impaired individuals could excel if they had the talent and which opened a perspective on a possible future career. At particularly the Pioneer School, learners enjoyed access to a wealth of resources, including two libraries – one containing general reading matter, and the other a Braille music library, which is the largest (known) of its kind on the African continent – and a music auditorium, a two-storey facility with practice rooms, music classrooms, and a small-sized performance venue with a grand piano, harpsichord, and room for 100 audience members. If a learner undertakes musical training at the school, the Braille music code is taught, and students are able to do accredited practical and theory courses such as Unisa, Royal Schools, or Trinity exams. In addition, the school also houses a printing house, which fulfils the printing needs of Braille textbooks around the country, and even has a music division where the transcribing of printed music into Braille notation takes place.

At Jonathan’s school, the scenario was remarkably different. Built up under the leadership of a Lutheran missionary in a rural district of South Africa, he and his fellow pupils were for the most part isolated from mainstream society and left to fend for themselves. According to Kasiram and Subrayen (2013:70), visually impaired people are already vulnerable to poverty. The learners who attended this particular school, especially prior to 1994, were extremely vulnerable, not only on account of their visual impairment but also because they were people of colour, who, for the most part, came from poverty-stricken and poorly educated backgrounds. According to Jonathan, the adverse situation was exacerbated when, for example, clothing donations intended for the financially needy children were instead sold to them by staff members for personal gain.

As indicated in Chapter 5, the musical culture in Jonathan’s school was very informal and unstructured. A musician who agreed to teach music at the school on a voluntary basis was the

main inspiration behind Jonathan's musical endeavours. He inspired Jonathan to make the most of his musical talent, a talent which would otherwise have remained dormant. When Jonathan started his university studies, the transition from school, which most students find hard to cope with, was particularly difficult for him, partly because his school background was not very strong, but also because he came from poverty-stricken circumstances. In addition, he had very little familial support, be it psychological, practical, or otherwise.

Engelbrecht (2006:260) states that the abovementioned green paper does not acknowledge that the special needs system in South Africa was fragmented in more ways than one before 1994. Separation along racial lines on all levels of society was coupled with the enactment of policies such as the 1948 Special Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). But children "categorised as having special needs" were also separated from "ordinary children" for their education. The latter kind of separation, however, did not necessarily have its roots in the ideology of apartheid but rather in medical model thinking (Crous, 2004b:228). This resulted in the establishment of special schools for visually impaired children, e.g. the Pioneer School in Worcester, the Athlone School for the Blind, as well as the Prinshof School. As mentioned previously, the medical model ideology located the root of the deficit within the child with an impairment. Even if one accepts that these schools were established with the best of intentions and on the basis of the best knowledge available at the time, they were founded on a model, which reinforced the idea of biological inequality. In agreement with the views of Garland-Thomson (1997:6, see section 2.3.1), this resulted in the placement of learners and students in a hierarchy of bodily traits "dictating status and power", which led to exclusionary practices in respect of people with impairment. This removal from mainstream society had a disempowering effect on the individuals concerned and conditioned them to become dependent on teachers and caregivers. In extreme cases it could be argued that this model denied them the enjoyment of basic "social, political and economic rights" (Crous, 2004a:210).

The Constitution, which came into effect in 1996, abolished discrimination of all kind. It paved the way for a shift away from medical model thinking by adopting the global agenda of inclusive education (van Rooyen & le Grange, 2003:152). This also allowed a move towards the social model of disability, which, as indicated in Chapter 2, located individuals' disability in structural elements. However, Howell and Lazarus (2003:290) point out that debates surrounding inclusion took place with the school context in mind. Only a short passage was devoted to the inclusion of students with disabilities within the system of higher education in

White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Republic of South Africa, DE, 2001:31):

“The National Plan for Higher Education [...] commits our higher education institutions to increasing the access of learners with special education needs. The Ministry therefore, expects institutions to indicate in their institutional plans the strategies and steps, with the relevant time frames, they intend taking to increase enrolment of these learners.”

It is important to take note of the fact that the medical model discourse had a profound and lasting effect on the lives of many of the participants in the present study. Ruth, Elenore, Steven, Freddy, Richard, Christelle, and Jonathan all grew up when medical model thinking was still prevalent in schools and in society at large. All these participants – except Christelle, who attended a mainstream school since she only became visually impaired in her adult life – matriculated and enrolled at university, in itself a momentous step in gaining greater independence. But they attributed the problems they encountered in this environment to their supposed inability to adapt. Van Rooyen and le Grange (2003:153) rightfully assert that the medical discourse “decentres and silences” the voices of persons with disabilities, particularly concerning their subjective experiences, giving way to “objective observation and individual deficit”. Consequently, these participants tended to keep silent about their personal struggles, subjective fears, and the barriers that inhibited them, perhaps for fear of reinforcing the negative medical deficit view, or due to an inner motivation not to accept defeat, to overcome their impairment, and to achieve success.

Central to the medical discourse is the promotion of normalised assumptions of disability. As cited in Chapter 2, Michalko argues that according to this view, visual impairment is seen as a shadow of sightedness. Consequently, subscribers to the deficit view of disability will attribute any problem to an individual’s visual impairment, instead of evaluating it on own accord. Consequently, the abilities of the visually impaired person are then also automatically regarded as inferior to those of sighted individuals. Therefore, the impaired persons become used to having lower expectations in life. Those who have been educated in such a system become conditioned to these negative perceptions and skewed convictions regarding their potential. Often the individual in question will internalise these normalised assumptions, which will have a great bearing on their lives in the future.

6.3 Barriers in an academic context

Swart and Greyling (2011:81) state that “while legislation and policy might create a higher education environment that is sensitised to the support needs of students with disabilities, this does not necessarily mean that the policies are converted into effective practice”. Regarding the transition from school to university, the lack of assistance and knowledge experienced by some participants in this study echoed the findings in the studies by Mullins and Preyde (2013) and Redpath et al. (2013). In Mullins and Preyde, participants underscored the importance of the student centre for counselling services, although participants in the present study were not aware of any disability related services to which they had access. Regarding the transition from school to university, parental assistance was cited by some participants as being instrumental in establishing contact with their institution of choice. In particular, the experiences relayed by Elenore, Ruth, and Jonathan are similar in that they did not receive any prior guidance and support from the schools they attended, or from their prospective universities.

Similar to the participants in the study conducted by Lourens (2015), participants mentioned that adapting to a new physical environment was challenging. For Elenore and Ruth, adapting to the physical environment was difficult, as they chose to stay in the university residences closest to the music department. In addition, participants sometimes dealt with uncompliant lecturers when steps to make the learning environment more inclusive were called for. This includes writing on the board without further verbal elucidation and additional verbal input, or using other visual media. A telling example is Ruth, who on a certain occasion could not identify visual media during a class test. However, inclusive teaching practices were at times a natural outcome of the teaching style practiced by a particular lecturer. Participants reported that music theory lecturers would play the music excerpts that were written on the board on the piano. Richard mentioned such an experience, which provided the visually impaired members in class with the information they needed.

However, Charly experienced exclusion in one of his music theory modules. He referred to an occasion in the music theory class when Schenkerian analysis was presented. This method of analysis relies heavily on visual and textual illustration, so it would have been very helpful if the lecturer had played the examples on the piano or as sound recording. As a result, Charly experienced psycho-emotional disablism because he felt left-out and frustrated.

This story is a good example of an attitudinal barrier on the part of the lecturer in respect of his student's musical abilities. As indicated in Chapter 2 (see section 2.1.), frequent misperceptions of visually impaired musicians' abilities exist and result in either under- or overestimation of their aural skills. These musicians are mostly believed to have exceptional or even perfect hearing, as pointed out by Simpson and Simpson (1976), Rowland (1985), Kruger (1986, 1988), Cole (2006), and Honisch (2009). From Charly's story, it is clear that his lecturer was unaware of the fact that he was not able to follow in class when it came to the topic of Schenkerian analysis. Either the lecturer thought that Charly, because of his visual impairment, would be unable to grasp the theoretical concepts concerned and, therefore, allowed him to be excluded during the lecture. Or he believed that Charly had the aural ability to make sense of the information relayed and that his teaching was sufficiently inclusive.

The topic of structural and psycho-emotional disablism surfaced in the stories of other participants as well: As Elenore relayed her experience of frustration with the subject of orchestration, which was also a notation-based subject, she explained that she faced an attitudinal barrier because the relevant lecturer was unreceptive to her needs and, therefore, unwilling to accommodate her by making his teaching more inclusive. This would have improved her success in the subject and alleviated her frustration.

Similar to the participant who studied music in the study conducted by Lourens (2015), three participants in the present study, including Christelle and Charly, mentioned the matter of time adjustment. Similar to the cases reported by Mullins and Preyde (2013) and Lourens (2015), and who resort under the category of the "print-disabled", they felt that they needed extra time to complete prescribed work. These participants mentioned that music analysis and the learning of new repertoire was a problem. For visually impaired individuals, processing visual texts is often a time-consuming and laborious exercise. On the one hand, printed texts have to be converted into an accessible format for Braille or audio users. On the other hand, those individuals who require large print or magnification software in order to read printed text, process the material at a rate that requires extra time.

But some participants relayed examples where their impairment was accommodated by the respective lecturers, who arranged separate test and examination venues for participants, as well as extended time.

In a report by Lyner-Cleophas et al. (2014:3), it was found that South African students with disabilities still experience key buildings, such as libraries, as inaccessible. In the case of the participants in the present study, this inaccessibility came down to the fact that they could not access the literature housed in these facilities without assistance. As a consequence, they became dependent on the help of whoever would assist them, which created a time-consuming obstacle in their learning and academic progress.

In order to compensate for barriers like this, participants such as Thomas abandoned one form of communication for another. Thomas, who was taught Braille in school, switched to studying his literary and music notation texts via audio recordings. In this way, he devised his own response to the demands of the situation.

The most impressive example of overcoming barriers is the story of Jonathan, who, with the help of university personnel, devised an alternative notational system for his personal use. Up to that stage he was not Braille-music literate because the Pioneer School prohibited him from receiving the necessary training in this particular and very vital medium. The degree of institutional support he received in devising a novel music notation medium enabled him to complete music-theory related assignments, study notation in order to learn new repertoire, and consequently receive the same quality education as his sighted classmates. Thus, a situation that could otherwise have resulted in a significant inequality for Jonathan was successfully overcome.

6.4 Psychological well-being of participants

Participants reported conflicting stories about their socialising. For some, such as Elenore and Richard, participation on campus took place in the form of membership of cultural bodies. Thomas, who studied music at two separate institutions, reported very positive social experiences at the second university. He said that fellow students easily approached and interacted freely with him. They showed an interest in his personal life. By way of contrast, Jonathan and Elenore reported feelings of social isolation and lack of social and moral support from peers at certain times during their studies. For Elenore, socialising was not at the top of her priority list, and she spent most of her time focussing on her academic work.

The lack of support felt by some participants resulted in social isolation. Jonathan, for example, said that he was not familiar with the physical campus environment and had to find his way around on his own. This was a considerable challenge for him. He would have appreciated help from his sighted friends, but this was not always forthcoming.

In contrast to the findings in Lourens (2015), only two participants – Thomas and Christelle – studied alongside other visually impaired students. Thomas gained much moral and even practical support from his visually impaired peers, while Christelle preferred to avoid the company of individuals with a similar impairment to her own, since it reminded her of her own dire condition.

Although experiencing feelings of social isolation, participants did not report that this isolation went as far as actual marginalisation or exclusion. This differs from Lourens's findings. Participants who had chosen not to socialise would miss out on social interaction, while those who did participate in cultural activities found that this stimulated meaningful social interaction and positive reinforcement.

Participants shared varying stories about the kinds of coping strategies mentioned in Chapter 5. The first coping strategy listed there, i.e. **self-advocacy**, was practised by those participants who felt sufficiently empowered to assert their particular academic needs. Carmen, for example, would take it upon herself to make suggestions as to how she could be accommodated in the class environment. However, it became clear that some of the older participants in the study had internalised the medical model thinking to the extent that it withheld them from obtaining the assistance they would have needed to realise their full academic potential.

In correspondence with the findings of Ward and Webster (2018), several participants in the present study expressed reluctance to request that their needs be accommodated. Ruth and Elenore indicated that they were reluctant to make such requests because they did not expect that their particular institution would grant them the necessary support. Rather, they felt that such help and support would have been unwarranted because the deficit supposedly lay with them. Therefore, instead of the system adapting to accommodate them – in line with the concept of inclusive education that calls for a system that is flexible enough to accommodate students with varying needs – they believed they were the ones who had to adapt.

The second listed coping strategy is **self-reliance**. In this respect it became clear that all participants strove to function as independently as possible. Similar to Ruth and Elenore, Freddy refused to request any form of assistance from any of his lecturers throughout his tertiary career, since he felt it would have displayed weakness or an attempt to exploit the system on account of his visual impairment. Throughout the interview, Freddy did not admit to having struggled in any way. The ongoing support from his wife possibly balanced out the practical obstacles there may have been. It is a support mechanism which was not necessarily available in the case of other participants.

In other instances, participants' self-reliance afforded them greater independence and enhanced their academic well-being. Though representing a last resort for Charly, who learnt to scan his own material, and for Jonathan, who worked out an alternative form of notation, their self-reliance ended up being beneficial to their autonomous functioning as music students in the long run.

When it came to the third coping strategy, **social support**, it was clear that most participants viewed their respective institutions as unresponsive to and unsupportive of their unique needs. Consequently, these individuals resorted to their own devices and requested the help of people they knew, frequently external to the university. This apparent mistrust in their institution was, perhaps subconsciously, also fuelled by the fact that the institution did not help to empower these students to begin with. Consequently, in the absence of institutional support, participants became conditioned to doing things on their own and to seek help along avenues in which they had more faith.

Discussion of the fourth coping strategy, **masking emotional hardship and pain**, was the most poignant aspect of the interviews. It revealed the silence about their disability, which participants had learnt to practise. Perhaps this corresponds to the statement cited by Shakespeare (1996:40 – see section 2.2) in respect of the admittance of “pain” and “defeat”, i.e. the negative emotions and experiences connected to one's impairment, in effect providing reinforcement of the negative, stereotyped views resulting from the medical discourse on disability. This is a prime example of psycho-emotional disablism, which is present in the lives of many of the participants. In line with Garland-Thomson's concept of “misfitting” (see section 2.3), it becomes apparent here that participants experienced structural and psychological obstacles, which affected their entire emotional well-being. However, like

Garland-Thomson proffers, this “misfitting” often remains invisible, which accounts for the silence from participants. They internalise the negative views about themselves, or perhaps the emotions are simply too painful for them to risk confronting them. Be that as it may, the vicious cycle of silence about disablism and real emotional pain is perpetuated.

Finally, participants’ perceptions about the **value and meaning of studying music** at a tertiary institution were overall positive. Despite experiencing numerous obstacles and challenges along the way, some which seemed to be beyond their control, participants viewed their studies as an enriching part of their life journey. They gained freedom after school, were excited about a new environment, made new acquaintances, and experienced much artistic and personal growth. For those who were university alumni at the time of their interview, it was clear that university was a vital stepping stone for them, since each one became a successful professional musician in their respective musical fields, and they have many positive aspirations for the future. The kinds of vocation followed by participants include teaching, on both school and university level, performance, as well as sound engineering, and record producing.

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, the case for an IPA approach to the present study was made once again. An interpretation of the findings of the interviews was provided, beginning with confronting inequality, which has its roots in the participants’ personal backgrounds. It was established that participants experienced numerous structural barriers on university campuses, which included inaccessible facilities, as well as attitudinal barriers on the part of lecturers, as a result of lacking awareness and misperception. In closing, the focus shifted to the psychological well-being of participants, where the matter of personal coping strategies and the ultimate finding of meaning in the university experience were brought to the fore.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Link to initial points of departure in Chapter 1

At the end of this thesis, it is necessary to link the outcome of the research with the initial points of departure on which the study was based (refer to section 1.7). More than anything else, these points of departure were informed by my personal experience as a visually impaired postgraduate student at a tertiary institution in South Africa.

The first point to reiterate is that this project was aimed at filling a very distinctive gap in research on visually impaired music students at South African tertiary institutions. The fact that the only comparable study, the one by Lourens (2015) on visually impaired students, included only one music student amongst its participants, suggested that a more in-depth investigation of students in this discipline was called for. It turned out that the findings of the present study were congruent to a large extent with what was found in other studies (as indicated in Chapter 6), although some important disagreements/differences were also identified.

One important difference to Lourens's work is that the present study breaks the discipline of music into its various sub-divisions, including music theory and studying a musical instrument, as well as more general aspects, such as academic support for visually impaired students. Teaching practices, social adjustment and psychological factors are also considered. The extent to which the specific needs of visually impaired students were accommodated was investigated as well.

It is important to point out once again that the present study follows an increasing trend within the field of disability studies, namely that I, as a visually impaired individual myself, conducted the research from the perspective of an insider. This is in agreement with the internationally accepted slogan amongst disabled persons: "nothing about us without us". It emphasises that I have a vested interest in the research field in question. As a consequence, I could fall back on the network that exists between me and other visually impaired musicians' peers, rather than rely on an incomplete and unreliable database, which may exist somewhere. At the same time, my position as an insider may bias my work to some extent. I am aware of this danger, but

believe that the advantages override the disadvantages. Moreover, my work creates a platform for the voices of other visually impaired individuals to be heard.

As was pointed out in section 1.3, literature about visual impairment and music consists mostly of manuals on teaching praxis. Hardly any of these are based on qualitative research or on an interpretative angle and, even more importantly, most of them are geared to the situation at school level.

Finally, I hope that my study will stimulate similar research in the other arts.

7.2 Summary of interpretation of findings

In the course of the analysis, it became clear that the results fell naturally into three broad categories: the participants' academic life during their tertiary studies, their social life over this period, and their inner life as visually impaired music students.

One of the most significant findings was that many participants still showed the effects of medical model thinking, which was prevalent at the institutions where they went to school. Despite the fact that schools for the visually impaired in South Africa are becoming more racially integrated, the special needs system within the country still bears the marks of the former fragmentation on account of impairment and race.

An unsurprising finding was that participants experienced the transition from school to university as very challenging. While this can certainly be said of all students, regardless of their background or personal circumstances, the transition was experienced as particularly challenging by the participants as visually impaired music students. Strong parental support was found to be an important factor in providing them with a good start.

Most participants experienced the lack of academic support as a particular problem area. They felt that they were not always accommodated as well as they reasonably could have expected. On the other hand, participants had actually benefitted from inclusive teaching practices, if they were followed deliberately by supportive lecturers. However, structural barriers were frequently encountered, such as difficulties in accessing necessary information or in gaining access to and making use of facilities such as the university library.

A limited number of participants indicated that their social life on campus had benefitted from meaningful personal friendships and membership of various cultural organisations. However, in other cases, negative stories about social support from peers were reported, with some participants feeling isolated quite frequently.

Finally, participants reported that they developed and applied a number of personal coping strategies to counter the adverse psychological aspects of tertiary studies that inevitably occurred. Some participants had learnt to apply self-advocacy as such a coping strategy and consequently had no difficulty in voicing their needs to lecturers, even making suggestions as to how they could be accommodated. However, older participants particularly, who were affected by medical model thinking in the institutions where they were enrolled, did not develop this skill. A second personal coping strategy was found to be that of self-reliance, which a few of the participants strove to achieve, but the majority lacked the ability to advocate their needs. Others devised personal strategies that served to allow them to function more independently if a service was not rendered. A third coping strategy was to seek external social support when they felt disempowered by the lack of institutional support at their respective institutions. Masking personal hardship and pain was found to be a fourth coping strategy, which participants developed to a greater or lesser degree. For one participant particularly, adapting to the late onset of her visual impairment proved to be very difficult. Her loss of autonomy was especially difficult to bear. Consequently, she experienced extreme emotional hardship, but chose to hide it because it was too traumatic for her to deal with. Consequently, she learnt to project an outward facade of cheerfulness, in order to divert the attention from her lack of emotional well-being.

A final outcome of the interviews was that participants felt that, on the whole, studying at a university had been a meaningful experience. This sentiment was expressed despite the numerous challenges they had experienced in the course of their academic careers. They emphasised that their studies had afforded them with much artistic and personal growth, and that it had given them a vital stepping stone for future success.

7.3 Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made as a result of the above findings. These recommendations are addressed at the various stakeholders involved in the enrolment, training,

and successful functioning of visually impaired music students within South African universities.

Already at the level of secondary education, schools should take on a more active role in preparing prospective students for the difficult transition that awaits them when they enter the tertiary system. This could include establishing contact and meaningful rapport with the respective institutions of higher learning, creating awareness of the various needs that a visually impaired music student may have. In this respect, the music department of the school concerned could help to convey information to future university lecturers about the incoming students and how their abilities and needs may be accommodated. This will assist in creating an inclusive teaching and learning environment for the benefit of all concerned.

At university level, staff members should strive to maintain an open channel of communication with the disability unit, if the particular university has one. More importantly, disability units should in turn strive to be of service to staff members and students alike – because that is the reason for its existence. They should assist staff members to raise their level of awareness regarding the academic needs of visually impaired students. Institutions have to take full responsibility to maintain an effective disability unit and to commit the necessary financial and human resources for such a unit.

On their part, students should strive to maintain an open channel of communication with all the various stakeholders, including disability support services as well as lecturers, in order for concerns to be addressed in a timely and effective manner. The onus also lies with the disability support unit of the relevant university to dispense appropriate information regarding the various support mechanisms available to students who may require it.

Finally, students should have access to counselling services, in order for academic, social, or psychological concerns and problems to be effectively addressed and, hopefully, resolved. Counsellors need to be sensitive to the fact that, although struggles are present in the lives of most students in general, visually impaired students have a lot more to contend with, due to the practical and psychological ramifications that their particular impairment may have. Important coping skills that may need developing is self-advocacy, how to become self-reliant in a healthy way, yet realising that they are entitled to whatever support they may need, and that asking for help is not a sign of weakness. If necessary, students should receive the necessary guidance, in

order to ensure that they adjust well to the university environment, which may include supportive measures such as a student mentors, as well as practical solutions about how to cope with their visual impairment.

7.4 Strengths and contributions of the research study

The first strength of the present study is that I, as researcher, maintained a high level of internal and external validity, as well as reliability. By way of my detailed documenting of all the steps taken during the present research – including data collection, transformation, and analysis – and opting for supervision in order to interrogate and develop the coherence and plausibility thereof, I strove to ensure the trustworthiness of the present study. By way of the literature review, the relevance of the present study was demonstrated, particularly in that it is the first study concerning visually impaired musicians from an IPA perspective, thereby establishing the external validity of the research. Regarding the reliability, the main concern is with the instrument of data collection which, within the context of the present study, is me as researcher. By way of a reflexive approach, I considered my assumptions and presuppositions, and ensured that the quality of my interpretation was rigorous and scientifically sound.

Secondly, as stated in the previous paragraph, this is the first study of its kind within the field of music. Although there is a very limited number of qualitative studies where visually impaired musicians are represented, they are all on a small scale, were located in other countries, and concerned musicians at school level. Aside from Lourens (2015), the present study is, therefore, the only of its kind in South Africa.

Finally, the findings of this research highlight the lived experiences of a population who are in the minority and whose voices have to date been silent from the interpretative discourse on disability and music.

7.5 Limitations of the research study

Due to the relatively small number of participants, the findings of the present study do not allow for quantifiable statistical data and, therefore, generalisability. Only three schools out of a possible 22 in South Africa were represented by means of their past pupils. However, generalisability was not the aim of the study.

The profile of the research population represents individuals of diverse ages, who play different instruments, and have qualifications in various fields within the discipline of music. However, in terms of race, the scope is very narrow, with the research sample only containing one musician of colour. For that reason, a follow-up research project among black visually impaired musicians and music students is of the utmost importance and urgency.

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APPENDIX A – Stellenbosch University: Consent to participate in research



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The lived experiences of music students with visual impairment in South African tertiary institutions.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Michelle Nell MMus, from the faculty of music at Stellenbosch University. Results from the present study will contribute to a master's thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a visually impaired musician who is studying (or have previously studied) at a South African university.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to establish *what the lived experiences are of music students with visual impairment within the South African tertiary system of education.*

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to participate in a one-on-one interview, talking about your experiences as a visually impaired music student, which is estimated to last between 60-90 minutes. Due to geographical considerations you as participant will have the opportunity of choosing amongst three possible settings for the interview:

1. The Stellenbosch Conservatorium
2. Interview via telephone
3. Interview via Skype.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Since the focus of the interviews aims to deal with participants' personal experiences, there is the possibility of psychological risks involved. You may want to discuss a challenging or traumatic event, or I as interviewer may unknowingly broach a difficult topic, so there might be the possibility of

emotional distress or even psychological harm. You as participant has the right to one or both of the following options:

1. You may choose to change the direction of the interview, or decide to terminate it altogether
2. You are entitled to seek psychological support. If participants should feel the need to seek psychological help as a direct result of the interview, they are welcome to contact the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) of Stellenbosch University at 021 808 4707 in order to make arrangements.

The reasonably foreseeable risks involved with your participation in the present study is minimal. However, the following possibilities are listed here:

The broaching of sensitive topics that may be psychologically harmful for the participant. In this instance the participant could exercise their right to terminate the interview, or choose not to divulge any information in that regard. Furthermore, the contact details of counselling services have been enclosed in this letter, in case of any emergency that may occur as a direct result of participating in the present study (see above stated contact details).

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Within the field of disability studies as well as music very little is known about the visually impaired musician, particularly within a university context. By way of the present study within which you are asked to be a participant, the researcher aims to shed more light on this particular minority group by way of focusing on participants' personal experiences of coping within the tertiary system.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants in the present study will not receive any financial remuneration for partaking in this research.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the following:

All interviews will be audio recorded and afterward transcribed verbatim. All information pertaining to the present study, including this mentioned information in addition to the data processing and analysis, will be stored on a password protected computer in order to prevent theft of data, to which only the present researcher and research supervisors will have access. Furthermore, participants' identities will be protected by way of pseudonyms being assigned to

them, and the altering of any identifying information such as names of institutions or geographical locations, in order to minimize improper or involuntary disclosure. Furthermore, interview recordings will not be utilized in any other context, e.g. for educational purposes, and the recordings will be erased upon completion of this research project.

One particular outcome of the present study is to publish the research findings in accredited academic journals. However, the above precautions regarding confidentiality and participants' anonymity will continue to be instated.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the following people:

1. Principle investigator, MS Michelle Nell (Department of Music) – (cell) +2782-690-6282, (email) mnellpiano@gmail.com
2. Primary supervisor, Prof Winfried Lüdemann (Department of Music) – (tel) +2721-808-2345, (email) w@sun.ac.za
3. Co-supervisor, Prof Estelle Swart (Department of Educational Psychology) – (tel) +2721-808-2305, (email) estelle@sun.ac.za

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to [*me/the subject/the participant*] by [*name of relevant person*] in [*Afrikaans/English/Xhosa/other*] and [*I am/the subject is/the participant is*] in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [*me/him/her*]. [*I/the participant/the subject*] was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to [*my/his/her*] satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the subject/participant*] and/or [his/her] representative _____ [*name of the representative*]. [*He/she*] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [*Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*Other*] and [*no translator was used/this conversation was translated into* _____ by _____].

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX B – Interview schedule

Researcher: Michelle Nell

University: Stellenbosch University

Student number: 14572621

Proposal number: HS1208/2016

Title of study: The lived experiences of music students with visual impairment in South African tertiary institutions.

The instrument that will be employed to collect data for the present study is a semi-structured, one-on-one interview, with the aim of eliciting participants' subjective accounts regarding their university experiences. The starting point of the interview will take place according to what is understood as a "grand tour" question, which will be stated as follows:

I want you to share with me your life story, with a particular emphasis on your time at your university. What was university like for you as a student with a visual impairment?

The aim of this open-ended design should permit the present researcher to capture participants' life stories in their own words without these individuals being limited by leading questions, which may contaminate the data being collected, or disrupt the flow of the interview. In this way, sufficient space is created for participants to determine the flow and direction of their narratives, and to steer clear of sensitive and potentially harmful topics they do not wish to discuss.

The only instances during the interview where the present researcher will intervene, will be when the participant should wish to direct a question requiring a response, or when the researcher needs to establish whether a particular statement was interpreted correctly.

In line with Stellenbosch University's code of ethical conduct, participants will be advised of their rights at the outset of their participation in the present study, by way of a letter requesting informed consent, after which the information will be reaffirmed when the eventual interview commences.

In addition to the grand-tour question, various underlying areas of focus are also of relevance during the interview. Throughout the session the researcher will closely monitor each issue that the participant chooses to discuss, but will in addition guide the interview in such a way as to ensure that all important areas of focus were addressed.

The main themes within the interview are as follows:

- Academic support from university faculty: To what extent did the student communicate with relevant lecturers in order to address important issues? Did they e.g. disclose their disability at the outset of their studies? Did they have access to and consult with the university's disability unit?
- Experiences during lectures: What teaching methods of lecturers were or were not effective in relation to the student's visual impairment? If not, were these matters addressed, and in what way? What adaptations, if any, were made in terms of e.g. assessment, the arrangement of private tutorials, the designation of a student assistant?

- Social support: To what extent did the student interact with fellow students within or beyond the faculty? Did he/she belong to any student organizations (e.g. a society for students with disabilities, or of fellow music students)? Were their socialization experiences over all positive or negative?
- Coping strategies: Did the participant develop any adaptive strategies, personal or otherwise, in order to cope at university? In their opinion, were they effective?